

Terth Willager: Age of Mythology

A Great Expedition

Black. Either way he looked up the dusty corridor, it was black. Aside from the flickering whisper of the fire from their torches, the sheer lack of noise so deep within the labyrinth was but a minor distraction to the wreaking stench of earth and rot that intruded the two men's nostrils. The odour was only slightly masked by the smoke from the dim flames they carried.

"The Minotaur leaves a carnage that can foul a man's nose for days, if you are wondering what you smell." Theseus said.

Tuthrow could barely see the warrior though he walked only a few paces behind him. His forty-three year old eyes weren't what they used to be and he wished he would have brought a more modern kerosene lantern with him before he jumped through the doorway into ancient Greece.

"Had I thought the labyrinth was this hot, I would have considered the belt and skirt instead of my tunic and breeches. Though I believe I would feel rather naked when confronted by the Minotaur," he said. He was running short of dry sleeve on which to wipe his brow and he wanted to run through the hallway just to create a breeze to cool off.

Two things broke the silence, there came a steady, louder crunching beneath their feet, like the terrain shifted from dirt to pebble, and as Tuthrow ran his hand along the wall, he passed over an obstruction he couldn't readily identify. Lifting his torch closer, he was startled to illuminate a skull flopped loosely to one side and still covered with chunks of dark, rotting flesh and long strands of dry hair. The dead face looked back at him with large black eyes and its jaw hung open in an eternal silent scream. The sight jostled Tuthrow and he dropped his torch to the ground to reveal the source of the new

floor. A living carpet of creep, Tuthrow danced on the spot to avoid the crawling scorpions, spiders and beetles the like of which he had never seen before. Theseus stared at him calmly and waited for the man to finish.

“Sorry,” Tuthrow said when he regained his composure.

“We are close now,” Theseus said.

As he said the words, a voice rumbled from within the dark. It spoke nothing discernable but he heard it deep and threatening.

“I fear it may have heard me.”

Theseus led on, quickening his pace and keeping his sword forward. From behind the Greek, Tuthrow spotted a glimmer of light in the distance. Again the roar bounced along the rock, closer and louder. The light marked the end of the corridor where a torch hung on the wall and designated a left or right turn. The warrior waved his torch toward one way then the other and finally turned left when the sound of the roar foretold its direction. The explorer kept close, his heart thumping harder in his chest in anticipation of the beast that awaited them. The hall they now ran along was glowing with torches spaced evenly on either side. Theseus finally stopped at a large stone doorway on his right. He looked back at the excited eyes Tuthrow sported but they could still not hide the fear that lurked behind them.

“The beast is here, are you prepared?” The Greek asked as he nodded and unsheathed the sword he was given before they entered the labyrinth.

The warrior drew a large breath then both men ducked into the room. They had to stop at the grotesque sight before them. In the center of the room, crouched over the corpse of a man, was the Minotaur. The body of a well muscled warrior with the horned head of a bull the beast grasped its prey in powerful hands and tore into the flesh of the corpse.

“Good Lord.” Tuthrow remarked.

At the sound, the Minotaur turned its head to them and let out a raging bellow. It tossed its meal to the back wall where it slumped onto an already discarded pile of half consumed bodies in various stages of decay. Tuthrow brought his hand to his face and scoured at the stench. The beast lifted itself to its full

height and both men had to raise their eyes at its remarkable size. It roared again and stomped one hoof on the dirt before charging them.

“Move!” Theseus ordered and the men split in two directions causing the bull confusion at which to chase first. The warrior dodged to the left, the explorer to the right.

The Minotaur must have seen the explorer as the easier hunt as it chose to pursue him first, giving the warrior the opportunity to rush behind and slash the beast across the back of its thigh. It dropped to the injured knee and yelled in obvious pain. Tuthor stopped running as the thing focused its attention on the warrior. The Greek squared off with it and made a few short jabs with his sword. The beast lunged forward to grab him. Theseus ducked once, twice, then swung hard at its head. It saw the blade come and it tilted its massive head to the side, grazing the sword off its horn. Tuthor jumped into the fight, thrusting his sword deep into the Minotaur’s back. The creature arched and spun, keeping one hand high to pelt him in his shoulder, sending him across the room. The beast turned to him as he tried to recover, saw the Minotaur approaching in a frenzy and brought his arms up as it lurched at him. From behind, Theseus gave a wild cry and ran in quick to help. He leapt into the air, placed one foot on the wall beside the beast, bounced again with his sword high and continued his scream as he brought his sword down hard -

Tuthor Jacob Willager sat in a creaky, wooden chair with his head flopped over a desk He bolted upright to recover his breath. As always, the dream left him disoriented and he had to look around to remember he was in his cabin onboard the *Odyssey Maiden*. The visions would never leave him, they weren’t so much as dreams as they were memories acting themselves out again in his sleep. He glanced out the round window and watched a pink sunrise peak over the horizon of a calm sea. The schooner left port in Victoria, Australia and the almost three month voyage across the South Pacific to reach a well planned objective had his mind longing for activity. There was a tension of excitement within him that would not allow his body to slow down enough for solid rest which was likely the reason for the recurring

visions. Instead, the man spent many of the night hours tending to old maps and parchments so difficult to collect. Such stories they would make to future generations, he thought.

