Lady Emilia Stormbringer

A Log of a Text-Based Adventure

Written by ‘Dragon’, an Artificial Intelligence derived from the GPT-3 algorithm, developed by Latitude, creators of AI Dungeon

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feel free to tweet, email, or dm me comments <3

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Foreword

Hiya! I'm Emily Bellavia. Just putting this here as a quick primer for anyone that ends up seeing this, as the story has grown far longer than I expected.

This adventure has been co-written by myself and an AI. Specifically, the GPT-3 'Dragon' algorithm that powers *AI Dungeon,* a text adventure game by developer Latitude that procedurally generates a story based on what you do. You can reroll the AI's responses if they don't make sense, or edit them to fix small details. As the story continues, the AI learns to adapt to your writing style and the general narrative flow, using incredibly advanced deep learning algorithms to describe what happens next.

To be honest, it's all WAY above my head. Try it yourself; you'll see what I mean soon enough! At the time of writing, the 'Dragon' algorithm requires a monthly subscription (this kind of stuff needs a lot of power to keep the lights on), but the weaker AI variant 'Griffin' is completely free to play. It isn't as coherent, but it'll give you a taste of how this works. You can find it here: https://play.aidungeon.io/

With all that said, I want to use the rest of this foreword to clarify how I play, because **this will not read like a traditional narrative.**

> You explain commands.

Everything that has a > symbol before it is a command. This is my primary input on the story, and how I give direction to the AI. It's important to remember that there are only two types of direct commands — "Do" and "Say." Thus, all my commands start with "You" or "You say," respectively.

There is another type of command, the "Story" command. This allows you to drop a line in the story without the >. It's useful, but I only used it a handful of times to keep the distinction between the AI and I clear. The ol' bot ain't perfect, sometimes you have to remind it what a character was doing in a fight!

Thus, 99% of the time, everything you see that isn't in front of a > is AI-generated. I frequently touched it up, rerolling stuff that is too out there, fixing names and editing small details, but the bulk of the plot is always decided by the algorithm. With that in mind, the AI did need time to get used to my writing style. The first 'arc' is a *very* choppy, and reads more like an uninspired traditional adventure game; things pick up as soon as you get to the chapter "New Town, Old Friend" and continue to improve from there.

Thank you for reading. I'm not sure how enjoyable this sort of narrative is to read as opposed to play, but nevertheless, please enjoy.

-Em <3

Book One

The Dragon of Larion

Getting the Gang Together

You are on a quest...

You are Emilia Stormbringer, a knight living in the kingdom of Larion. You have a steel longsword and a wooden shield. You are on a quest to defeat the evil dragon of Larion. You've heard he lives up at the north of the kingdom. You set on the path to defeat him and walk into a dark forest. As you enter the forest you see a troll fighting some man. You charge forward and stab the troll with your sword. The troll bellows in pain and quickly runs away. You pull out your sword and turn to look at the man you just saved.

> You say "Can you stand?"
"Yes, yes I think so," the man says. "Thanks to you."

> You say "What is your name?"
"Sir Kenneth Regan."
"I am Emilia."
"So, why did you enter the Northern Pass?"
"I am going to slay the dragon."
"You've been marked for death, girl," Sir Kenneth says. "If you continue forward, the dragon will kill you."

> You say "What makes you doubt me so?"
"Have you seen my scars, girl?" Sir Kenneth asks. "I've been fighting the dragon for years. No man has ever succeeded, and no man ever will."

> You say "I am no man, Sir Kenneth. Perhaps the answer to your struggle lies with the steel of Lady Emilia Stormbringer. I will not turn back from this fight."
"Then you are more of a fool than I thought," Sir Kenneth says.

> You say "I need not suffer the judgement of cowards."
Sir Kenneth grunts and shakes his head in dismay.
"Seek death if you will. The dragon is no easy foe."
Sir Kenneth then runs down the path and out of sight.

> You shake your head and check your inventory.
You have a steel longsword, a wooden shield and leather armor. You're not sure if that's enough to slay the dragon, but you need to keep going.
You see a wooden cottage up ahead.

> You knock on the door of the cottage.
You hear shuffling from inside, and the door opens. A young woman stands in the doorway. She looks frightened.
"Please, don't hurt me," she begs.

> You say "Good lady, don't be frightened. I am Lady Emilia Stormbringer, seeking to slay the Dragon of Larion. I mean you no harm."
"Oh, thank goodness." The woman appears to relax. "I was worried you were one of the bandits here."
"The bandits? Why are there bandits here? Is this your home?"
"It's my father's home. He's very, very ill. The bandits have been coming by everyday to pillage what little we have. There's nothing left.

> You say "How many of them are there? And when do they usually arrive?"
"There's five of them. They come by in the morning."
"Perfect. I shall set an ambush for them. Get your father and hide in the cellar, where they cannot find you."
The woman nods. "Thank you, knight."
You nod and go outside to wait for the bandits. After a while, you hear them coming down the path.
"Where is that old man?" one of them asks.
"He's probably hiding like he always does," another one answers.
Five bandits appear, all carrying axes.

> You say "Greetings, brigands."
The bandits turn and see you. The look of surprise on their faces is satisfying.
"Well, well, what do we have here?" one of them asks. "A knight.

> You say "Lady Emilia Stormbringer, future dragonslayer and current protector of the weak."
"Ha! Future? You'll be future fodder, that's for sure."
The bandits begin advancing towards you, but you are patient. You wait until they're in the right position, then strike.

You swing your sword at the leftmost bandit, and bring him down. The bandits appear shocked at how easily you defeated their companion, and back up.
"W-what? How did you?

> You say "You need not all die here. Throw down your weapons, and we may talk."
"Bah! No fooling around with this one. Let's get her!"
The bandits begin advancing once more, but they don't attack with their axes. Instead, they fight with their fists.

> You say "Chivalry was never my strong suit!" as you charge them with your sword.
You knock one to the ground, then whirl around and cleave another's head in two. The bandits begin to realize that they are outmatched, and begin running away.

> You let the others escape and bind the one on the ground with rope.
You tie the bandit up with some rope you have in your pack. Then, you drag him into the old man's house.
"Sir, I brought you a guest."
The old man looks up. "Oh, a bandit? Thank you, Lady Emilia."
"Father, this is not just any bandit. This is the leader of the bandits," his daughter says with wide eyes.
The old man looks surprised. "Truly?"

> You say "I thought it best to offer him to you, be it that his crew has caused you no end of trouble. Or, I can dispose of him, if you wish."
"No, no, I'll question him. It is important to know what we're up against." The old man approaches the tied up bandit and smacks him. "Get up."

> You "I will leave you to it, sir. Though, if I may speak to your daughter outside for a moment while you question him?" You make for the door, motioning for the young woman to follow.
"Hmm? Oh, yes, of course." The old man returns to his questioning.
The daughter walks outside and sees the dead bodies of the bandits you had slain.
"Those are the men who have been tormenting us," she says. "I cannot thank you enough for your deeds."
"You are quite welcome, my lady."

She smiles at the complement.

> You say "But I would prefer that my intervention not be necessary in the future. Have you ever trained in combat?"
"No, I'm afraid not. My mother wanted me to, but my father refused.

> You "He would be lucky to have a strong daughter to protect him in his ailing days. Here," you say, picking up a hand axe from the body of a bandit. "Spar with me. I will teach you some tricks, just in case."
You begin to train her in basic axe swings, blocks, and dodges.
"Why are you helping me?" she asks as she misses a swing.

> You say "It is what a knight does. Continue."
You train her for a little longer, until the old man comes out.
"I found out what we're up against. We're not just fighting bandits. He's convinced several villagers to join him as well."

> You say "Mm. That is not good. Two of them did get away. I presumed that they would be too afraid to come back and no threat, but if they have greater numbers that may not be the case."
You stop training the daughter to think. "If they come back with more people, we'll be overrun."
The old man nods in agreement. "We need to prepare for the worst."

