

The First King of  
Yore:  
Manis Furin,  
The King of Madness.

Joshua Wilmoth

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DEDICATION

**For my light and joy: Summer.**

**For all the people, I have lost.**

**For all the people that have supported me, and continue to do so.**

## CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	i
0	Prologue: Dome-Wyrd's Creation	3
1	The First Age, An Era Of Darkness	Pg #
2	The Isle Of Vale	Pg #
3	Manis's Escape	Pg #
4	Dome-Wyrd	Pg #
5	The Ripper & The Slasher	Pg #
6	The Bubbling-Bogs	Pg #
7	A Kingdom Of Madness	Pg #
8	The Sun & The Moon	Pg #
9	Dome-Wyrd's First Dawn	Pg #
10	Madness Born From Grief	Pg #
11	Manis's Big Day	Pg #
12	Manis's Gift	Pg #
13	Epilogue: The Wandering Coliseum & An Elven Presence	Pg #

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The First King Of Yore: Manis Furin, The Delusional King.

## PROLOGUE: DOME-WYRD'S CREATION

In the first moments of creation, the world was blank. There is nothing but the darkness, in its somber and dismal gloaming, It churned and swirled the empty nothingness of the cold world. In its endlessness out of the bubbling tar. Rising to its surface, resting and bobbing in the tar was an egg. This egg was was resonating all of the goods and evils that were to manifest in the world of Dome-Wyrd. All the essences and magics of the universe.

All of the turmoil and pain it will know. All of the darkness, and all of the light that will balance these unborn lands. The injustices and justices, the hate and all of the sorrow, the guilt and anguish, the selfishness and the madness. The deceit and the betrayal. The war and the crime. The murder and the all of the lies. This egg. it was the birth of an entire universe. Like all miracles, abruptly and capriciously it began. The microcosm of a doomed fate; the world of Dome-Wyrd would soon be birthed.

Splintering from the top-center of this egg that was pure gold, the first gold of the universe; the first miracle. Lightning cracking stone, the sound was an almost ethereal-static that vibrated through the dark and blank purgatory. Creating color in this limbo of creation. All the colors known to the universe in a vigorous intensity, that of a tongue of flame. A bright blinding white light started gleaming from the lightning-splinters of fate. Shooting a beacon of light upwards toward the empty sky. It beamed for days, months, years, and decades. Time was endless in the age just before the world. For it never ceases, never halting for anyone. No matter if you are a man, dwarf, elf, god, or even a terrible demon. Time never ceases, even in death. Time pushes forward like the

wheels of fate endlessly turning. In a seamless cycle; An incessant never-ending terminus.

As the grips of eternity folds over the centuries, just as the beacon of light bursts from the lightning splinters of the Microcosmic shell. The light grew, resonating everything entrapped within it's worldly shells. The hope and wills of the world. Making this centuries old grandisonance of fate, Expand with time's progression. The many dot's on an incessant timeline. It's rays were peered effulgence, It's humming was spiteful and deafening. It's intensity billowed, devouring the vacant desolate purgatory. Completely overwhelming and enshrouding it. Filling The void of creation- with life, the hope and the wills of the young universe.

Radiating it's blinding light throughout the shadows. Molding and morphing the black-tar into a meteoric prismatic fog. Filling the emptiness of this young foolish world. Giving it hope and the sustaining will of the universe; The unknown force of determination. As the beam now occupied the entirety of the cold black-tar infested purgatory. Soon after the sky and the clouds were born below, This once bare world was now possessed with light. Using time as it's vessel, as it spins upon the wheels of fate meticulously turning.

In the blinding-light of the sky, the world witnessed its first tempest. A storm of the ages. It's wind howled with a ferocity that imbalanced the unknown forces of the cosmos. The guardians of fate. The one's who will not be named. Lightning struck down piercing through the clouds with the proficiency and the celerity of a bolt channeled by an amalgamation of harrowing and extravagant effects. It pierced the fog leaving a hyper-active rippling and a shrill booming sound, riddled with the wails and reverberating lost screams of the tempers of fate. The lords of creation; The Guardians Of Fate; The Watchers who remained in the planes of an unbeknown void. Shattering the egg as thousands of its shells became adrift in the prismatic fog like missing pieces to a conundrum. The beacon swelled, it's rays of piercing light complementing the emptiness, and dallied as the cosmic clock slowly ticked and clacked. Which ultimately bestowed this young microcosm of dome-wyrd.

Suddenly abandoning everything it silently-promised. Quickly abandoning the world, the fog, purgatory, and all things In that moment of disconcerting beautiful sublunary compulsion. All of those missing pieces of integument came revolving in coexistence all in oscillation. Pivoting around the one noticeable discoloration in the fluorescent fog. Slightly different from the trauma of the lightning bolt. Conveying some ingrained energy the first-storm had left. The shell was still rotating in-sync with flawless motion within fog. It's unstable, moving as if it's replicating the shell or merely adapting to the will of the universe or the miasma in it's changing colors. Almost sliding up and down the color spectrum as if it was evolving, or becoming something grandiose.

The haze was breathing, the shell was still irrefutably and perfectly in sync. In flawless dynamics, as if these two things were supposed to come together at this particular moment. it's squalling of fulmination was merely a vestige of the universe's own inevitable creation. The beam of light now rushed back to the floor of the purgatory. Instantly returning back to the humming that was spitefully deafening, It's rays piercing and penetrating purgatory and the fog causing it to disperse around the ray of overwhelming prosperity and creation. The light; The brightest the world had seen yet, was simply blinding.

Practically suffocating this young world of pristine and impeccable creation. Through it's own bitter radiance It needed the shell and the fog to be stricken by the first storm to keep the wheel's of fate turning, and so the guardians of this young universe pushed. When they pushed, Out of the light came; Death and Life. Manifestations of the purest energy. these young orbs of energy dispersed from the incandescent light

The luminosity slowly faded transcending into a greater energy. Light, beauty and life itself. Only meant to give, serve and guide the young world of Dome-Wyrd. Not to mention. entwined to her lover in an impeccable and immeasurable unison. From the shadows in that supposedly wholesome and selfless light, seeped and leaked a peaceful and undeniable dark. This was the manifestation of judgment, power, control, and death itself. The vessel of all the infamy, injustices and malcontent.

Not evil but cautious and twisted. Playing the role cause simply, he's the only soul who can. They didn't care for each other, only to understand why they had suddenly fabricated into existence. Idly each of them wandered purgatory stubborn to those few moments they

would brush past and a static spark of ethereal connection would possess them. Something with such an essence and a paralytic shock, that they had to of been filled with a blinding ignorance or truly, ultimately riddled with fear of each other's disseminated presence. Though her light seemed to just watch time's flow, she would soon be the pinnacle, the apex, the culmination , the spire of the first lies ever told. The obelisk of the first trauma's of the world. The deception of life and the shameless fraudulence of beauty.

As time gradually passed with the cycle of fate turning, cretinously they ignored their fate. Each flare of ethereal sparking energy caused their essence to feed, grow, and evolve. Or contort From manifestations of energy. To orbs of light and dark, Ethereal apparitions. Slowly the fog molded their physicality into the universe, with the demanding will of fate. Morphing from Ethereal Spirits, into the first and only gods of our time. The First Ones. The God of death, now dawning cartilage,bones,muscles,flesh,tendons and frail pale skin bestowed by the universe itself. He was unusually beautiful with unbelievably pale cold skin, almost ashen. Flowing brown hair that was only a shade away from black. Eyes golden with the intensity of a black-hole. Hypnotic and knee-crippling. Hearty and muscular and always with a crooked distant smile. He wore a black-hooded and heavy robe, that always remained open. Cold to the touch, seething an overwhelming black mist covering and shrouding his lower body. In the overwhelming darkness you would only witness his golden piercing eyes seducing, like an irresistible cold darkness. He was a colossal god in height, and he has no pity for the men or their lusts of this earth and believes they should have to affray for their honor to even walk the planes of it's existence. He wanted nothing more than to devise the World of Dome-Wyrd and oversee its judgment, endlessly testing the race of mortals. He's not an evil god, but merely a misguided and betrayed one. Blind sighted by his own destiny, blinded by power and lust. A depressing and ignorant Paradox of a god who only wants to create a world of wondrous potential.

The Goddess of light and life of the world was the epitome of pure beauty. With luminescent glowing pale skin like the moon. It was practically blinding and hypnotizing. She had Eyes like the deepest darkest oceans. Full of wonder and mystery. She wore a pearl cloak, but the cloak had cuts revealing her shoulder of perfect sculpture. With a white hood that was two-sizes too small. Out-lined in a magic, glowing aura. Only Resonating a seducing gold. She was a towering display of

beauty, the first beauty of the world. Taller even than her destined lover, Vorago.

From the destruction of the egg in the first storm. Everything that was Dome-Wyrd came flooding out in an overwhelming surreal energy. Madness, nightmares, all of the darkness, death, all of the sorrow, guilt, pity, trauma, all of the hate, anger, revenge, pain, all of the control, power, judgment, all of the light, beauty, manipulation, all of the lies, deceit, betrayal, selfishness, all of the cruelty, horrors, brutality, mutilation, obsession and evil. The nobility and all of the dreadfulness of the universe, with the vestiges allowed by creation and the guardians of fate. They were manifested into Life and Death. The First Ones. Merely meant for definitive roles in this universe. They were destined to create the World of Dome-Wyrd. Two gods of creation, but even gods lust for power. Even gods can be selfish, but only man will be punished for it. Incessantly. Centuries and eras of untold ignorance pass by until in a minuscule moment The God of Death realized his name. He heard it in a cold distant whisper of fate, Vorago. It echoed throughout his mind almost like a madness. He realized in this important but tiny second that he was in fact the soul manifested of all the world's evils, darkness, cruelty, madness and pure judgment. He was the only soul capable of this, and such a grandiose manifestation of heroism that he as the vessel of Dome-Wyrd's judgment can contain all of the world's horrors. The father of fate, the creator of cycles.

"Vorago The God Of Death". He hears it echo, reverberate, shout and sporadically personify throughout the dark-tar that is his mind. His power only began to swell with his epiphany, his realization of destiny and fate. The manifestation of life did nothing but acknowledge this flourish of energy. Lusting after his swelling power seeking it for her own vile purposes. Although she remained distant and clueless. Vaea was forever watching and knowing her fate since she was but a glimmering sphere of light. Waiting for the god of death to analyze his potential. His destiny of fashioning a grandiose universe and how her own egotistical lust could steal it for her own. To siphon Vorago of his virtue and birth a world in her own vile, and corrupted image. How foolish one god can be, the guardians of fate could only ponder.

Through the prismatic impenetrable haze they caught each other's magnetic eyes drawn by fate's gaze, and within the fog a mystical energy traverses through. Snapping and sparking off of the two



gods as it recoils back and forth. As if it was bounded by them, honing the two ignorant gods in on each other through some unbeknown force greater than even Life & Death; The Will Of the universe commanded them. Although Vaea had greater plans deceitfully lost in Vorago's seething power. Ages transpired as the god's inched closer and closer to the calling essence that they both possess. Unable to resist what fate is propelling them towards. In a brief moment the god's hands touched. Slowly they moved together like planets aligning. Almost as if all the time that had transpired in this juvenile creation was leading, and pushing to this very euphoric second. Their hand's connected they were interwoven, seamlessly like a perfect puzzle finally solved. The electricity that magnified with every instance of the god's echoing footsteps boomed the ground. Tripping and falling toward their destiny. All of the manifested electricity that did nothing but amplify the god's futile ignorance. Resonating at the palms of their hand; A burning hot fire. The universe's first flame. It replaced their hands, swallowing their godly fingers ablaze. Lightning, crepitating as if the god's themselves became a tempest; A pristine hurricane of creation. The prismatic fog slowly transmuted colorless.

The erratic lightning created from the unison of the first ones was out of control but just under the watchful eyes of the guardians. With their ever reaching hands of fate. In that beautiful moment, of the two ignorant self recessing gods they both became the bliss of the world. The Pinnacles of Creation; Life and Death. The blaze that now possessed their hands. Dominated the entirety of purgatory. Dousing the once impenetrable fog into a blinding conflagration of embers and luminosity. Overwhelming and now taking place of the fog. Blinding wildfires accompanied by an endless erratic lightning. It's bolting strikes were consuming purgatory, only with a glimmer of the god's in unison in the center of this young universe. At its very core, the tempest of creation and with one last final grandeur strike of lightning incomparable in ferocity and intensity. Only leaving a thunderous sound, with a booming incomprehensible echo. In a split-second all of the flames, and electric uproars of ethereal static were all null to the gods and the universe. Coated in a darkness, completely enshrouded. into a dead and lifeless silence. A rippling shock-wave of that familiar humming white light.

Marking the birth, the beginning, and pinnacle of all creation. Mountains began to rise, forests and green-lands began to flourish. Plains and tundras rose from the soils of the earth. Molding and forming the world. Masses of water named the oceans, rivers, and lakes. set their place on this juvenile earth. The gods built a castle fit for giants in honor of the first ones godly splendor. High above the world of man, so high that the cold winds of the north would freeze any mere mortal that had dared to trespass it's hollow steps. Up in the the tallest mountain peak, in all of dome-wyrd, stood Faigun-Gard. It's marble steps were so high above the clouds that the mountain's sheer height was and is still a spectacle of the gods. The mortals worshiped the mountain's existence and the daunting palace of Faigun-Gard, Even though no mortal in all of dome-wyrd lived to ever see it's godly steps. Upon this godly mountain there was a never ending rain. subtly it always dampened the mountain for endless eternities. The marble stair-case of Faigun-Gard would be daunting to any man who happened to make it to its grand step's, Just before the piercing winds would freeze them were their poor feet stood. Seeming as though it was built for giants.

The First perfection of the newly born world of Dome-Wyrd, the home of the first ones and as one creation is bestowed with the universe. Rapidly follows the next blessing of godly unison. The next godly vestige of creation. Or so the guardians of fate thought, as did Vorago but Vaea in all of her splendor had bigger plans for this juvenile world.

## Chapter I: The First Age, An Era Of Darkness.

The watchers smiled upon Dome-Wyrd's flourishing existence, everything had gone according to plan. They created "The First Ones." Whom possessed immeasurable and untold power. The watchers themselves destined The First Ones to create a land of prosperity, ruling over its irrefutable, ever-expanding splendor. They were not only responsible for, but capable of shaping the landscape itself.

When the lands formed, bodies of water rose into place. Basins & waterways spawned where the landscape dipped, trees and forests flourished, mountains began to rumble on the plains green surface. Towering surfaces of rocks rose to shake the land, far above the pearly clouds, and shake they did. The rolling hills were graced by delicate white and red flowers, the land began to shift and elevate. To the east, the ground fissured, a crack ripped the ground, causing the rising rocks to shift. Sand pours and funnels through the cracked fissure of earth, giving Dome-Wyrd its sprawling canyons and encroaching desert. The entire province shook in a violent, pulsing wave. Forming the great hilly vale of Domewyrd. The place in this young microcosm that will be known as their homelands, a land of astounding beauty. Alas, even the beautiful can be corrupted. Where there lies hope, betrayal can only follow.

Vaea; The goddess of life gave this young sprawling world its first breathe of existence. She gave Dome-Wyrd civilization, she gave it beauty, ultimately, she gave it life. Vaea herself gave these sprawling lands their first years of mortals, dwarves, and elves, along with every year that has transpired since, in this young and foolish world. The first age, although it was an era worthy of song and tale, it was indeed, an age of darkness. A time in this juvenile world where the sun graced no valleys, the moon illuminated no paths. There were no days and no nights in the vacant sky. In the times of yore, it was an endless night, a terrible night that never saw a sunrise, that never once had a dawn. Before the plagues, and certainly before the great tempest of fire that

changed these once beautiful lands for an eternity. Much, much, before that. In a young world with an endless midnight, the question remains for all the young elves, dwarves, and mortals alike. That the night is darkest just before the dawn, aye, but still, the question remains. When is the dawn coming?

In the north, colossal mountains stood over Domewyrd, their peaks covered in heavy, dense, snow. It was a daunting valley of mountains that stood over Dome-Wyrd's stretching vale, with a rugged-peak peeking over the rest, peering high-above. Where the clouds were tinted, a deep, dark, grey. To the south of this daunting mountain range, lied miles upon miles of beautiful vacant valleys, graced by plains & hills that stretched across the bleak, unlit horizon. Rife with colorful flowers of blues, reds, and whites, bits of orange swayed about as well. There were in fact, so many willows, tulips, and lilacs that they painted the somber horizon. With what little color this young world had, Vaea graced the budding lands with a vibrant, variegated beauty, that she herself called nature.

Further south, past the seemingly endless spectacle of rolling hills, vast deserts, deep canyons, vibrant flowers, and undoubtedly lush forests. Over those daunting hills that seemed to touch the vacuous skyline. There stood a field of grand oak trees, they rivaled the neighboring & daunting mountains to the north. This thick greenwood covered the entire southern province of Dome-Wyrd. Trees encased the entire south, in southern Domewyrd there rested miles of bogs, only complimented by a thick, dreary, creaking wood.

This sprawling beauty of a content named: "Domewyrd."— Was an empty canvas, an empty canvas that needed to be filled with life and guided to prosperity. Although where prosperity thrives, terrible, ghastly things only seem to flock. Cold winds gusted through the tall grass. Vibrant meadows, rampant with color. Traveling among the lands and creaking the greenwood, there were no paths, there was no civilization, well, at least not yet. The rain pattering against the mighty mountains and its rugged peaks. The inevitable thunder began crashing in the dark, looming sky; The lightning only painted the gloomy picture that was: the violence of nature. These were the only sounds that this young world knew. Rain, crashing thunder, and gusting gales. Ever since those impeccable and defining moments, of its irrefutable creation, its birth, there has been nothing but silence inhabiting this juvenile microcosm.

Vaea smiled upon the immense landscape, her smile stretched wryly. Her slender legs tapped against the marble balcony in Fairgun-Gard. Which rested high above Domewyrd, levitating betwixt its murky clouds. Throwing her head back, her flowing hair waved, and bounced. Her eyes illuminated a blinding gold, as she looked to the sky her eyes pierced through the bleak clouds. She inhaled, slowly, panning her gaze downwards. This was the first light the world had ever seen, in a time before mortals. In a time before elves and dwarves, aye, it was even a time before demons ran rampant across the land.

A golden energy weaved around Vaea's curves. Coiling around her feet, spiraling upwards toward her neck. It began to resonate a vapor of starlight, starting where the coil spawned, at her feet. Rising up, filling the coil with a vibrant light. Until it reached her golden-eyes. They were dancing with a swelling flame. Adorning Domewyrd with the first light it had ever witnessed. Vapors of ethereal light seeped into her glowing eyes. The vapors wafted into her nostrils. Her mouth was moving involuntarily. The words she chanted, In a deep, booming voice. Were not that of a woman, nor a goddess, nay, it was the voice of many. Something greater than even The First One's existence. A force more immense than even Vaea, the goddess of life herself could even hope to fathom. The coiling energy that encased, that seeped into Vaea, it began to pulsate. Pouring an incessant light into her agape mouth. Her eyes shook, they then suddenly grew wide, practically bulging with power. With one final word her chanting ceased. The coiling energy slowly dissipated, reversing itself to the bottom of her feet, from whence it came.

As the light faded around Vaea, this untold power forced her to shake immensely. Barely able to grasp the railing on the balcony without chipping the marble. She struggled, the railing chipped and cracked, her bones were shivering, hardly able to handle a seemingly sudden weight that now possessed her frame. For the first moment since her birth, she questioned her fate. The rays of light spewing from her eyes began to hum louder, expanding in volume, amplifying its deafening ferocity. abruptly, her mouth was agape. It sank far too low, Vaea screamed in horror as her bottom-lip drooped to her chest, elongated and grotesque. Almost instantly another ray of light possessed her mouth, shooting downwards, the humming and pulsing was now twice as loud. Shaking the entire landscape, not only was it the first sound Domewyrd had heard aside from the "violence of nature." At this particular moment it was the only sound it knew. The light was

blinding; The humming was deafening. The colossal rays of light were now amplified into blinding pillars of light. Piercing through the earth's dull surface, to its very core. The blinding pillars of light were not only humming, but quickly began to pulsate a golden shockwave. It shot outwards, in rings, that hummed and vibrated throughout the vast landscape. Echoing & stretching further across the plains, past the daunting mountains, until it echoed against the waves of the raging sea. Just beyond Dome-Wyrd's Sandy shores. They echoed further and further, out until they dissipated with the bleak horizon. The shockwaves quickened, increasing their intensity, faster they pulsated, louder the deafening hum of blinding light became. It now blared, penetrating this once silent, vacant, & innocent world.

Vaea still stood over the balcony, although, half of the railing lied in shambles on the marble floor. Her body was frozen. The pillar of light was still beaming from her soft-eyes and drooping mouth. With one deep breath, and one final act she shrieked. The light vibrating, the blinding pillars of light retracted to her sockets and drooping, agape mouth. Pummeling towards Dome-Wyrd's surface, leaving Vaea's mouth. Upon its wrathful impact it initiated one-last shockwave. A shockwave so immense, that it rippled past the greenwood. Hurling, and chucking trees that cratered into the dirt, but it didn't cease. The violence of nature moved past the thick, creaking-forests, past the bubbling bogs, and finally across the shores, along the beaches of Dome-Wyrd, traveling far-out into its limitless ocean. As far as the mortal eye can see but this time it doesn't dissipate. It remains dormant, it pulsates. Once, twice, and on the third time the shockwaves stretched upward, toward the dark and empty sky. The gold that outlined the shockwaves grew thicker, encasing all of Domewyrd in an orb of a gold. The gold suddenly waxed over and dripped, almost oozing. The humming stopped. The oozing golden orb had instantly hardened and become translucent.

Sporadically the translucent golden orb iced and frosted over. The dome that had suddenly encased Domewyrd had quickly become a solid white. Hardening into a crystal, freezing it completely. Vaea heaved out of exhaustion, slumped over the balcony, quickly catching her breath as she inhales, an untold energy weaves between her fingertips, jolting them. Little orbs mutate into existence as she pulls them into bouncing strings of light. Far down, below on Dome-Wyrd's mortal surface, was now a frozen. The entire province encased completely in a solid-crystal. The frozen dome of light that held all of Domewyrd captive began to

meticulously crack. Vaea reeled her hands back in a furious tugging motion, she huffed and gritted her teeth. The energy thickening, almost pouring from her delicate and slender fingers. Shining particles of light speckled her existence. Illuminating her, making her shine in a divine luminescence.

Vorago stood behind her silently, seething a familiar darkness that funneled beneath his robe. He merely stood there, watching his lover weave the fate of the world like the destined god of creation she was. Vorago was enthralled by her undeniable power; The enticing beauty of creation. Nay, not envious, but enthralled. So much so that he slowly moved closer, carefully. Staring his blank, penetrating stare, like a child in awe. Dawning a smirk that was the first smile that the juvenile world had ever known.

The crack thickened. It deepened, spreading as the chipping-frost expanded the stressing crack. Quicker and quicker the crack spread down the middle of the encasing dome of frozen light. The crack was spreading even faster, shooting off chips of ice, as it pummeled downward. All the way through the bottom of the dome crashing and scratching the ice. Thumping the soil, kicking up dirt and grass, accompanied by a ripple of energy that pulses through the flowing grass violently. Waving the grass in an unnatural tempo. Darker clouds formed in the gloomy unlit sky above. Thunder cued the storm, lightning painted a ferocious picture as the pattering rain continuously fell. The crack now split the dome into two separate halves, but it didn't fall apart, not yet, it just sat there idly for what seemed like months. Day, nights, and fortnights later, Vaea had finally stopped casting, but she didn't budge. She didn't move or breathe since she had halted her creation. Vorago looked on over her shoulder, puzzled. Before he could even approach her, he had suddenly thought of the—

"World's first challenge."

"Yes."

He thought, he knew for this foolish and young world to prosper, and for them to be enlightened. That they must first experience **suffering**, loss, and dire mistakes that sound off in the silent night with an explosive flame.

"That suffering will make its existence known, in the form of Dome-Wyrd's first beast."

"In the form of titanic golden wings."

"I will make this young world know terror, and they will fight that terror to survive."

"Or they will dreadfully perish"

"In surviving this dreadful terror, these mortals will learn that they will have to advance, adapt, and irrefutably evolve to survive in this dreary and juvenile world."

"Lest they perish."

"Death is the unmistakable teacher that accompanies life, for death cannot exist without life."

Vorago looks onto Vaea with admiration as he continues on—

"Through the role I must play. I will make these mortals affray for their honor."

"To teach them for a brighter dawn to follow"

"So by the time the next era dawns, the next trial they face."

"When this world makes its evil known; they will be prepared."

"They will learn from their mistakes, and trust their neighbor. "

"They will band together, and learn how sacred the beauty of life actually is."

"In the beginning of times, plagues must transpire, atrocities must take place, and tragedies must occur."

"They will learn from foul turmoil, they will survive, I know of this."



"I hear it from the watchers themselves."

"Whispering from the great beyond, in the center of the vast cosmos, as they are surrounded by legions of demons, striking harmonious violins and chanting in unison. Their existence is even incomprehensible to us, let alone the mortals."

"Whatever form this world's evil may take."

"These unworldly tragedies I create will in time become Dome-Wyrd's triumph, it's tales of yore."

"It is Dome-Wyrd's destiny to keep fighting and prosper."

"So that one day a golden dawn will shine upon this gloomy land."

"It will illuminate all the sprawling life Vaea and I will create."