Mr. Willager sat in his beige wide pants tucked into knee-high leather boots, the beige tunic, wide leather belt, burly moustache and round rimmed glasses. His satchel and dusty old hat he was rarely seen not wearing, were hanging on a bedpost nearby. He had been travelling for several months without correspondence to the outside world. He was bearing secrets he did not want discovered by other entrepreneurial types. He had an idea of what he was looking for, gossip and rumours shared by natives, secret stories told by elders of ancient, almost unknown tribes.

The maps he'd collected were hand-drawn on frail parchment of lands he knew as Guatemala. Within this border is Palenque, where exists the ancient ruins of a Maya civilization the elders referred to as the tribe of Pakal the Great. But it wasn't the ruins that attracted him, it was the secret, a secret without origin, so terrible that it warranted immeasurable caution and investigation at the same time.

It was during a less than satisfying breakfast of dry toast and wheat porridge when the call of 'Land ho!' was echoed through the cabins of the boat. The explorer nearly leapt from the small desk in his cabin when he heard it. He rushed to the upper deck, went straight to the edge of the schooner and looked forward. A smile stretched across his face at the most welcomed vision of a shoreline, green trees and mountains coming in from the distance. He packed his gear in moments then paused in front of a wall-mounted mirror and adjusted the belt a bit tighter, rolled out the ends of his curly moustache and dared to think he should have shaved the bristles on his cheeks and chin before the dismal breakfast. No time now though, land was coming and secrets were waiting.

The captain of the *Odyssey Maiden* anchored his schooner in shallow waters where Tuthor then disembarked and was rowed to a dry shoreline. The seasoned traveller had arranged for a guide with a six-man team with pack mules weeks before. The team had camped on the shore for two days already, waiting for his arrival. When the anxious explorer found his land legs and his belongings were secured to a mule, he wasted no further time to begin his inland journey. Of all his party, he would be the only

foreigner going in. He wanted it that way for he knew if the old tales were true, the whole world could be thrown into cataclysmic change should the secret get out.

Days passed as they trekked through the sweltering humidity of the rainforests of Central America. They stopped often to nourish themselves on vegetables, dried meat and fruit, and plenty of water. Daytime was full of amazing sights to behold in rock formations and green vegetation. Bats appeared soaring and screeching overhead at twilight and night time offered a surprise chorus of unfamiliar sounds washing through the underbrush. The trail leaders found a sheltered area in a thicket of trees and the team quickly had a camp erected and a fire blazing. Tuthor set a folding, wooden chair outside his tent and opened his leather bound journal to make some notes. Within moments, he was handed a cup of wine from Gordo, his main guide.

“May I join you?”

“Of course, Gordo, please.” Tuthor retrieved another chair before he took the cup.

The guide made himself comfortable, took a sip from his own drink and curled his bottom lip up as he swallowed. “How are you finding our jungle, Mr. Willager?”

“It is a warm environment for sure, but I have spent time in hotter, admittedly.”

Gordo nodded. “Then you indeed travel far and wide.” The explorer knew there was something else on the guide’s mind so he gave him pause to collect his thoughts. “This place we are going to, it is well tended by many elders whose charge it is to protect its location. Many of us are curious how you were allowed in.”

Tuthor put his cup down, “I spoke the truth of my purpose. I understand there are many white men who would come to take the culture from the temple to display it in some other land for other eyes. These men would not claim your treasures out of respect, but for their selfish profit.” Gordo listened closely, his eyes narrowed as he looked for signs of truth or mistrust. “I did not come for such purpose. I do not wish to raid your temples and steal any treasure save for one and that is only for the protection of the land. And I would not be here to take even that without the explicit permission of your elders.”

Gordo nodded again and studied his wine after he took another sip. “And this thing you seek, it is a dangerous thing?”

“It is in the wrong hands. I know Pakal believed it would help him reach the house of his gods after his death. If its power were to get into possession of some men, some bad men, it would mean the end of everything we know.” Tuthor looked into Gordo’s eyes with utmost sincerity.

“Are you willing to bear the burden of this responsibility?”

It was the explorer’s turn to pause and sip some wine. “I am. And I will teach my heirs after me to do the same, for as long as my blood flows through them and beyond.”

“That is a good thing, Mr. Willager. I hope you do not regret your decision.” He raised his cup to Tuthor and they toasted their understanding.

Nearly a week since landing on shore, they had finally broken through the tree line and stood to gawk at his prize – the ancient Maya ruins of Palenque, a stone city hidden away for centuries in the safety of the jungle. He stood at one end and panned the open field surrounded by an assembly of temples and at the far end, the reason for him being there at all, a simple stone building atop a Maya-made pyramid with a long flight of steep steps leading to its entrance. The explorer had come to learn that the Maya people constructed their pyramids to mimic the mountains. Inside their temples were caves believed to be passageways to the underworld upon death of the body. This particular tomb was the most extravagant and the largest of any other. This is where Pakal kept his secret, he was sure of it. He had spoken with the oldest of the old to learn things not known to anyone else, and would not be known until later discoveries nearly a hundred years later.