> You say "I am not fond of leaving a job undone. I will hunt the rest of them down."
"Are you sure, m'lady? They are dangerous men."
"I will be fine. I have my sword and shield. And my skills." You pat the sword hanging by your side.

> You kneel down in front of the daughter. "I never did get your name."
"Oh. I'm sorry. I'm Sophie."
You smile at her. "I must leave, Sophie. But I will be back soon." You turn to the father.

> You say "If more bandits come here, hide. Sophie will protect you both, but only as a last resort."
"Understood." The father nods.

Hunting Down the Bandits

You set out for the hills, in search of the bandits' hideout.
You come to a fork in the road. The sign points one way to "Blackcreek Mining Camp", and the other to "Blackcreek Farm".
Search for tracks, to find out which path the fleeing bandits took.
You look for any sign that might indicate which path they went down. You see some hoof prints leading towards Blackcreek Farm, as well as a few footprints leading in that direction.

> You say "Got you. Blackcreek Farm it is."
You follow the tracks to Blackcreek Farm. You are starting to get hungry; it must be at least midday. As you crest a hill, you see the farmhouse.

> You keenly aware the farmers are likely the villagers that aid the bandits, you creep forward as quietly as you possibly can.
You creep through the tall grass, slowly getting closer to the house. You see two bandits, armed with knives and wearing leather armor, standing outside the farmhouse.
Suddenly, you get an idea. You unsheathe your sword and throw it, impaling one of the bandits through the neck. He falls backwards, making little noise. The other bandit looks at his friend in shock before turning to face you.

> You rush forward and strike the bandit in the throat with your gauntlet, seeking to crush his windpipe.
Your gauntlet smacks into the bandit's throat. He begins to choke, and falls to the ground clutching his throat. You look around. No one has come out of the farmhouse yet.

> You rip your sword out of the dead bandit and finish off the choking one with it before he can alert those inside.
You pull your sword out of the bandit's neck and stab the other through the chest. He lets out a pained grunt as he falls backwards, dead.
You look around. Still no one has come out.
You go over to the two bandits and take their knives, adding them to your own collection.

> You slowly open the door to the farmhouse and listen intently.
You open the door and listen. You hear sobbing, from a female voice.
"Shut up," a hoarse voice growls. "Do you want to die? Keep quiet.
You hear sniffling, then silence.
You push the door open and look inside. You see a man with long, scraggly gray hair sitting in a chair, sharpening a knife.

> You point your sword at him and hold a finger to your lips.
You try to silently indicate that he should be quiet, but he does not seem to understand, or chooses to ignore it.
"Who are you?" he growls.

> You say "Lady Emilia Stormbringer, wandering knight and future dragonslayer. I have tracked bandits that were attacking innocent people here, and slew the two guards outside. I suggest you surrender."
"You've killed two of my best men. You've got some stones, I'll give you that." The man slowly gets to his feet.

> You take a combat stance, and glance around the room, looking for the woman you heard earlier.
The man grabs a woman, who was hiding behind his seat, and holds the knife to her throat. The woman appears to be a foreigner and is dressed in a simple shirt and cotton trousers.
"Stay back!" the bandit leader snarls. "One step closer and I slit her throat."
You back up. The woman looks at you through tear-streaked eyes.
"Please," she begs, "Help me."
You look at her for a second, then back at the bandit. You need to figure out if you can take him out before he hurts the woman.

> You try the same trick from earlier, and hurl your sword at the bandit, hoping he will drop the woman to dodge.
Your sword sails through the air and impales the bandit in the thigh. He screams and drops the woman, clutching at the sword. The woman crawls away from him towards you.

> You draw one of your knives and hold it to the bandit's throat. "How many of you are there here?" you growl.
The bandit glares at you and does not answer.

"Last chance. How many of you are there here?"
The man spits in your face and clenches his teeth.
"Your choice," you say.

> You slit his throat.
You grab the bandit's head and slit his throat, killing him like you did with the two bandits outside. You then kick him in the stomach, knocking him backwards.

> You turn to the woman. "Go hide in the tall grass outside. I'll be back for you shortly, I promise."
The woman nods and runs out the front door, heading for the grass. You look around the farmhouse and find some more throwing knives.

> You search the house thoroughly and slaughter any bandits you find.
You make sure every inch of the farmhouse is searched. Bandits cower in their beds, trying to hide from you. You slaughter them all without mercy.

> You go outside and find the girl.
You go outside and see the girl, sitting in the tall grass, her back against the house. You walk over to her. "Come on," you say. "Let's get you away from here."
You help her up and lead her back to the road.
"I'm Lady Emilia," you say.
"I'm Kate," she says. "Thank you for rescuing me."
You nod.

> You say "You are welcome. How did you come to end up in that position?"
"I'm from the mining village. I was on my way to try and find some work in one of the coastal towns when they captured me. They dragged me back to their hideout."
You nod.

> You say "Travel with me for a time. I have to check on a couple people, and you will be safer with me."
"OK," she says. "Can you take me to another town?"
"I have to go this way for a little while, but when we are done with my business, I will make sure you get there."

> You give Kate one of your knives so that she can defend herself, and set off back to Sophie's cabin to check on her and her father.
You arrive back at the cabin and walk inside. You see Sophie, sitting at the table, a axe in her hand and a dagger on the table. She looks up at you, her eyes filled with tears.

> You say "Sophie, are you alright? Where is your father?"
"They took him," she says, through tears. "They grabbed him and dragged him outside and..." her voice chokes up. "I couldn't do anything. I'm sorry."

> You put your hand on her shoulder to comfort her.
You put your hand on her shoulder to comfort her, and she looks up at you, then hugs you tightly.

> You say "What happened to the bandits? Did they come back for you?"
"I killed one of them, the rest ran away," she says. "I don't think they'll be back."
"Are you sure you're okay?"
"I'll be fine," she says.

> You say "You are a brave woman, Sophie. I know you have guilt eating at your heart, but you nevertheless carry on. That is admirable."
"Thank you," she says.

> You say "I have to go back on the road for a bit. Will you stay here? You may accompany me, if you wish. I am heading to the coastal towns in the north."
"I'll come with you," she says. "Just let me put this away." She puts the dagger into her pack, then nods. "Let's go."

> You lead Sophie outside and introduce her to Kate.
You lead Sophie outside and see Kate sitting on the ground, waiting. You walk over to her and introduce her to Sophie.
"Hello," she says. "I'm Kate."
"Hello," Sophie says.

> You say "I rescued Kate from the same bandits that killed your father, Sophie. Rest assured, no bandit survived."
"Good," Sophie says.
You nod, then lead the two women on the road to the north.

> You stop and make camp for the night.
You stop and make camp for the night, setting up a small campfire. You set up a watch system to make sure no bandits sneak up on you, then drift off to sleep.

The Party Begins Their Long Journey

New Town, Old Friend

Morning arrives, and you awake to a gentle nudge. You look up and see Sophie.
"Morning," she says.
"Good morning," you reply. You look at Kate, still fast asleep. "I think we should wake her."
"I agree," Sophie says.
The two of you get up and walk over to Kate. You shake her shoulder, and she wakes with a start.
"What?" she asks.

> You say "It's morning. We are getting back on the road."
"Right," she says.
You all pack your belongings and get back on the road, walking to the north. You reach the first town just as evening approaches. The town is small, but busy.

> You say "We should resupply and rest here for the night. What do you two think?"
"Yes, a good idea," Sophie says.
"Sounds good to me," Kate replies.
You nod, and lead the two women into the town.

> You say "Kate, Sophie, can you two find an inn and grab us a couple rooms? Here's some coin; it should be more than enough. I want to shop around a bit."
"Sure thing," Kate says, taking the coin. "I know just the place."
The two women wander off towards the center of the town, leaving you to wander the market stalls.

> You meander around, looking for any weapons that look particularly magical, as well as light armor pieces for your companions.
You spend the next few hours meandering through the market stalls, admiring the various goods on sale. You pass by a weapons stall and stop, staring at a glinting steel dagger.