Vorago's head felt light, strange even. He had a loss of time and the words that had spewed from his mouth, they didn't particularly feel like his own but rather as if someone else was speaking for him. He shook off the thought, for some peculiar reason he knew exactly where to place the egg that would one-day spawn golden wings. That would one day soon test Domewyrd and its inhabitants the value of mortal-life.

Vorago had no idea how much time had passed, or how in the seven-hells he knew exactly where to put the egg, or even where he got the thought for the egg itself. He didn't question it, he gazed toward Vaea, she still hadn't moved. There she stood, standing frozen, lifeless & stiff. Vorago marched toward Fairgun-Gard's towering double-doors, through the marble palace, which its floors glimmered and sparkled. Its halls towered over Vorago, just slightly. The concaved, dome-like ceiling was just high enough to contain the colossal Vorago.

He approached the stone double-doors that were anything but towering for Vorago. His right hand fiercely clutched the right-hand side of the archway. With the mortal air of the mountain Vorago was mutating into his true form, rapidly. His hands pulsated, growing in volume with an echoing groan. His left hand slamming onto the left side

of the archway with an immense crash, with both his hands now bigger than the palace-doors themselves.

Vorago began pulling himself upward with a roar that echoed. Reverberating throughout Dome-Wyrd's dark and empty skies. He pulled himself out of the entrance. Slowly, one titanic limb at a time. First came his left foot, which he slowly reeled outside of the palace using his hands on the crumbling archway as leverage. Accidentally crashing into the archway that stood above the palace doors, with his expanding shoulders, as blocks of stone broke off and tumbled into the deep snow, his left foot slams onto the snowy peak brisk with falling snow, sinking into the snowfall. Lastly came his right foot, he tugged it with his left arm. Almost losing his balance, he pivots his body as his right foot stood sunken in the snow atop the peak, his left foot slid across over the other side of the snow-covered mountain. Vorago stood hunched over the mountain, he was peering unto the glorious lands before him.

It was a beautiful moment, the first Vorago had seen of what he and his lover created. For a split-second and like Domewyrd would soon know, the only time that peace graced the idle lands. Before the time of mortals, before the time of betrayal, even before Vorago himself knew that this would be the age of darkness. Upon the horizon in which he was standing on, in all of his pristine and darkened splendor he saw the enormous frozen dome that encased all of Domewyrd. It stood there stretching far above the gloomy skies, Vorago was perplexed as the darkness beneath his robe seethed a certain suspicious thickness.

The cracks upon the frozen-crystal orb had seemingly multiplied in size as well as the immensity of the dome itself. Stretching an extra five-hundred meters above Domewyrd and around its surrounding sea that was now raging and violent.

He could not place his seething mist on it, he had a churning, wriggling feeling, swimming in his gut. Although for some unbeknown reason, he thought nothing of it. Perhaps it was the glorious horizon and the seemingly endless spectacle of beauty before him that not only he, but what he & his lover created, together. It was an overwhelming euphoria, it soothed his mind. An uplifting feeling that made him lose time, and perhaps even his mind. He knew in that moment, seeing the splendor of both of their beauty, in an undeniable existence.

He knew that this young world, it was his only purpose, to create and teach this world they had created so that it can prosper, flourish, and grow with the ever-turning wheels of fate. These mortals wouldn't be his children, although these mortals are beautiful in their own right. Enticing beings, he thought. Quite noticeably different from Vorago, he was a god after all.

These far-stretching lands. They were his golden love and joy, Vorago may have been created from the watchers far above, but it was Vorago AND Vaea that molded this impeccable beauty, this euphoric land of prosperity; A cosmic gift: Dome-Wyrd. They created all of this on their godly own.

Vorago straightened his back, snow fell from his colossal shoulders as he seethed his unmistakable darkness that fluttered and oscillated around him, with his flowing robe. The roof of Fairgun-Gard only touches Vorago's titan-sized knees, the immensity of a God was truly the first wonder of Domewyrd. A wonder so immense that if a mortal merely glimpsed at a god's true form. It would mean death itself.

He began wandering down the mountains, making a haste leap to the beautiful valley below, hitting the ground with a crater and an echoing thud. This crater would soon be the founding discovery of the god's presence in Dome-Wyrd.

You know what they say

"The first step is a foot-print."

Vorago straightened his knees, he took a deep breath, as he exhaled and dark vapors began to spin around his head. He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them, their golden tint, it shone even brighter. A blinding brightness radiated from within. Gazing upon the mortal world he and Vaea had created, he suddenly felt a warped feeling reside within the depths of his mind. As if his thoughts were no longer his own but merely projected into his mind.

The more he tried to decipher this warping and controlling feeling. The more his mind seemed to gap, pondering on the swarming thought, his thoughts seemed to disconnect from each other. Unable to concentrate he now found himself stumbling across the vacant valleys. Losing his balance and crashing into a nearby mountain.

His elbow slamming into the mountain's peak, penetrating its feeble rocks, as they crumbled and cratered into the valley below his elbow sliced the top-half of the mountain completely off. With the penetration of his colossal elbow the crumbling peak slid down the other side of the tumbling mountain. Kicking-up rocks and heaps of snow following its plummeting fall. The peak abruptly came to a complete halt at the mountains bottom, concaving the earth around its center.

Vorago heaved as his elbow resting on the now mutilated mountain top that was completely flattened. He felt a fog dispersing throughout his mind. He couldn't control his thoughts, his vision was shaky, his echoing thoughts were powerful, pulsating, demanding, and crushing.

The more he tried to think the more he thought about her and her glorious figure. How Vaea seemed to grace the skies themselves, making them shine brighter. Her eyes, oh, her eyes he thought. They seemed to shine and entice him, just from the mere imagining of her undeniable existence. He couldn't separate a single thought from her, and her soft, reverberating voice. He swore he could see her in the sky and hear her in his mind, he was in a state of a circling and swarming obsession.

he still hadn't moved from the wreckage of the crumbled mountain. Laying in the destruction like it was his throne, slumped over, his head-tilted back, his eyes wide, and a continuous moaning groan. A groan so immense that it boomed throughout the lands, blowing through the multicolored meadows on the rolling hills.

Almost catatonic, Vorago heard her voice pass ear-to-ear, his head perked to the side like a curious dog.

His breaths quickened, he felt perspiration on his forehead. As Vorago wiped his forehead, he thought for a moment, "Is this fear?" he pondered, his vision began shifting, the world became wavy, he saw the landscape in a world of doubles. He suddenly felt an unfathomable heat. A sweet one, gods know naught of exhaustion, sweating, sleeping, or fear for that matter.

They are an endless energy of creation. Vorago was baffled, perplexed, and the more he couldn't wrap his mind around the situation, the more he started to worry. It was as if the darkness he seethed had infected his mind. As if his powers that be were his own damnation.

He shouted as his seething darkness reacted to his booming voice that suddenly began to radiate a swarming heat. A heat that warmed the earth and the skies hanging above. He reached into his robe with a quickening frustration, he suddenly was rambling.

"Where, WHERE IN THE DEVIL IS IT?!"

After moments of searching, and bellowing rage. He felt something golden and orb-like rub against his palms, he started to pull his titanic hand out of his robe. Hunching over the mountain as he rose holding a shining golden egg. His eyebrows tilted, his golden eyes began to brighten and widen. The egg itself radiated a blinding gold, the light that surrounded the egg shone like an aura.

Vorago began rotating it within his palms and gazed into its beauty. Savoring the moment for a brief second he had forgotten all about the swarming fog that was inevitably infecting his mind and his thoughts. With a slight smirk and a subtle wince, he grasps the egg firmly. Chucking the egg, pursing his lips and grunting, the egg began flying across all of Dome-Wyrd.

Tossing it with such a dire strength, at such a speed, that it became encased in bright, burning flames. Every moment that passed while it soared through the air, its momentum increased. Destroying entire grand-oak trees with a shockwave, as the egg shoots past the forests. Waving the trees, tearing through the skies, the egg whistled, it spun through the air with a certain ferocity. As it began to pass Dome-Wyrd's sandy shores, all the while Vorago stared onwards, it finally began to ark.

Hitting the water with a thud and sinking to its bottom. Impacting the water's surface, a pounding splash followed by an abrupt change in the flowing tide, of the endless sea. Vorago, although miles away, could make out the splash just on the vast horizon. With a nod he began to look up in awe.

He watched as the crystallized sphere encasing Domewyrd had rapidly dissipated into golden particles gently falling onto Dome-Wyrd's surface. Golden speckles touched the flowers and bountiful grass, they too dissipated. Upon this moment Vorago realized that there was no fog or raiding thoughts conquering his mind that seemed to swirl around him like an unending flame. There was only Dome-Wyrd, this flawless creation; Vaea, and Vorago.

He didn't ponder of the confusion, what had transpired, he couldn't even recollect it, or the frozen sphere that once toward above him. Vorago merely stood there, appreciating everything in his presence. The beauty of existence.

Vorago picked his colossal self-up, he began striding with a certain godly pride back to the peak of Fairgun-Gard. For what do minor troubles matter when we have this creation of godly splendor; Domewyrd! Vorago thought as he chuckled, reeling his body limb-by-limb back into Fairgun-Gard's now damaged entrance.

As his limbs were stuck in the entrance, they shrunk back to his containable size, fit for the palace of gods.

Vorago strolled in the palace with a new-found confidence, he gazed past the enormous throne and to the left, toward the balcony, Vaea it seemed, had finally moved.

"To where?"

He briefly wondered, just before he could finish the thought he had heard her voice suddenly, from behind him. Vorago quickly turned around to find that the throne was now facing him, Vaea was sitting there, although, much larger than he remembered. Her immensity crashed through the ceiling as Vorago looked upon her.

The upper-half of her body was sticking out of a hole at the top of the palace. She peered down at Vorago with demeaning eyes that made him shrink, even smaller than he already was. Vaea began to slowly stretching as the Ceiling of the palace crashed above Vorago, he dashed to the entrance with a leaping-roll. Barely making it out of the way she now began to cackle a maddening cackle, it reverberated throughout the palace and forced Vorago to shield his ears, as his eyes began to throb and shake.

Vorago's face was sweating, his seething darkness was erratic and wild. He stared right into her eyes, Vaea reclined in the throne, crashing the ceiling behind her and slouching her silky arms along the arm-rests. She crossed her legs as her skin shined. She then donned a devious smile and piercing, bright eyes.

Not even a god could deny them. She slowly stood up not restraining her eye contact on Vorago as her head tilted down, she opened her soft-jaw

"Vorago! my sweet! Darkened lover! Where have you been!"

She yipped in an unpleasantly perfect tone.

"We have a world to shape in my! Oh, I mean, OUR IMAGE."

Smiling down on Vorago she snaps her fingers, almost instantly shrinking down to his size. She stood brushing off her robe, her soft hands clasped together. She motioned for him to come closer.

"Come, Come my love! See what your seething darkness has helped create."

As Vorago suspiciously stepped toward her, her head cocked down toward his seething darkness. Her smile mutates into a wryly grin, flashing it back to innocent she begins walking beside Vorago, toward the balcony. He walked out onto the balcony as Vaea slipped in front of him, her eyes scanning him from his darkness, all the way to his glowing eyes.

She rubs her slender fingers slightly across his broad chest, twirling around Vorago, just behind him, her arms slung around his thick neck.

"And so, it would seem the world has its first breath."

Vorago slowly stated, suspiciously. She clasped his hands in hers, gently.

"Vorago my love! Look upon the sprawling life we have created! This land! its inhabitants!"

"All of what stands before us, truly, it is ours to shape as we please!"

"For our own desires, I mean yours, my oh so powerful and undeniable one!"

Vaea pauses, and then sarcastically continues as her velvety lip twitches.

"Or there's..."

Vorago grunts, sliding her hand off of his shoulders.

"No Vaea, it will always be for them, and for things even unbeknown to us."

"It's for the mortals and their children. Their children's children, and every generation after."

He strolls to the railing of the balcony, his hands clasped behind his waist.

"The sprawling life we were blessed with; the gifts we were destined with."

Vorago clenches his fists.

"It will be our grandiose legacy! that in time, it will be held only in the tales and myths of this aging young land."

Upon Vaea's face was a look that was displeased, a disgusted look. Appalled by Vorago's words, her bright eyes darkened within a millisecond of a moment, throwing her hands to the side of her hips, smacking her lips and raising her eyebrows.

"Oh, but my great and powerful lover... you can't be so foolish as to believe that the watchers themselves, the only beings known higher than us! the gods of creation! the first ones! intended for us to be so... BORING!"

"Vorago, my liege, please understand. We have potential, these lands have potential!"

She begins stepping forward, swinging her hips, her left hand drops behind her waist as a bright, white-glow illuminates her curves.

"Imagine what we could do, together."



"We can be so much more, whatever we choose in fact! We could sail the cosmos with these lands as our vessel!"

"Two lovers! Oh, my sweet. We would be revered, praised by the mortals below!"

Her face twitched with excitement, her eyes bulging, her voice was cracking and shaking, the muscles in her neck were tense. Vorago reeled back, on his guard with his fists clenched even tighter, his eyes squinted.

"YOU ARE MAD VAEA."

Vorago shouted in a booming echo.

Vaea suddenly pursed her lips in an "o" with her eyes squinted, she instantaneously cackled. She cackled a cackle no god, no mortal should ever hear. "Mad? Mad? MAD? VORAGO?!" Her voice escalated into shrieks, her muscles tensed, and spit flew from her perfect lips.

"MAD, is having so much seething power! and not doing a god-damn thing with it! You're the mad one Vorago!!"

"You're weak! you're pathetic! you are no god! You couldn't have gotten even half as far WITHOUT ME!!"

Vaea was practically foaming at the mouth, her voice reverberating and echoing all throughout the palace.

Her echoing voice began bursting all the windows, glass shattering every-which-way.

"No Vorago, you're not mad you are a fool. Do you know why my beloved?"

Her voice rapidly shrunk, she was absolutely calm now.

Vorago balls his fists shaking ferociously.

"How am I the fool Vaea? If I have been tricked, if the evil did not lie below with the soon to be mortals."

"If the evil of this world, perhaps by chance, stood before me all this time."

Vorago raises his left arm.

"You are the fool Vaea."

"For such a great evil, you have already revealed your ideals, you have already given me the scope of your deceit and treachery, possibly even your plan."

"You foul temptress, you heathen, do you honestly think you could defeat me? Blowing your horn? Screaming at the one soul in this young world, that was created for you? to help you and shape this world? To guide the both of you?"

**"YOU WOULD DARE DEFY I, VORAGO, THE GOD OF DEATH?!"**

**"WE ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME IRREFUTABLE COIN; WITHOUT DEATH THERE CAN BE NO LIFE!"**

"Oh, Vorago, I don't need you darling, I just need your delicious power."

"YOU SUCCUBUS, IS THAT HOW YOU WILL USE THE GIFTS THE WATCHERS GAVE US?"

"This predestined fate the watchers gave us?"

"Who's to say I ever wanted to love you Vorago?"

"I never got to choose"

"I went along with the charade as long as I could, but I never lied, I do love you."

"I love your power."

Vaea smirks, bursting into an uncontrollable chuckle. Vorago raises his fists, grunting. He begins pummeling toward Vaea, each step booms, each step gets heavier as he sprints toward her. The darkness that flows behind Vorago pulsates, it drags behinds him, growing, the voices of many began to scream and shriek.

His darkness whips behind him violently. Oozing onto his body, forming an exoskeleton that hardens into a dark suit of plate armor, just as he raises his fist and screams "VAEA", his armor now ignites into a white, blazing, flame.

Vaea steps to the right, just in time. Her footwork is incredible, gracious, daunting. Down below Fairgun-Gard it was a bolt of lightning illuminating the unlit sky. Vorago grunted in a confusion stopping himself with his heavy, dreadful, blazing armor. Planting his feet into the marble as he slides across the marble, the floor cracked and flew behind him. Gazing into her, her mouth opened quickly, perhaps too quickly.

"Fine, have it your way Vorago, this was a test, and a test you have now failed."

"Such a sad fate for a god, you could have been such a great partner."

She revealed her hidden hand, in that moment Vorago truly knew not only fear, but defeat. Grey vapors assimilate from Vaea's slender fingers. The vapors crawl and creep betwixt Vorago's seething darkness. Seemingly enough, their colors mutate, blending with Vorago's seething and undeniable power. Vaea croaks, replacing her hands on his wide shoulders as she grins.

"But my love, aren't we worthy enough to have just a bit of fun with these boring mortals?"

Something changed in Vorago's demeanor, as if his mind became a decrepit ruin whose contents amounted to only archaic, and rotten water. He seemed disassociated and androgynous, Vorago simply replied in slow, forced, and distant sentences.

"Yes, yes, my queen, creation is a task only fit for a goddess, and as a god I know you forever wait in my lucid dreams. My dreams rife with

colossal towers oozing black-tar, vales in plain sculpted in your image. With lands riddled with war, death, and brutal sacrilege, yes I know you wait in my lucid dreams..."

She turns his shoulders toward the throne as he slowly drags his heavy plated feet throughout the palace. Vorago plops his body downward into the throne, his armor crashing, his head bobbing on the cushion behind him as his bright and golden eyes began to dim, slowly.

Vaea walked over to Vorago's slumped body, casually, her hips swinging, her lips whistling, her arms swinging exuberantly. Vorago's limbs go limp as he slouches forward, lifeless and hollow.

"Slumber soundly my wretched god of death!"

"You'll find when you wake up, well if you do."

"You'll find that this world will truly be a deserving world!"

"Of pristine potential, my love!"

She giggles with her hand covering her perfect jaw, sliding her hand onto his shoulders, playfully patting his head.

"Oh, dear me! Dear me! you can't hear a word can you?"

"Well slumbering gods are the worst, what's a lonely goddess to do!"

She cackles into a reverberating hysteria. She was holding her stomach as tears began to line her delicate face. she joyfully slapped Vorago's shoulders, shaking his lifeless body. Vaea hops up on her toes, strolling to the balcony's railing, making sure to bounce playfully over the dents that Vorago had left on the palace floor amidst his failure of a fight, more of a struggle. Then again, we all lose fights against the ones we love. Some are temporary, and some are dreadfully permanent.

"Vorago, Vorago, Vorago, it's a shame because your name has quite the pleasant ring to it."

"I love the way it rolls of my tongue, don't you?"

"Hmm, what a shame, we could've been such a delightful pair my dear!"

"It's going to be a gorgeous! A horrendous! A chaotically euphoric ride my love!"

"Now slumber while I show you the true power, the true destiny the watchers gave to us."

With Vorago's slumber, the world was now truly blind to the truth. They weren't foolish, they weren't ignorant, but merely blind to the definition of the world's absolute truths. For the first ones, the first entities birthed into the universe. They were now a lie, Vaea siphoned Vorago's seething darkness from his unconscious body, he was now nothing more than a lifeless vessel of untold power.

For now, the world wasn't ruled by both of the foolish gods, only the treacherous Vaea. She was now the puppet master of Dome-Wyrd, she spawned the titanium strings that she would inevitable tug. The world and all its inhabitants were now her little lost puppets. There are forces even higher than the first ones, and ever since that fateful moment in history, Time stood still in Domewyrd.

Terrible endings always have a beginning, Vaea, concocted a vile, vile plan. Her terror had no bounds, her evil had no limits. She knew her first step was to slowly, but surely, corrupt each king that Vorago had so foolishly hoped for and gleefully instructed her to create.

Vaea, although, as deceitful as she was, was distrusting and paranoid. In her delusions she had decided that shortly after Vorago had revealed his plan to lead this universe through fear, trauma, and war. Forcing all of the societies to affray for their honor, to prove their worth. All-the-while keeping the mortals greed contained by riddling the sprawling hills with titanic beasts that the mortals would time and time again. Just like the civil war had Vorago planned for, he would indeed learn from their mistakes.

That from their mistakes that they would all band-together. For greater threats, for the greater good, for enlightenment, for honor, for their future, for their children's future, For Dome-Wyrd.

Vaea being the treacherous being that she was, knew exactly how to turn this plan on top of itself. She thought it was foolish to trust these mortals, that they could use all of these kings. To control the vast continent. To control the mortals, you must first control the ones that foolishly lead them. With Vorago in a deep, soundless slumber.

With Vaea's very existence pulsing, she knew not only what to do, but how to do it, how she could use the mortals, to harness even more flourishing power, their very essence of life; Their souls. She knew that somewhere on this juvenile world that there lied something Vorago had planted. If the watchers created them who by a tree of power, created the world before them. There had to be something else, something that could lead her to a power even greater than the watchers themselves. Even more so than the power now coursing through her veins. After all, someone had to have created the watchers, didn't they?

She didn't know the answer to this revolving question. She felt it like the energy she was siphoning from Vorago, every vile plan must have an origin. For a great change to transpire across the lands in a chain-reaction. It matters not how grand the evil is, or the complexity of the diabolical plan.

For whatever plan, or whatever evil that sweeps across unsuspecting lands. All it ever takes is a first-step, one small-step, after that, the pieces will flawlessly fall into the place.

With patience, time, and a truly sadistic mind. Any terrible future can be realized; any doom can be wrought. Any plague can be spawned, any evil can find a foot-hole, in any world, no matter how precious. No matter how beautiful and pristine. Regardless of how many seemingly endless nights that you pray underneath the empty sky. Life cannot exist without death, light cannot exist without shadow. Joy cannot exist without pain, and surely, good cannot not exist without evil. As Vaea's plan would soon grow with time, she would also come to know that even gods can make mistakes, just as Vorago did in trusting her.

To the west of Dome-Wyrd's daunting greenwood, far out in the sea, but not too far. A world apart lied a series of islands, unbeknown to the rest of the world. Homely, kindhearted, and honest folk resided among these isles. Shaped in a upside-down "U", the waters surrounding them were littered with fish making it not only an applicable market of sales, but a logical one. Although where business thrives, shady and disheartened men will soon find themselves.

The First King Of Yore: Manis Furin, The Delusional King.

Squeezing the copper out of a man's leather bag, wringing them tighter than cleaning a piece of cloth.

## Chapter II The Isle Of Vale.

We travel not to the west, nor the south and definitely not the east! Dreadfully vile that east is! Not far from Dome-Wyrd's shores rests a series of islands, fisherman settlements and towns that sat upon docks, over murky waters that they dreadfully referred to as the sea. The west islands were dangerous, riddled with pirates and thieves.

The east islands were of high renown, they had their own border and refused to let anyone pass through its gates if they didn't by chance, have an "Eastern Border Pass" They were white pieces of parchment with text that read: "By the royalty invested in me by the First Ones themselves, and hereby grant the holder of this pass admission to the Eastern Islands of Mahree."

The only problem was that to get one of these passes, you were required to have an audience with the King of Mahree, but to even get into the kingdom, to get an audience, you needed a pass. Hard times these were, dark times indeed, and the mortals themselves stricken by grief, poverty, or even stressed by their own health. Morale was at an all-time low in the isles, which was better than Domewyrd could say. We travel to the center of all of these isles, on a small island which stood on the very tip of the southern coast, To the Isle of : **Vale**.

*The Isle Of Vale;* It was a poor island, Several villages spread throughout these vast southern isles, riddled with run-down shacks the charring spread about the village like a stain, a stain of history. They were common folk, more times than not the poor usually were. They weren't warriors, or pirates, or even scholars, they were honest men living in an abysmal time, merely trying to survive so that their children had a parent to wish them good morning.

These were the dark times after all, and with the grim isles touching the surrounding sea, well it's not surprising to know that pirates and thieves circled these seas, as well as raiding these villages. There was a reason for the eastern isles border gate after all, as



*ridiculous* as the mortals were, they weren't mad. Pirates usually plundered the villages, causing chaos, commandeering the taverns, wrecking homes and lives, but it all mattered naught to them.

These were dark times after all, and everyone, even the wicked needed to eat and provide. No matter how twisted the man, at the end of every grueling day, every man, every dwarf, and every elf knew that. It's just the route you travel upon that defines you, not your actions.

On the cusp of the raging sea stood a shore on the southern isle. Upon its dirty shores riddled with debris and ship-wreckage, just above the incline, past the trail that lead to a quiet village. A quiet, small village, whose homes all faced one another, hardly put together.

Although not impressive, it was honorable to see homes built by bare hands and not slaves. The time was not yet for slaves, that came dreadfully later. The time was still dark, as this silent village would soon know. In the center of the town stood a dingy stage, and above it was a wooden plaque, poorly made, that read; "Talented Tykes."

Behind the dingy stage stood a dirt path that winded to the north east for about half a mile, at its end you could clearly see a two-story home, one would wonder why the homes in town weren't even half as good as that home. Then one would realize, that in these poorly made homes lied husbands and wives, in the well-constructed home, billowing smoke from a stone chimney, one would realize that there slumbered all of the children whom were in fact, without parents.

In these dark times, war and poverty caused the constant raiding of villages, where no mortal was safe to live with their family. Often more times than not, they burned entire villages as they siphoned their booze, guzzling it like heckling fiends. There was a reason to why there were so many orphans in this dark time, the age of darkness, the first age of Domewyrd.

There was no civil way to live, it was maim, or be maimed. Kill or be killed, although these were everyday things for mortals. This day was not an everyday occurrence, and a certain orphan that was no mere orphan, resting in that cozy home just behind the dingy stage, which would soon be his podium.

This orphan, he was no ordinary orphan, as he would soon know.

He slept soundly, snoring louder than all the other frail and sickly children. He was pawing in his sleep, drooling on his wool pillow, kicking his sheets and twitching like a frog.

Looking on, this was probably an adorable thing, but deep within this special boy's mind. In the realm of dreams and nightmares, something horrific began. Before the young, although clever and docile Manis could even fathom it, it was already too late.