The tomb he stepped towards was the resting place of the city’s greatest ruler, Pakal the Great. He had designed the entire city and his own tomb as well. As he entered the grounds he saw the stone ruins before him but he envisioned the city in its prime. The lifeless grey rock construction turned to a formation of well sculpted architecture in his mind, rich with slate blues, accessorized with the green of the forest surrounding and accented with the golden rays of the warm sun. During the days he spent with

the elders, he learned the Maya were incredibly well advanced for a seventh century tribe having developed a written language, mathematics, art and a calendar. The only metals they had ever known their entire reign was gold and copper, which were regarded as secondary luxuries next to jade and obsidian. They knew stone.

Once he reached the top of the steps, he marched into the temple's open doorways and looked upon two great walls adorned with sculpted hieroglyphs, their written language. The explorer stepped past these into a skinny room with nothing but a build up of dirt on the floor. He stopped to look around. He was investigating, looking for clues from what he was told. He walked carefully into the room, brushing aside the dirt until he found something. He rushed back to the entrance and called for his guide to bring rope.

Within a short period of time, the team had the rope strung through a double row of holes in the floor and all of the men on hand to pull. With great effort, a large slab of stone was jerked loose and slid out of the way. Tuthor lit a torch and poked it into the gaping corridor that descended before him. Stone steps dropped into an abyss of blackness under the temple. The adventurer and his guide shared expressions of uncertain excitement before Tuthor himself took the first step downward, the first step taken by any human in a thousand years.

Four other men lit torches and descended behind him and the guide while two stayed above ground. The trek seemed endless, made worse by the slow pace of traversing down the slick limestone steps. The natives had tied their bandanas around their heads to soak the sweat and Tuthor had kept a kerchief in one hand, at the ready.

The men looked about the close walls during their descent, keeping hands flat against the slick of the stone for support. They found jambs without doors, passageways stretching down into oblivion and empty rooms as they reached welcomed landings between each flight of the slippery steps. After several more of these flights they found a small chamber with no door blocking the entrance. Tuthor peered inside, signing for his crew to wait until he investigated. Upon entering the room, he found five skeletal remains stationed on a ledge around the walls. They were in a sitting position and each held a trinket or box, undoubtedly something of sacrificial importance as far as he could guess. Thinking nothing more of it,

they continued on and came to the bottom of the stairs to discover a hole in the wall that opened into a small chamber about half the height of any average man. Tuthorow raised his lantern into the room and gasped at his findings. In front of him lay a stone box that filled the floor of the chamber and could serve only one purpose.

“The sarcophagus of Pakal,” the explorer said. He reached out to the lid and his fingers ran over the sculpted mural on its surface. “Gordo, do you know this carving?”

Gordo leaned in and raised his own lantern to study the slab. There was a man in an awkward position beneath a tree-looking design with square branches above a strange face which was in turn over a river. “It is Pakal, falling down from his temple to the underworld where his spirit is to be carried to the gods by this stream or river,” he said at length.

“Spectacular,” Tuthorow said. “But what we seek will not be found here. This chamber will not be disturbed.” Pakal was a royal figure held in high regard by the Maya people, present party inclusive, so the order was agreed to without hesitation. Tuthorow knew, from the stories he’d gathered from the old shamans, what he sought was not in the tomb of the great king, so it had to be hidden elsewhere.

“Where to now, Boss?” Gordo asked when he shone his light around the dead end.

The explorer thought for a moment and only one other room came to mind. “In the chamber with the skeletons. These men must have been sacrificial victims, each holding a treasure that would aid Pakal in his journey to the underworld. The elders told me your ancestors believed in a spiritual otherworld that awaited the spirit when it had completed its time on the mortal plane. Pakal believed his journey would take him down a river to the underworld, as depicted on the sarcophagus, where he would find immortality and a god’s status. The key must be in the hands of one of these poor souls.”

Tuthorow stood at the entrance to the chamber and stared thoughtfully at the skeletons. They sat on a stone bench, two on either side and one across from the entrance, facing him in a blank, eternal stare. Each held a different box of stone on his lap with detailed carvings on their sides. This was where the danger would be. Pakal would have designed his tomb so that none of his treasures could be easily removed.

The men were ordered to wait on the steps should they have to run if anything went wrong. He then stepped into the room and studied each victim in succession. To his dismay, he saw no obvious signs of traps. *Was this an elaborate hoax played by Pakal, or a well hidden device of stone-age architectural genius?*

He knelt to study the pictures of each stone container. He made the rounds to each of the five then decided to come back to the single victim opposite the entrance. The pictures sculpted into the box depicted a royal figure removing a gem from a box, which was from another box in the hands of a seated skeleton. The figure held the gem before a doorway where there was a carved scene of a mountain with a cave from where a river flowed.

It must be the one. Carefully, Tuthrow took hold of the stone lid and lifted, checking all around for signs of levers or latches. Freeing the lid, he placed it on the ground then looked inside the container. What he found amazed him. There was a wooden box inside but where it should have rotted centuries before, this one was enclosed in its own yellowish tomb of hardened tree resin. It was an ingenious method of sealing the wood in an air-tight package to withstand the trials of time.