> You ask the shopkeeper about the dagger.
"Ah, yes," the bearded trader says. "This is the Dagger of Telios. It's the only dagger known to be able to slay a basilisk."

> You say "Impressive. Is it enchanted?"
"No," the trader says, "but it's still a finely-crafted piece. Quite the find. If you want it, I can give it to you for a good price.

> You say "It does look wonderful, but I'm mainly in the market for magical weaponry. I have my sights set on grand prey."
"I see," the trader says. "Well, I hope you find what you're looking for."
You thank the trader and walk away. As you browse through the various other stalls, you come across a familiar face.
"Gideon?" you ask.
"Ah, the Wanderer!" he says. "A pleasure to see you again."

> You recall how you met Gideon.
You were in the woods, surrounded by corpses and bleeding from several wounds. It didn't matter how hard you'd tried; you hadn't been strong enough to save them. The bloody knife in your hand clattered to the ground, and you felt your legs give out beneath you. You fell to your knees, staring at the corpses. You tried to scream, but no sound would come out.
"Wanderer, you're alive!" you hear.
A hand was placed on your shoulder, and you turn to see Gideon. His eyes were filled with sorrow.
"It's... all... dead..." you stammer. "They're all dead."
"Yes, I know," Gideon replies. "I'm sorry I couldn't save them."
"No!" you yell, grabbing him by the collar. "They're dead because of me! I was leading them! I had the most responsibility, and I failed them! I couldn't save them!"
Gideon stares at you, and you let go of his collar. You collapse backwards, lying among the corpses in the dirt. Gideon crouches down, extending a hand to you.
"Come on," he says. "You've been through a lot. Let's get you home."
You grab his hand, and with his help, stand up. You stare at the ground, silent, before following him away from the massacre.
Back the present day, you look at Gideon and smile. "It's been too long, old friend. What have you been up to?"

"Nothing much, just working as a guard. You're the one traveling the world, what have you been up to?"

> You say "Traveling north. I seek to slay the Evil Dragon of Larion, though I have a long way to go."
You and Gideon speak for a while, catching up on old times. It feels good to see an old friend again. He offers to let you stay at his place, but you politely decline.

> You say "My companions have already purchased a couple rooms at the inn, I'm afraid. They've been through a lot; I don't want to part from them for too long."
"Ah, of course. I understand," Gideon says.

> You say "I don't suppose you would join us there for a meal? "
"I would love to," Gideon says.
The two of you set off for the inn, and soon arrive.

> You look for Sophie and Kate.
You find Sophie standing in the corner of the room, holding a tankard of ale. She smiles as she sees you enter the room, and holds up her drink in salute.

> You say "Enjoying yourself?"
"Immensely," Sophie replies.
Gideon and you walk over to her. She offers the tankard to you, but you decline.

> You say "Where's Kate at? Do you two have a table?"
"She's getting us a table. She went to go ask the barmaid for one."
Sophie looks around the room, and her eyes light up.
"Ah, there she is. Come on, I see her table."
The three of you head to a table in the corner of the room. A couple bottles of wine have already been set upon it, and Kate is waiting for you there.

> You slide into your seat and introduce Kate and Sophie to Gideon.
As you sit down at the table, Gideon holds out his hand to Kate.
"I don't believe we've met. I'm Gideon."
"Kate," she replies, shaking his hand.
He then holds out his hand to Sophie.
"I'm Sophie," she says.
"Gideon," he says, shaking her hand. "Pleasure to meet you."

> You order a hot meal for the four of you and listen to your companions talk for a while.
You all decide on what you want to eat, and the four of you sit and talk for a while. The topic turns to your companions.
"So, Gideon," Kate begins, "What brings you here?"
"I was on guard duty," he replies. "I'm a captain in the Zalan army. I'm in charge of defending this road."
"So you're here to protect merchants?" Sophie asks.
"To protect all people who are using the road," Gideon corrects her. "We're also here to make sure the bandits don't become too unbearable. Now that we're here, the bandits have fallen back to the forests. We'll wipe them out eventually, but for now they're not our primary concern."
"What about the orcs?" you ask.
"Orcs are a pain, but the real issue is the Vampire Clans. The current theory is that there's a small coven of vampires making their home in the Catacombs. So far we haven't had any luck exploring too deeply into the place, so we don't really know how many there are or who they're allied with.

> You say "You live quite the exciting life these days, Gideon!"
"I suppose I do at that," Gideon laughs. "How about the rest of you? What are you all doing here?"
You explain that you're all traveling north.

> You say "Ran into a pack of bandits a couple days south of here. Kate was kidnapped on her own journey north, and Sophie lost her family to them. We decided to all travel together for safety, at least as far as the coastal towns."
"That's quite the story," Gideon says. "You've had a lot of misfortune, haven't you?"
"We have," you admit.
The food arrives, and you all begin eating. The food tastes good, and you're glad to have something warm in your stomach. For a while you just eat in silence, but eventually Sophie speaks up.
"What's it like?" she asks. "Serving in the army, I mean."
Gideon seems to know what she's asking. He stops eating and thinks for a moment, trying to choose his words carefully.
"It's the most terrifying thing I've ever been a part of," he says gravely.

> You quietly wait for Gideon to expand on his role as captain in the Zalan army.

"It's a lot of pressure, knowing that you could die at any moment and that you have to make choices that might lead to that outcome."
"Do you...regret any of your choices?" you ask hesitantly.
Gideon looks to the side for a moment, then returns to make eye contact with you.
"My only regret is any of them that didn't come back."
There's an awkward silence, before Gideon changes the subject.
"So, anything I can do help you on your journey?"

> You say "Actually, there might be. I didn't see anything at the market earlier when I browsed. Do you know where I could acquire light leather armor for my companions, or enchanted gear for me?"
"Well," Gideon says, "there is a vendor here who sells weapons and armor. The quality isn't great, but it's better than nothing. I can take you there in the morning."
"That would be wonderful, thank you."

> You idly chat while everyone finishes their meals.
You talk with Gideon and your companions for a while. Eventually you all head to your rooms. Gideon mentions he has to get up early to train some new soldiers before you meet him tomorrow, so he wishes you all a good night and heads off.

> You say "What did you two think of Gideon?"
"I like him," Kate says.
"He seems very nice," Sophie adds.
You nod. "He is a good man."

> You bid them goodnight and head to your room to sleep.
You go to your room and get into bed. Despite being exhausted, you toss and turn for a bit trying to get comfortable. Eventually you manage to doze off.
You awake to Kate shaking your shoulder.

> You yawn and stretch.
"What time is it?"
"11. We need to meet Gideon in an hour."
You nod. "Alright, I'll be ready soon."

> You say "Sophie ready to go too?"
"She is getting ready now."

You nod.
As Sophie packs her things, you pack your own and wait for the women. After a few minutes they appear dressed for traveling.

> You eat a quick breakfast downstairs with your companions.
You order some food and drink from the innkeeper. You have some bread and wine while you wait for Gideon. It isn't long before he arrives. He waves to you from across the room.

> You say "Good morning, Gideon!"
Gideon walks over to you and smiles. "Hello, Wanderer."
He sits down with a heavy sigh.
"Long night?" you ask.
He nods. "There was an attack by a bandit earlier. It took some time to clean up the mess."
You grimace. "I'm sorry to hear that. Were you hurt?"
He shakes his head. "I was just helping carry the bodies out."
You look at him, not knowing what to say. He smiles sadly.
"It's fine. I volunteered to help."
You nod. "Of course."
The waiter comes with a plate of eggs and bacon, which Gideon eagerly begins eating.

> You say "Kate, Sophie, you two ready to have some proper armor?"
They look at you, clearly excited. Gideon pauses with a mouthful of food to nod at you as well.
You stand up when he finishes, and begin leading everyone out of the inn.

> You say "Kate, I think some light leather armor would do you well, what with your preference for a small dagger. That sound good to you?"
"That sounds wonderful, Emilia," she says with a big grin.
"Alright, we'll see what they have."