Manis yawned as his voice squeaked, tussling his bright-orange hair, rubbing his eyes which had full circles surrounding them. All the other boy seemed to have left their small room, it housed ten beds, five on each side. The wooden walls creaked and were starting to become weathered, although you could never tell from the outside.

All the beds were laid facing each other, touching the wall. Manis stayed in the last bed on the right wall, closest to the cracked and dirty window. At the east-end of the room there was a bathroom, and to the left of that door lead to the hallway, Along with every other bed sat a trunk for each child, it held their clothes.

Manis reached in his trunk and slipped his white tunic over his head, it didn't have sleeves (they were ripped off), and revealed his scrawny arms. He jumped into his white linen pants, they were always dirty.

Manis wasn't the cleanest, or well, normal for that matter. He was animated, erratic, charismatic(for his age), and extremely emotional. Often he ended up brawling with the other boys, more times than not Manis couldn't contain his emotions, or control his rage. Although, there was one boy he considered his friend, Manis was a solitary child but for some reason when Jaykob was around, he talked up a storm.

He was the best friend a boy like Manis could've hoped for in dark times like these. Jaykob was an orphan just like Manis, he slept across from him, they were practically inseparable. After Manis was dressed, he jolted across the room, slinging as he turns and magnetizing his hand straight to the door-handle with a zip.

He flings open the door peeking around the corner, it's absolutely silent, no one's around. He was confused as he strolled whistling down the hallway, the wood creaked as he stepped, he headed toward the stairs to the left. Every other step had a hole in it, so you had to hop down each step in odds.

As Manis platformed and zig-zagged, he hit the bottom floor with a thud just as dust shoots from under his slamming feet. he looked to the right in the kitchen, cocking his eyebrows he realized it was too, empty.

Manis shrugged his shoulders and stepped outside, in the distance, in the town's center, just upon the dingy stage everyone in town was standing. He jogged toward the stage and as he approached skidded in the dirt, and announcing in a shaky voice.

"H-h-heeey guys! d-d-d-id, I miss something?"

Everyone was standing above him on the stage, everyone he knew from the orphanage, their care-taker "Madam Moisselle" and old crow-like woman, she was as sweet as a peach.

The kids all called her that because her husband did, and he was regrettably lost at sea. They were all chatting so fast, Manis had no hope of being able to hear what they were talking about, almost ignoring him.

He heard a terrible wind that passed just behind his ear. Not ten-feet behind him, or in front of him, or even to the side, right behind him.

As the win passed he could've swore it spoke and said: "Trust no one, my young delusional Manis!"

He was startled, shaking, and frightened. Manis began sweating and a shriek flew from his mouth,

**"ARE YOU DOLTS IGNORING ME!?!?"**

**"I'M SICK OF YOUR DASTARDLY RUSES!"**

**"IF YOU BURKES HAVE GOT A QUALM, THEN ANNOUNCE IT!"**

**"BAH PLAGUE ON IT! YOU AND THE WHOLE LOT OF THE WRETCHED TOWN!"**

Instantly they all turned, gazing down at him, all of them dawned a look of menacing hatred, their facial expressions warped like flowing water. Manis reeled back and screamed, kicking up dirt behind him.

They all leaned forward pressing their faces together, harder and harder they shouted, with so many voices that it became unintelligible. Their voices were screaming, shrieking, reverberating, and pulsating all around Manis.

The villagers were now practically falling off the stage their faces all pressed together tight and sporadically shouting. Just as they all began tumbling forward on top of Manis, all of their faces mutated together, their eyes, noses, and mouths were all oscillating on this now disfigured face.

Manis jumped backwards, falling on his rear with a thud. His eyes were wide, and as this abomination fell onto the dirt, everything below its face moved like water and began oozing as its skin became a neutral grey. It moaned in the voice of many as all the voices and faces swirled before him. The moaning grew louder, it was unbearable as Manis screamed with a face full of tears, covering his ears, and staring into this monstrosity.

It inched closer, and closer, oozing and flopping it's liquid skin. It's oversized and grotesque face flowing like water, moaning, groaning and screaming. Just as Manis was petrified from fear, the being dripping it's gray skin the reeked of rotting flesh, as Manis now had to cover his nose from the smell and propelling himself backwards with his feet and hands.

In the middle of its overgrown face opened a cut, as if someone he didn't see vertically slashed the beast.

He mouthed with his bright lips "what?" As giant insect legs crept out, it was stretched passed the town and over the sea, it was riddled with dark hairs.

Then a second leg flew out stretching over and above Manis. A third leg inched out to his right, and then a fourth leg to his left, a fifth spanned to his left, a sixth to the right, Manis couldn't believe what he was seeing. Just as he was trying to fathom what in the seven hells was transpiring, a seventh, and an eighth leg shot out behind him.

He stood up and gazed around and quickly realized that these legs stretched from this overgrown face all the way to the deep, raging sea. Before Manis could think a moment more, Something rose out of the abomination.

It was a colossal spider, it ripped abomination's skin as blood poured underneath it, it stood just above the clouds. Then it began moving not forward mind you, it descended it's body staring straight at Manis.

It had eight ruby eyes on its skull, it's skin a dark black, and a dormant sleeping eyes sat above its skull resting on its body, it's towering body, although black, it was not that of a spider's structure but a brain's. It's pincers were covered in hair and just beneath it, were dark green tendrils, that hung hundreds of feet below as they dangled and swayed. It descended faster and faster towards Manis, his eyes grew wider and his sweat dropped faster.

As he screamed thinking it was far too late for him, it stops, pivoting it's head pointed directly at Manis, it stares for what seemed like five minutes straight.

It's pincers chatter whilst the dormant sleeping eye opens, the entirety of its eyes is a bloody red, in its iris stood a mesmerizing swirl. The eye began twitching, the swirl inside the dominating iris twirled chaotically fast as the spider crashes it's pincers together and shivers. Manis is hypnotized, lost to the eye, just as one of its monumental legs stretches from far in the distance. Hovering above Manis, it slowly descended down and Just as the spider is about to snatch Manis, time halted, and the world erratically melted, like throwing water on a freshly inked painting.

Manis shrieks a bellowing scream, rising like a vampire in a deep sweat, his sheets completely drenched. He gazes around in a fret, breathing heavily, uncontrollably, he notices everyone was still asleep. Manis mutters to himself,

"It was just a dream, just a dream, don't be a fool! don't be stupid! stupid!"

He threw his blanket off of him and still drenched in sweat he runs his fingers through his hair and pulls. Staring up at the ceiling trying to decipher what exactly he just experienced during his slumber.

Why did the people turn into an abomination? What was with that spider? Just before Manis could wonder anymore, the door to the hallway crashes open.

Madame Moisselle was the culprit, she waltzed in dawning her tattered black dress, stomping her ashy heels, with her deep sunken bags and dark eyes.

One could have sworn they were portals to a dreadful abyss. Alas, looks can be quite the deceiver. As this young foolish world and our young Manis would soon know, beauty is the greatest deception of life.

She was a feeble old woman and it only took a few heavy steps to wake all of the children. She looked down at them like an archaic tree withering in the wind, moving her forearms behind her hips and straightening her back. (Her likeness to the tree was astounding, her joints even creaked like the branches that populated the lush greenwoods of Domewyrd.)

She tilted her lips upward, stretching her wrinkles in a pleasant way. Leaning over slightly and her dark eyes seem to glimmer slightly, she opened her mouth with a wide grin, rolling her tongue in such a way that you could have sworn that sunlight peered from her throat.

"Up, up, up! My talented tykes!"

"Now my groggy dears, rub your sockets, stretch your little bones, greet the sunlight! for today my children, today is that time of year again."

"Where travelers come to see my talented tykes perform."

Madame Moisselle strides over to the window, yanking the curtain, as echoes of groans grace the bedroom.

All at once the children realized what day it was, there was a play to perform, chairs to set up, costumes to wear, and roles to rehearse. They all twitched with their eyes bulging, their grins stretched, and almost simultaneously shot out of their beds. All the children scurried in their trunks for their linens, drawers, and shoes.

Manis was the first one out of the room, as they hopped, jumped, and stampeded down the stairs for breakfast, and yet again Manis was the first one at the table, with his eyes bright, his orange hair even brighter. The day was dark, as it always was in these times.

Lanterns were always riddled around the house, in front of the orphanage, and all around the village. Madame Moisselle, threw all of

their bowls on the table in an acrobatic fashion. Spinning them and herself as she set the table for the children, spouting in a joyous tune "Eat my children, we've have a big day. NO! the biggest day of the year! Eat up and get in character my darlings, we all have a part to play, especially our talented Manis!"

She shuffles behind Manis's chair with her boney fingers resting them on Manis's frail shoulders as he grunts in displeasure.

"All of us have a part to play, and my dears, I have the utmost faith that we will get that standing ovation!"

"For it may be that time of year children, but I have some glorious news my dears, glorious news I say!"

Waving her hands back and forth, "There's a special someone who's said to attend our yearly play, I didn't want to put any unnecessary stress on my darlings. Oh! But I couldn't resist not-telling you! *If* we do put on a show worthy of the name "**Talented Tykes**", it just may, seal us entree to the eastern islands to perform for the king of Mahree himself!"

The children all stared at each other in amazement, shouting and hollering, banging on the table, but not Manis. Manis stood quiet, his arms crossed.

"We'll see, our parents aren't here for us so what makes you morons think that a bunch of snooty highly-folk will be there for us?"

They all got quiet, as Madame Moisselle interjected,

"Oh Manis, you brooder! Children, I assure you a representative of the king will be here!"

She brushes off his comment as her unbreakable smile seemed to twitch.

"Now children! eat up! eat up, and scurry along to my room! we must get ready! and Manis! Jaykob! go set up the chairs in front of the stage! take all the ones from the kitchen, and living room! some other genuine folk from the village have donated their personal chairs as well, so take the ones from the kitchen and living room my dears, and set them up in rows, but Manis, Jaykob, leave a gap in the middle so we can walk off stage."

"You've got a big performance today Manis; I know you can do it my love."

Madame Moisselle, pets both Manis and Jaykob's hair. Smiling, she turns around bouncily, slowly limping up the stairs as her joints creak and the children finish eating.

Manis & Jaykob grab two chairs each from the living room and walk out the front door, still groggy wobbling with chairs bigger than themselves and onto the dirt path heading into the village. Manis was slightly at a faster pace so Jaykob scurried to catch-up.

The dirt path winded from the orphanage down a hill and into the town square, surrounded by an ocean of water and the subtle breeze of the sea. Their hair blew in their faces as they picked up their kicking up dirt as they ran.

"Hey Manis!"

Jaykob said as they jogged into town.

"yeah?"

"Do you really think we have a shot at making into the Eastern Kingdom?"

"ha-ha"

Manis chuckled.

"Honestly? No, I don't, I think Miss Moisselle just wants us to be happy and put on one hell of a show, I mean, sure Jaykob, it would be a grand opportunity. As much as I'd love to believe that would happen to us, we're just lowly orphans!"



"We were shit onto this earth, sure, there's actors and poets in the eastern kingdoms, but they're all high-borns. They're all adults, and surely they all have or at the very least **had** god-damned parents."

Manis was shaking, and Jaykob got quiet, but then replied "Yeah, I guess you're right Manis, it is too good to be true, but there's nothing wrong with  
hope."

Manis laughed again as they skidded in the dirt to stop in front of the dingy stage.

"Yeah, if you don't mind being a fool."

he said with his tongue out, as Jaykob laughed along. They began setting up the four Chairs they had and ran back through the village. Up the hill and along the path, back into the orphanage. The rest of the children had already finished their breakfast and were presumably upstairs so they grabbed the chairs from the kitchen in one trip, bolting out the door and back into town.

Jolting back-down the dirt path, kicking up dirt and rocks. Skidding in the dirt to barely stop in front of the stage as Manis & Jaykob finished setting up the main chairs. They spaced them obsessively, evenly, Manis got irate over the specific spacing of the chairs until he began sweating.

Cursing and hollering, spit flying from his lips as he slams the last one down and bursts

"DONE, HOW CAN IT BE SO IRRITATING TO JUST OBTAIN ORDER,"

"FUCK"

he shouted.

"Fuck, Fuck, fuck!"

Suddenly, all Manis could see, was glimpses from the night his father abandoned him at this lowly village. He muttered with wide eyes, pulling his bright hair muttering "Father...Father...Alone."

Manis chuckled, which got louder, rising up in octaves to a shrieking shrill of a cackle. He had tears line his face, but Manis, Manis couldn't stop laughing.

Jaykob reached forth with his palm open, and shouted

"MANIS, GET IT TOGETHER YOU WHORESON!"

With the strike of his palm, Manis fell to the ground, confused. He was at a complete loss, it took him a few seconds but then he realized where he was, and what in the seven-hells had just happened. He wiped his face with his forearm on his knee, he grunted.

Pushing himself up and as Jaykob took his hand he grasped with a slap. Jaykob helped him up and wiped the dirt off of his back, stared Manis in the eyes and said:

"Manis.. it's okay, listen to me, You're your own man, and you've made it this far without a single soul! We're going to get out of this village one day, and we're both going to etch our name in this world, don't lose hope Manis. I'm always with you brother."

"Now wipe those foolish tears Manis, no lead actor needs to be bubbling like a weakling, especially not you Manis. "

Manis smiles, as he wipes off his face.

"Thanks Jaykob, what in the seven hells would I do without you?"

"I rightfully couldn't say Manis, but I do promise you, that regardless of the adventures that we will have. I will always stand by your side, Actor, poet, or even lunatic; I am by your side Manis. We don't have parents, or friends, we just have each other!"

They grinned as they sprinted, side-by-side. The dark day that stood before them, it was unbeknown to these young mortals, and the rest of the village for that matter.

Vaea smiled down upon them, not a single soul had the slightest idea of what was about to transpire on this fateful and tragic day, but it was already too late. Nor did Jaykob & Manis know, that they would both have a pivotal role to play.

Not only on this day but for the rest of their mortal lives, on a mysterious island to the East. A land enshrouded in a frigid miasma.

A mass of land that no one ever returned from, no mortals were ever seen on its shores, no signs of life graced the greenwoods, but all who gazed at its splendor in the distance, across the vast sea, felt its yearning call.

Once one had found themselves on the shores, not only would they never return but they would have no recollection of their travels. Quickly finding that their memories were just like the dense fog that enshrouds the landscape.

Maybe not now, or even tomorrow but eventually they'll forfeit their own will and realize it just is. Whether their mind is their own, or not. Whether their journey was their own or not, Whether they have changed for the worse, or mutated into something much more grotesque.

Once one had set foot on those shores, it was the beginning of the end of their mind. The end of their own thoughts. Heroes are born from tragedy, but the question is not when the tragedy will occur, but whom is the hero? Every world has an undying evil, for good cannot exist with evil.

Just as light will not exist without a shadow. Love refuses to exist without heart wrenching pain. Just as this Vast world could not exist without the first ones themselves, or the impeccable lands of: Domewyrd.

Madam Moisselle paced back and forth, stomping her heels, waving her hands a speaking in an inspiring tone.

"We've rehearsed your parts for months now, we've gotten you all costumes, every single one of you are more talented than any of the villagers have in their brittle fingers! You are my talented tykes! The time is almost upon us to march toward that stage, and children once your feet are out the door, the play begins."

"You will all remain in character until the final act comes to a close and we all bow on stage, understood my talented darlings."

As she finishes speaking she shakes her finger, scanning her eyes back and forth between the children.

"Yes, Madame Moisselle."

They all chanted in a harmonious but monotonous tone. Just as the children replied, Manis and Jaykob stormed up the stairs and jumped into the room like frogs. With a stomp of their feet, everyone in the room cocked their head. Manis chuckled and said

"The chairs are done! Madam! now, isn't time to put on a show?" Jaykob merely smiled, as Madam Moisselle clapped her hands."

Just what I wanted to hear my talented darlings! Jaykob, Manis, come here and put these on.

She hands Jaykob his costume. Sewn together from scraps of different colored cloths and an old dirty hat with a feather sticking through the brim. She handed Manis something similar but in the style of a doublet, and a tattered cape with holes scattered about. As Manis and Jaykob finish getting dressed, Manis rolled his tongue and spoke in a more annunciated and profound dialect.

**"MY SUBJECTS, I DO BELIVE, WE HAVE A WAR TO WIN; MY FELLOW COUNTRYMAN, MY SOLDIERS, MY HONORABLE SUBJECTS, FOLLOW ME INTO THE FLAMES AND I ASSURE YOU; YOU WILL STRIDE THROUGH THE HEAVY BLAZE LIK AN IRON TITAN!"**

Madam Moisselle giggles, as the children clap for Manis, he holds his cape out with both hands and bows. Lifting his head up while still bent over he glares like a wolf, grinning wryly.

"Well, what are we waiting for?! Let us make haste! for a brighter tomorrow!"

Manis holds his chest high as he shoots down the stairs with a slam, and shouts as the children and Madame Moisselle follow in suit.

**"WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR! COME ON!!!"**

As the children rush down stairs, three of them grab instruments: An old trumpet, and a pair of drums. Heading out the door Manis marches with his knees high and his chest puffed, his "holey" cape

flowing. The children with the instruments follow just behind Manis, the rest follow and lastly, behind everyone, limping, was Madam Moisselle.

The children bang those drums in a slow, loud tempo. The child with the trumpet played a loud, bursting tune, that only a king would be expected to march in rhythm with his loyal soldiers. The other remaining children had make-shift swords and shields, carved by Jaykob & Manis. ( Truthfully Manis had heaps of make-shift daggers whittled from tree bark hidden in his trunk, although those were crafted out of a paranoia. Manis knew a thing or two about crafting a weapon.)

As Manis and the rest of the children(along with the limping, Madam Moisselle.) made it to the bottom of the dirt hill. He raised his hands at the drummers and told them to bang louder, and so they did. People had already arrived, the chairs were filled and a good dozen villagers were standing behind the chairs.

Somehow word spread, Manis had only been with the orphanage a year prior, so he only had one annual play before this. Even then, there were never this many people, let alone to fill all of the chairs. All the children stomped in synch, the audience cocked their heads and began clapping.

Manis stomped the loudest, radiating confidence with each slam of his boot, as they marched between the seats, and walked up the dingy steps of the stage, well, eight of them did. Two children remained behind the stage in charge of props and setting the scene—

Between each of the three acts. The talented tykes that graced the stage all lined up. Shoulder to shoulder, Manis & Jaykob stood in the middle, and then Jaykob slowly stepped forward. Lowering his frail hands just below his hips, scanning his eyes through the crowd, a storm was approaching the village but Jaykob paid no mind. He took a deep breath and addressed the crowd.

"My friends, my neighbors, ladies and gentleman. Today is a special day, once a year you all travel to this lowly town, and each year you leave with a grin. As do your lovely children, this year shall not be any less unique."

He paces left and right on the stage just in front of Manis. The clouds began moving faster, blurring in their pristine movement.

Again, Jaykob paid no mind, but the inattentive never know when it is, far, far too late.

"We have a special play for you today. A king, a dreadful lover, we are truly taking you to faraway lands on this fateful day. You'll laugh, you'll cry, and you may get sick to your sinking stomach."

Jaykob spins around, flailing and waving his hands with a devilish smirk.

"You can't say I didn't warn you folks"

An older gentleman in the crowd, who wasn't that fit, nor that happy. A pudgy, balding man, who reeked of liquor, he shouted out.

"WHORESONS! PLAGUE ON THE LOT OF YOU! WHEN MY FATHER--"

Those clouds grew thicker, and darker, and shortly before the rain began to fall. A bolt of lightning crashes in the distance, five-hundred yards behind Manis and the stage. All the children jumped in a fright, letting out gasps and shrieks, all of them drenching sweat from one of nature's many dreads.

Before the talented tykes could even get their act together and put the play underway, there was heavy, stamping hooves in the distance. Not one or two, but a whole lot of them. The entire village stopped, wondering what could possibly be headed their way.

Many of them had a sinking feeling that in a dark time like this, when it rains in such a way, one could only know that only bad things were heading their way. Just over the hill the unknown riders stampeded toward the village.

They kicked up dust, trampling as fast as they could and their leader was the most intimidating. They all had a healthy and heart build, but their leader seemed to tower over his men.

He donned a onyx black helmet, a tiny slit that fit over his eyes like a grin formed his visor, his pauldrons were round, big, and bulbous. The

leader's cuirass had layers of thick plated armor fit with scales that draped over his legs.

With each step of his and his company's horses, the leader huffed cold air through his visor, they all hollered, shrieking and blaring obscenities. Their armor clanked, their black horses, they whipped. If the seven hells had an army, this would be it, Manis pondered.

Stricken with fear, drenching sweat into his balled fist. As they reached the village, the devil of a leader raised his polished silver sword. The blade glistened and a bright golden aura surrounded it. He shouted to such a degree split flew from within his visor.

"FOR VAEA, FOR LIFE!"

They all croaked in agreement,

"HERE HEAR!"

"FOR LIFE MY DREADFULNESS!"

"SHE GAVE US OUR EXISTENCE! SO AFFRAY FOR OUR HONOR WE MUST!"

"ANOTHER TOWN, SOME MORE WOMEN, AND EVEN MORE THRILLS!"

"HERE HEAR!"

The leader and his men split-apart, five of his men slowly lit torches and burned their shacks to the ground, all the while laughing until their veins throbbed. Whether or not children were napping, or a family or two weren't viewing the play because they just happened to be ill, none of these things mattered.

When their torches dimmed they used the burning shacks for fuel. The leader and two of his men, circled around the dingy stage, the children, and the audience.

The intimidating leader dismounted with a grunt, handing his horse's reins to one of his men to lead as they continued to circle the stage, laughing and hollering. The leader's armor clanged as he planted his heavy boots into the soil. Looking down on the children even from below the stage's wooden stairs.

He was still heaving cold air, the children were all shaking in their tiny shoes, well everyone except for Manis. He knew there was something about this bandit leader, something about him, maybe it was his towering height, or his demeaning armor.

Or maybe, just maybe, it was the cold air he was breathing. All Manis knew was this man reeked of death. The leader spoke no words, he only continued to breathe. scanning each and every one of the children as he slowly stomped toward the stage.

Madam Moisselle couldn't help but chomp on her fingernails and just as he was about to set foot on those dingy steps, she bolted in front of him with her arms wide open and shouted.

“STOP!”

“Whatever it is you want, take it from me, please. I beg thee.”

Tears began flowing from her eyes, her knees buckled and fell to the dirt.

“PLEASE!”

She shrieked as she placed her palms on the scales of his armor.

“These children! They're all I have, don't take them from me like the sea took my husband!”

The leader says nothing; he merely stares down upon her. He huffs another puff of cold air, his armor clanks, he raises his right hand and with his onyx plated gauntlets, grabs her by the throat, squeezing her until she turned purple. Staring from the darkness of his visor, watching her claw and thrash for air. The leader only squeezed harder, tightening his grip, her veins throbbing, her eyes watering, as her mouth opens he gazes into the windows of her soul, watching the life leave her body. Just as Madam Moisselle begins to go limp, the kids all scream, of course, everyone but Manis, his fists only balled tighter.

The daunting leader tossed her to the side in front of the stage, the audience cried and screamed for their beloved ol' Moisselle. He began stomping toward the stage, his boots were so heavy that when he collided with the first step it crushed beneath his weight. When he



plummeted his foot toward the second step, all four of the steps shattered into splinters of wood. Crunching beneath his onyx-plated boots, he looks down and raises his left foot high and onto the stage. Then his right foot followed all the while shaking the debris off of his plated boot.

He walks past the children, completely ignoring everyone, even Jaykob, but he halted at Manis and pivoted his gaze toward him. The blackness of his visor judging, peering into the windows of his soul, slowly reading him.

The leader slowly reaches for the hilt of his sword, Manis's eyes stretch wide and his glances at Jaykob. The leader releases his hand from his sword, he then kneels down placing his plated-forearm on his kneecap.

With his left hand he lifts his visor-up and tosses it to the side. His face was unpleasant, a scar stretched from his forehead down to his chin, his nose was enormous and protruding, with dark brown eyes. Bushy eyebrows graced with rough and weathered skin. He spoke in a deep, raspy voice.

"Now little Manis Furin, I know you're a young tyke, a foolish rambunctious one, but here's some manly advice." "Every man has a weakness, and once he reveals it, he's ultimately vulnerable."

Manis chuckled. "What's my weakness then? You're just a cowardly bandit who preys on the defenseless!" The rugged leader grins wryly, "Your friend here, you just looked to him like one would a brother." "A good teacher would know, if you give advice you must give a relatable example." "And I'm a wonderful teacher! Aren't I boys?!" His men all cackle, even the ones still burning homes in the distance.

"A regular professor you are sir!" "I remember when I was just a lost boy, now I have purpose, honor, and pride!" "YOU MADE MEN OUT OF US YET!" The leader throws his hands out, "See? And you all want to make me out as some vile villain! You and the whole lot of you are ignorant!"

"To the powers that created us, the forces we were not meant to understand!" "How the great Vaea gave us the gift of our existence! And the least we can do is carry out her bidding! So that one day she may grace these lowly lands with her splendor."

"You know not of the world my young Manis, so I forgive you, but I was sent here on a quest, to make you vulnerable, and find your manhood, you're going to accomplish things in your later years Manis,

and none of this will make sense for years, but I assure you in time, it will.”

The leader slowly stands back on his feet, walking towards Jaykob, he raises his palm toward him as Manis yells in a fright lunging toward him. The leader smacks him with his other plated arm, instantly breaking Manis’s nose as he falls with a thud on the stage and groans. The leader places his hand around Jaykob’s tiny throat, raising him to his eye level with one tightly gripped hand. “Now watch Manis, this, this is a pivotal moment in your life, one you will never forget.”