Mimicking the same careful technique as with the lid, Tuthrow held his breath and lifted the package from its resting place, turned and placed it on the ground before him. He called to his guide to bring a hammer and chisel.

Within moments, Tuthrow was squatting on the ancient floor, meticulously chipping away at the encrusted box. Hours passed and the adventurer lingered on, stopping only to drink gulps of water and waving away any food offered. The Guatemalan natives chatted amongst themselves on the steps outside the chamber when the call of "Eureka!" rang through the tunnel. The group crowded at the entrance to see a sweaty Tuthrow kneeling on the floor, holding the freed box before him.

Declaring the moment hopeful that all their efforts would then come to fruit, he slowly lifted the lid, which swung on crude copper hinges, to reveal a green gem, big enough to fill the palm of his hand. As soon as the gem touched the air, one of the natives shouted of an iridescent light from another chamber up the steps a ways.

The whole of the group followed Tuthor as he led with the gem. The light grew stronger as he approached and when he turned into the chamber, he was set back at the viewing. In the center of the small room, seated firmly on the floor and standing only inches from the ceiling, was a doorway. It was stone with carved hieroglyphics around the jamb and an opening that led to nowhere. All the symbols glowed green save for one on the left side about midway up. This one had no glyphs, instead, there was a pocket where something round would fit into. Catching on immediately, Tuthor removed the gem from the box and inserted it into the pocket. Instantly, the symbols grew brighter and the space where a door should have been became misted then turned into a churning, cloudy mass.

The natives dropped to their knees behind him, a reaction to witnessing the portal to the underworld. The explorer knew otherwise though. He had contrived, through the stories he learned on his expeditions, this door was not to travel to one place, but many. He retrieved the gem and convinced the natives the whole doorway was to be removed from the tomb. They protested at first but once he explained the dangers of other men of different ambitions finding Pakal's doorway, they quickly reserved to the fact the treasure was better hidden in his custody, thusly saving the entire temple from destruction of greedy hunters of power.

"Are you sure, Boss, the door will still work outside the tomb?" Gordo asked.

"We will have to take that chance, my friend. But rest assured, if it does not, we will not have to worry it will be used for evil deeds."

When the deconstruction of the doorway was about to begin, an onslaught of reality struck Tuthor like a landslide. He studied the design of the chamber, especially the size of the doorway compared to the entrance. It was clear the door was constructed after the room was built.

Here was the genius of Pakal's design - his booby trap. It wasn't the removal of the gem where the danger lied, but the removal of the doorway. Fortunately, what seemed complicated in his day was simple science to Tuthor. Pakal had not anticipated the advancements of technology.

This slowed the process for almost two weeks. More natives were brought on, timbers were erected to act as supports and take the weight of the rock above once the entrance was expanded enough to fit the

portal. When he was satisfied, the enlarged jamb looked like the inside of a pin cushion on either side but a path remained to carry the doorway out. Ropes and pulleys were strategically set and on Tuthrow's command, the portal was yanked and carefully lowered to its side. Everybody paused to listen to the creaking of the timbers as they absorbed the weight of the ceiling with less wall to hold it up. When it seemed to stop, he gave the word to continue carefully, but as quickly as possible.

There were many more men pulling the ropes that hoisted the jamb up the many steps. They had almost reached the daylight of the opening when they heard the first crack.

Everybody stopped and waited again; another crack, then another, a pause, then another. Haste became an absolute by that time. The jamb was brought to the surface and the last of the men dove from the staircase as the timbers collapsed and the whole filled with crumbling debris and a cloud of dust. The workers looked around to ensure no one had been stuck in the tunnel – no casualties – relief fell on the faces of the men.

The next few days consisted of hauling the jamb to a box built on the spot to ready it for cargo and cleaning up as many traces of their visit as they could. The lid was placed back over the hole, footprints were swept away and Tuthrow hoped time would complete the rest before any other would visit this place again.

Once Tuthrow had the gem and the doorway home, he stopped travelling. Deciphering the secrets of the doorway became the existence of his life for the next few years. In the meantime, he had ordered the construction of a museum in his quaint little town to display the rest of his collections. He treasured them still, but after the door, he found most of them trivial in comparison.

It wasn't until the day he finally unlocked the secrets of this time portal, as he came to call it, would he travel again...

The Key

Rex was a Rottweiler. He was a monster of a dog, without a trace of a good disposition or mercy. Terth Willager was an average twelve-year-old boy living an average life. He liked to wear shorts and t-shirts and his favourite hiking boots, beige to go with his hair. Old Man Mason owned the dog and always called him T-Rex when kids were around to scare them from ever going onto his property. Mason hated kids. Children learned quickly too, just walking by the fence sent Rex into a frenzy. Most times you might see kids wanting to taunt a dog on the other side of the chain link just to watch it bark and snap. But every kid in Wallaby truly believed that Rex could chew through the steel if he put his mind to it. The other side of the street was far safer territory.