> You say "Sophie, are you still fond of that axe? You could potentially opt for slightly heavier armor like chainmail. Leather could also work. Which would you prefer?"
Sophie looks up at you, pondering your words.
"Well, I have a small bit of experience with an axe. Maybe I should stick with what I know."

You smile and nod.

> You say "And for the armor? Light or medium?"
"I'd prefer something light, if possible."
You nod. "Alright then, we'll see what we can find."
After walking for a while, you arrive at the weapon and armor store.

> You say "Thank you for bringing us here, Gideon."
"No problem at all, Wanderer."
You open the door and step inside. A bell on the door lets out a clear chime as you enter.

> "Let's find that armor."
You, Gideon and your companions begin browsing. Soon, you find a chest plate made of leather for Kate.
It's a dark brown, nearly black color.

> You help Kate try it on and make sure it fits.
You help Kate try it on and... it fits perfectly!
You look at Gideon, smiling.
"What do you think?"
Gideon looks Kate up and down, nodding in approval.

> You say "How does it feel, Kate?"
"I... like it," she says, a bit nervous.
"It looks great."
She looks down at herself. She smiles a bit.

> You say "Do you want more than the chestpiece, or just that?"
She looks up at you.
"Just that."
You nod.
"Alright, let's get it then."
You begin looking through the various armors and find a set that might suit Sophie.
You find a set of leather armor that seems to fit her, and you show it to her.
"Here," you say. "Let's try this on."
Sophie looks it over and nods.
You help her try it on, making sure it fits. It seems to be a good fit.

Gideon looks at you. "What do you think?"
You nod. "It seems to fit well."

> You ask Sophie how it feels, and to try moving in it.
"How does it feel?" you ask.
She smiles. "Great! It's very comfortable."
You nod and motion to Gideon.
"Let's get it, then."
Gideon nods and takes the armor to the counter.
You look around for anything else you might need, but don't find anything.
"Alright, let's go pay for this and go."
You and your companions follow Gideon to the counter.
Gideon takes out his coin pouch and lays the coins on the table. You look at him and raise an eyebrow.
"What?" he asks.

> You say "Gideon, you don't have to pay for us! You've been so much help already, we can't possibly accept this."
"Nonsense," he says. "You can buy me more drinks when we see each other again."
You laugh and accept.
Gideon pays for the armor and you all leave the store.

> You say "Well, I think this might be where we part ways, Gideon. The three of us still have a ways to go before we reach the northern coastal towns."
Gideon nods. "I'll be seeing you, then."
"It was great seeing you again."

> You embrace Gideon.
You step forward and embrace Gideon, holding him close.
"Take care of yourself," you say.
He nods and smiles. "You too."
You release him and turn to leave.

> You say "Kate, Sophie, ready to get on the road?"
They nod and the three of you begin your walk northward.
Your next stop is a coastal town several days away by foot.

A Pirate's Life For Us?

> You train Kate and Sophie with their respective weapons as you travel, sparring every night you can.
As you travel northward, you train Kate and Sophie in the arts of battle.
Every night, you spar with them for at least an hour. You teach them everything you know, and they pick it up remarkably well. You grow very close during this time, forming a special bond with them.
You learn about their families and childhoods, and they learn about yours. You find out that Kate comes from a very wealthy merchant family, and has a brother who is most likely older than you by now. She is very well-traveled, having gone as far as the Arat province. She hopes to travel to the elven forests one day.

> You say "How are you holding up, Sophie? With the death of your father, and all."
Sophie grows quiet for a moment, and you feel as though you should've not brought it up.
"I'm doing fine," she says, sighing.
You nod. "I know it's hard, but you'll get through this."
She smiles at you. "I know I will."

> You continue traveling northward towards the coastal town.
After several days of walking, you find yourself at a crossroads. A signpost stands there, with four different directions indicated by a road.
You have no idea which way leads to the town.

> You read the signpost.
You walk over to the signpost and look at the directions.
The first one says "Rakt". The second one says "Olton". The third one says "Casimir". The fourth one says "Dagden".

> You say "Kate, any idea which of these is the coastal town you were heading to?"
"I think it was the coastal town of Olton," she says.
You nod. "I think you're right."

"I think we should go to Olton," Sophie says.

> You say "Works for me. Onward, to Olton then!"
You turn, heading down the path towards Olton.
The day passes uneventfully, as you travel through a forested area. Eventually, the trees clear to reveal a coastal town.

> You say "I think I can smell the sea from here."
"It smells fishy," Kate says.
Sophie sniffs and nods. "Yeah, it's definitely the sea."
The three of you continue down the path towards Olton. As you get closer, you notice something is wrong. There are no people milling about, and there are no boats in the harbor.

> You say "Be on your guard. This doesn't feel right. Keep your eyes peeled for an ambush."
You slow your pace, keeping your shield up.
Ahead, you see a dozen or so men with short swords standing around the harbor. They see you, and begin to walk towards you.

> You say " Stay behind me, you two. Let me do the talking."
You approach the men, your shield raised.
"Alright, you three. Stop right there," The one in front says. "What are you doing here?

> You say "We are travelers, each with our own objective. My name is Lady Emilia Stormbringer, and I seek to cross the sea and travel the northern wastes in search of the Evil Dragon of Larion. My companions are Kate and Sophie."
You notice the men whispering amongst themselves.
"Whatever you're planning, I suggest you drop it," you say.
The man who was speaking turns towards you, smiling. "I was planning on having my men stab you and your friends while your backs are turned. However, I like your spirit, and your prowess with a shield. I think I'll offer you a deal. Join us."

> You say "Join you? What even is your business?"
"We are a band of pirates," he says. "I am surprised you have not heard of us. We are known as the Olton Pirates."
You frown.

> You say "Pirates? By your title, I assume you operate out of this port?"
"Correct. We use this port to stage our operations. Most of the townspeople here are actually our spies. Now, shall we discuss your answer?"
You nod slowly.
"Yes, I accept."

> You say "On one condition though. You take me to the Northern Wastes. If we must stop for your business upon the way, so be it, but I will not be deterred from my quest. Additionally, I do not speak for my companions, and must discuss with them first."
You see the pirate's eyebrows rise in surprise.
"Very well," he says, smiling. "I can accept those terms."

> You say "Please give us a moment to talk amongst ourselves then. "
"As you wish."
The pirate nods, and you walk back to your friends.
"What did he say?" Sophie asks.
You tell her what the pirate said.

> You say "This is not how I anticipated getting to the Northern Wastes, but judging from the atmosphere here, this ship is my best chance. You two need not join me, however. We will be sailing towards great danger, and though I have enjoyed our travels, I will not force you to come with me. It is your choice."
You watch as Sophie looks to you and Kate, then back to you.
"I'll go with you. If only because if I stayed here I would go mad with boredom."
Kate nods.

> You say "Both of you?"
"Both of us," Kate says.
You smile, and embrace them both.
"Thank you both."

> You return to the pirates, and tell them that all three of you have agreed to temporarily join the crew, at least as far as the Northern Wastes.
"Perfect," the pirate captain says. "Welcome to the Black Corsair."
He leads you into town, and towards a tavern.
"We'll discuss things in here," he says.

> You say "When are we sailing off? Also, what is your name, Captain?"
"We'll be setting sail tonight," the Captain says. "My name is Matthias."

> You say "Pleasure to meet you, Captain Matthias. As I said earlier, I am Lady Emilia Stormbringer, a knight. "
Matthias nods.
"Well then, Emilia. I have to say, I'm glad you agreed to come aboard. Our previous knight was thrown overboard by a rogue wave during a storm."
You frown.

> You shudder at the thought of wearing heavy armor and trying to swim in an ocean storm. You turn to introduce Kate and Sophie to the Captain.
"These are my two traveling companions, Kate and Sophie."
Matthias nods.

> You say "Kate is a dagger-wielder, something of a rogue. She is quiet, but well-traveled and knows her stuff."
Matthias nods.
"Pleasure to meet you," he says, shaking her hand.
You turn to Sophie.