Jaykob tries to scream but all that leaves his throat is something vague and hoarse. Jaykob clawed against his armor, his veins throbbing, his eyes popping and watering.

“See how your weakness has made you vulnerable Manis? If you learn anything let it be this: People are weak, and caring for them will leave your stomach gutting on the side of a dirt path.”

He raises Jaykob above his fore head, his legs sloshing around. With one forceful move and a groan the leader throws Jaykob down by his throat.

His nose crunches, his face bruised, as his nostrils pour blood like a faucet. The leader makes eye contact with a now-rage-filled Manis, his fists shaking, his bright eyes burning with hatred, but Manis doesn’t flinch, he doesn’t move and he doesn’t speak.

The leader breaks his eye contact and kneels over Jaykob, grabbing his helmet and raises his arms and smashes his helmet into his face. Once, twice, and three times, but the leader doesn’t stop. He bashes Jaykob’s face until it’s unrecognizable, by the ninth hit.

Jaykob’s teeth began to fly betwixt the spurts of blood, each pounding pummel, bones crunched, blood flew, and the audience was screaming and crying like bubbling idiots.

The leader was laughing and he was nowhere near stopping his relentless brutality. Manis slowly waltzed toward the leader with the biggest, scariest grin imaginable. The leader has a dagger on his left hip, and Manis quickly steals it under his nose. The leader instantly takes notice and begins to turn around and just as his eyes meet Manis’s it would be the last thing he ever saw.

Manis screams “WEAKNESS LEAVES YOU VULNERABLE DOESN’T IT?!” Manis thrusts the dagger straight into his throat. Staring into his eyes, but he doesn’t pull the blade out, he jags it inside and tugs it around.

Gritting his teeth, as his eyes start the water works and finally pulls the blade out. With a spurt of blood, Manis lets out a monstrous scream. Not the product of a child mind you, but a traumatized man. Holding the dagger in both hands he stabs him exactly the same number of times he bashed Jaykob’s skull, ten dreadful and brutal strikes.

Manis thrusted the blade, like each incision wasn’t satisfying enough. As he panicked, he felt the world around him vibrate and the colors of the grass and trees were specifically more vibrant, but Manis, Manis couldn’t stop laughing.

Lost in a hysteric episode, Manis was crying, screaming and laughing all at once. The leader’s Men, were in such a state of shock they didn’t have a reaction other than strolling toward the stage, and Manis. He stood up, still laughing and covered in the leader’s blood.

Manis bolted in a jolt of a fright, jumping off of the stage and sprinting toward the sea. The men at first payed no mind to Manis fleeing. They took it upon themselves to start cutting and slashing every villager, every child, every mother and every father. As if the villages were the real objective, leaving Manis to only the unrelenting horror of watching the only people that ever offered a breath of compassion toward him, slaughtered, maimed, and raped.

## Chapter III: Manis's Escape.

Once Manis began running, he didn't look back. He sprinted faster and faster, kicking up dirt and sand behind him, heaving from being out of shape, but none of that mattered as he dove into the stretching sea.

He paddled one arm in front of the other, thrashing for air every twenty-seconds, kicking his legs like a spastic dolphin. All that mattered was his survival, and Manis still couldn't stop laughing. Every breath he took, poking his head out of the water as his paddles were graced and surrounded by monstrous cackles that only seemed to escalate. After what seemed like hours of swimming Manis's strokes and kicks, halted to a minimum, to conserve his dwindling energy. He can make out an island miles ahead of him, barely able to make out the landscape as it is encased in a dreary mist with towering trees peering down on the sandy beach. There was much Manis couldn't see but he can most definitely see a shore in the distance. And so he picked up his kicks and strokes once again, for one final push toward the only land in sight.

Kicking and paddling through the water each breath he took when he poked his head above water mid-stroke wasn't graced with laughter, but a determined look and intense heaving. The only thing that mattered now was making it to the shore before he drowned, he glanced back at his once homelands, they were now a speckle on the horizon and hardly able to make out the shores, and flames from his village. As Manis glanced back toward the shore in front of him, he finally realized he had made it. He sloshed his feet through the water slowly transitioning to a walking motion. He waded through the beach's waters and onto the shores, there wasn't a soul in sight, although right now that was a gift from the world, or so Manis thought. His feet planted into the sand as he dropped to his knees and began catching his breath, he slowly inhaled and shouted.

"JAYKOB!"

Throwing his shoulders back and clenching his fists, screaming until his voice cracks, void of all saliva, his throat goes dry, becoming raspy and hoarse. He topples forward with a thump, his face in the deep sand, his vision becomes blurry and the world seems like it is now suddenly

underwater. As a dream light begins to shine, Manis's consciousness fades.

Manis's body felt weak and frail. He slowly propped himself up on his trembling knee. The beach that he was laying on, was no longer in front of him. At first glance, Manis jumped backwards muttering to himself. "What in the devil, where am I?" Manis pondered, as he rotated his gaze before him. Not only was the beach gone, the thick greenwood that dwelled just beyond the beach had now disintegrated.

The world itself was gone, everything before him was nothing but a white purgatory. Much like the realm of thought that dwells within all mortal's minds. It seemed vacant, vacuous even, and as Manis began to stroll forward he looked around, dumb-founded. His footsteps echoed, but not just echoed, each echo, reverberated. Louder and louder into the distance until they faded.

Was this the reality of the world? Was this a dream? Manis wondered, and then he gasped in a fret.

"Did I die from exhaustion?"

The thought molested his mind, it oscillated out of control. Manis screamed, he began sweating profusely. Pulling his hair until not just strands, but clumps of hair lied betwixt his palms. If he knew one thing, it was that he was beginning to lose his young mind, what was left of it. Another thought weaved itself into his young, unsuspecting brain. "If I'm dead... then Jaykob **MUST** be here." "Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, **HE MUST BE!**" He frantically and maniacally repeated in cataclysmic shrill of desperation.

Manis's eyes were stretched with a newfound excitement, almost tearing up. A grin made his teeth chatter. A grin that was so wide it mutated his cheeks. He nervously laughed as he strolled with shaking hands and shrieking Jaykob's name like a mystery he irrefutably refused to solve. Manis's knees trembled as his gaze jolted around like an indecisive dog. Nervous, scared, and lost Manis was, undoubtedly. His young frame was shaking with fear, his hands clasped together and clammy. When suddenly, he heard a reverberating moan that pierced his eardrums. buckling in a fever to his knees, shielding his ears with sweaty palms. The moan transitioned into a cackle, it started in a deep voice of many, escalating into that of a woman. Whose delicate voice

calls you, intrigues you, and pulls you closer as her pheromones are some unfathomable energy that draws you in and possess your very heart, making Manis smaller than he has ever been in his juvenile life.

Manis gritted his teeth, and as they chattered he began screaming; “WHAT IN THE SEVEN HELLS IS THIS?!” The laugh grew thicker, louder, closer. Footsteps that shook the purgatory followed. Each step got heavier as did the cackling. Manis’s head was now tucked between his knees and as he shook, piss ran down his legs. Abruptly, the noises stopped. All was quiet, too quiet, the feeling crawled up his brittle spine.

Now Manis slowly looked up without fear, tears lining and drenching his dark sockets, eyes wide and piercing. All of the sounds he had heard, from the footsteps, to the cackling. All that was responsible vibrantly and blindingly, stood before him, towering, a wonder of colossal existence. She stood with such an immensity, even her toe was taller than Manis. He began blushing as he tilted his head, looking up, he was frightened, and that quite literally was an understatement.

Dawning her white-silk robe, her perfect shoulders teased her curves which jutted outwards in an irrefutable perfection. Her eyes a tantalizing blue, and her smile lustful. She held her right hand under her left forearm, with her left hand slanted with her femininity. She turned her head downwards as her lustful smile turned into something suspiciously welcoming. She kneeled down calmly, putting her angelically soft hands upon her knees and coaxed Manis.

“Don’t be frightened my young dear Manis Furin, Jaykob couldn’t be saved, he was already gone.” His blush quickly turned to rage as spit flew from his mouth, “HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?! AND DON’T YOU DARE SPEAK OF HIM UNLESS YOU ARE THE ONE THAT TOOK HIM!” he blurted out in a volatile rage.

She cocked and raised her eyebrows, flicking her fingers in the air and snapped her fingers on the opposite hand. Every which way spawned the village that Manis had ran from. Although, there was one difference. The entire village that spawned before him was encased in a bright, captivating blaze, the few trees on isle had become torches, that surrounded Manis.

She then began to fade into the dark sky that now stood before him. Cackling as she spoke: “Oh, Manis, Manis, now I know you’re

young but only the most foolish mortals challenge and raise their voice to a god, for these foolish mortals Manis, they **always** lose.”

As she faded only the white of her smile remained, the fire grew out of control. It was spreading, not throughout the village but toward Manis, from all sides. He buckled onto his knees once again and screamed while his whole body seemed to convulse and jitter. “Stop! PLEASE! WHATEVER YOU ARE, I ALREADY LOST HIM ONCE, I, I-I-I-I... WHATEVER YOU ARE, I SWEAR TO YOU AND BEG FOR ALLEGIANCE. OH GREAT ENTITY, I BEG OF THEE PLEASE STOP THE FLAMES, I’ll do anything...” “ANYTHING!” Manis booms and cracks his voice as he breaks down into a flowing stream of tears muttering: “Please... please!”

The fire halted, and her fading ceased. Slowly in reverse, first her face, then her neck and slowly the rest of her titanic body. The village faded and the world transitioned back to the white purgatory. This purgatory now seemed like a nice homely hovel compared to what Manis had just experienced. He slowly wiped his tears and stood up. As he began to make a statement she held up her hand and cut him off.

“Let’s start anew Manis, even mortals deserve second chances. Don’t you agree?” “Oh yes great one, but for the sake of pleasantries what should I refer to your stupendous greatness as?” “The mortals call me one of the *first ones*, but you my dear Manis, you may call me Vaea” She says with a disconcerting smile. “Vaea”, Manis repeats.

“Manis, listen to me. You are destined to be something greater than even you yourself can fathom, Jaykob’s death is nothing more than a vestige toward your own greatness.” “He was the one that protected me! And I couldn’t even save him.” He says in a maniac fret.

“Manis my dear child, some aren’t meant to be saved. It is a gruesome truth of this young world. We all have our fates written in the stars, even my own. Alas, I who stands before you is the only one in this world that can read mortal’s fates and guide those select few toward their shining destinies.”

“You’re a lucky boy Manis, heed my words and count your juvenile blessings.” Manis wanted to question if she was a demon but the thought wouldn’t leave his mind and all that seemed to seep-out was:

“My benevolent Vaea!” “By what slimy grim chance was I blessed with your presence!” She smiled and held out her delicate hand. It inched toward Manis as he instinctively stepped forward into her tremendous and moonlit palm. Vaea cautiously hoisted him to her eye-level.

“Manis you **WILL** accomplish astounding things, your name and face will be etched into statues, and the tomes that will one day serve as this cosm’s undeniable history.” Concerned, Manis speaks out. “I may be young, but from being an orphan I’ve watched many people come and go from our village.” “I have drastically learned for a great opportunity to arise there is always a catch, a trade.” “So I ask with the utmost respect my benevolent and undeniable goddess, Vaea, what is it?”

Manis nervously rambled and stated. Vaea smirks, a smirk that crawls up his spine. “All I ask my dear Manis is you follow me, listen to me, and let me guide you. Jaykob isn’t the end of your childhood, it is the beginning of your adult-hood.” Manis didn’t believe a word, his face spoke this in volumes, but once again all that came out was a manic grin and shaky words that spoke in a ghastly pitch:

“My magnificent Vaea, what more could a lost child ask for, I never knew my father and my mother died giving birth to me, so it only seems.” “Yes... that the universe itself is finally giving back to my bastard life. That for every action there is a consequence. I although young, have dealt with weights that would crush a man—let alone a boy.” “This is my fate my benevolent Vaea and I, Manis Furin. Look to the stars in search of your voice to guide me. In dire hopes of a golden throne that hopefully, one day I can look back on all of this, and just laugh.”

Manis falls over in Vaea’s palms in a bout of hysteria, thrashing as his tears lined his red cheeks. His mouth stood agape and Vaea merely smiled with bulging attentive eyes. “Now Manis, your first chapter has ended and your second is merely beginning.” Manis ceased laughing, his eyes still and his mouth shut-close.

“Yes... my titanic Vaea, your word is law, your power is unequalled, and I am merely a conduit for your greatness.” Manis says sporadically, almost involuntarily. “Yes... my dear delusional Manis” Vaea cackles thunderously. “Now Manis, it’s time for you to wake up.



Do not dwell, follow the path that is now illuminating before you.” “Find your way through the Greenwood, do not fret, for your path will find you just as I found you.”

She raises her opposite hand and slowly descends her hand. Placing Manis gently on the ground of the vast purgatory, and just as her shadow towers over him her index finger extends forward, pressing slightly on his temple. Emitting a radiant and blinding white oval light, as the world goes blind in the whiteness, the dream light fades.

## Chapter IV: Dome-Wyrd.

Manis gasps as if he hasn't been breathing, tumbling over in the sand inhaling and exhaling vigorously. Slamming his hands into the sand propping himself upward. Standing up he began to look around. The beach is just as it was, he can smell the salty air and hear the waves roll onto the damp shore. He cocked his head back and confirmed that he couldn't see his village apart from the smoke. Which only meant he had been away for at least a day's time.

Cocking his head back forward he saw the thick greenwood, as the wind blew through the trees it began to creak. He scratched the back of his scraggly hair and began walking forward. He could not fathom why he knew he had to traverse beyond this eerie forest, Manis just knew.

Something that lied dormant in the air, the feeling pulsed as it unknowingly guided him. Manis thought about his dream, he pondered until he perplexed his young mind. "It was just a dream from exhaustion wasn't it?" "Although, it felt so real , inexplicably real." "If it was a dream, methinks it was a message of a dream."

As Manis wandered into the forest strange sounds seemed to rustle behind him. He saw wondrous creatures that astonished him, although, they all scurried quickly from the loud crunch of branches and leaves beneath his filthy, damp, boots.

Before they vanished into the trees that seemed to move on their own in reaction to the creature's fearsome cries. They looked like rabbits with human skin, not only that but their skin was deflated and drooping. Their teeth did not look like teeth but teeth fashioned of sharp and narrow bone. Their legs were more that of a frogs, but three times the length, allowing them to jump unfathomably far.

In the distance, Manis heard loud and deep groans. He only caught a glimpse of the creature. It reminded Manis of the monkeys that lied in the pages of the books he had previously read. The peculiar monkey's mouth took up its entire body, It drooped and instead of two eyes, it had one big bulging one that rested upon its mouth, that was always bloodshot.

As the strange monkey had disappeared into a pair of nearby bushes, the ground-shook. Manis inhaled nervously and kept walking. “1” “2” “3” he counted, balling his fists, inhaling deeply. He increased his pace, walking faster, his boots were now crunching the branches quicker, and heavier.

“You can do this Manis, Jaykob didn’t die for nothing!” He muttered to himself. Suddenly Manis hears footsteps behind him, crunching the branches just as he was. He was paralyzed with fear and in an instant his face was drenched with sweat. Manis heard that laugh from his dream, then he heard it again as it wined and echoed. Passing from his right ear – directly to his left ear.

Manis pivoted his body ready to attack, his teeth grinding. Manis was now caught in the surprise of finding nothing behind him, but the darkness. Not even that comforting beach stood behind him anymore. There was only an army of trees that stretched as far as his tiny eyes could see. He was stricken with panic, as he spun every which way sweating and shaking, he then dropped to his knees.

“W-w-where in the seven hells am I?! AM I EVEN GOING TO SURVIVE?! God... JAYKOB!!!” Manis panics, grasping his chest and heaving. His hands planted into the grass. He closes his eyes shut muttering to himself again. “No, no, no! You can do this Manis!”

He begins to nervously laugh, escalating in his pitch as tears moisten his deep sockets. Manis finally opened his eyes. Still cackling, very much so, hysterically even. As Manis opened his eyes his ears were possessed by the sound of flowing water. He hears it coming from behind him, his laughing now abruptly ceases as Manis manically rambles.

“OH! SEE! I just knew I could do it! It’s all just a matter of survival, it always is, and that’s why Jaykob couldn’t make it this far. It just wasn’t his fate, but mine! OH YES, I SWEAR ON MY BASTARD FATHER’S GRAVE. WHEREVER THAT FOUL PLACE IS! AND ON JAYKOB’S TOO! THAT I- Manis Furin, WILL MAKE IT OUT OF THIS DREADFUL FOREST. SO HELP THE FIRST ONES IF I DON’T!” Heaving, trying to catch up with his own breath. “Vaea... she’s counting on me and I would be a fool to deny such a grandiose responsibility.”

Manis’s voice shaking, his hands clasped and clammy, his teeth chattering and his eyes jolting. He dawns upon the place that his ears

have lead him too. Seemingly in the middle of nowhere there now lied a waterfall, an enormous one. It towered over, above, on a range of mossy cliffs.

Below stood a spring, with such clear water you could see the bottom of the spring itself with merely a quick glance. Manis stood, glancing in awe, and for a brief moment he actually felt calm.

He knew in that moment no matter how many years he may live. That this will always be the first place, the first moment, that he had felt sane , let alone accepted. Then again, we always notice things just as it is much, much, too late. Manis stood there for a moment, that moment then became a minute, and that minute then became an hour.

He was lost in thought, gazing into the waterfall and peering around into everything that was before him. The daunting trees that stood over the cliff and much higher than the army of trees that stood all around him. When Manis looked up he could not see the sky, just the green trees before him, that stole the sky's natural right.

The forest grew quiet in the hours he had gazed into the beauty of its existence. The spring stood almost in the shape of a skull, at the bottom the flowing water channeled into a river which Manis, was beyond curious as to where it led.

Although Manis definitely knew time had taken its toll, just before he set on another days-worth of walking, he needed not only to rest—but to eat as well. Manis set out to gather bundles of sticks, which there were more than enough of. He hadn't needed to walk for long before he had the right amount for a proper flame, and just as Manis was picking up the decidedly last bundle of sticks he had heard her laughter, again.

It didn't pass by his ears this time, he heard it in the distance, near where the spring was. His eyes widened, with the bundled sticks in-hand, he bolted. Sprinting through the trees and vaulting over logs, he was pouring sweat and focused. As he finally came to a halting stop, skidding in the grass, kicking up dirt, and crunching branches. He dropped every single one of them, they tumbled and rolled on the grass with a thump.

Manis stood in awe and paralyzed by fear, the sweat was now flooding his face and dripping before him. He had no idea what beast now stood before him, but it's eight, hairy white legs spanned every

which way. As far as the eyes could see. Manis could only fear the worst, he could only consider this thing, whatever it was, a grotesque, monstrosity of a spider. Its body shone in a pearl-white, the form of its body was that of an overgrown and rotting brain. Seeping and oozing puss as the revolting liquid dripped onto the grass. Its pincers were enormous and ten ruby eyes stood erratic and on its skull near the top of its body stood an eleventh eye. Much larger than the rest, this eleventh eye gazed right at him, its body alone was bigger than the trees that rested upon the cliff.

Manis gulped, and attempted to swallow his fear, but he only ended up in a complete paralysis, like a devil gazing at him from a foul place far beyond reality, through the decaying gates of hell. Its pincers clacked and its large eleventh eye spun around. Gazing directly toward Manis, focusing on only him.

The beast slowly descended its body toward him, dripping slime and puss, inching closer until he was merely feet away from Manis, his pincers poking his chest. Then, suddenly, the behemoth of a spider spoke in an effeminate tone— “Well, well, if it isn’t the young Manis Furin!”

The spider spoke in an erratically feminine voice as it smacked its pincers together, Manis exploded out of fear, puffing his chest out as he screamed.

“HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME DEMON!”

“Oh. you’re talking about me I presume? Well, i’m no Demon Manis, oh no, I’m something much more terrible.” She cackles as she replies. “No, no, MY name my dear delusional Manis... is GRIMACE.” “You! Have set foot into my domain, I watch over this thick and endless greenwood that stands before you Manis!” “This is my home!” “The one you have been freely squandering in! if anything my young Manis, I should be scared of you! A deceitful human trespassing in my humbly vast abode!” She jokingly says, cackling as her body twitches and jiggles, the puss and slime flying in several different directions, splashing against the bark of the trees.

Manis folded his arms over, grunting awkwardly. He repositions his posture, his arms behind his waist. Shining a confidence no nine-year-old should have.

“Grimace you said your name was? My dearest apologies, Oh, watcher in the greenwood. Oh, foulest of the foul!”

“Forgive my ignorance oh great and awful one.” Manis folded his hands as he clasps them gently, smiling. “Oh, don’t be coy young Manis, I can smell your fear as it hinders your buckling knees! Oh you mortals, you never cease to humor me.” Grimace inches even closer, his eyes meeting her several ruby irises.

“I’m not going to eat you!” She throws her head back, her pincers chattering as she cackles. Her tone is cut-short, quickly possessing a serious attitude.

“I only eat the foul, the wicked men who have wasted what Vaea has so graciously given the sodding imbeciles, in their desperate time of need. For without Vaea, their existence, it would have no purpose.”

“Actually without her, there would be no existence! There would be no you, no forest to set your little feet in. There would most definitely not be I, residing and crawling all about these beautiful trees Manis!”

Manis cocks his eyebrows responding in a questionable tone. “Vaea you say? One of the first ones?” Grimace, excited, shrieks out. “Oh, my! It seems our young mortal is indeed educated, even for a mere orphan... Color me impressed Manis!” As grimace chuckles her titanic body rocks back and forth, swaying the trees around it. After witnessing her horrendously shake the world around her, Grimace calmed herself, he pincers opening.

“Manis, my purpose is not to eat, but show children their path in this world, if they are so lucky as to be graced with crossing my path, which we have my dear Manis.” Manis, without thinking, interrupts.

“Path? What is this destiny you speak of? Or is it merely a trick—a deception of a foul demon!” Grimace’s pincers pound against each other as its mouths fumes a black puss that seeps and evaporates the ground on contact with a cackling sizzle.

“WATCH YOUR TONE, AND MIND YOUR TONGUE, LEST IT FALLS FROM YOUR MOUTH, YOU INSOLENT MORTAL.” She shakes her body like a mangy cur bolting in from the rain. A shiver runs through Grimace, making her shudder.

“Manis... your path, the road you must travel, even I cannot see that at this dull-point in time. For I to decipher such knowledge, you my

dear Manis. You must tell a tale, but not a folk-tale, not a dreadful mortals tale, no. you must tell me your own tale—your history, the portents of your life, the archives of your young and flourishing memories. So please, I am eagerly waiting after all Manis. Tell me of the hope that slipped through your fingers at such young age. I may not be a soothsayer my young mortal, but I can see the pain in the windows of your poor, lost soul.”

One of Grimace’s many legs reaches behind its body, underneath the waterfall. Slowly reeling an enormous sack all bundled up and tied with a precise knot. She then sets it down before her, dropping it with a thud. Manis is perplexed, he scratches his chin.

Grimace began ripping apart the sack, not minding the knot that was so precisely tied. As the sack ripped open a decaying skull slumped out. Half of its face had deteriorated to the bone. While on the other half, remained rotted skin, riddled with maggots and flies. His eyeballs were deep dark sockets, pointless voids that used to hold his sight. Manis being a child had never seen a corpse, well aside from the bandit leader whose corpse he had run from. He was frozen from fear. He squealed with his mouth and his face stretched.

“Can I not enjoy my lunch? Aren't you supposed to be telling me your life's story?” "I don't take kindly to insubordinate behavior young Manis." Manis shudders avoiding to look at her lunch, shuttering with wide, petrified eyes. "Your magnificence... If I may, I'll tell you my life's story, but not facing your horrid lunch. " Manis turned around and clasps his hands, the spider grunts with a shriek, all eight of its eyes blinking at once. "Fine, fine... If that's the only way to hear your tale mortal, so be it, but get on with it! Before I decide I'm hungry"

She uses her elongated hairy legs to push her lunch inside of her mouth, by its feet. Chomping, crunching, and swallowing bone. Besides the eerie wind, the sound of grimace feeding on its lunch was the only sound in the forest.

Each crunch seemed to get louder, Manis winced with each horrid audible. With a mouth full of dead rotting meat, grimace spoke "Well?"

Manis adjusted himself and shakes off the noises that he cannot help but zone in on. "Well... My magnificent grimace, from the moment I was born, my mother gave her life for me. Complications you see, the

poor soul had the kind of body that wasn't able to have kids. Alas, she did anyways, the moment she passed my father befriended the demon drink. Which is a funny saying cause the man, was a demon himself.”

“Methinks it was roughly a few weeks after I was born, it was a dark and luminous night, the fog was especially thick. My father saddled up on his mare. With all the booze he could get his filthy hands on but not before he tiptoed his way into each and every home in the village on that awful night. He tiptoed in and cut the jugulars of the mothers and the children. The entirety of the village woke in crying screams that night. A mob started to form, flooding out of their homes like rats wielding pitch forks. My father had just mounted his steed with its long black hair and brown skin, he kicked its sides and galloped through the waving fire that was now a town of angry and widowed fathers.”

“With me in one hand and booze in the other, he was already plastered with a lazy, sloping face and bloodshot eyes. I'll never forget my father's face because he was the first atrocious memory of my young life.”

Grimace licks its legs of the droppings of meat, licking it absolutely clean like a bone of chicken. Holding its leg up like a finger, it inches in front of Manis

"My, my! What a sad, depressing story! Oh I do think it's right to ponder Manis, that I would've eaten your father with a grandiose splendor. Let's hope you don't suffer the same fate.”