Terth's own fear of Rex was personal. It wasn't just the fear of the dog, it was that he believed Rex really hated him too. He was walking home late one Saturday afternoon. He had run a few errands for his father and he thought he would detour through Wallaby's central park to get home. As it happened, Rex would every so often dig himself a hole under the fence of the scrap yard and wander about the town. On this particular day of days, Rex found his way to the park.

As he walked toward the swings, he stopped when he heard some rustling a short distance from the sand box. A few more steps and he saw him. Rex had knocked over a garbage can and was busy rummaging through its contents. The boy heard his heart suddenly thump in his ears and his knees got weak. Rex perked up when Terth approached and the two made that sort of eye contact two beings make when a lot is said but no one is really saying anything. In this case, he was well aware that his eyes said, "I'm scared out of my wits!" while the dog's eyes said, "I'm going to eat you whole!"

Rex put his head down and stepped forward. His gaze did not falter and a low growl grew in his throat. Terth's gaze did falter as he looked frantically for a place to run, or a place to hide or even for an adult to call for help, but there was no time. Rex took off on a run straight for him. He turned on reflex and dashed for the closest tree. Rex bore down on him quickly. Terth sprinted for the tree and eyed the

branch closest to the ground. He had to time it right on the first try – if he missed, it would be all over. A few more steps, Terth leapt and Rex leapt after him. His hands gripped firmly onto the tree limb and his momentum swung his feet into the air as Rex flew past but not without a quick snap at his heels, the roddy landed with a single boot in his jaws and he thrust his head from side to side and chewed on it violently giving the boy enough time to scramble up into the safety of the branches.

Rex stayed at the base of that tree and gnarled the boot down to its rubber sole. Every so often he would look up at Terth, give a bark and return to the shoe, but he wouldn't leave. Terth was stuck with nothing to do but stare back at Rex and his dismantled footwear.

It went on for the better part of an hour before Mason finally showed up in his old, red truck to collect his dog. Rex proudly displayed the chewed up shoe but Mason never did look around to see if there was an owner. He simply latched a thick chain onto him, rubbed him around his ears and mumbled, "Dumb mutt," before dragging him off to the truck.

Terth lived in an average town called Wallaby. It was named by Tuthor Jacob Willager, his great, great grandfather, who founded the town and called it Wallaby after an overseas visit to Australia, honouring the kangaroo. From the stories his father, Terence, used to tell him, Tuthor had been an explorer. He traveled far and wide searching out the histories and mysteries of the past. Nearing the end of his travelling days, his father told him the explorer traveled so far and so deep, that he completely disappeared for a whole year. There were so many rumours of his disappearance in the villages where he was last seen. He listened to his father speak of how Tuthor was attracted to the mysticism and legends of uncharted lands. He was so addicted to the weird and the unbelievable, and the stories that were too odd to be true. So he investigated them for he was driven to unravel their secrets.

The one story which was his father's favourite was one about this particular secret concerning a gem with unusual properties, odd to the point of defying every known law of physics and time itself. So determined was the explorer to find it, it became the reason for his disappearance. He was a changed man after that trip. He had a new appreciation for history, whatever happened...

There were no more stories after that. When he returned with his secret, Tuthorow settled and started his family. Travel didn't appeal to him any more. Wallaby grew and none seen him leave again until the day he died. His last words were that he was going on his greatest adventure yet.

He left one legacy to be carried on down the generations, as his father told him. The longest standing attraction in the town was the museum that Tuthorow built when the town grew big enough to even be a town. He called it Willager's Museum of Myth and Legend. He wanted to share the stories he uncovered on his expeditions and he knew no better way. It was a steady attraction that never ceased to amaze the visitors who entered the vast rooms and were introduced to the characters who waited them. Terth knew it was going to be handed to him someday – he just wasn't sure he wanted it.

A few generations after Tuthorow, the population of Wallaby grew to just over eight thousand happy townsfolk. It was quaint for some, just right for everyone else. The museum came under the ownership of Terence and it stood as proudly and as abundantly historic as the day the doors first opened, though it has grown since to make room for much more stuff. Many artefacts and many more tales were collected over four generations of Willagers. Everyone was urged to bring a hearty imagination while strolling through the many rooms, peruse the great legends, ogle the great heroes and heroines and, most of all - have fun. Terth should know, he heard the stories again and again, over and over. So much that he found the histories of our past boring. He thought history was a useless subject, dull with no real adventure. There were no machine guns in ancient history, no tanks, no lasers, and none of the heroes had super powers like flying or climbing walls. There was nothing extraordinary about the heroes of history.

The door opened into the kitchen where Terth's mother, Julia sat at the table filtering through the day's mail. She wore her dark hair down and it draped over a blue blouse and she smiled instantly when he stepped into the house. He removed his tan hiker shoes, slid the black backpack from his shoulder as the sun from the window reflected the red from his baggy shirt onto his face. It was report card day at Wallaby Public School, instead of the large, tan envelope that was supposed to contain his report card, he fished into the right side pocket of his khaki shorts and handed her a folded, scuffed piece of paper. She

unfolded it, she was always excited to see her son's report card, regardless of the condition in which it arrived.

"Let's see it, bring it here!" She pleaded.