> You say "Sophie is an axe-wielder, and has proven herself in a fight more than once. Both of them I have personally trained, and can attest to their ability. You'll be lucky to have them on your ship."
"As you say," Captain Matthias says.
He looks down at his wrist, at a strange metal watch.

> You say "What is that?"
"It's a watch," Matthias says, tapping at its face. "A gift from my father when I took command of the Black Corsair."
You nod.

> You and your companions discuss things further with Captain Matthias until he indicates it is time to set sail.
You stand up, and join the rest of the crew at the gangplank.

> You say "Kate, Sophie, have either of you sailed before? "
"I have not," Sophie says. "But Kate has."
You look at Kate, who looks at you.

"Just a little," she says.
Matthias approaches the three of you.
"Listen up, we've got a good crew here, you'll be fine. My First Mate, Bertrand!"
The old man that was with Matthias earlier appears and stands at attention.

> You say "Pleasure to meet you, Bertrand. I am Lady Emilia, and these are my companions Kate and Sophie."
"Aye, ma'am."
He leads the three of you to the lower decks, where you find your room. It's small, with three hammocks, and very little space to do anything.

> You say "Cramped, but this is ship life, I suppose."
You spend the next few hours getting to know the crew, as well as your companions. It's late afternoon by the time the ship sets sail, and you spend the rest of the day chatting with your new friends.

> You find Captain Matthias and ask him about where you are sailing to.
You approach Matthias, who is standing at the helm of the ship.
"Captain," you say. "May I speak with you?"
He nods, smiling.
"Of course. What can I do for you?"
You look over your shoulder to see that the rest of your companions are busy chatting amongst themselves and not paying attention to you.

> You say "What are our plans? Where are we sailing?"
"Ah, excellent questions. The northern continent is a treacherous place, and you never know what to expect. Myself and my crew will be happy to help you in any way we can, however."
You nod.

> You say "What is our first stop? I know this is a pirate vessel, after all. I doubt we are heading straight to my ultimate destination."
"Of course not," Matthias says. "We'll be stopping at the port town of Jicol first, to stock up on supplies."

> You raise your eyebrow. "By stopping in, or by raiding the town and stealing what we need?"

"Oh, we'll be stopping in. I've heard they have some new tricks they've been using to defend themselves lately, and I wouldn't want anyone on my ship getting injured after just joining."

> You say "Hm. You seem a good man, Captain. I expected this voyage to be non-stop raiding."
"Oh, we'll get to that," he says. "Just a few days of rest for the crew after a big raid is necessary every once in awhile."
You nod.

> You say "I'll be honest with you, Captain. My quest in the Northern Wastes is a deadly one, and one I don't currently feel prepared for."
"Ah, well I've never been one to turn away a damsel in distress. Tell me, how can I help?"
You explain your situation to Matthias.

> You say "My target is the Great Evil Dragon of Larion. Though I am confident in my skills and my companions, I worry that those might not be enough. I've been seeking magical weapons and armor at every town we come through, but have yet to locate any."
"Well, you've come to the right person. I've got a few contacts in Jicol, and one in particular who deals with magic objects. We'll get you fixed up right, lass. Trust me."

> You say "I appreciate it greatly, Captain. How long will we be in Jicol? I also would like to spend some time doing research on the dragon if possible, to give myself every advantage I can muster. There must be someone there that can help."
"We'll be in Jicol for two days, no more," Matthias says.

> You say "Is there truly no way to stay there another day or two? "
"I'd rather not. We stayed in Jicol longer than usual last time, and I'd rather not push my luck."

> You say "I understand. I'll do my best with the time we have there, then."
"I know you will," the captain says, smiling. "Now, we'll be arriving at Jicol soon. You should get some rest before then."

> You say "Aye, Captain. I will at that."

You take your leave of Matthias, and begin walking down the length of the ship. You pass by several crewmen, who nod in deference to you or pause their work to stare. You're not sure how you feel about the constant attention, but you suppose it's to be expected on a ship with as few people as this one. After walking for a while, you arrive at the hammocks. You find one that's empty, and slip into it. You close your eyes, and fall asleep.

The Pirate Town, Jicol

...And The Goodies They Found There

You awake to a hand on your shoulder, shaking you back and forth. You open your eyes, to see that the sun is high in the sky. You must have been asleep for several hours.
"Hey, wake up," a voice whispers.
You look to see who is speaking, and see one of the sailors from the night before.

> You say "Are we nearing Jicol?"
"We just arrived. Captain's told everyone to gather their belongings and disembark."
You nod, and slip out of the hammock.

> You say "Are Kate and Sophie already topside?"
"I believe I just saw them near the prow of the ship."
"Thank you."
You make your way to the prow of the ship, and sure enough you find Kate and Sophie there.

> You look at the port town of Jicol.
As you look about at the town, you see that it has a somewhat disorganized look to it. The buildings all have a self-built look to them, lacking the straight lines and precise craftsmanship of Kingdom-constructed towns. The people, too, look less like Kingdom merchants and soldiers and more like the pirates, raiders, and scavengers.

> You say "No wonder the Captain chose here to restock before raiding."
"Agreed," Sophie says. "The less attention we attract, the better."

> You say "I spoke to the Captain prior, and he said we would be spending two days here. I plan to use his contacts to try and acquire some magical equipment, as well as see if I can find anyone that knows anything about the Dragon of Larion."

"I'll join you," Kate says. "Sophie, you should stay here with the men, just in case something happens."
Sophie nods, and you and Kate disembark from the Black Corsair.

> You say "Alright. Let's wait here for Captain Matthias, and see about those contacts of his. "
You and Kate wait for Matthias to disembark from the ship. A few moments later, he appears, striding off the ship with a large chest in hand. He nods at you.

> You say "What's in the chest? Pirate business, I presume?"
"Yes. Mostly silver and other valuables, looted from a town we raided a few months ago. We can use the money to buy what we need here."

> You say "Shall we accompany you? You did hire me on as a knight, after all. The sooner you can introduce me to your contacts for magic gear, the better."
"Of course. Come on, I'll take you now," Matthias says.
You follow Matthias as he leads you into the town. He leads you to a large house that could be better described as a small mansion.
"This is the home of the mayor of this town, Edgar."

> You say "The mayor is your magic equipment dealer? No way."
"Yes, Edgar is my contact here. He has always been reliable in the past."
You knock on the door. A man answers, dressed in fine clothing with a large golden ring on his finger.
"Ah, Matthias. Good to see you again. I was just talking about you not long ago, in fact," the man says.
"Yes, I imagine you would be," Matthias says. "Allow me to introduce you to my crew. This is Lady Emilia, a knight. Her companion is Kate."
"A pleasure," you say.
"The pleasure is all mine," Edgar says, bowing slightly. "Please, come in."
You and Kate enter the mansion, followed by Matthias and then Edgar.

> You look around.
As you step inside the mansion, you see that the interior is lavishly decorated. A golden chandelier hangs from the ceiling, and the walls are a deep red, like the curtains that cover the windows. A large, thick red rug covers the floor. You follow Edgar through the mansion, passing several rooms.
"This is quite the place you have here," Matthias says.
"Thank you. I built it with the spoils of my endeavors," Edgar replies.

Soon, you reach a room with several chairs around a fireplace. You and the others sit down. Edgar's butler brings you all drinks, then leaves.
"Now then, what can I do for you?" Edgar asks.
"Emilia here is looking to buy some magical equipment," Matthias says.

> You nod.
"Ah, excellent. What kind of equipment are you looking for?"
You describe the equipment that you need.
"Yes, I think I have just the thing. Jacob!" Edgar shouts.
Jacob, the butler, enters the room.
"Bring out the goods," Edgar says.
Jacob nods, and leaves. He returns a few moments later, carrying several items. He places them on a table next to you. You examine them.
"Are these to your liking?" Edgar asks.

> You examine the first item.
You pick up one of the items from the table. It's a compass, with the dial embedded in a solid gold circle. The circle is studded with jewels, and a small, silver needle protrudes from the center of the dial.