Although Manis was still turned around, he could feel grimace smirking at his tale. What could this fiendish demon be planning he wondered. Before he thought too much and risked offending this monstrosity, Manis took a deep breath and continued.

"Many hours later in my father's journey he found himself at the poor village I just ran away from. The Isle Of Vale” Grimace shook once again and interrupted. "Oh my so he abandoned you did he?" The spider commented as its eight eyes blinked following this, it presented a cackle that shook the trees and made Manis shudder. Recomposing himself he continued on "To put it bluntly, yes, my magnificence. He blamed me for my mother's death (like the fool that he was) and his disgusting problems" The spider cackles even louder "You have the



makings of something Royal, something kingly. My dear delusional Manis."

Manis fists ball up, and he raises his voice, eyebrows slanted and spit flying but still he refuses to turn around. "Delusional?! I am not!! Your magnificence, with the utmost respect. I am not delusional! And how dare you! I will not stand for this! After that wretched excuse for a father dumped me, he didn't show me anything he forsake my existence and dug my own grave. I won't stand for this! I won't, I won't, I won't!!" As his voice escalated to a shriek, he hears the trees shake and sees the spider's legs expand over his shoulders and he starts shaking. "Be careful Manis, know your place in this world, you are merely a boy and as far as I am concerned I'm the closest thing you have to a family. This will be your only warning, and how dare YOU, Interrupt this exuberantly intriguing story. Now Manis be a good boy and continue on, we have all the time in the world, here in Domewyrd." Manis doesn't know why but his lips started shaking and he exploded into a spell of crying. The kind of crying where bubbles foam at your mouth, unable to form even one, intelligible sentence.

Grimace slowly moves behind his ears, only inches away and whispers "For all the things your father never taught you, know this young mortal. Those who keep their emotions in check succeed in this dreary world, those who do not will irrefutably find it will be the cause of their own futile demise." Manis slowly stands with one knee in the dirt, he quickly wipes his moist face, rubbing his eyes and drying his face. He rises from his knee and pats off the dirt lining his dirty shirt and pants. Still refusing to turn around, Manis then adjusts himself and clears his throat.

His face is now void of emotion, and almost distant. As if he's here but also somewhere else, on some other plane he's created in his psyche. "My magnificence, please forgive my young foolish self. I realize that I was not only out of line, but absolutely disrespecting you and your perplexing, enormous nature. If I may, perchance redeem myself, let me continue" Grimace chuckles as its pincers rattle, as do the daunting thick woods. "Yes, yes you may Manis, all this dreadful father talk has got me quite starving, but please continue my exquisite young mortal"

Grimace reaches behind the bush yet again unraveling another corpse. But this one, this one is familiar. Grimace is grinning as she quickly funnels this familiar corpse into her drooling mouth.

From the feet all the way to the head, bones crunching, blood spilling, and a body disappearing. Not just any body, the corpse of Manis's dreadful father. Wincing from the bones crunching, trying to fight the imagery swarming in Manis's young mind, he continues on.

"When my father got to the village, he dropped me on the steps of an orphanage. He knocked and the door and he ran, he kept running he didn't look back not once" Grimace shifts its weight confused as it chatters. "Ah, but young Manis how can you remember this, if you were but a few weeks old? " Manis holds his hands forthright. "Don't worry my magnificence I will explain! Madam Moselle, the house mother of my orphanage, explained all this to me when I was just old enough to learn how to read and write." Grimace cackles perplexing Manis "Oh I see I see! Oh, I'm quite excited to hear the rest of your tale."

She says with a smirk that Manis couldn't be happier that he can't see. "After that night my new life started in this village by the swamp, I can't recollect why... But the name escapes me" She laughs hysterically. "Well you see my young child, once you find yourself in Domewyrd. Time quickly becomes irrelevant as does the past. You'll find the only thing that matters is your present. And Domewyrd" Manis slowly strokes his little chin. "I see, I see, what an odd place I've come to. Ah, but hell, better than that dreadful place." Grimace moves around sitting up in a higher spot in the trees. Its legs span out over Manis, and little Manis can now see its shadow above him. He shutters but ignores it and just before he can continue, Grimace interrupts him.

"Well I guess it's a good thing you're telling your life's tale Manis, lest you forget it!" Grimace cackles to such a degree a tree falls down in the distance. Manis jumps in a fright but continues on. "And so my poor life began, slowly but surely. I couldn't get along with any other of the kids, but one."

"His Name was Jaykob. Every fist fight I found myself in, he stopped the rowe, and let the other kids know just how much they were antagonizing me. Bringing my fire swarming towards them. Jaykob was the only one!" his voice shrieking, whining. "The only one who even took the time to try and understand! And he's gone... rotting in the soil.

My father never cared! and he blamed me for my mother's death... although I can't seem to blame him..." Manis's legs began shaking, trembling. Tears lined his face, streaks and rivers of water dripped down onto the dirt, soiling and altering its pigment.

"I'm nothing! plague on everything that is my existence!" Manis's snot begins bubbling as he can't even form a coherent sentence without stumbling on his words. Grimace's legs wrap around Manis, coddling him. her teeth begin to chatter. "Tears wasted my dear Manis! oh poor little tears wasted, don't you see Manis? These humans, these mortals, they have given you nothing! Not a single ounce of kindness, except poor Jaykob. and what did that get him?" Manis mutters wiping his face with a ferocity. "Shut... up..." In a condescending tone, Grimace teases Manis. "Oh poor little Manis is getting his feelings poked?" twisting and turning its head while it's feelers begin to slowly rub Manis.

"WHAT DID IT GIVE YOU MANIS?! WHAT DID IT GIVE JAYKOB?!" Manis retaliates with spit flying from his mouth "ENOUGH. ENOUGH, **ENOUGH!** IT GAVE ME FURY... RAGE... PAIN... Is that what you want to hear?!" He bursted out.

"Since the moment I was born... I was forsaken by my own father. My birth was my first betrayal I gave to the world. Forever damned. Forever a mistake. The only soul I had come to trust... Jaykob was the only one to ever show me compassion." Grimace chatters and cackles "And what happened to poor Jaykob, Manis?"

Manis Clenches his fist. "He was thrown off the stage like a pointless ragdoll, I can still see his neck snapping, the bones, crunching, and those bones that crunched peeking out of his neck. As he twitched he finally had to let go... only a year older than I..." Grimace moves one of its long legs and turns Manis around, whom is no longer afraid.

"And you can't let go can you?" Manis's eyes widen. "What if I don't want too Grimace?" The wretched thing smiles at him, dripping bile. "Then I don't think you should Manis, you should search within your boiling soul for that rage. The fury, the oscillating pain."

Before grimace can continue on, Manis twitches and throws his head back. His long red hair shining and fumbling onto his shoulders. His shoulders go limp as he curves his back in an arc. He moans and groans loudly. Grimace is confused, perplexed, reeling back into the shaking

trees. Manis's mouth opens wide a voice much louder, and much more charismatic than before. "You mean... like igniting a fire that burns so bright all you can do is walk through its magnificence." His smile becomes wryly. "Allowing your meager existence to be swarmed and swallowed by its bright blaze. Oh Poor little Jaykob, Heh."

Throwing his body back upright Manis seems to stand two inches taller, and not the least bit sad. He smiles, strafing back and forth in front of Grimace. "Heh." he repeats. His "hehs" quickly turned into laughter. Escalating, almost reverberating as he throws his arms back and spit dribbles down his chin. The little veins in his small neck are bulging. His eyes were so wide you could swear they were about to burst, or explode. Spewing his eyes all over himself in some staining, unforgivable liquid, but they didn't. Manis just kept laughing, and laughing. Finally cutting himself off and switching to an immediate serious tone.

"WHERE WERE THEY GRIMACE?! My father, what a cruel joke! My Mother, some woman! she couldn't even handle giving birth!" Shaking his fingers with his opposite hand on his hip "What grotesque excuses for parents, my path seems so true it's only blinding Grimace!" Grimace stays silent it's eyes eager with curiosity and excitement.

"The first thing I did on this earth was in fact kill my own mother! oh! the horror!" he says in a joking tone cutting to maniac laughter with a Cheshire grin "And when the tragedy of Jaykob happened... **OH WHAT A POOR SOUL!** I killed that wretched bastard!" Spit flies from his mouth staining the soil like a rabid dog. He runs his fingers through his hair pulling it with all of his might beginning to laugh uncontrollably. Grimace then points it's leg an inch away from Manis's face.

"You loved it didn't you Manis? The way you watched the life slip from his cold fingers, didn't you?" Manis continues chuckling harmoniously

"Oh Grimace, let's just say you're my new loving mother! You understand me, but I want to really learn... the right way. How to maim! I already know I can entertain, what do ye say?" Grimace questions Manis.

"Is this the beginning of a new partnership?" Grimace shakes the trees in excitement "Oh I knew there was just something oh so thrilling about you Manis. Let's just leave it at... a spider needs to eat."  
"I'll be your guide, just give me what I need." Manis dawns a wryly grin  
"It rhymes so it must be true!" He stands with his hands on his hips, his chest puffed out.

"Use me to do your bidding! Grimace! I BEG OF THEE IN ALL OF YOUR HORRIBLY GROTESQUE SPLENDOR! IN ALL OF YOUR FIENDISH EXISTENCE!" After a slight pause Grimace's body shakes in excitement, vibrating the ground. "YES! YES! YES! My, dear, delusional Manis! Our adventure has only just begun..."

Grimace snickered as one of its hairy and immense legs grabbed Manis by the collar. Lifting him not only with ease but a certain swiftness. A swiftness that only a beast would be capable of, she placed him upon her oozing back, it's center eye slowly opened, as crust and ooze seeps among its swirling pupils.

Pulses of energy resonate from Grimace's center eye and lull Manis into a deep, deep sleep. As trees creak, topple over, and crash into the soil. Grimace scurried through the forest. Ooze dripping, and breaking the limbs of every tree they passed. Melting away soil and riddling the forest with poisonous craters.

Not now but with time—will cause this dreary greenwood to be known as the "*The Greenwood Of Miasma.*" Grimace crawled over the forest with a certain simplicity, and speed. Each creeping step of its hairy legs guided the next. A horror unlike Domewyrd had ever seen.

To anyone else but Manis, too see Grimace pummeling toward you. As a crawling mountain with its daunting ruby eyes, could only mean one inevitable thing, "**Death.**" Its leg span was so large that in fact, it could traverse miles in under a minutes time. A moving apocalypse. As evil always finds a foothold, evil is always sought to be controlled for personal gain.

“OI! Did you see that?!” a sweaty man shouted. “What in the devil... SHUT YOUR GODDAMN GOB” A tired neighbor complained from his hovel. “Ain’t nobody give a thousand moons what ye claim to see!” “A mountain! A MOVING MOUNTAIN, To the west by them greenwoods!” The sweaty man shrieked out of pure terror.

“And I don’t give five-thousand copper coins if ye don’t believe me. There’s something brewing, and I’ll be DAMNED if I’m to stand alone when the devil shows it’s face in our darkest hour! There’s been talk...” The tired man wipes his eyes, vaulting out of his window with cocked eyebrows and a confused look. “A moving mountain? Talk? My fucking beard—if you’re weren’t my brother I’d give you a hammer to the nape, what in the sodding devil are you going on about?”

“Animals are growing thin, the forest is quieter, the wind is heavier. as for the talk? Brother... People at the taverns converse for hours upon hours about how **war**, is coming.”

“Soldiers now roam these lands, people have stopped using the roads, and things aren’t as merry as they have been. In every settlement I’ve come to know as our neighbors, SUICIDES, in every one—sons, fathers, mothers—sod on my beard, everyone... they’re dropping like gnats. You may not believe me, nay but plague on the soil we stand on! I will not let our home get swiped from under our nose like the ruffians’ swipe bread! Nay, ye don’t have to agree, or even believe,” The sweaty man shakes his fingers. “but I do know I need to find out what IS happening, and be there at trouble’s door-step, to defend not only my home, but yours as well, brother. Stay here if you will, but I do believe I’m heading to the swamplands.”

“Stay here if you must—but I, will be back with word, and if what I feel, this rotting feeling decaying in the back of me shallow head, methinks we’re going to need all the help we can get.” The tired man, who is more so wide-awake, and shook with uncertainty.

He scratches his dirty beard. Pulling his tobacco pipe out of his linen pants, sparking it by snapping his old fingers and summoning a bright orange flame that shines with a burst. As it lights, he puffs his mahogany pipe, the summoned fire vanishes as he speaks.

“Well so be it, and now that ye mention it my paranoid brother—things have been so sodding boring around here so let’s take a walk. we

can get there in a few hours' time, and if what you say **IS** true. I'm going to need a tankard, plough the rest of my sleep! I've got to mend this boredom aye, and for talks-on-the-road, I had the strangest dream."

The not-so-tired-man, puffs his pipe and strolls toward his brother as he steps on the western path. Just out of their small, but growing village. Dingy road signs guide their path. That thankfully, the brothers posted themselves. Boarded up shacks, disheveled fences, a vacant moonless sky. Passing the road signs with dried, but the paint had run slightly beneath each letter. The road sign was tilting, slanted from the forebodingly threatening gales that blew the dirt road. Winding turbulent, violent, tornadoes of dust off into the distance.

As the two dim brothers strolled out of the village the other brother comments. "Aye? Do tell Brother! What plagues thee?" His sweaty brother's brow furrowed in a concerning manner, his eyebrows furrowed, his forehead wrinkled.

"Well, I remember a babe of a goddess, perfection if there ever was... I miss the dream terribly, I find myself sleeping the days away in hopes I can find the place, from whence I saw her euphoric glow. At the end of my dream, she told me, it was already far, far too late.."

## Chapter V: The Ripper & The Slasher.

As time passes, boys can only grow, and like their passions will flourish, so will their demons and vices. The dreadful beasts that we always manage to find in the most cataclysmic of moments. Manis & Grimace wandered the lands for a year's time, even in the late hours under the moonless sky.

Grimace would never let Manis sleep, when they would happen to find themselves in a safe haven for the dark hours. Grimace only instigated Manis, pushing him further amidst the glow of a campfire, further away from reality. Picking his buttons, teasing him for losing Jaykob to the demanding claws of death, only fueling the fire that was beginning to grow wild. Grief, without a father, is a tragedy all on its own, Day-by-terrible-haunting-day that passed caused Manis's mind to break more-and-more.

The longer time went on the longer Manis was being driven absolutely mad. Irrefutably mad. Eventually, Manis rambled to himself, having bouts of hysteria. Grimace had gotten what she so woefully desired. A corrupted soul, broken from the very depths of its existence, the core of his psyche.

Each unsuspecting traveler Grimace spotted, she would coax Manis into taking what was his, their *life*. Not taking no for an answer, having her feed on the travelers, not only that, but forcing Manis to watch. She taught young Manis who had hardly just reached the age of thirteen, still a boy, to craft and whittle fine iron blades. She taught a mere child, not only how to fashion an entire armory, or how to kill, but how ugly the world truly **is**. The monster created another monster, or so it seemed.

They became the topics of rumors that spread to the likes of a small village, just west of the greenwood. Across the maze of forest, lied



a town on the swamps. A town with piers, docks, and rowboats. A homely town, with bubbling bogs, loud taverns, flower shops with gorgeous tulips, the sounds of a flooding market in the town square, lowly fisherman smoking their pipes and conversing about the rumors that are circulating.

“The Ripper & The Slasher” they called them. The first terror to sweep the lands, and as drunken patrons joked and gossiped, there was talk that the slasher was merely a child and The ripper, well, it was something... not of this plane of existence...

No matter how many dwarves there were (and dwarves are a hearty-**LOUD**-bunch.) the room always grew silent when talk of the slasher stopped, and words of the *ripper* had begun. Although, they all knew every night some other piss poor folk was losing his sodding life, and for what?

Alas, it didn't matter how much they drank, or how much they talked, or even how silent they were, just like Manis's fate, and it was already too late. It was a good thing that their bellies happened to be full of ale.

The unlit sky is a pitch-black, trees creak with a bustling wind. Branches snap, animals scurry in a fret. The breeze is continuous, ominous. A constant eerie shrill can be heard as it snaps branches, toppling over smaller trees, pulling bushes, yanking them out of the ground. It weaved through the vales and valleys, a ferocious force.

When bad things are due to happen, there's bound to be foul weather. Call it a hunch, but evil has no limits, the best we can do is learn from others failures and mistakes of the past. Or else the future will end up as tainted as cracked glass. Evil... like energy cannot be destroyed, only vanquished, for a time being. A moment of calm, of tranquil peace...

To the east of the toppled trees stood Manis clenching his fists. Gritting his teeth muttering.

“Why?” “Why do I have to... this is wretched... it's vile and wrong...” Just behind Manis stood the forest, between its creaking trees illuminated Grimace's ruby eyes. Its pincers scraped against one another. “Oh... Manis! How long will you do this silly dance! Your demons... you can't fight them any longer... you're sick and you need to eat!” she cackles horrendously, shaking the trees. “You know exactly

how good killing the man who took Jaykob from you felt... how can you mortals...be so ignorant!"

Across the field from Manis, stood an older gentleman. Huge scruffy beard, dirty to say the least. His hair was long and balding at the top, he had sun spots characterizing his scalp. Wearing a dirty, green doublet with tattered and sewn linen pants. The elderly man, walked the path with a limp as he lugged a burlap sack that had to of almost been bigger than his slanting posture.

"I mean after all Manis, what have you got left to lose? Can you even name one miniscule thing in your so far, wasted sappy life, that can amount to any sort of accomplishment, aside from murder ?!" Manis shutters and stutters "I... I..." Grimace shrieks and screams "WELL?! OUT WITH IT, OR I'LL DO IT MYSELF."

Manis's face is now pouring sweat as it stains the ground he turns around, glaring at him with cocked eyebrows and a dead gaze dawning a wickedly frightening grin. He clasps he hands, and tilts his head, suddenly spit flies from his mouth and his veins throb. "NO... YOU THINK YOU COULD STEAL FROM ME GRIMACE?"

He laughs monotonous, shaking his fingers as his laugh escalates, as does his grin. He points backwards towards the limping old man in the distance. "YOU SEE THAT GRIMACE?" He only seemed to get louder. "Take a good long look, cause that man..."

His laughs break his sentence, as tears line his sockets, not the sad kind, the maddening kind. The hysterical kind. His laughs stretch his face, as he pulls his bright orange hair. "THAT MAN, IS ALL MINE YOU DIRTY FIEND, FOR WITHOUT ME, MY DEAR GRIMACE, YOU WOULDN'T FEED!" Manis grabs his stomach cackling so hard he starts leaning backwards.

"Oh Manis! This is the side of you by all means Manis, don't let me stop you!" Creeping into the darkness of the greenwood, and in a few moments there was nothing to see but a glint of its vanishing ruby eyes accompanied by the trees waving and the foliage swaying.

Manis spins around facing the man, who's traveled quite the distance since Grimace & Manis had begun arguing. Manis dusts off his clothes, a bit taller than before but not by much. He hasn't changed his clothes since the orphanage, with his growth his pants shrunk to above his ankles, and his shirt revealed his stomach. He sprinted up to the man from afar, seemingly jolting through the grass, his hair bouncing. Manis slides on the dirt path, kicking-up dirt beside the old man. The old man stops and tries to walk around him as Manis stops him with his hands on his chest.

"Woah, where are you going old man?" He smiles and chuckles. "That's a pretty heavy sack you got there and I noticed your limp a while back, need some help? Where in the seven hells are you headed!" Manis's hand moves to his shoulder, gripping him far too tightly. The old man's eyes widen at Manis's voice and he turns a deep red.

"I ... no... well I mean yes, if you would be so kind." "I'm heading to the swamplands... there's a meeting, there's a cause of suspicion in the world... or so it seems..." The old man frailly hands Manis the burlap sack and slinging it over his shoulder. Smacking against his back with the sound of coins jingling, walking to the left of the man.

"Oh? Is there now? What is the suspicion of? Pray do tell sir!" "You haven't heard? There's two scoundrels wandering about these parts, The Ripper & The Slasher they call them, are ye living under a rock? The times are dark... not even the roads are safe anymore.

"The Ripper & The Slasher... it's got a nice ring to it you know mate? Kind of like a stage-name, now that's glamorous...That's a life worth remembering, don't you think? You gullible sap..." Manis's grin becomes devilish, his demeanor shifts, the old man jumps back. "w-wait... you're not...The Slasher are ye?" He steps in front of the old man. "Words, Words, what are they worth if you're not having fun and losing yourself in the absurd! You better run..."

Manis swung the burlap sack with a grunt and hits the elderly man in the chin. He goes flying backwards thudding on the ground, groaning, his face swollen. Bleeding and twitching on the ground. In a fright, he crawls backwards as the coins' jingle on the ground.

"P-please... NO!" Manis kicks dirt in his mouth as the old man hacks and wheezes. Blood staining the ground, tainting the dirt. Manis then

reaches into his pocket pulling out a blade whittled from wood, he kneels down on the old man's chest. He cackles in a terror, waving the blade around and smacks his lips.

"aye, you know what mate?" "w-w-what..." The old man struggles to say. "I really do love it... It truly is the greatest feeling in this world I've come to know..."

Manis squeezes the old man's cheeks, "and I know, none of you will understand... so I guess I'll just have to just make you **ALL** see my reality." His grin stretches the skin back on his face.

He plunges the blade into his heart, pulling it out instantly as quickly as the man gasps. He plunges it into his neck, using both hands and slashing it all the way across his neck, tearing it open. Blood pours and sprays for a few seconds as the old man chokes and gasps for air, his eyes wide and Manis laughs, and laughs.

His face speckled with blood. He lunges the blade into his stomach, pulling it out again, lunging it in again. Over and over Manis stabs him, with each plunge into the depths of his skin, Manis only stabbed and slashed faster. His bloodlust was relentless, his cackles ghastly, his wet mouth drooling and his eyes bulging. Manis turned him over and started stabbing his legs. His body was already passed lifeless, as Manis irrefutably could not cease his laughing, it only escalated. Grimace slowly approaches behind him, her legs creeping across the grass. As Manis feels her creeping shadow... his eyes widen, his face now smeared with blood.

"Oh!" Manis says cocking his head back and looking up "There you are... I was starting to get SO BORED..." He cackles profusely, arching his back backwards and throwing his hands back. Her pincers clap, "I didn't think you had it in you Manis... I'll admit but then again even gods are wrong sometimes..." He stands up pointing his hands toward the bloody mess that was this old man's corpse, and bowed.

"Oh thank you my terribly great teacher! My foul lord and savior, my seeker of bountiful opportunity, my one and only GRIMACE..." Manis licks the blood around his lips, wiping his face as the dripping blood only tainted more of the now corrupted soil.

Quickly crunching his bones, and inhaling the old man's corpse, Manis stares with an intense demeanor at the mutilated body. The boy who was once afraid, was now enticed and intrigued.

The old man's corpse was nearly gone, being swallowed and eaten whole, Manis could only stretch his cheeks with a wryly grin. Smacking his lips not averting his gaze.

"Grimace... we're being talked about in all the villages that surround us, oh you've taught me well my great dark one... but this... I think this is what you talked of all those years ago when you first met me. How I'm destined for greatness if I listen to you and your magnificent darkened splendor."

"I finally understand now Grimace... it's not that I'm special, it's that I met you, what plane of existence you are from I cannot say...but even to say unto ye, that you are a godly one would be an understatement, the dire fact that I have met you, with this great and terrible power you possess, in that enticing ruby eye of yours. "

"Oh yes! Manis, I knew you'd come around, my young Manis, how you've grown in such a short-time, but oh I must ask you mortal, what are the other dreadful mortals doing talking about us Manis?" Manis smiles and clasps his hands together.

"Well my dark liege, I don't know much but I know where to find out more, but allow me to share what little I know—Apparently to them we're **The Ripper & The Slasher**, and the word is... That we are the reason that not even the roads are safe." Manis chuckles and his grin grows.

"Oh my Manis! Flattering isn't it? Having a life worth remembering?" "It is Grimace... but I confess, I hunger for more, word from the man that now resides in your stomach is that there's a meeting in the swamplands!"

Manis unclasps his hands beckoning Grimace. "So my great and terrible liege, what say ye? Will ye lend me your strength, to take what's rightfully mine?"

"Oh! Oh!!! Manis! Delightful! Truly! Yes, yes! A thousand fallen moons Yes!" Grimace shakes its body, wiggling and jumping shaking the earth. Causing Manis to lose his balance, he falls over laughing. "My liege! I have never seen you in such high spirits."

Grimace bends forward holding one of its hairy legs out, welcoming him on what could be Manis's greatest challenge yet. Manis climbs onto her legs, scurrying upwards as another leg reaches across. Picking-up Manis and dropping him on the top of her head.

As Manis looked down he realized he could see the entirety of the world from here. Towering mountains that reached passed the clouds, Miles of trees he knew as the greenwood, He could make out all the campfires from every village. In the distance, he spotted a valley with deep colossal ridges, one he had never known existed in Dome-Wyrd. Rolling hills stretched to the east, with patches of flowers covering the miles of beautiful hills.

Far to the east Manis could make out all of the waves that came rolling into Dome-Wyrd's Shores, and precisely where he had first found himself. Although, Manis noticed he couldn't see the orphanage anymore, there was a veil of fog beyond the sea.

He then looked all around and he found the thought dawn on him. "Does anything really exist outside of these lands?" Manis pondered, but most importantly to the west, from where they stood, past the forest from a path he had never seen, was the *swamplands*.

## Chapter VI: The Bubbling-Bogs.

“So the Bubbling-Bogs eh?”