"Sheesh, Mom, it's just a report card, no big deal."

"It's always a big deal, we like to know how smart you are," she read it over in silence while Terth stood and watched. He knew he had good marks, average in some, above average in others, but there was one class he knew his parents would give him heck for.

At length, Julia lowered the report and looked at her son, her smile hinted one thought, her eyes hinted another, "This really looks good, you're doing very well," he felt the 'but...' coming, "we just have to work on your history a little more."

"But history is so boring. Mr. Myrden tries but it's just – boring! I can't help it."

"You know it's important to your father."

He heard this argument already and finished the thought, "I know – the future of the museum..."

She sighed, "You better go show him. He's over there setting up a display for Monday. I am very happy with your grades, your father will be too."

He knew that. They never hesitated to compliment him on his schoolwork and supported him always. It was just this one class. It had to be the one subject that he had the least interest in that was the most important. Sometimes life just wasn't fair. He scooped the report card from his mom's hand and headed back out the door.

His father was setting up a new display about Greek mythology when Terth found him. He noticed the roundness of his gut protruding from the bottom of his collared t-shirt as he reached up. Despite the thinning hairline, he thought the old man was still in pretty good shape after forty-one years. The display sported a replica statue of Hercules holding a large club. Set around him were Greek vases with paintings of Hercules fighting different beasts. There was a large backdrop set behind the statue with various

paintings of people paying tribute to him, and one picture of him speaking to a robed figure inside a temple. He came in just as his father was draping a mock lion's skin over the statue of the legendary hero.

"Ah, the Greeks," his proud dad said. "Few myths remain so cemented in today's culture, wouldn't you say?"

"Sure Dad."

"Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Hades. How can we forget the great gods who influenced the actions of man and set about the course of his future? Did you know that Hercules's name was actually Herakles before it was converted by the Romans?"

"Nope."

"Well it was. It was to pay tribute to Hera, wife of Zeus. Hera hated Hercules and did a lot to see him fail at everything he did," Terence replied.

"Wow, that's really interesting."

"It is! I bet you didn't know Hera wasn't Hercules' real mother either, did you? You'd be surprised what you can learn from history, son. You'll see, history is the foundation upon which your future is built."

"Ease up there Dad, you're getting too deep. I know I'm supposed I'm to learn all this but... who cares about stuff that happened like a million years ago? Seriously, gods and monsters roaming about with people? Like that really happened."

"My boy, it is not for us to say what happened and what didn't. People need their heroes. They need to believe that there is something to believe in. Our heroes give us hope, fictional or otherwise. Besides, many advances and strategies that have preserved our world as we know it have been adapted from the experiences of past civilizations and leaders."

"Whatever. Put Heracles or whatever up against Superman and see who wins. I bet he has nothing against Supes' laser vision!" he bulged his eyes at his father.

“I see you still haven’t learned to really appreciate all this. You know Terth, there may come a day when the knowledge of history will be your only guide. You’re twelve now, your mother and I really hoped you would start coming around, it’s a family tradition after all.”

“I know, Dad. Mom wanted me to show you this.”

He handed the report over and watched his father browse over it. He was trying not to anticipate the disappointment at the bottom.

“Math is good, English is good, science good, social studies all right, phys-ed okay, history...” he delayed on the subject and drew it out with a tone that made it sound like the grade was a mortal sin. “We need to work on that one still, eh? I have an idea about that,” he looked at the boy over the top of the paper with one eyebrow raised.

“You’re looking at me funny.”

He had no chance to respond as Terth’s two best friends, Kim Yamoto and Jesse “Jersey” Gerome, entered the room to his relief. Today was opening day for the movie, *Mutants Unchained*, and for the sake of social status, they could not miss it.

“Awesome, just in time!”

“Konnichi-wa, Kim,” Terence said, “Jersey, wassup?” His father always tried to stay in touch with the lingo of the modern lingo, it took some practice, but they got used to it.

“Konnichi-wa, Willager-san. Ogenki desu ka?” Kim replied.

“Yo, T,” Jersey said. “Showtime, Terth, you coming?”

“Can I jet, Dad?”

“I guess, wouldn’t want this boring history stuff to slow you down. But we are still to chat about this grade!” Terence’s voice raised to keep within earshot of his son as the boy was running off.

At the sound of, “I guess...” the three were already making for the door. They had been close friends since kindergarten. He and Jersey had always lived in Wallaby and together, they watched Kim’s family move in from Japan when she was four years old. Mr. and Mrs. Yamoto couldn’t speak English very well so Kim had to translate most of the time.

“Thanks for the save again, you guys,” Terth said. “Dad was about to go on an ancient Greece lecture, and he was babbling about family tradition.”

“That’s lame, dude! We’re taking that in Mr. Myrden’s class anyway,” Jersey replied.

“My parents say that family tradition is very important. It is how we uphold family honour,” Kim said.

“My Dad is the only one who would think the Greeks have anything to do with my upholding my family honour. Making sure we see this movie, however, is crucial!”

“And we’d better hurry, it’s about to start and we still gotta get popcorn!” Jersey took the lead as he broke into a run.