> You say "What does this compass do? It is very pretty, but the enchantment upon it is what interests me."
Edgar smiles. "It's not a regular compass. It uses the power of the sun to always point towards the location of the keyhole to the other world."

> You pale slightly. "That... seems a little overkill for what I need."
Edgar nods. "True."
"What else do you have?"

> You examine the second item.
The second object is a small, strange looking gun, made of metal. It's very simplistic in design, with only a trigger and a small barrel.
"What's this?" you ask.
"It's a flintlock pistol," Jacob says, taking the gun off of the table and handing it to you.
You turn it over in your hands, examining it.
"Pull the trigger," Jacob says.
You place your finger against the trigger, and squeeze lightly. A small flame erupts from the end of the barrel, and the gun kicks back into your shoulder. You

smell the scent of smoke, and see that the gun has ignited a piece of cloth that was placed in front of the barrel.
"It's a firearm," Jacob says.
"What does it do?" you ask.
"It shoots bullets."
"What are bullets?"
Jacob smiles slightly. "They're small metal objects that are placed inside the gun's barrel."

> You say "A weapon, then... Fascinating. "
"Indeed. Firearms are quite dangerous. They can kill an elephant with one shot."
"How does it work?" you ask.
Jacob places a small metal sphere into the gun's barrel, and shows you how to operate it.

> You say "I tend to prefer my sword and shield... Kate, what do you think of this? Could you use something like this?"
Kate takes the gun from you, examining it. She points it upwards, and fires. The recoil knocks her backwards, and she barely manages to keep hold of the gun.

> You say "Maybe not then."
Edgar laughs, a booming sound.
"I'm afraid you'll have to work on your aim," Jacob says. "This gun is meant for someone with experience using firearms."

> You laugh and touch Kate's shoulder with a smile. "It's okay," you say. You examine the next item.
"The next item is a cloak, made from the shadows themselves. It has several... unique properties," Edgar says.
He hands you the cloak. You take it, and instantly feel its strange texture. It feels like cloth, but also feels like water.

> You say "What enchantments are upon this?"
"It bends the light around the user, making them almost invisible. It also amplifies the user's capacity to hide."

> You say "Once again, not suited to my style... Kate, what do you think? Could you use something like this? "

Kate examines the cloak, holding it in her hands.
"Maybe," she says.
"The next item is a set of throwing knives," Edgar says. "Take a look."
You pick up the knife. It feels solid and heavy in your hands, with a small groove running along the blade. The handle is wrapped in blue leather, with small, golden symbols etched into it.

> You say "What does its magic do?"
"It is imbued with the power of wind. When the knife is thrown, it will carry the user towards its destination."
You look at Kate, and she nods in agreement.

> You say "We'll definitely take this one. Do you have any armor, perchance? Or shields? This wooden shield has done me well, but I fear it will not last against a dragon."
"Yes, we do. We have a suit of plate armor and a large steel shield."

> You say "Magical, I presume? May I take a look?"
"By all means."
You approach the table, and pick up the shield. It's a large, kite-shaped shield, covered with intricate patterns and etchings. It feels heavier than it looks, and you feel certain that it could withstand a heavy blow.

> You say "Are there any special enchantments upon this?"
"It can withstand even the heaviest of blows," Edgar says. "I dare say, it's the sturdiest shield I've ever laid eyes on."

> You nod decisively. "This is exactly the sort of thing I was hoping for." You turn to look at Kate. "I'd like to get Sophie something too. Do you see anything she would like here?"
You look at the items on the table, and your eyes light upon a silver necklace with a large, flawless emerald set in it. It's simply gorgeous, and you can tell that it must be valuable.
"What about this necklace?" you ask.
"Ah, the eye of the dragon," Edgar says. "A beautiful piece indeed."

> You say "What magical properties does it have?"

"The eye of the dragon has an interesting effect. When the owner of the necklace looks into it, they see the image of their most beloved, cherished person being tortured."
Edgar gives a wide grin.

> You say "That's horrific."
"Oh, but it gets better! The closer the person is to death, the brighter the eye glows. A clever owner could probably use it to tell when they are on the verge of death."

> You say "I'll... pass, thank you. I was hoping for something an axe wielder could use in combat against a dragon."
Edgar nods. "Very well."
He picks up a heavy belt set with several large gemstones, each of which has been carved to show a different face within it.

> You say "What does this do?"
"This is a belt with the power to summon elementals."

> You say "Woah."
"Indeed. Elementals are powerful creatures, and can be deadly if angered. However, they are also some of the most loyal soldiers one could wish for."

> You say "And the wearer of the belt commands them?"
"Yes. The belt's power will only last as long as the wearer is alive, though."
"I'll take it," you say.
Edgar nods. "Very well."

> You say "That should be more than enough... and reaching the limits of what I can afford. Kate, did you decide whether you want the cloak of shadows? The ability to turn invisible does sound useful, "
Kate shakes her head. "I think I'll pass."
"Alright then. That's everything," you say.
"You sure?" Edgar asks, raising an eyebrow.
"Yes," you reply.

> You say "The kite shield, the belt of elementals, and the throwing dagger of wind. How much will those three run us?"
"That'll be six thousand gold pieces," Edgar says.

You nod, and pull sacks of coins from your bag from beneath the table, dropping them on top with a satisfying noise. You slide the total amount back towards Edgar.
"Perfect," he says, smiling as he slides the sacks into his own pack.

> You say "I can't thank you enough, Edgar. And you, Captain Matthias, for introducing me. These will be invaluable."
Edgar smiles. "If you survive, you can thank me by coming back and telling me about it. If you don't survive, well..."

> You say "We will survive. "
Edgar smiles. "Of course you will."
He pauses, and then takes a small box out of his pack, sliding it across the table to you.
"My friend, I wish you the best of luck on your quest."

> You say "What's this? "
"A gift. A last gift. In case you should need it."
You pause, frowning, and slide open the box. Inside is a small vial of clear liquid.

> You say "A potion? What does it do?"
"A potion of speed. A useful tool for a strong warrior such as yourself."

> You clasp Edgar's hand and give it a firm shake. "Thank you."
Edgar smiles, and you stand. You turn to Kate, who nods silently, and the two of you walk off towards the ship.
The trip back is uneventful.

> You say "Well, we still have a day and a half in port... Let's first go find Sophie, and give her the belt."
You find Sophie where you left her, staring out over the ocean. She startles when she turns and sees you, jumping up into a defensive stance.

> You say "Easy there. Just us."
Sophie nods, relaxing. She looks expectantly at the two of you, waiting for you to speak.

> You say "We met Captain Matthias' contact, and acquired several magical items. One for Kate; magical throwing daggers that teleport her to where they land. One for me, an impenetrable shield. And one for you."
Sophie holds out her hand, and you place the belt in it. She examines it for a second, and then wraps it around her waist.

> You say "This is a Belt of Elementals. Apparently, you can summon several elementals with it that will obey your every command. It's probably best to not test it here, though."
Sophie nods.
"Thank you, Emilia. I... I don't know what else to say."
You nod. "Say nothing. You've done much for me. Come on, let's find somewhere outside town where we can see how all these work."
The three of you head off towards a large empty field. You begin by having Sophie summon a couple of fire elementals, showing her how to give them commands and such. Then you have her do it, having her practice for a while.
Kate works with her throwing knives, getting the feel for them and the teleportation magic. After an hour or two, she's hitting everything she aims at.
You work with your shield, getting used to the feel of it on your arm and learning how to bring it up quickly.
The day passes into night, and you stop training.

> You say "Should we sleep on the ship, or find somewhere in town to stay?"
"I think we should stay in town," Sophie says. "Getting some rest on a real bed... My back is killing me from the hammocks."
"I'm with Sophie," Kate says.

> You say "It's a plan then. Let's find an inn."
The three of you head off towards the nearest inn, the Traveller's Pint. You pay for a single room, and collapse onto the bed closest to the window. Kate and Sophie share a bed by the door.