Grimace called the swamps, the destinations that the rumors have decidedly lead them to. She came to a slow, tilting her body downwards as Manis hopped off. Springing his knees as dust puffed around him.

“I can take you as far as the path in the forest, just follow it, you won’t be able to miss the bogs. When you’re ready my dear, say my name! and you will find my shadow over you, no matter what I have to trample to get to you! Now! Run along, there’s a kingdom waiting for you!” She pauses with a bubbling cackle...

“And Manis... lest you forget I’m always watching; They’ll never be able to stop you... just trust in me... trust in the darkness...follow it unto the sea of Oblivion...Following destruction, can only mean rebirth...” Her voice hums, vibrates, lulling Manis into a haze that paralyzes him and his visions begins to shake.

Before Manis can readjust his vision, her ruby eyes glistening against the torches light, making them shine even brighter. There was a rumble in the distant forest and as quickly as they rumble came, Grimace was gone. The path was dark, bugs chirped around him, things unbeknown to him rustled in the darkness.

Following the path forward as towering trees accompanied his journey, against a tree stood a back-pack, it was dirty and looked to have been here for years. Possibly even longer. The top of the bag that was folded over and snapped to two buckles, was suspiciously left open. There were dirty brown leaves lying inside the pack, along with branches. Manis cautiously looked up, squinting his gaze, and they definitely didn’t match the vibrant yellow leaves that graced the greenwoods.

He rummaged around with his fingers and found a box that was left under the aging leaves. It was a rounded chest, crafted with chipped and aged wood. The lock was already busted open, but it was full of something. Manis set it on the ground, slowly opening it with anticipation muttering. "What in the seven hells..."

A piece of paper lied on top of a heap of things, it only had one thing written upon it. "For: Manis" He crumpled the paper and threw it behind him pulling everything out one-by-one, setting the items on the ground. There was an iron blade with a steel hilt, a short silver morning star that looked to have been cleaned recently.

A set of home-made bombs of sorts, steel balls with holes in the middle of them, with pieces of strings sticking out of the holes. Lastly there was a torch, and sheaths for each of the weapons that he was now fastening to his belt. With the clicking of his accessorized and weaponized belt, out of the darkness he heard a muffled "poof!"

There was a long-line of dimly lit torches on the right-side of the path, announcing themselves and the path before him. Manis instinctively lit his torch. as the embers brightened his dirty face, he began strolling cautiously down the winding path that seemed to go on for a day's time.

The trail winded and curved and even inclined up a hill for a few miles. The incline, the further Manis trekked upon, the more it seemed to slope. When Manis finally reached the top, heaving, and out of breath. He looked up holding his torch, exhausted. He could now see the bog that was bubbling, a village that stood upon a series of docks.

Smoke poured from chimney's, he could hear a commotion coming from the village, barely able to make out a group of people. Just beyond the village of docks stood a coliseum, and with that Manis grinned. "This is it... This is exactly what I've been searching for, plague on the rest of my childhood, now these idle docks, I could grow to call home."

After taking a few minutes to breathe, Manis jogged down the hill and made for the bridge that connected the docks to the neighboring path. The bridge was rickety and made of wooden planks.

As Manis skipped across he stepped onto the docks, which were much more stable than the bridge. The docks were in the shape of an



“H” with three buildings on each side and in the center stood a seventh building, the pub.

A sign was hitched above it that read “The Swampy Wench” It didn’t have a door, well, it obviously **did**, but it was thrown off the hinges lying to the right of the entrance.

A mug of ale flies by his left shoulder, and just like that, Manis knew he had found the commotion. Claspng his hands and smiling a smile, that only a snake would have. Many patrons filled the bar, from dwarves to elves, all the way to humans.

Only a few seats were left unfilled, it was crowded so Manis used that to his advantage and immediately sat down to his right, on the only free bar stool. A dirty grizzly looking man, who reeked of foul smells, hiccupped.

“HEY! What are you doin’ in ‘ere kid...” Manis hears a breeze pass through the pub, from his right ear to his left it whispers, “Do it, start the situation and control it, no one can stop you...”

Manis flips his hair and cocks his eyes, piercing his. He laughs with a dead gaze, unsheathing his blade. He stabs the man in the ribs twisting his blade and putting his index finger on his mouth. Telling the man whose legs are now shaking, not to scream. His blood pouring down the stool, onto Manis’s blade and painting his fingertips. A voice then shouts from the back of the pub.

“OI! What the devil is goin’ on o’er there mate! “ Manis laughs turn to a sigh of irritation, he pushes the Man’s body to the left, as he topples over, Manis shrugs. “WELL I GUESS I’M DONE WITH THAT ONE!” He hopped up on his stool balancing himself on one foot. Jumping on the bar and kicking glasses everywhere. The barmaid curses at him but before she can say another word his mace swings to the side of her temple. Her words quickly slowed to nothing, as she twitched on the ground Manis looked down...

She groaned saying quite slowly. “W...why...” He chuckles, as everyone in the pub is still in a state of shock, almost if Manis felt a pleasure in their fear. Every woman is shrieking, jolting his eyes toward the back.

“THIS... is what is going on here gentlemen and WHORES” Manis says as he screams and spits dragging his mace on the bar with a horrible scraping sound piercing everyone’s eardrums, chucking splinters of

wood every which way, Manis looked around, analyzing the crowd as he stops walking.

“Oh? Uncomfortable are we? Good, great, **SPLENDID!**” Manis throws his hands out and jumps off of the bar smashing a table in half with his mace. There’s a group of men now standing in the back, shaking with their weapons drawn, Manis drew long, deep breaths. “Who... **WHAT IN THE DEVIL ARE YE! DEMON OR MAN?!**”

A hearty man with a long, surprisingly kempt beard. He had sad dough eyes, scraggly black hair that rested on his shoulders. A kind soul who wore dark plated armor, with orb like pauldrons, sharp and heavy plated boots. head-to-toe, as did his men whom were sitting with him at a table in the back of the dimly lit pub.

“Do you have eyes?” Manis says calmly with a welcoming grin. Chuckling as he speaks. “well... **USE THEM YOU SODDING MORON!**” He swings his mace upward to the right, cackling and smashing a woman’s already broken-glass jaw.

She somehow, cursed, screamed, hacked-up blood, cried, and clawed the bar floor all at once. As Manis continuously drives his morning star into her face, she begins to look less like a women and more like a terrible tragedy. The kind of tragedy that would come to work in bandages, if she did perchance survive this...

He picks her up by the hair forcing her to face the men in the back. “Pretty ain’t she boys?” All of her teeth are hanging by a thread, some are falling out, her face is drenched in her own blood, her eyes swollen, her face is horrifically disfigured and dripping blood, practically pouring. The look in her eyes says she’s barely alive, but she might as well be dead. As she stared at the men in the back for some glimmer of hope, they clinched their weapons and did *nothing*. Manis pivoted her body toward a post in the pub, pulling her by the hair, she didn’t retaliate. He then leaned her back, smashing her head into the post, as he snapped the post and dented her forehead. The barmaid's face was now unrecognizable. Manis smiled, stretching the skin on his face as he cackled. Gritting his teeth as he slammed her into the post over and over, and over again. As blood surrounded and painted the post, Manis Threw her body to the side, shaking his finger at the crowd, his hands soaked in her blood.

“Now that’s number three! Shall we go to four? Or are you lads going to be clever, and put down your weapons and listen, you wanted The Slasher... you got him boys.” He grins sheathing his mace, and graciously bowing, wiping the blood off of his forearms. The only sound that filled the pub was all of their weapons dropping. “Y-Y-our, just a child...” The hearty kind-soul-of-a-soldier says in disbelief. “Well the world creates some terrible monsters... I’m not here to mutilate, a thousand apologies for the mess!”

Manis grinning as he pulls a chair forward and turns it around sitting on it backwards.

“Listen, listen, listen, mates... if ye do happen to comply, I could personally say that you five would be my most honored personal guard. Taking care of yours truly, Manis slyly points to himself as his posture slopes. If you *accept* that this village changes from henceforth, I promise you, nay, all of you. Right here and now, that everyone in this village will have a rightful place in my kingdom... but mates... before you even think of responding, know this. What I did just moments ago is nothing compared to a force greater than even I, and what it will do if you deny **me**. You folk know him as **The Ripper...**”

Everyone in the bar goes wide-eyed... the kind souled leader of the men spoke up, without hesitation. “We accept...” A clatter of argument begins to erupt.

Manis eyes wander around the room smiling at what seems to be transpiring. The leader booms in a shout, slamming his metal gloves down on the table, adding a new hole to its many. “SILENCE...” “If this be our only chance, lest he calls his **beast** on us... that we have talked of for a many-a-nights now...aye... I’ve heard the stories, the speculation of this beast we’ve come to know as: **The Ripper.**” One of the Leaders men shouted out. “The Boy speaks the truth! Traveling the road, I’ve seen it’s peril, it’s destruction... it’s ghastly carnage...” “And I pray unto all of you, LISTEN TO ME.” “The things I’ve witnessed The Ripper do, it is more vile than the devil himself!” As a silence spreads throughout the bar, Manis claps his hands.

“So, we’re in agreement are we? While you’re not wrong about The Ripper being quite the terrible beast, to think he wouldn’t be present or to think that siding with me would prevent my holy dark liege’s

presence, well that's just foolish sir!" he says jokingly, chuckling and holding his stomach. "Now I will ask of all of you to go to the coliseum, please my subjects" he says with a disconcerting smile and a paralyzed gaze, "have no fear..." They all follow Manis as he marches, just like he used to march toward that stage every year. This year was no different, Manis had just found his next stage.

The coliseum itself, was abandoned. Topped pillars, seats sprinkled with debris, even charred stairs, from a battle that's a story for another time. The archway was crumbling as all the drunk patrons followed, single-file, their feet thumping in a monotonous rhythm. The fallen pillars were toppled on one another at the coliseum's base floor. Weathered from age, some were crushed and some were still whole, disheveled from time. Many of the balconies seemed to have been torn off by something ferocious from a time before. Just as the crowd of drunkards stomped into the base of the arena, their boots kicking up the sand, scuffling forward. Manis stomps, pivoting his body and taking a deep breath, holding his stomach.

"My dark liege, **COME UNTO ME!!**"

**"OH, GRIMACE, PLEASE HEAR THEE!"**

Manis dances and screams giggling, as a rumble approaches from the forest and all the people turn back stricken with fear, nasty humid sweats, seeing it's tyrannical horror in all of its splendor. All of the peasants hollered, screamed, and ran to the coliseum's back wall in a panic as Grimace's enormity had increased, undeniably. It towered, crawling over the archway, its legs seemingly endless and hairy pillars of fear. Peering its gaze downward at Manis, tendrils swaying, oozing its bile. Grimace then reached its leg forward and picked up Manis, quickly setting him on top of her hairy head. Manis cackled as he spoke. "Oh my dark liege, how I have truly missed thee." Grimace was speechless, her pincers slammed together in a booming clap, crawling over the coliseum it's legs creeping all the way to the back wall. Where the people had all huddled to in absolute terror, in some, poor desperate salvation. Crawling around the coliseum to the opposite side. As Grimace positioned its body to be looking directly at all of the peasants. Its legs then stretched onto both of the adjacent sides of the coliseum, crushing the only seats left in this abandoned venue. Grimace had to bend its legs to fit in this poor excuse for a coliseum, due to its architecture, it

can hardly contain Grimace's ferocious, immense, and terrible existence.

The crowd is rife with panic, terror, sweat define their faces, women's knees buckle, father's fists clench, children wailed, screamed, and babbled as they inevitably cried. Until their cries turn into irrefutably horrible shrieks. Manis flips his hair back, smiling a grin no boy should have.

"MY EXTRAVAGANTLY STRANGE SUBJECTS! WHY THE LONG FACES?"

Manis points to his rosy cheeks, rotating his fingertips. "SMILE! HAVE A LAUGH! Or perish..." He chuckles throwing his head back, losing himself in the moment, and quite possibly Manis's damaged mind... Snapping back to a serious tone, his expressions becomes flat. "Now... I do have to think you lovely folks, truly, if I had a hat, I'd tip it!" "For being, such lovely hosts, inviting me in like this and deeming me your young king, many couldn't accept this honor..."

"Oh my darling subjects!" his grin flashes wide and violent as he chomps his teeth. "You truly are the kindest, if not the only kind folks I have ever met! You could say I am a man of theatrics." He says with a twinkle in his eye, flashing his yellow teeth. A small child breaks away from his father's grasp, a snot-nosed runt if there ever was. He was only a few feet shorter than Manis, although when the child spoke it was apparent that he was indeed... slow.

"OI! B-B-BUT, YOU'RE JUST A BOY, YOU'RE NO MAN..." he bows his head down ashamed "Well at least not yet..." Manis dawns this puzzled look, puckering his lips and squinting his eyes. He forces direct eye contact with the boy, refusing to avert his gaze. As he snaps his fingers one of Grimace's legs picks him up. She sets him down graciously, Manis still with his gaze locked on the frightened child. Manis stares down at the child smiling. "Not a man huh?" His tone quickly transforms, from charismatic and cheerful all the way to vitriol. "AND YOU'LL NEVER LIVE TO BE ONE MY DEAR BOY, YOU, ARE THE FIRST EXAMPLE!" He draws his blade slowly. The father catches it with his eye and sprints toward him shouting. "Sire! Sire!! Please! NO!" Tossing the blade over the small boy's shoulder, the blade spins so fast it whistles through the air, straight into the father's neck. As the boy hears his father grunt and choke on his pouring blood, he turns around and screams. Sadly for the

boy, Manis has already sprinted to the father, pulling the hilt across his neck spraying blood all over Manis. He cackles in an escalating pitch, which only lead to hysterical laughter and tears. The boy shrieks "D-D-DADDY!" Manis holds his hands up. "Don't worry my esteemed subjects! There's a happy ending waiting for us!" He bows, flinging his arm back, jabbing the knife into the boy's neck. "Don't worry, you'll see him soon" Manis says in a soft, concerned tone just before breaking out in hysterical laughter.

Chatter spreads across the crowd, an old man shouts. "OI! He can't take the lot of us on! Another man chimes in. "Aye! He's just a boy!" Manis scans the crowd, left-to-right. As they inch closer, the crowd's shouts become indistinctive, a sporadic audible clatter.

Manis doesn't flinch, he doesn't unsheathe any of his weapons, he continues to stare at the crowd. Placing his hands on his hips, a wryly grin stretches his face, His ghastly grin was the only that Moved. "Don't be so sure my foolish subjects!" he stated with a shriek and a crack in his voice. He cackles spitting on himself, "Uncertainty is the first sign of weakness!"

The crowd is now inches away, The leader from the tavern steps through the rage-induced crowd. Gently shoving them to the side with his metal gloves. "Slay me you might..." he cocks his head back gazing at grimace, as she tilts her hairy head down and clacks her pincers. "But slay My dear, dark, Grimace, you shall not!" "The thing about the darkness is..."

The leader cuts Manis off— "PISS ON YOUR POETRY YOU DEMON..." Manis talks over his powerful voice,

"MADNESS, IS THE ONLY LIGHT THAT SHINES, MY DARK LIEGE, YOUR GAZE OF MADNESS! YOUR POWERFUL DARKENED SPLENDOR, LEND IT TO THEM LIKE YOU DID I, YEARS AGO!" As the leader began reaching for Manis, Grimace turned its body upside down, knocking stone and dismantling the architecture around the crowd. As stones plummeted into the coliseum below, Grimace's legs rotated its body. Its pincers clacked together, slowly at first, but with the rhythm they smacked together, their speed increased. The clacking thump grew louder, and then Grimace shrieked a shriek that pierced the eardrums and in an irrefutable unison the crowd dropped to its knees, all of them screaming. Tears lining their delicate dirty faces. "Foolish, insolent, mortals..."

Grimace spoke in an irritated tone, the closed eye on

it's now rotated back, slammed-open. Skin ripped once it had opened its eyes, dead skin and debris falling. The eye itself was blood-shot, with a spiral incessantly oscillating from the inside of its pupils. Their screams turned into silence in an instant, the gaze from grimace's eye sends a pulsing energy through the air, through all of them, simultaneously.

From dropping on their knees the entirety of the crowd threw their heads back. Slinging their arms backwards. Their faces toward the sky, and their mouths agape. Saliva slowly dripped from their mouths, they were now unarguably brain-dead. Manis wiped his forehead, placing his hand on his knee, propping his other hand in the sand to push himself up. Well not push, Manis jumps upwards on his feet. Wiping his shoulders free of the dirt of the coliseum floor. He grins, a wryly, distant, grin. Turning away from the people he throws his hands up.

"Grimace, oh my dark liege! Witnessing your power.., it is truly enticing! Oh, yes! My dear dark calamity!" His smile stretches wider, cackling as he spoke. Grimace slowly scurries to the top of the arena. "Ah... You truly are too kind, but Manis! What will my little devious king to be, do now?" Manis scratches his chin, slicking his bright-red hair through his dirty palms and shouts.

"WELL, what an excellent question! If the tragedy of Jaykob has taught me anything, it's always, ALWAYS, find the biggest, mountain-of-meat, you can find and bring him to his knees!" Manis begins trotting and humming, skipping through the dirt. Approaching the leader he pulls him by his hair, saliva still drooping off of his chin. He grabs the leaders cheeks in his palms, rotating it back and forth, examining his bone structure thoroughly. "Oh ! yes, well, I truly cannot see it any other way!" Manis throws his head back laughing, stretching the veins in his neck, spitting as he cackles. He pushes the leader's head forward, back-first into the dirt. Manis positions his legs on both sides of his stomach. His head cocked down, his glare lazy, his grin stretched. The leader groans slowly, placing his face in his palms, moaning in excruciating pain. "Ah finally! My knight in shining armor rises from the depths!" clapping his hands, Manis chuckles without smiling. He stumbles through his words laying on the ground. "I-I-I- can't remember, b-b-b-ut I feel as though my mind is blank, vacuous... a-a-a-are you my king? The one I look to and serve?"

Manis begins cocking his eyebrows, smiling deceptively. “Oh? You forgot all ready did you?!” He smiles even wider his charisma shining through his eyes. “You were like a brother to the king, alas, sadly, regrettably, my father passed. Ever since, which is roughly six-months passed mind you. You have guarded me as your own, to not only ensure my safety, but be that commendable king my father would have oh so joyously wanted!” Manis smirks clasping his hands together, he steps over the leader and to his side, refusing to break his piercing eye contact. Placing one hand on the dirt and another on his knee, the leader stands up, groaning as he does.

“I... remember this.” Manis begins shaking his hands laughing, “Well I certainly hope! We were to beginning construction on my father’s—“ Manis’s grin stretches “

**MY** kingdom, when you all decided to celebrate! And got shit-faced, rightfully so, and I’m the young one here you sorry excuse for a knight!” Manis’s spit flies and hits the leader in the face. Manis’s eyes stretch wide as he screams. “I’M LOSING MY PATIENCE HERE, ALL OF YOU SODDING IMBECILES, MY FATHER, HE DIDN’T DIE FOR THIS! TO GET SHIT-FACED, TO LEAVE HIS LONE SON CONTEMPLATING HIS FATE UNDER THIS BLANK SKY.”

Pacing around Manis throws out his hands, “Or is it THAT WHAT YOU WANT GOING TO YOUR grave!” pointing at the leader, marching towards him until his finger pressed against his plated armor. Slowly pushing him back with Manis’s surprising strength. His shouts growing louder. “IS THIS THE KIND OF BEST-FRIEND MY FATHER HATH KNOWN?! BY ALL THE lands that GRACE OUR PITIFUL SOULS, I NEVER THOUGHT MY FATHER... OH I KNOW INSTEAD OF TALKING AND TALKING. WHY DON’T I JUST BEHEAD YOU RIGHT HERE AND NOW, EH?”

Manis’s nose now pressed against his, the leader said nothing. His face didn’t react, he didn’t flinch, he was void of all emotions. “No my liege, no, of course not, my apologies, I... please... my king, let me fix this.” Manis paces back and forth, cocking his eyebrows his gaze widening. “Well? What are you— WAITING FOR YOU DOLT. GET TO IT. YOUR IRRESPONSIBLE LIFE IS IN YOUR OWN HANDS,”



Manis intense rage cools to a grin, placing his hands on his hips. The leader begins shouting, "UP, UP, UP!" A good portion of the crowd slowly arises, the other half, which a good amount seemed to be **HIS** men. He began hitting them on the shoulder with the hilt of his sword, shouting. "OI!" "GET UP YOU SLAGS" "WE'VE GOT A TYKE-OF-A-KING TO LOOK AFTER AND LEAD, UP YOU DOLTS." The rest that remained unconscious, began to wake them up. Nudging and prodding them with their elbows and knees. "Now, since the lot of you decided to finally get up. " " You see that tyke of a man over there? Did you all forget? Getting shit-faced under the starless sky?" "Sodding pathetic" "THE WHOLE LOT OF YOU." "When his father died, he entrusted me, he entrusted ALL OF US TO PROTECT, AND GUIDE THIS YOUNG MAN TO BE THE KING THAT HIS FATHER NOT ONLY WAS, BUT EVEN BETTER THAN HE COULD BE." Talk began to spread throughout the crowd, it was indistinctive, but it all resulted in the same raising questions. "What father?" "King?" "Since when?!" Suddenly they all ceased chattering, Grimace's eye began to throb, pulsating its familiar energy again. They all nodded attentively, as if someone had all just told them the story. As if something had whispered into all of their ears, and convinced them this is the story as they know it.

They all shared the same lost look in their eyes. Nodding in synchronization. In a complete, unison. As the leader watch their faces change, as he paced back and forth he nodded and continued on. "I don't want this boy's death on my conscience and I know neither do any of you pour souls, we have a SODDING KINGDOM TO BUILD. So what in the blazes are we doing just standing about?" "Idly twiddling our fucking thumbs, I don't know if you confounded morons have noticed, but, time doesn't stop. Soon this boy will be a full-fledged-man, and besides look at the state of this ruin we call a coliseum!" They crowed aimlessly gazes around, paying absolutely no mind to the hulking spider preying above them. " Is this the kingdom you want to call home?!" The crowd doesn't respond but sulks at the remnants of the coliseum.

"Aye, I said, IS THIS THE KINGDOM YOU WOULD CALL HOME?" outbursts spread through the crowd simultaneously, "I WOULDN'T BARE MY CHILDREN ANYWHERE NEAR THESE DUMPS!" "NAY! This coliseum used to know combatants, glory, and fame! WHERE HAS IT ALL GONE?!" The leader points amidst the crowd "Precisely!" "All of you are correct, AS RIGHT AS RAIN!"

“So why sit idly? Lollygagging, let’s give ourselves a home to not only be proud of, but a kingdom to please our young and budding king!” Applause and cheering spread amidst the crowd. Manis slowly walked forward, slowly clapping his hands. “Right as rain you all are, so why don’t we all, begin...” He says slowly, annunciating his words, slithering out of his mouth like a snake. Manis sat on Grimace’s head, Grinning ear-to-ear, his eye brows cocked, and his chest-puffed out. Grimace subtly and slowly whispered

“Yes, yes my dear Manis. Look into the darkness and I promise you, it **shall** grin back.”

## Chapter VII

### A Kingdom Of Madness.

Now Manis described his kingdom's plan with waving hands and dancing-legs. As Grimace watched from above, like spiders always eerily seemed to. He told his hazy-minded subjects that the ground in which they stood upon. Was to be flooded with shops, craftsman, and his throne room was to reside where the gladiators once called their "blood-works." Not only that but Manis would have a throne directly above the arching entrance to his throne-room, to watch his glorious kingdom thrive. He told his subjects that it will be no easy task, but their pride will carry them to commit to the construction of his kingdom, or perish. Lest they be gruesomely be fed to his dark liege, Grimace.

They worked endlessly for the next two years of their dimly lit lives. As every man has a profession, a talent if you will. Each and every man that happened to be responsible for a young family, was instructed by Manis, to find a talent. A craft, something of value, something of integrity. They were too find that talent and construct it into a business. For if anyone dwelling in Manis's kingdom, were to remain, alive. They must've brought some-sort of monetary value to the table. Or else, what was he worth? Nothing more than Grimace's next bite to eat, and he made sure all of his subjects knew this better than their left hand. Manis had dreadfully found his specific set of talents long, long, ago. Thanks to the hulking monstrosity that is Grimace, more importantly in Jaykob's death he had found that his talent, thanks to his maniac rage.

As many years slowly passed, businesses' and homes seemingly rose from the ground. Fashioned from wood farmed at the nearby forest. They riddled the vacant ground of the coliseum. First there were businesses, and then homes rose at the far-end of the coliseum, adjacent from the throne-room's arching entrance. The entrance to the throne room became decorated in a black banner, Manis had instructed one of his poorly subjects to paint a smiling face with his blood, which he did, although he did not survive. The painter was never even gratified the moment to tell his family of a job well done.

A reward fit for half-assed job, or so Manis decided. All of the taverns, and shops that resided in the swampy village were torn down. The wood was then sparingly used by carpenters to construct taverns, shops, and shacks that they referred to as homes, and the liking of whatever the king demanded in the coliseum. Although it took two exhausting and deathly years, the kingdom was now a thriving success. No shop was ever empty, no tavern was ever silent, and the king was never left alone and in so, Grimace was never hungry... It became such a popular town, Manis began forcing all who enter to pay for day passes in his kingdom, this only lead to even more revenue for his budding kingdom of madness.

Manis was mad, but he was also absurdly intelligent. He siphoned all of the earnings to the shops that brought the town inevitable success. upgrading and polishing them, only leading to even more unsuspecting visitors. Manis sat in his throne above the archway twiddling his thumbs and a vicious grin as he watched the streets consistently flooded with patrons, which to Manis, only equated into copper coins.