Luckily for them, the museum was the center point of all of Wallaby and the theatre was only three blocks away. Unluckily for them, since they ran late, Jersey thought they’d best take a short cut through Mason’s Scrap Yard to get there on time. Terth hated that scrap yard. It had Rex.

Ever since that one day, when the boy and the monster had to pass by each other, either in Mason’s truck or walking by the scrap yard, Rex would stare at him. He wouldn’t even bark, he would just fix his deep, brown eyes straight through to his fear.

Terth’s knees started to shake as they approached the fence, “Are you serious? I don’t think this is such a good idea. Can’t we catch the late show?”

“Bro, you gotta face your demons sometime,” Jersey replied.

“This is Rex we’re talking about! He is a demon! Aren’t you guys worried?”

“Only if he catches us. Mason’s never here this time on the weekends and Rex can’t climb. We just stick to the tops of the cars along that far fence,” Jersey pointed to his right. “Now pull the wedgy from your butt, tightwad and let’s go!”

Jersey scrambled up the fence and waited at the top. Kim placed her hands within the chain links and looked at Terth.

“We’ll be with you all the way.”

“Yeah,” he said. The wire mesh was cold in his hands. The familiar sound of his heart thumping in his ears began and his legs grew too heavy to lift. He could not get past staring into the compound, visions of monstrous fangs charging him down on the other side of the chain link. The strength was just not in him. He dropped his hands to his sides.

“I can’t do it. I just can’t. You guys go,” his eyes dropped to his shoes.

“Aww, man!” Jersey said as he climbed back down. “I said it – you gotta face your demons!”

Kim was a little more comforting, “We won’t go without you, Terth. Let’s catch the late show, no big deal. We’ll wait at your place.”

“Sure, ok. Thanks.”

They didn’t rush back to Terth’s house. He looked up at it from the sidewalk, a nice place but a large, controlling curse in the back of his mind. If his father had any say, his life would be hand-cuffed to it until he could pass it on to his own children and recover his freedom. The house was built right beside the museum and had been renovated and modernized with the times and it even burnt down once when Terth’s grandfather owned it but he rebuilt it almost the way it was aside for adding a few more conveniences and a couple more rooms.

Once the trio left for the theatre, Terence and Julia spoke about Terth’s future. They sat across from each other at the kitchen table sharing a pot of tea. Terence saw that his wife was a bit agitated by what he had in mind with her constant fidgeting. It had always been, since Tuthor Jacob, when a Willager boy reached a point in his life, he would be given a task in order to fully understand the importance of history in his life, and the life of the museum. It was a test to prove whether or not history would ever be important to him at all. It was the future of the museum that rested on the shoulders of the next generation after all but one rule Tuthor put down was to never pressure the heir to take the responsibility over, he had to do it because he wanted to. Terence and Julia debated if that time had come for Terth.

“I don’t know if he’s quite ready yet,” Terence said. “That’s a lot to put on a boy of twelve.”

“He’s about the same age as you were when your father sent you.” his wife replied. She poured herself some tea.

“Actually, I was fourteen.”

“And you still turned out all right.”

“I suppose.” He stood from the dining table and crossed his arms while he stared out the window. “I know he has little interest in the museum, it’s not the thing for boys these days. Times are changing, Julia, there’s more video games and movies and they only show distorted depictions of history.”

“I know, dear. It’s not like it used to be,” she filled Terence’s cup. “The way we raise children, the way we teach them, the rules, the discipline. There’s so much you just can’t do anymore.”

“That’s the truth of it. But we must accept that kids are also smarter these days. They come into their own sooner and they seem to grow up faster, right before your eyes in fact,” he sat back down and took his wife’s hand in his. “Maybe he is ready. We must trust in family tradition. We must trust that Terth can handle the responsibility. We should tell him when he comes home.”

“All right. I’m scared to death for him but I’m with you completely.” She gazed over his shoulder out the window, “And I think their home already.”

“Really? The movie just started,” he said with a glance at his watch.

He rose to greet the kids as they walked into the house. “What happened, son? Missed the show?”

“Uh, yeah, we ran a little late. We’re just going to wait for the next one, ‘kay?”

“Sure, that’s fine. Say, uh, I wonder if you would do something for me.” He glanced quickly at his wife.

“Now?”

“Sure, you’re not doing anything but waiting anyway, it’ll only take you a minute.”

“Fine.” Kim and Jersey went to the living room while Terth waited for his instructions.

Terence did his best to keep his expression relaxed. He saw on his son’s face that queasy look one gets when about to receive news of some impending doom.

“Son, your mother and I have been discussing what we might do to assist your interest in history. It’s been a Willager family tradition that the heir to the museum is handed a task of sorts when the father feels it is time.”

He rolled his eyes, “I already have enough to do, Dad!”

“But this is a big thing, Terth. It’s important to us that you at least try.”

“Fine, whatever.”

He tucked away his pride and anticipation. “Good, son, good. We’ll discuss the full details shortly but first I need you to get something for me from the basement of the museum.”

“The basement! You know how creepy it is down there? Can I take Jersey and Kim?”

“No, this is something you need to do on your own.”