A Change of Plans

In the morning, you head down to a late breakfast. Sophie has the front page of a newspaper open, and Kate is reading over her shoulder.
"You should look at this," Sophie says grimly.
You approach and read the article. The title reads 'Bodies of Two Royal Guards Found; Captain Matthias detained for Questioning'.

> You say "That isn't good."
"Shit, this isn't good," Kate says.
"We need to go," you say. "Now."
You pay for your meal and head out the door towards the docks.

> You say "Keep your heads down as we get near the Black Corsair. We don't know if anyone is looking for us."
You, Kate, and Sophie walk down the streets towards the docks. You keep your heads down, not wanting to be recognized by any royal guards that may be passing through. After a few minutes, you arrive at the docks. The Black Corsair is still there, but as you look it seems different somehow. The flags on the masts seem to have changed.
"This is bad," Sophie says.
"Yeah," Kate agrees.
You look closer at the flags, and what you see sends a chill down your spine. The black flag with the red eye has been replaced with a dark red flag with a black cross.

> You say "Was Matthias framed and his ship commandeered? Or was this a mutiny?"
"It was a mutiny," a voice says from behind you.
You turn, to see a large number of armed pirates. They have a dark, predatory look about them, like wolves.

> You say "Easy. We got along with the Captain, but not enough to lose our lives over it. "
The pirates stare at you for a moment, then burst out laughing.

"Y'heard the girl! She's got spunk!" one of them says, in a thick commoner's accent.

> You say "We merely wished to sail with Captain Matthias to the Northern Wastes. Our shared business ends there. He seemed a good man, but I trust you all had your reasons."
"Indeed we did, lassy," the pirate says. "indeed we did. To the captain!"
"To the captain!" you say, raising your fist.
The pirates cheer, and raise their fists.

> You glance between Sophie and Kate, nervous. "All things considered, sir, I believe we'd like to make our own way north from here. This should probably be where the three of us part ways with the Black Corsair."
The pirate stares at you for a moment, and lets out a barking laugh.
"Got yer own reasons, huh?" he says. "Well, if'n you want ta go that way, be my guest. You're either very brave, or... ya got some sorta death wish."
You swallow nervously.

> You say "It was a pleasure sailing with you... even if our time was brief. Fair skies to you."
"Fair skies, lassy," the pirate says. "Fair skies."
You turn, and head away from the ship. Kate and Sophie follow behind you.

> You say "That... could have gone worse, I suppose."
You walk along the docks for another five minutes, before you see a man waving at you. He has long blond hair, and is wearing a large black coat.
"Over here, ladies!" he says, smiling.

> You say "Oh, what the hell is this... "
"Ahoy there, ladies!" the man says, grinning. "My name is Olaf, and I take it you're looking for passage to the Northern Wastes?"

> You say "How do you know where we are going?"
"You seem traveled, and you're walking towards the ships that are leaving the docks. Plus, your coats aren't exactly designed for warmer climates," he says. "So, interested?

> You say "Perhaps... This feels too convenient. We only just lost our other passage there, then you show up to spirit us away."

"Hey, I'm just providing a service. If you want, you can look me up in the registry. I'm sure my ship, the Windswept, is registered somewhere."

> You say "Let me speak to my companions privately for a minute."
"Of course," Olaf says, bowing.
You turn to Kate and Sophie, and whisper.

> You say "Do you think we can trust him?"
"I don't see why not," Sophie says.
"Me neither," Kate says.
You look back at Olaf.

> You say "It just feels too convenient. I'm worried he is a slaver, or something."
"Ah, you're worried I'm a slaver. I can understand that, but if I was a slaver, why would I tell you that?" Olaf says.

> You say "I was trying to speak to my companions privately, Olaf..."
"Apologies. I just get excited to meet new people. But I understand. Do you want to board the ship?"
You look at Kate and Sophie, and nod.

> You say "What sort of ship is the Windswept?"
"The best kind," Olaf says. "One that goes fast. She's an Avelith-class speedy transport, just the thing for dodging giant icebergs.

> You say "A smaller vessel? How large is your crew, then?"
"Just me and my first mate, Locke. You don't need a big crew to sail a ship like this. Come aboard, I'll show you around."

> You hesitantly follow Olaf aboard.
You follow Olaf aboard the ship. He leads you below deck, to a small room with three hammocks.
"The ship's not big enough to have a spare cabin, so this will have to do," he says.
He leads you back onto the deck, where a tall woman with long red hair is waiting.

> You say "Locke, I presume?"
"Aye, I'm Locke," the woman says, extending a hand to shake.

"I'm Emilia."
"Pleasure to meet you, Emilia," she says.
She extends a hand to Kate, then Sophie.
"Kate," she says.
"Sophie," she says.
She turns back to you.
"So, you need a ride to the Northern Wastes?" she asks.

> You say "Aye. I seek to slay the Great Dragon of Larion that resides there, and my companions here have agreed to help."
"Ah, I see. You're an adventuress, then? Seeking to slay a beast to prove your bravery?

> You recall why you decided to slay the Evil Dragon of Larion.
You look into Olaf's eyes, and nod.
"I seek to avenge my parents," you say.
"Ah, I see. They were killed by the Great Dragon of Larion?"
You shake your head.
"I see. My apologies," Olaf says.

> You say "It is what it is. You do not seem afraid of our quest, though. Have you crossed paths with this dragon before? Offering passage to the Northern Wastes, and all."
"Not exactly," Olaf says. "In fact, you're the first passengers I've had in quite some time. I'm usually just doing shipping for the miners, bringing metals and other resources back down south."
"I don't understand," you say. "What does this have to do with the dragon?"
"The miners are too scared to travel," Olaf says.

> You say "Ah. And so you lost your business, and so you are happy to help us try to slay the source of your troubles. I see."
"Something like that, aye," Olaf says. "But I'd still like to hear the full story."
You tell Olaf the tale of how you're trying to find the dragon, and why.

> You study Olaf and Locke's faces intently while talking, trying to discern whether they are trustworthy.
You stare into their faces. Olaf looks distinctly uncomfortable under your gaze, but does not look away. You give him a chance to look away, to not meet your eyes, but he does not. You realize that he is honest, despite his demeanor.

As for the woman, you can't tell. Her face is a stone mask. It looks like she's trying not to let her face give anything away.

> You say "Well. Kate, Sophie. Shall we hire them?"
"Yes," Kate says, without hesitation.
Sophie nods, slowly in agreement.

> You say "Well. No reason to linger, then. Jicol doesn't exactly feel like the safest port ever. What are your fares, Captain Olaf, and how soon can we depart?"
"Our fares?" Olaf asks. "Ah, right. I suppose you'd be wondering about that."
He scratches the back of his head.
"Normally, I'd want five thousand gold for the trip," he says. "However, seeing as you seem like an... interesting bunch, I think I could let you have it for three.

> You say "Three thousand?! Are you mad? Ship passage rarely goes for over a hundred gold!"
"It's not the ship passage I'm worried about," Olaf says.
"What do you mean?" you ask.
"I mean this is a quest most men would not dare to take. You three look... experienced. But this is dangerous."

> You say "You are afraid of the dragon, then."
"I'm not afraid of anything," Olaf says, puffing out his chest a bit.

> You say "Sure you aren't. Well, as it is, we are traveling to slay a powerful dragon that has been slaughtering and raiding for decades. It is bound to have massive hoards of wealth, ones that would make the three thousand you ask seem trifling. What say you to five hundred gold now, with the remaining two thousand five hundred paid on the return trip?"
"Done," Olaf says, extending a hand.
You shake on it, and Kate extends her hand for Olaf to shake as well. The deal is made.

> You say "When do we depart?"
"Tomorrow morning," Olaf says. "Come to the docks at first light."

> You "Aye aye, Captain." You motion for Kate and Sophie to follow you, and return to the Traveller's Pint inn.

After a dinner of roasted lamb and mashed potatoes, you retire to your room for the night with Kate and Sophie. You lie in bed, staring at the ceiling, waiting for sleep to come.