Even though it was a success, muggers ran the streets, gangs occupied the taverns. People remained in their homes or shops, paranoid that they might be the next body to litter the dirty street. The king loved this, hell he told them to do it, watching from above he loved seeing the chaos. After all it only made them plead for an audience which Manis then turned into an opportunity. To have his own personal guard extort "copper protection" from his subjects and have them stand guard for the taverns and shops. Not before he gave each and every subject who pleaded a scar, so they remember that the next time they ask, they'll be a delightful snack for the horror that watches above them that they dare not speak of. To any soul, living or not.

## Chapter VIII: The Sun & The Moon.

Far above, on the pristine marble balcony of Fairgun-Gard, the wind roared ferociously, blowing Vaea's perfect hair across her nose. She combs strands behind her ears, tapping her fingers in a certain succession. Cocking her eyebrows, she raises her index finger forward. "That's IT!" she slowly shouted "Oh, I truly out do myself don't I?"

Her cackles occupied the halls of Fairgun-Gard, shrilling through the white hallways like an eerie gust. Vaea turned around, her gown brushes against the stone-floor. Swaying her delicate but pronounced hips, she walks seductively towards Vorago. Whom is laying on a stone-slab. His lifeless arms folded onto his chest, he snores soundly asleep as the darkness seething all around him begins to move with his every breath. Vaea giggles, placing her hand on her lips.

"You know, Vorago, you really are just adorable laying there, ever so vulnerable." After laughing in her palm, Vaea then traces her fingertips on his resting body. "I don't know about you, but I do think Dome-Wyrd is due for some light, it's too gloomy my dear." "Whatever will the poor mortals think... It needs some light, it needs some stars, oh heavens, Vorago!" "It's just no good— at all." Her tone lowering, ripping her previous words to shreds. She now grips his chest, her other hand raising upwards, spawning a spinning orb. An ethereal rainbow of colors. Vorago began groaning, an aura slowly reveals itself, encasing Vorago's body.

The darkness he seethes is being spun around him, entangling his body. Slowly siphoning his seething darkness into the orb. "Now, Vorago, darling. Since you're just being so LAZY, I'm going to do— what I should have been **DESTINED** to do."

She grasps the orbs in her delicate fingers as it slides inside of her skin. Vaea's skin vibrates as she dramatically inhales. Rightfully so as she exhales a darkened vapor, her skin pulsates and begins pulsating in a dark, familiar aura as her hair begins to flow upwards. Changing her

golden threads into an onyx-black. Holding her hands outwards, Vaea spawned two orbs in the bleak sky.

Vaea moves her fingertips gracefully. The orbs move across from each other, the one of the left is a bright orange. The one on the right is a luminescent white. Vaea swipes her right hand and the right orb flies out of sight. She grips her right hand toward the orange-orb, giant, crusty bulbous eyes open up. Tiny infant hands and feet spawn underneath its eyes. It yawns, as Vaea waves her left hand in a back-and-forth motion the orbs spin. Becoming a bright orb of orange light in the center of the sky. Hiding the mortals from the very thing they had been blessed with.

For every beauty has a hideous face, you just have to see it in the right light. The light beamed through the clouds, lighting up the beautiful rolling hills of Dome-Wyrd, its beautiful towering mountains, its lush and sprawling forests. It spread across all the vales in a pleasant flash. The entire world finally could live in light, not only giving Dome-Wyrd days & nights, but truly, giving Dome-Wyrd its sun & moon. When the mortals should finally see the true face of the sun & the moon, well that's quite the tragedy, for another time.

## Chapter IX: Dome-Wyrd's First Dawn

On the first day that the sun graced the sky in Dome-Wyrd, the swamp was bubbling-hot. In Manis's now thriving kingdom. People gathered in front of the entrance to the throne-room. Which was now sealed. By a giant steel gate which had a small steel door, it required a key which only Manis had. Only his original kidnapped subjects, all who have now undoubtedly lost their sodding minds, were allowed entrée.

Manis had hit extreme states of paranoia nevertheless this was already prevalent with charging folks for day-passes in his kingdom. Which was a past-time now, Manis had kept increasing the price for the day passes, and soon anyone who came wandering to the his gates of madness would've found themselves slaughtered before they found their mind again.

Above the entrance, and the swarming crowd that riddled the throne room, stood Manis who was now a young man. Not nearly any stronger but outrageously taller, for the first time in his life he had a full set of clothes, that fit. He strafed back and forth, putting his foot on the ledge as rock from the old coliseum slowly crumbled down onto the crowd below.

“ My subjects my beautiful people below me! My selected few! You have served me... decently well for such a very, very, long time. Not only am I proud of you...” He flashes an eerily long grin, his teeth now rotting a dark and disgusting yellow. His annunciation quickens. “ I want you all to know with my dreadfully withered heart, that from now until a month's' time, on this... our first day graced by the first one's blessing, the sun. A month-long celebration!”

The crowd confused begins hollering in an uproar that shakes the throne room. Onlookers from outside begin to listen on the thin walls before them. Manis claps his hands grinning and cackling. His pristine guard, a little older now, wobbles down with tankards full of ale.

Before long they hauled down rows and rows , full of ale. No one needed to tell his dimwitted subjects they were free to drink, rightfully

they did. Manis inclined himself to join in on the party, he thought as Jaykob taught him, you only die once.

He drank, perhaps a little too much. Hiccuping along in song, and as they wandered out of the throne room with the news. As the drunk love to talk word spread very quickly of the celebration. It was the first night that Manis held hand-in-hand with his subjects in song, and delightful ramblings, and probably would be the last. Manis wandered group to group also doing his drunkenly part of spreading the good word.

Manis unlocked the gate to the kingdom in a drunken rant about how nice he can actually be. So he did, and he kept drinking. People seemed to just pour in, probably just as much as they were pouring drinks, and still no one knows how or when the dwarves got here. Perhaps that's a mystery that was never solved, the best ones usually are. They drank until the sun set, they drank until the sun rose again. For what seemed like several fortnights. It wasn't until many moons and many dawns later that on one dawn, Manis grew bored of the celebration. People were passed out in the streets, several groups he passed on the way to the throne room seemed to be fighting, or rough-housing, he couldn't tell. With the rising sun he slammed open the throne room door and locked it behind him, his hands shaking. When the lock-clicked he clasped the key-ring tightly, he had an odd feeling.

Manis began walking, quickly, gazing over his shoulders as he heard eerie winds pass through the dark halls with him. Quicker he paced to his isolated throne, as he stepped onto his bright red carpet just as he was beginning to sit down he heard a voice slither in the distance. First he heard a teasing cackle.

"Oh, but Manis... the celebration can only last so long" She waved her hairy legs across the throne room. They slowly passed over Manis's head. Grimace had now grown, she was sluggish and fat. Her immensity sat in the back of the room, behind the throne. "And Manis have you forgotten?" "I absolutely NEED to feed" She complained as he balled his fists, shaking. Pacing back and forth, his legs shivering. "feed, Grimace?" increasing his speed, pacing back-and-forth. "FEED?" "FEED ?!" "You know my dark liege, there's no denying your enormity truly, but forgive me." Bowing his head, "But... JAYKOB..." "He wanted to live, he wanted to breathe, he wanted to grow as old as I stand before you now!"

His words increase in intensity, practically spitting them. Manis stops himself, putting his palm over his chest, his grin possessing his



face. Slowly chuckling, as those chuckles became a moaning cackle, that echoed throughout the halls as Manis pounded the floor with his fists, until they began bleeding. He was crying, laughing, and having delusions all at once. Manis mumbles about how you cannot escape death it only follows you, especially if you're me. He rolled on the floor, hysterically laughing, drooling on himself when suddenly his face snapped to a serious-tone. His eyes widened.

"Oh that's it!" peaking Grimace's curiosity she props herself up, intrigued. Her head slowly rotating as her pincers crashed together. Her ruby eyes all blinking at the same speed. "Where has my delusional little Manis gone to?" On the ground Manis throws his hands up cackling to himself, darting his eyes around and pawing his nose. "The STAGE!" "The stage, the stage!" "THE STAGE! GRIMACE! OF COURSE!" "I can't get over these tribulations, so! Why not bring the tribulations from the past to the present?!" "YES!" "I could command my subjects to build a glamorous stage, perform that tragic play that was never finished, maybe then, maybe then this haunting will finally rest..."

Grimace paws her hairy-leg against his chest, gently. "Oh, my dear Manis, yes, keep telling yourself your curse will abruptly end." "You humans and your grandiose delusions, it's adorable it really is." Manis hops up on his feet, pointing his fingers toward her immensity. "ENOUGH, SILENCE," he bows his head in a shaking fright. "With respect I mean, my dark liege..." "Yes you do, yes you do Manis." She turns him around with one of her legs, lowering her head just above Manis's ear. "Lest you forget who the beast is Manis, for the sake of your own mortal life, don't."

Now it was dawn, Manis hadn't slept, which was expected. He had sat in the throne ignoring Grimace as she complained, and criticized until the sun began to rise. His eyes were sunken into pits that were the circles around his eyes. The sun pierced down onto the coliseum illuminating all the shops that graced the slummy streets of Manis's kingdom.

Drunks littered the streets, thieves lurked in the alleys, and people were gathering under the entrance to the throne room. There was a bustling chatter throughout the crowd, when out from the distance above them birthed a haunting-laugh that could only belong to their king. The bags in his eyes were deeper, his smile stretched wider as his laugh mutated

into a terrifying cackle. Manis's eyebrows were flat as he ran his hands through his dirty, greasy, orange hair. Throwing his hands out to his sides, inhaling intensely. His nostrils flared and Manis's mouth opened wide. "Now, now, my beautiful subjects. I know, you all have your schedules, but I digress, though our kingdom thrives! I have plans..." he scans the crowd which has gone from eager to nervous. "Theatrical ones!" his gaze widens, practically bulging from his sockets as he clasps his hands together.

"oh! And every-single one of you has pivotal role to play!" "We... in honor of my father of course..." his widened grin retracts to a sly smirk. "Will put on the grandest play these lands have EVER WITNESSED!" The mothers and children all begin clapping and hollering in dire excitement. Manis smiles back, gazing toward their excitement. "Yes! My subjects! This is the time..." he begins pacing back and forth waving his hands with enthusiasm. "The time in this young and hopeless world to shape the ages that are to come after us!" "So they could learn from our regrettable mistakes..." "So that the orphans of tomorrow, the fatherless, the motherless, will have a god-damn clue, in this young and forsaken world.. So that maybe the next generation, will be able to cope with death!"

Manis bursted in laughter, his eyes darting around. "But that's the thing about death it's inevitable." His laughs grow louder, his veins bulge against his skin, spit flies down, spraying the now frightened crowd. His face snaps to a concerned look, his eyebrows arched-up. "That is why my chosen few, we must teach the world through this play, nay, some may not understand or comprehend the tale it tells, but like we inevitably all lose the ones we cherish most...watching their forsaken life slip through our delicate fingers..." his eyes line with tears as his voice becomes shaky. "when there's nothing we can do to stop our madness, like death, we either learn..."

"OR WE GO MAD..." Hysterically laughing, turning around as he waves his hands around, when he finally comes back facing the crowd... Manis bends forward, his eyebrows cocked, his grin flashing. "Well?..." "WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!" "A STAGE WON'T BUILD ITSELF." "THE LANDS WON'T KNOW ABOUT OUR PLAY BY THEMSELVES!" "AFTER ALL..." his screams stop, as his smile becomes violent. "THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO PERISH, ARE THOSE WHO DO NOTHING."

The crowd follows in-suit, scattering as Manis walks back into the throne room. His cackles growing louder, and louder as they fade into the distance. Walking back to his isolated throne, Manis is losing himself in hysteria. Tears falling down his cheeks, his mouth shaking, throwing his head back, his hair damp with sweat as he stumbles. Just as he enters the throne room he hears the sound of clanking metal and a distant voice. His gaze now wide. "My liege! There's... someone at the gates."

"She, refuses to leave without an audience." Manis turns around his gaze intense, "She you say?" "Y-y-yes, my liege..." Holding his hand out Manis replies. "Well?" "WHERE THE SODDING HELL IS SHE?" The guard jumps back as spit wets his visor, walking out toward the coliseum the guard adjusts his posture and leads on. At the towering gate that was fashioned by old-pieces of wood, making it look like an abomination of a gate. It held a smaller gate which allowed for entering and exiting but was bolted-shut with a sliding peep-hole above the door-handle.

The guard instinctively opens the door for Manis, she stood directly to the right of the door just out of sight. She stood there idly flipping her hair, lost in her thoughts and batting her eyelashes when she noticed Manis standing before her. "Oh! Finally! Manis, I had no idea you would be so handsome for Dome-Wyrd's youngest king." He's caught off-guard by her existence. She stood there too good for him. With long golden hair, dark-deep-set-eyes. Curves that would intoxicate any man. She was wearing a white-gown with a frilly neck-line with a slit going down her leg exposing her legs.

Manis stutters. "h-h-how, do you know me by name Madame, and what is your business at my glorious kingdom?" Placing her soft-hands before her delicate lips she giggles " Well everyone far and wide knows of Manis, the youngest king of Dome-Wyrd!" "my business is of personal interest." She bows, refusing to break eye-contact. Manis steps forth holding his hand out, swallowing the lump in his throat he seemed intimidated by her beauty. "The pleasure is all mine." Forcing the words out, He instinctively leads her forward in front of him through the gate. He watches her hips sway through her white-gown. As she takes her first steps in Manis's locked-kingdom, she stares in wonder, her eyes lit like Dome-Wyrd's newly found starlight.

"You did this all of this by yourself? Remarkable." She said in awe, Manis dawns a genuine smile, the first one since Jaykob use to make him

smile. "In these lands, you must see your prize and rightfully take it as your own. Living in times of such... dire evil, in times of wicked selfishness, we must affray to prove our miniscule worth. You must find the light in that impenetrable darkness. And once you do so happen to find it, if you do.

You better never let go lest you lose your head, your life, and your opportunities you have fought and traveled so far for. For in this world, if you do not sift through the darkness, it's inevitable darling! You will sink."

As they walked through town they walked side-by-side as her hand grabbed **HIS**, her eyes still not breaking their piercing contact, Manis then blushed. She giggled, bouncing her bust with an amused twinkle in her eye. Laughing in her palm as her face blushes just as much as Manis's. "You know, when I was a little tyke." I came to these swamp-lands, my father took me to the coliseum when the seats were always full, when unsuspecting winners started riots, when of all the places in the world, that this was the place to be. Of course this was far before The Riot of Clashes. Like I said, it was when I was little but looking back on the thought... it really is rather humorous." Manis looked on with an obvious admiration, cocking his eyebrows. "What is milady?" "How permanent of a change takes place after a horrendous battle, then again what is horrendous to some, is just that start of another cycle to others. I've never fancied emotions, they're just so troublesome and controlling, I've found if we control others emotions and lose our own it makes us all the more impenetrable.

Oh... but silly me, it looks like I'm rambling again." She bats her eyes, laughing into her palms again as she continues on as they continued to stroll through the town as drunk onlookers whispered amongst themselves. "We came to this thriving coliseum once a year, ever since my mother's irrefutably dreadful passing." Manis looked onto her as she told her tale with a now intense admiration, biting his lips, finally, he could relate to someone or so he began to ponder.

Who is this woman Manis wondered. Even as Manis wondered with his mind spinning and his heart full of butterflies, it was already much too late for him. "It's funny, truly, no matter how many times we came here Manis, just like the coliseum soon became a decrepit past-time. My father & I could not escape my mother's death." "We eventually stopped coming, as something that once was a grand ol' time, quickly became a horrible reminder, which was shortly before he mutated into a malicious bastard!" spit flying from her lips as she

quivered, clenching her hands beneath her forearms as Manis chuckled. "Death, death is a funny thing dear, it changes us, molds us, and shapes-us into who we inevitably become five years down the road. No matter how malicious, or monstrous you become. Even if we let go, change is inevitable!" They stop walking at the entrance to the throne room. Locking hands with their gazes meeting. "you truly are a beautifully twisted soul Manis, I find myself drawn to you." Her face inches closer towards Manis, now only a nose apart. They smile in synchronization, blushing like-wise as her gaze widens, her eye bulging and her eyebrows lowered intensely. "Your laugh Manis, we all have a darkness that lays dormant within... never in my life have in just a few brief moments, have I been convinced of not only a dormant darkness laying within, but an awakened one.

One that entices and guides, I don't know what it is but your soul is an especially special one..." Her gaze is distant as Manis smirks. "Oh, my, I do not know where the blazes you came from, but I do not object, nay, I'd be mad to even think." "well I am mad, but, come, come, come, come, see the rest of the kingdom!" She smiles in anticipation, stroking her hair behind her ear her eyes glowing with the sun setting behind her. "Yes, let's."

Clasping her hand as Manis un-bolts the door, swinging it open forcefully, his body flinging with the door as he catches his balance, holding it open for her as he grins. Her curvaceous body swirls and waves through the door way as Manis slams the bolted door shut the lock began to clank as the sun was finally setting over the horizon, and the first night slowly began. The luminescence of the moon peering over the horizon as drunk townspeople stared in awe. Just like Manis captivated and distracted by beauty, not a soul in the kingdom knew it was far, far, too late.

## Chapter X: Madness Born From Grief.

Love is an inevitable thing, infatuation and affection plague young men regardless of the time or the age. To find love is one thing, a beautiful thing.

To fall for the wrong individual is a completely different tale. One of the likes that Manis would come to quickly and regrettably know. We often fall hard and fast early in life, and with these young and dumb mistakes we inevitably learn. Much like Manis irrefutably learned with Jaykob's gruesome murder.

It's not how we fall, it's how we pick ourselves up. Where we go from falling off a mountain in unsure lands, in ghastly, and dark times. It's not the tale of how we fell into the darkness, but how we found the light after striding for an eon through that seemingly impenetrable darkness.

Then again, saying and doing are entirely different things. It's easier said than done when you find yourself down that path, when you find yourself hot and sweating in the moment, only in the dawn after will you realize it's too late. And that path you have found yourself set upon, you'll find it's harder to leave than to stay, no matter how maddening that is, but then again some individuals emotions are weaker than others and some mistakes made by some are far deeper craters than others.

We all must learn from our forefathers mistakes, for the hopes of that someday somewhere there will be a brighter tomorrow.

Suns rose giving the day's color, suns set giving the young world character. Moons rose revealing all the horrors that used to be hidden under the starless and moonless sky, and moons set and in those few moments of absolute darkness, the cycle began anew. Days became nights, nights became weeks, and the weeks in the hot summer became the next sweating months. What started as an innocent call of fate, or

so Manis thought had quickly become his biggest regret. He had become reclused to the depths of his throne room for hours and days on end.

She idolized Manis's power of the darkness he had awakened, but at the same time she was unmistakably jealous. They were inseparable for the first few weeks. For hours they made love, cackling in the dark lying on his bed, sipping wine and toasting together in each other's grasp. All seemed well, but as time rode on, she wouldn't let him leave his sight.

As soon as those days and nights became the first month, his beloved seemed to always wake on the wrong side of their bed. She picked fights, and she always started them, she created them out of seemingly nothing. The halls of the throne room that were once filled with delightful moans and laughter had become screams, shrieks, bouts of rage and cries. At certain points during the night even, crashes against the wall, the breaking of vases and the slamming of doors with only obscenities that followed the slamming.

Their fights seemed to have no end in sight unless the both of them were blacked out from ale or their own volatile rage. A volcano should never meet a hurricane, but still he willfully loved her no matter how many nights he did not sleep a wink.

No matter how many nights he driven to insanity only left with a door slam and his own cackles filling the halls of his throne room as he aimlessly wandered it's echoing halls.

Talking to himself, babbling and mumbling about how what love and care does, about how it only leads and ends in madness. When he wasn't being driven mad with hysterical madness or being driven down the halls cackling by his betrothed Manis had found himself disappearing into the production of his play, which finally his subjects had almost completed the building of his stage.

The only thing keeping him together, although barely he was away from her. Even though that didn't stop her from watching above the throne rooms archway. Never breaking eye contact and constantly shouting asinine criticism from above, casually tapping her delicate feet. He had now isolated himself, or so he thought, but man can never escape a watchful woman's eye or intuition.

Manis's prolonged time working with his subjects on the play, and the screenplay itself only made arguments with his beloved, deeply

worsen. The longer they loved each other, maliciously, the more Manis's mind seemed to break, he didn't know how much longer he could keep his broken mind together, but he could care less as long as his play was completed. Nothing dissipates by being ignored, it only pulses and grows in the subconscious. Although his relationship with his queen was faltering and breaking, the script for his play was thriving.

Late one night months later, Manis had finally finished his script, the only early night off he had. He screamed from his study. "Oh yes! Finally, months upon months of work! Comes to a golden close. This, this is my life's work." He maniacally kisses the manuscript, spinning in circles dancing with himself. " he begins laughing, only, the laughing doesn't cease it grows louder and louder, filling the halls. He runs to his room and slams open the door, his love laying nude and cocking her eyebrows as she strokes her hair behind her ears. His smile is wryly, eerie, his whole face is shaking while his eyes are trying to jump out of their sockets. "It's done, finally, months upon months, and it's finely DONE. PURE GOLD I HAVE CRAFTED." He holds his belly cackling and spinning around the room. His beloved says nothing, she stands up on bounces, kissing his dirty neck. Her hands pawing his chest as his hand clasps her neck close and Manis bites tenderly. Moans fill the room as he licks the side of her face Manis kicks his foot outward slamming shut the door.

The first happy slam that door has seen. And better days the door had seen, all weathered from its abuse. As the door creaked shut his love spoke. "Oh, my dear Manis." She said as she chuckled. strangely enough, this was the only night his beloved didn't bicker, instigate, or criticize him. Even on his "performance" They conceived that night and the walls moaned in their pleasure. The bed shook the walls as dust fell from the wooden beams hoisted over their bedframe. She clinged to Manis and for once, he felt completely connected to not only her but another human being.

Although if Manis had been looking into her eyes his face not pressed against her breasts, he would have seen it was far too late, for him, for the kingdom, and all the unsuspecting mortals that inevitable followed Manis to his own damnation.

Manis awoke to an empty bed, confused but relaxed and the room still smelt of sweat, so at least he knew that wasn't a dream. Even so he



wondered for a woman that wouldn't let him out of her sight, where the devil has she gone? He chuckled to himself, the irony of the situation baffled him as sluggishly began dressing himself, yawning into the confusing awakened state he had found himself in.

It's always calmest before the storm, and only after a few moments of peace Manis now fully dressed he suddenly heard a shrieking wind pass his ear. Manis shuttered and instantly began pouring sweat, his chest drenched and his hair damp.

“LIES LIES, THERE'S ONLY ONE TRUTH, THEY'RE ALL GOING TO LEAVE, THEY'RE ALL GOING TO DIE, GO OUT WITH A BOOM— OR YOU'LL ONLY BUILD A MADDENING TOMB.”

As the voice passed it hysterically cackled with a certain familiar reverberation.

Manis was now screaming spit flying from his mouth, snot shooting from his nostrils. “Whom... WHOM THE DEVIL'S THERE?!” “I DEMAND IT SO, MAKE YOUR PRESENCE KNOWN, OR THEIR SHALL BE BLOOD.” He stated clenching his fists, moving his hands to the hilt of his blade. Then the thought dawned on Manis, Grimace... Where has she been? “Grimace...” he slowly said with a quiver in his lip, his posture taller and his gaze electric and jolting around the room like lightning.

Manis leaned up putting his hands on his face, muttering to himself. “What's even the difference anymore? Was my beloved merely a dream?” He was now utterly sure that last night and all the nights he shared with his betrothed was nothing more than a delusion. Then again he couldn't tell the difference anymore so he began maniacally cackling to himself, tears gracing his sockets as he found himself stuck in the own reverberation of his undeniable laughter that made the veins in his throat stretch and bulge.

He jumped out of bed in a panic, still laughing. Storming out of his quarters, searching the throne room. With no luck he frantically bolted out of the throne-room door, it was hardly even dawn— the sun had just barely risen.

The sunlight peered over the horizon illuminating the hills beyond the swamp and the rays of light pierced through the forest just beyond that. The day seemed strange, with a dense unsure air. With his queen

seemingly nowhere in sight, the only sound that he heard was the endless clank of hammers finishing his stage with the morning light.

Manis slammed the throne-room door shut, bolting the lock with a slam, breathing heavily and pacing back to his throne scratching and pulling his hair somehow laughing, screaming, and crying all at the same time. Muttering to himself again “Oh, yes, love, the most delusional of all feelings, and like all feelings, so, so, so, SO pointless.”

Manis caught himself saying the same things his queen said to him the first day he had met her. Was she really a delusion Manis began to think, or was he so lost in his own madness that his mind was now betraying him?

Another wind passed by his ears, as he stepped and plopped himself into his throne, sinking, throwing his legs outwards, his eyes jolting as he placed his palm on his chin with his fingers grazing his red cheeks, hot from worry. “What’s difference between reality and a dream?” The voice slowly annunciated, and asked him. As the voice passed, it vanishes with an echoing laughter, an even louder one than before. One that seemed in the tone of many. Multitudes of laughs and different voices all cackling about in unison. Surrounding Manis in an involuntary fright. As his eyes bulged and darted around the room. Manis watched the walls become wavy, there was an oceanic rhythm to them, he stared in awe drawn into the reality before him that seemed to be bending, or cracking at the very least. muttering to himself, biting his nails and sweating. “What in the seven hells...” He steps forward, leaping out of his throne, he watches the throne grow, crashing through the ceiling. Manis screams and reels backwards, skidding along the marble floor. In the giant hole that moments ago was the ceiling. There are now giant apparitions donning Jaykob and the bandit-leader's face. Ghostly abominations that stood skies high. They then fade transforming and mutating into another ghost. It’s Manis himself. The ghost dissipates and splits into three ghosts. The bandit, Jaykob, and Manis himself. He’s caught in an awfully mesmerizing trance as he watches the apparitions re-enact that pivotal moment of tragedy down to the specific lines spoken that day about weakness as a giant ethereal projection of that familiar dingy stage is spawned and the ghosts take their places and watches the horror play again. And when the scene ends, a wisp of smoke clouds his vision and they do it again, and again, and again. Never once does a single that change, the exact thing that

has haunted him since he was a boy now was a monstrous abomination of visuals and audibles.