“Great, this keeps getting better!” He crossed his arms. “What am I supposed to get?”

“Find the shelf of Greek and Roman stuff, the one past the Arthurian displays. Look for a little wooden box. You with me so far?” Terence started.

“Yeah.”

“The box has some carvings on it, really neat stuff. I really need it for the Ancient Greece display.”

“That’s it? I have to go into the dungeon for that?”

“Yep. And don’t open it, what’s inside is very special,” he warned.

“Oh my god,” and stomped back out the door.

There were no windows in the museum’s so it was always dark and with the wide array of collections that had been gathered down there it was just creepy. Everything from mythological history to fact-based, Terth believed the basement to be a giant warehouse of spooky. The stairs were just inside the back entrance and he fumbled for the lights before he could flick them on and allowed the basement its own ambiance.

The bottom of the stairs opened into a large room filled with shelves, crates and oddities. The shelf with the antiquities of Arthurian legend was close by and Terth glanced over the artefacts. There was

armour and goblets and daggers, sword replicas and ancient looking tomes with strange letters. One sword caught his eye, a shining ideal of the sword Excalibur. He unsheathed it and swung it around in a sweeping arc between the shelves. He admired it and imagined strapping it on to his waist and challenging whatever foe may lurk in that dungeon of a basement. For a moment, he dared to feel courageous.

It was short lived, however, as there were duties to be done. He placed the sword back on the shelf and stepped toward another that stood against the wall. This was the Greek and Roman shelf where lay an arrangement of shields, vases with ornate paintings of men and women and strange beasts. Amidst it all, about half way up, was the box Terth's father sent him for.

"That was easy," he said to himself.

It wasn't the box that he thought it would be. It should have been bigger since his dad made it out to be such an important thing. It didn't really look like it belonged with the Greek collection either. The carvings on its sides were very detailed and knot-like in shape. Terth figured it should have gone on the Arthur shelf instead as it seemed better suited for that time. Maybe even something Merlin would have made. The box fit in his palm, being just a little wider than his hand and was rather interesting to look at. The more he looked at it, the more he wondered what special thing it actually held. What harm would there be then to have a quick peek as no one else was there to know?

He held it steady in his right hand and lifted the lid with his left. It wasn't real stiff but it wasn't real loose either as it swung on the two tiny hinges attached to its back. Yet as soon as the contents were exposed to the air, Terth noticed a faint glow from over his left shoulder. The lid dropped back into place as he snapped his head around to look, but he saw nothing.

He opened the box again and this time held the lid as he looked. Again there was the glow but this time it was brighter and very green. He felt a surge of excitement coupled with eeriness as he tested the light by closing and opening the box. The light dimmed and shone again with his motions. He looked at the contents of the box. Set inside a cushion of velvet was an oval-shaped gem, green and glowing like the light in the basement. He stepped toward the glow and found it originating from behind an Egyptian

tapestry hung on the wall. Carefully, he reached out and gave the rug a gentle pull, forcing it free of its bindings and it fell in a heap to the floor. The light radiated brightly, completely filling the basement as soon as the obstruction had cleared. Terth shielded his eyes quickly until the brilliance dimmed some and he was able to look at the thing that glowed.

A tall, stone arch was built against the basement wall where strange hieroglyphs adorned the structure and where the source of the eerie light emanated. He could have easily mistaken the thing for a doorway had the stone of the basement wall not continued through the thing's center. He looked over the details of it and noticed a sign above the topmost curve.

'Secure thy Destiny, then enter.'

Obviously a riddle of sorts, Terth thought, and he continued looking. Along the left side he found a hole in the arch, oval in shape and not very large. He looked at the gem, then at the hole and figured out that they were the same size. Guided by his curiosity and lack of warning from his conscience, he took the gem and fitted it into the hole. He then watched in wonder as a strange thing happened. The green glowing characters grew brighter and the space of wall inside the arch began to glow as well. It became cloudy then finally gave way to a swirling mass of goop. Terth stared at it. He couldn't really help but stare at it. It was the most mesmerizing and strangest thing he had ever seen.

He stepped closer and reached out with his hand. He put his fingers to the stuff and he penetrated the swirling magic before him but he was a bit dismayed at the logic – what was there holding the stuff in and keeping it from falling all over the basement floor?

Still, he thought about it another moment then looked again to the words above. 'Secure thy Destiny, then enter.' A funny idea occurred to him and he looked around the room. Destiny - you usually have to go somewhere to reach a destiny. The most prominent thought on his mind was why he was in the basement in the first place. He lifted his hand again to the goop and spoke the words that came to him, "Ancient Greece."

The mass gained momentum and he was sucked inside with a flash of light and the cloudy substance swirled like a giant and strange toilet bowl, trying to flush him into oblivion. He grabbed onto the edge of

the doorway and tried desperately to pull himself back inside. He struggled against the pull of the vortex but it was strong and he felt the strain compete with his own strength. With one last effort, he reached inside and was able to snatch the gem from its socket before he was finally pulled inside and lost in the void. The box he held fell to the floor and the space between the arch lost all of its green brilliance then abruptly returned to normal and became very still once again.