Manis spoke no words, only bubbled and cried right then and there but quickly those tears remained but his voice went silent, abruptly and briefly. Manis suddenly lets out a quick laugh, and then another, followed by another. His chuckles quickly turning into a cackle, shouting. "It never ends, what's the point in fighting." Pulling his hair, the enormous ghosts dissipate and the walls begin rumbling and cracking, the entire throne room is now cataclysmically shaking. Manis plants his feet trying to hold his balance. Rocks start crumbling from the ceiling as the light shines in from the now gaping hole. Manis tumbles over, scurrying backwards in a fright.

What have I done he wondered, my own tragedies are melting all that I have earned, my madness is destroying my kingdom. Manis couldn't help but laugh with a face that showed nothing but terror, as if he didn't know why he was laughing but he had to. He sees a giant figure smiling from above the open-ceiling. Her existence is so immense, Manis instantly begins screaming. Manis's voice cracking and shaking, sweat drenching his sunken face. Throwing his body onto the floor, he cackles hysterically, pulling his hair and crying. Amidst his echoing laughter he realizes that the throne-room has stopped shaking. The ceiling that was broken was now fixed. The throne is it's normal size, in the sudden terror of change Manis was shocked, he checked his surroundings frantically. His face is blank, but his eyes widened. "Grimace..." He grits the words from the gaps in his rotting teeth.

Manis bolts across the throne room to the back of the room, opening the sealed dungeon door leading to a dark and damp basement. Manis Grabs a nearby torch that resides underneath the sealed door. As he slowly enters, the sound of a damp drip followed by his feet stomping down the winding, weathered steps. Approaching a bolted door he thrusts his feet with a grunt, kicking open the door so hard that splinters of wood knock against the stone and spread on the floor just past the entrance. As the old door slams open against the wall.

"GRIMACE!" Manis shouts, spit flying against the embers of his torch. Waving his torch around as he cannot seem to find her. He waves it across the other-side of the room to the left, to the right, and then towards the back as he steps forward he begins sees those familiar hairy-legs, moving the torch to the back of the room, Manis reeled back

in horror. Grimace was now even larger, her body so big she was scrunched against the wall. Not out of fear mind you, out of sheer immensity. It's pincers dripping a thick and pussy bile that stained the floor in trails.

Waving his torch back toward the wall he realizes his legs are even thicker, even longer. He moves his torch along it's legs, they too are scrunched against the wall where the ends of its legs are they curl against the corners. Grimace's tendrils that hang below its body now sluggishly occupy half of the room, leaving a slimy puddle that bubbles all around her tentacles. A bloated abomination of terror. Manis gulped, but not before she began talking.

"My, my, my, my Manis! It has been quite some time, what a fine young man you have become. A mad one, but a fine one nonetheless. Your big day is tomorrow, and rightfully so." One of her legs slowly moves across the room rubbing her swollen belly. "Because I do detest, it has been quite some time since I've been fed, any longer and I am afraid I'll have to venture out of these boarish walls. Manis begins shouting viciously. "That's what you're going on about? Being fed? YOU FIEND..."

Manis slowly calms himself, snapping to an obedient tone, his demeanor changing into that of a mindless soul whose only thought process was to follow instruction. Grimace's swirling eye starts to spin gruelingly fast. "I digress my darkened liege." His scowl becoming devious and distant. "A feast ye shall have, I promise thee my great and terrible Grimace. Tomorrow will be quite the show... quite the show indeed." Manis flashes a grin that lights up against the dimming torch.

As he turns his body around and slowly begins walking toward the entrance, he realizes he forgot why he came to her lair in such a worry. Uncontrollably he cackles as he walks away, losing his mind more and more as the time passes. At least, at least his life's work had been completed. As he begins closing the old door, Grimace interrupts him placing one of her legs before his feet as he stops politely. "Oh, and Manis, don't think that with this play and this feast that our deal will be done. We are tied, chained, and bound to one another. There's only one way out of madness and I believe you know what that answer might be. Alas, I also know that deep within that flesh of skin you call of chest, you enjoy it far, far, too much. The thrill, the chaos, letting your mind listen to those spiders and bounce like an ethereal spirit."

Manis smiles as he cautiously steps over her leg, walking backwards out of the room. “Right as rain you are, Grimace... but like that dreadful bandit that took Jaykob from me, don’t underestimate lest you lose yourself to the devil himself. Madness, madness is a powerfully enticing thing my horrid dark liege.

Manis grins and cackles up the stairs as he slams and locks the door. On the other side of the bolted door Grimace muttered to her enormous self.

“Right you are Manis, right you are, and the same goes to you, for when you met me as nothing more than a scared little boy, it was already far too late for your troubled little mortal soul.”

## Chapter XI: Manis's Big Day.

The big day had finally come, the sun rose with all those souls already lost. A dead-heat combed the skies. Manis was dressed up in a fancy, quilted-doublet, It was red and undoubtedly matched his flowing red cape, outlined in a golden lace, it was velvet and silky.

Although, like always, his pants were the same tattered linens he refused to change ever since, the tragic aftermath of Jaykob. His confidence shone as he walked out onto the wide-oval stage. Granted it took his subjects months, and many gruesome deaths later.

The longer Manis seemed to rule, the higher the body count seemed to rise. Even though the sun was hot and rising over the forest just beyond the coliseum, there was a dreadfully dead air passing through the morning light. There were torches scattered about the edges of the stage all dimly lit. The seats for the audience rested just beneath the stage and were all eagerly, not to mention surprisingly filled.

The only thought that dawned in Manis's mind, scanning the crowd as he paced back-and-forth on lit-up stage was how much Jaykob had craved this dream. Just how much he yearned for this dire moment, with a lit stage, and every seat filled all with eager eyes. His heart sank deep below, for the first time since he met Grimace. His thumping heart descended quickly into the acidic pits Manis called his stomach.

Manis took a slow, deep breath. Pacing back-and-forth once again as his heels stomped against the wooden stage, his footsteps echoed throughout the coliseum. With the audiences eager and silent eyes, it was the only sound occupying his disheveled kingdom. He stopped and turned toward the crowd at the center of the stage.

Placing one foot forward and puffing his chest out, holding his index-finger and thumb together he spoke with a golden confidence. "Today is a special day" Manis said with a delightful smile, his orange hair shining bright against the sun.

“A golden one eye, You— all of you, are in for quite the show! And I personally welcome you all to my kingdom!” Manis slowly bows, not breaking his eye-contact with the crowd. His grin becomes wryly, menacing, fiendish and violent. “Let the show begin...” he said in a deep-voice, breaking off in a chuckle, waving his palms in the dead air.

The crowd began to mutter with their children clasped tightly, and worried. The guards standing behind the crowd, back toward the town square, suddenly bolted-shut the entrance to the coliseum. The gate slammed, clanked, and locked with a thud. Repositioning himself upright from his graciously haunting bow, Manis begins to speak, pacing back-and-forth and continuing on.

“A golden day it is, it shines as bright as the sun before us! Alas, not all things are as bright in this thing we’ve come to known called life.” Finally, Manis’s beloved makes an appearance, although, the crowd has no reaction. Manis tries to ignore her continuing on once again, but with a stutter. “L-l-life... W-w-we lose so many in these d-d-d-ark times, a-a-a-although it’s not about how we fall...”

His beloved throws the wine-glass she was holding, pecking Manis on the nose as it bounces and clinks on the stage. She then buckles over, laughing hysterically, the veins on her neck announcing themselves with her catatonic laughter. Manis’s word cease, his eyebrows cock. His glare burns a certain intensity that frightens everyone, especially the children. His grin flashes wide, revealing his yellow and decaying teeth, his eyes bulging, and his stutter ceasing. “Death must be what you want.” He smacks his lips erratically. unsheathing his blade that lied behind his back. The blade reflecting against the sun, pulling from its sheath with a snick. Manis jumps off of the stage, dust shooting out from underneath his boots. Tossing the blade between his hands, playfully. His beloved still buckled over, her makeup now running from her hysterical chuckles. She forces out the words, wiping tears and smearing her make-up. “What, what could you possibly do? you’ve ruined your big-day!” she shrieks, throwing up her hands, and still the crowd pays no mind. The crowd is seemingly lost in a state of shock. Manis’s grin drops to a blank-stare, an expressionless one. “Be careful what you wish for wench...” Manis’s forehead drenching sweat, his gaze darting every-which-way and his teeth chattering. He seemed terrified but dysphoric. Raising Manis’s left hand without a second-thought he slashes her throat. Blood spray follows the slash as she gargles and chokes, grasping her drowning throat with wide, wet eyes. Manis stomps closer and

closer. Raising his shaking hand up again, grunting as he plunges the blade downward with a certain intensity. piercing her chest she gasps as Manis twists the blade, smiling and shoving it deeper, yanking the blade out as he plunges it back into the depths of her chest again. And again, and again, laughing as he continued to do so grotesquely.

Pleasurable tears lined his face, holding his other hand almost instinctively, stabbing her over and over again. By the time Manis finally stopped, coming to his senses, wiping the sweat and blood from his forehead. Arching his back and laughing, dropping the blade as it bounces on the stage. The crowd is numb with stares, completely silent and at a loss. Every mother with a child was shielding their kin's eyes.

Manis smirked as he scanned the crowd, looking back down in a fret, she was gone. Manis in a fright jumped-back. Knocking his blade off of the stage as it bounced back and forth in the dirt finally, finding a soft-spot to land. No words were exchanged, Manis, headed toward the bolted throne-room door, stammering to himself, unsealing it, yanking it open and slamming it shut without hesitation. With a confused crowd, they all began chattering. The guards stood like walls at the entrance, with no exits, and as tragic as the play was going to be. This was far worse, Manis's reality was breaking as he asked himself.

"What in the seven hells is real anymore." He muttered cackling. Manis ran his hands through his hair, pulling clumps of orange into his palms. Muttering on the other side of the bolted door. "What in the devil is the difference..." looking down at the floor as he panned his eyes forward, he stopped walking. "By the existence of the first ones" Manis stuttered, seemingly involuntary. He was shaking from head-to-toe. As an anxious crowd soon became irate.

From the ceiling to every wall surrounding Manis, he saw multiples of Grimace began to lurk on the walls. Visions of figments that made him feel nothing other than terror. Each one stood in a certain immensity, so haunting, and so large, that merely gazing upon them he could feel them all crawling up his spine, making him convulse even more as he strolled into the throne room. Ignoring the growingly irate crowd and lost in the existence of overwhelming apparitions. Copies of her swarmed every inch of the halls of the throne room.

As he walked their gazes and piercing ruby eyes followed. They all sat there on the walls silently, merely watching, waiting. Their enormity had



Manis paralyzed, he was stuttering nonsense as he tripped through his once familiar halls biting his lips as could barely keep his balance. The room felt wavy, Manis watched as the multiples of Grimace now slowly dissipated into thin air with an echoing wind that soon followed throughout the throne-room like a stalking gust. Perplexed and drenched in sweat Manis continued forward, cautiously and paranoid, scratching his sweaty scalp, his doublet stained with sweat. Behind the throne he heard a distant giggle, and his eyes suddenly became wider than the brightest fire to spread across the lands. he quickly sprinted toward the back of the room when he saw her. The Colossal beauty of a goddess from his dreams. Whom saved him from the haunting fire in the realm of dreams. Not just her and her magnificence, but four apparitions of her.

All standing side-by-side, motionless, standing like vacant souls, empty vessels of godliness. When Manis had finally decided it was time to step forward, they all turned and looked upon his meager existence, their gaze mutated menacing and hateful. Their arms all raised and their fingers pointed toward him in a judging manner. They all spoke in unison.

“Did you ever really think you were in control my dear, delusional Manis?” They vanished just as the words left her pristine lips. Manis gulped, turning around he ran toward his private quarters in a flash. He was jaded, hazy, and sweaty, approaching the door he slammed it open with his palm. His beloved was in his bed, with the captain of his guard, the same one he maliciously coerced in the tavern years ago. Upon realizing his entrance she said no words, she merely smirked and stared. It was too real, and far too late, in this impeccable moment of realization with his gaze wide and shaky, the room started spinning on Manis.

The captain was lost in the moment, penetrating her. He moaned and thrust like an animal. He knew in that moment with his clenched fists, how dirty and primal we mortals are. How infallible we are when it comes to death & lust. How unless you’ve lost your head, we all suffer the same selfish needs and desires, no matter the cost. “Disgusting Animals...” He muttered as he slammed the door-shut with such a ferocity a plank of wood attached to the door falls just behind him.

Leaping toward the captain without thought, only laughter. Grabbing him by his scraggly, damp hair. He pushed his head down, slamming his face onto the floor. Without any words, any thought but the laughter occupying the dreadful room. Manis placed his boot on his throat, grabbing the bust on the night stand. Smashing his face, instantly breaking his nose and letting the blood begin to flow, Manis grinned. Smashing the bust again, and again, each time faster, and harder, just like he was enjoying his beloved. His betrothed slowly applauded, the captain's face was dented, teeth were scattered on the floor, he groaned, coughing up blood. Mouthing something unintelligible as his lied their twitching. Manis grabbed him forcefully by the neck. He let out a wall-bending scream that echoed throughout the halls, snapping the captain's neck, forcing the boon to pierce through his skin as he shouted.

"You diabolical wench!" Manis talked so fast he could barely keep up with his wording. "After all the bloody time we've spent, after letting you in my kingdom's walls!"

"Irrefutably loving your wretched soul, regardless of the turmoil." "I ask you, WAS THIS YOUR PLAN?" "TO BEND AND BREAK THIS YOUNG KING?" "FOR WHAT?" "I WAS ALREADY BROKEN, ONLY DEMONS ARE AS FOUL AS THIS." His queen laughs, placing her soft-hands over her delicate lips, now, now Manis. He screams grabbing the captains sword.

Yanking it out from the sheath, waving it around as he screams. "IF YOU DIED ONCE, YOU CAN DIE AGAIN," Tears line his face, cackling as he slashes her across the face, blood spurting against the wall. Manis slices open her stomach, throwing the blade to the side as she twitches there lifelessly. In a delayed reaction as the blade hits the wall, her organs spill on the floor, her body hunched over and her mouth agape, slowly dripping blood.

A rumble spreads throughout the halls, and Manis turns his head back toward the door in pure terror, as he heaves there clenching the now bloody sword. He sees Grimace suddenly pushing her face in the door as much as she can with her immensity. "Oh, my Manis, you've done it again my delusional king... Just like I trained you... just like I warned you my dear..." Manis said nothing, tears just poured down his face. "Don't you see Manis? You lost once you met me... The first moment you gave-in, your mind. it was all-mine. you are nothing more than a vessel. A vessel that serves no purpose, other than to feed me, so that I."

“THE FIRST TRUE QUEEN OF DOME-WYRD, WILL REACH HER FULL POTENTIAL, AND BE THE TERROR.” “THE TERROR THAT NOT ONLY STALKS THESE LANDS, BUT DOMINATES THE MIND OF MAN.” “THAT ARE ALL AS FOOLISH AS YOU, MY DEAR, DEAR, MANIS- So trusting, ever so gullible, why is it you mortals trust your dreams more than your own minds? It’s funny, of all the mistakes you could’ve made, the only one you truly made was trusting me.”

Grimace cackles through the door-frame. For the first time in his young-life, Manis breaks down. All of the pent-up rage and pain, all that was bottled within his rotting mind. He instinctively started bubbling like a fool, for the first-time, not retaliating, not fighting. Not gruesomely murdering, feeling. He then realized, he was right, it isn’t how we fall, it’s how we pick ourselves up, but if you never pick yourself up, you’ve already lost.

Grimace opened its swirling eye, pulsing that familiar catatonic energy throughout Manis. “Now my king, it’s time to finish what you started, to finally finish your legacy.” He stood up without contest, his face still wet from all the tears, but no more escaped. He was void of everything that was emotion. He merely said: “Yes...”

Hysterically cackling into the afternoon as he sat there motionless on his blood-stained bed, with his mind dark, his brain mushed to ash, and the world seemingly false.

## Chapter XII: Manis's Gift.

He stomped his feet toward the door, his body swaying as he did, loosely. Grimace politely scurried across the ceiling as Manis slowly but surely walked toward the entrance to the throne-room, dragging his feet. Manis's footsteps heavy, sliding, clapping and echoing throughout the halls. Cautiously and paranoid, he unbolted the door, creaking open a gap in the door. It almost seemed like a separate reality, and everything outside of that bolted door was nothing but false.

Walking outside where the crowd hadn't moved from their seats. Still silent, still talking amongst themselves, and still irrefutably holding their kin. Manis spoke in a monotonous manner.

"I'm dreadfully sorry of what you delightful mortals had to experience earlier, truly." He says with an eerie smile.

"If you would all be so kind as to follow me to my throne-room I will personally give you all a parting gift...for this failed endeavor of theatrics..."

"I promise; to each one of you, children included. To gift you a gift that will know no equal! Every delightful soul here will receive a present worthy of tale & song. To share with your unborn children, to share with your growing children, and the folks you see on the road."

They all hesitantly stood up, muttering to each-other questioning his tone but cautiously following him. For times are dark, any gift worthy of value could help them and their families, they'd be selfish, foolish even, to not to take even a sliver of a chance. So they followed.

Manis lead them into the throne-room, without words, walking past the throne and to the back towards the dungeon door, the torch dimly lit-up the back of the room. As Manis placed his fingers on the handle, a father's voice raises the question "Sir?" "Mi lord, could we perhaps wait here in the throne-room for our gifts?" Slightly turning around Manis

speaks in yet again monotone. “But my good-man, don’t you wish to see the treasure-room that no one else in Dome-Wyrd has ever seen?” he says almost too quick for his lips to form the sentence. “I assure you, what lies below, it’s otherworldly. A wonder to this budding world itself...”

He stated slowly, picking up the torch and opening the door cautiously checking his surroundings as he leads them down the winding staircase. Approaching the final door at the bottom of the staircase as they willingly followed the delusional king. He slowly pushed it open. Following the ghastly creaks Manis steps forth into the room as they all blindly follow him, unbeknown to the death that taints the air before them.

Manis raised the torch, illuminating the room. Bodies piled up that used to be Manis’s elite guard, with the visuals the stench only followed the crowds gasps. Blood stains were splattered all across the floor, staining the concrete as the crowd could only wonder with all the bodies piled up in the room, how many have been eaten? Grimace was posted in the far corner, just above the pile of decaying bodies. With armies of flies below him finding home to the rotting corpses that lied there. Her legs stretched all across the room and scrunched in the opposing corners, excessively dripping bile from her pincers. The tentacles below grimace oozed profusely, the tentacles themselves seemed overgrown and larger than before.

The crowd reels back and screams, half of them run toward the door only to find an armed-guard is already standing at the door they entered. Bashing his plated shield into the face of scared individuals who tried to escape, shattering their bones in an instant. The crowd bundles up just in front of the armored guard, cautious to the three gentleman who convulsed on the floor with broken bones. Their arms bent ninety-degrees counter-clockwise, their noses shoved up to their brains, and their mouths flooding blood only staining the floor that much more. “Don’t be nervous, she’s quite beautiful once you get used to her...” Manis states, clasping his hands together with a grin that flashed like lightning.

Grimace began propping herself up, her tentacles sloshing and her legs readjusting themselves. the top of her body scrunched against the ceiling, her legs wrapping all the way to the front of the room. she slowly reaches forward, grabbing a young child, snatching it from his

mother's arms. The mother screams, instantly crying and pawing her hands-out, reaching for her child and failing. There's a whirl through the air. The mother's hands are gone, in an instant they dropped to the floor. Her face stretches from fear, to absolute horror, her smile stretching with her frightening scream that shook the walls. Dropping to her knees and blubbering, sniffing as she holds her hands up as blood won't stop flowing from her severed hands she falls backwards, lifeless. The crowd looked on in absolute horror. Gasping, their hands covering their jittering, agape, mouths. The poor woman's blood created a puddle outlining her body, as it dripped into the crevices of the archaic concrete. Grimace pulled it's leg holding the child back toward its mouth, she unwrapped it from its fuzzy blanket. Pulling it's torso apart from its legs, bones broke and organs plopped onto the floor along with a reserve of blood. Painting the child's organs as they fell to the floor. Funneling the child's body towards it's pincer she chomps down on the child's skull. Crunching it and nibbling it to oblivion. Eating the top-half of the child's body whole. Instantly swallowing the other half in one-bite, her bile dripped more ferociously. She inched forward, her sluggish body jiggling in excitement. Reaching for her next victim the crowd then screamed in horror. She proceeded to eat them all, one-by-one, piece-by-piece.

While grimace placed his body on a wall and laughed himself into a void. He couldn't cease, his cackled became almost harmonious. The aftermath was a blood-show, bits of crunched bones, and sprayed blood decorated the dimly lit dungeon. Manis sat there, laughing, muttering Jaykob's name over, and over again. The only intelligible thing that left Manis's mouth was that his kingdom is a joke, his life is a joke, life, period, is a joke. As the laughs overtook him, Grimace's body pulsated, her pincers crashed together as if they were thunder. Her body started to grow, at a monstrous rate. Manis didn't stop laughing, just as he could not avert his gaze.

Grimace crashed through the ceiling and into the throne room's floor. It's legs busted down the surrounding walls, Her legs spanned all the way to the arches of the coliseum. She pushed up and the coliseum began to seemingly levitate. The coliseum began walking into the twilight. It was an inevitable thought, that Manis was already dreadfully gone, and it was far, far, far too late.

Manis sat in his throne, incessantly as this wandering coliseum claimed the souls of innocent mortals across the lands. Manis did nothing but cackle days on end as the bodies unavoidably stacked.

To think this was once a boy who dreamed of the stage, who dreamed of the fame and recognition of theatrics, it's heart wrenching to say the least. The breaking of one's mind, with that, anything can become reality, even something as grotesque as Manis's fate.

The question was not, where Grimace was going. Or what Grimace was doing. It is merely, what is this crawling coliseum planning?

If she devoured an entire kingdom and grew to this immensity in only a few meager years, what in the seven hells could be next?

## Epilogue: The Wandering Coliseum, & an Elven Presence

Manis was not only lost, he did not want to be found. He had become a husk whose only actions became frightening cackles that penetrated the unlit and empty halls of his wandering throne room.

They were harmonious as he danced around in his own madness. Manis had become nothing more than a shell, a vessel of madness and all the horrifying things it implies. Sealing his fate as not only the youngest king in all of Dome-Wyrd, but the first to fall to the ever reaching hands of Vaea.

To think he was once a boy full of wonder and aspiration, if grief is ignored, there's no telling what monstrosity, or reality you'll find yourself in. Grimace wandered the lands during the nightfall, feeding on any unlucky traveler who found themselves just close enough to the coliseum. During the bleak depressing days of boorish sunlight, rumor and talk began to spread. Telling outlandish tales of a moving coliseum that devoured mortals for pleasure.

Quickly and surely these tall tales and rumors of talk mutated into frightening children bedtime stories. As grotesque as that was, they surely worked.

Scaring children and keeping them in their shacks they called homes, keeping them safe. Before long Snow Elves, and the coal-skinned Dwarves had found their home in Dome-Wyrd's towering mountains. Just like Manis before them, they couldn't remember how they arrived or what had drawn them to these vast lands of promise, they just were.

Among the vast mountain ranges gracing all of dome-wyrd's skies, there were two that towered and casted a daunting shadow among the rolling hills during the daylight. The elves and the dwarves had found themselves, ironically, in two towering mountains directly adjacent from



one another. As Vaea learned of the elves presence far-above on the balcony of Fairgun-Gard, she had found her next vessel. The idea sparked like the deceitful fire in her eyes shone.

The Elvaan king reeked of potential for a viable vessel, much more than a traumatized child Vaea thought. More than she herself even knew, perchance. As the blinding sun set, the elves were unaware of the darkness about to wash into their newfound kingdom with the dreadful nightfall. As they are comfortable, unaware, and safe in their newly made beds, as were the unbeknown dwarves.

Vaea knew exactly how to set the stage for the coming day, after all, it only takes one bad day to send a mortal over the edge and plummeting into the abyss to never, ever return.

Manis, although swallowed by the darkness he awakened, knows exactly how quickly in Dome-Wyrd, it can be far, far too late. Vaea smiled down upon the gorgeous vales from the heavens of Fairgun-Gard with a devious grin, flashing her blinding pearls.

As the Snow Elves snored their mortal minds to slumber, Vaea's eyes looked to the Elvaan king's spouse and how he irrefutably loved her. The way he looked to her, cared for her, and bowed to her every demand like it was law. With the two in each other's grasp, safe and sound, whispering sweet nothings into each other's knife-like-ears.

Vaea knew exactly how to sink her hollow claws into the next king's mind... Although to her, they were less than mortals, they were merely vestiges to her intricate plan that had yet to take full form.

Even for the greatest tempest to be born. Thunder must roll across the hills, then lightning must strike, as the rain falls with the frighteningly harmonious thunder, only then can a tempest truly begin...