> You say "Are you two still awake?"
"Yes," Kate says after a few moments.
"Yep," Sophie says.
"Do you think this is a good idea?" you ask.
"Probably not," Kate says.
"But we're doing it anyway," Sophie says.
"I suppose," you say. "I just hope you know what you're doing, following me to slay a dragon."
"I think I've known for a while," Sophie says.
"I don't understand," you say.
"Well, you and I are a bit similar," Sophie says.

> You say "How so?"
"We both saw our families die in front of us. That tends to make you think. To want revenge."

> You say "I'm sorry I wasn't there to protect your father too, Sophie."
Sophie laughs.
"I wasn't talking about my father," she says.
You frown in confusion.
"My mother was the one who died to the dragon. She died while my father watched."

> You say "You never mentioned her. I had no idea. How long ago was this?"
"A year," Sophie says. "It still feels new."
You take Sophie's hand, squeezing it gently.
"Well, you've got us now."
"Yeah," Sophie says, squeezing back. "I do."

> You say "What about you, Kate? Why are you joining us on this mad quest?"
"I've already told you," Kate says. "I want to make sure you both come back alive."

> You say "So you would follow us to the frozen ends of the earth, to battle one of the mightiest beasts known to man? "
"Yes," Kate says. "And you'd do the same for me."

> You fall silent for a long while before responding. "Yes, I would."
The three of you drift off to sleep, holding hands.

Into the Ocean

Captain Olaf and First Mate Locke

The next day, you rise early. You quickly eat a small breakfast of barley bread and bacon, then collect your sword and shield.

> You say "Shall we go, then? To the Windswept?"
"Yes," Kate says. "Let's go."

You head outside and walk to the docks, where the Windswept is docked. You board the ship and make your way to the captain's quarters. You find Olaf sitting in his chair, eating a piece of very overcooked meat.
"Ah, good, you're here," he says.

> You say "Aye. We're ready to depart. Is Locke also aboard?"
"Not quite yet," Olaf says. "She's on her way. I'm eager to leave as well."

> You ask Olaf about the upcoming voyage while waiting for Locke to arrive. "The dragon is one thing, but I fear the journey as well. The Northern Wastes are surrounded by ice floes, from what I hear. The Windswept seems a nimble boat, but are you sure you can navigate through them?"
"I'm not worried about the floes," Olaf says, taking a swig from his ale mug. "I'm worried about the Ice Queen."

> You say "I'm sorry. The what?"
"The Ice Queen. She rules the ice floes. The Northern Wastes are her home."
"Is she human?" you ask.
"I don't know," Olaf says.

> You say "I've never heard of her. Does she willingly house the dragon in her realm?"
"The dragon does as it pleases. It lives where it wants to live. As for the Ice Queen, I don't know much about her, save that she's a cruel ruler and has a terrible army."

> You say "Do you reckon we will cross paths with them?"
"I don't know. We might not cross paths with them at all. If we do, we will have to improvise."
A low rumbling noise draws your attention to the side of the ship.
"Ah, there she is," Olaf says.
A large woman covered from head to toe in heavy fur walks onto the deck.
"I'm here," she says.

> You say "Good morning, Locke. What was that noise?"
"That would be my sled," she says, pointing to a large metal object being pulled onto the ship.
You stare at it in awe. It's the strangest thing you've ever seen. It's made of some kind of metal, and is several feet long. Chains dangle from the bottom of it, no doubt used to steer the contraption.

> You say "Is this for crossing the ice and snow of the wastes?"
"Yes," she says. "It's a necessity if you want to get around up there."
As you continue to stare at it, Olaf walks over to it and begins to strap it down to the ship.

> You say "Will you be accompanying us further into the wastes, Locke? I assumed you and Olaf would stay behind while we challenged the great beast."
"No," she says. "I'm heading further North. My home is beyond the Northern Wastes."
You stare at her, wide-eyed.

> You say "My knowledge of the world ends at the wastes. What lies beyond?"
"It's... a long story," she says. "I will tell you on the way."
A few minutes later, Captain Olaf gives the all-clear for departure. The ship slowly begins to move away from the dock. You watch as the city Jicol fades into the distance over the next couple hours.

> You say "How many days until we reach the first of the ice floes, Captain?"
"A few days, lass," he says.
You look out into the ocean in front of you.

> You say "Clear skies until then, I pray."
"Aye, ma'am," the captain says.

Soon enough, you find yourself staring at an empty sea.

> You look for Kate and Sophie, intending to talk to pass the time.
You find Kate sitting on the lower deck, sharpening her dagger.
"Hey, Kate," you say.
She turns to look at you.
"Hey, Em. Check this out," she says, standing up and twirling her dagger.
She picks a spot on the wall to aim for, and throws the knife with lightning speed.
It hits the exact center of the target.
"Not bad, eh?" she asks.
"Not bad," you say.
"Want me to show you how to do it?"
"Uh... sure," you say.
She shows you the right grip, and how to throw it. You spend the next few hours practicing with her, until you've mastered it. You both retire to your room at sundown.
"Well, we're sleeping on a ship again," Kate says. "Still, I prefer it over those rooms we got in Jicol."

> You say "Taken a liking to sailing, eh?"
"You know it," Kate says. "I could get used to this."
"Same," you say.
The door to your room suddenly opens, and Sophie walks in.
"Hey, you two," she says. "You're never going to believe what I found."
She opens her hands to reveal a large, orange, jewel. It's about the size of your fist.

> You say "Where the hell did you find that?"
"I was on the upper deck, and I found this hidden behind one of the cannons. No idea how it got there."
"Someone probably stashed it there," Kate says.
"Should we keep it?" you ask.
"Hell yes," Kate says.
You take the jewel, and find a leather pouch to put it in.

> You say "I'm nervous about this. It might belong to the Captain."
"It's probably stolen," Sophie says.

> You say "Or lost by one of the miners he used to transport... "

"Or that," Sophie says. "It's still worth keeping, in my opinion."

> You say "I wonder if it's magical. It is rather large."
"Do you know anyone who could tell us?" Sophie asks.

> You say "Maybe Edgar back in Jicol. I doubt we'll find anyone before we enter the wastes, though."
"I suppose," Kate says. "Do you want to keep it for now?"

> You hand the pouch with the jewel in it back to Sophie.
"I'll hold onto this for now," Sophie says, sliding it into her pocket.
The three of you talk idly as the night grows longer. You find out Kate is especially interested in the legends of the Northern Wastes.
"They say it's constantly winter there," she says. "Which means no worrying about hurricanes or tsunamis.

> You say "Have you dealt a lot with those in your past?"
"More than I'd like to," she says. "The worst was a tsunami that killed hundreds in Arat."
The conversation continues as the three of you sit in your room and eventually drift off to sleep. Before you know it, the sun is rising.
The captain soon comes to get you.
"Alright, you lot," he says.

> You rub your eyes sleepily. "Yes, Captain?"
"It's about time you lot got up," he says. "The ship will be entering rougher waters soon. I need all hands on deck."

> You shoot a worried glance towards Kate and Sophie.
"You're the only ones with any sort of magical talent, so if any of those sea monsters come about, I need you to be ready with those magic tricks of yours," Olaf continues.
"Of course, Captain," you reply.
You head up to the deck. The wind is picking up, and it's probably not going to get any calmer than this.

> You shout over the noise of the storm. "Is it always like this up here?"
"No, actually," the captain yells back. "This is a particularly bad storm. I hope the rest of you are ready for this."

> You glance about, looking for Locke.
You see her standing in front of the wheel, steering and staring out into the distance. She appears to be looking at something on the horizon. You squint, but you can't make it out.
"What is it?" you ask.
"There's something out there," she says, not taking her eyes off the horizon. "I can't tell what it is, but it's big."

> You say "Should we ready the cannons?"
"I think that's a good idea," she says, turning to look at you.
She heads down to the lower deck, leaving you up top with Olaf taking the helm. You take the opportunity to plan with your companions.

> You say "There's only one cannon on each side of this ship. Kate, can you help me with those?"
"I suppose so," Kate says. "Do you want to load or aim?"
"I'll aim. We need to make every shot count."
You both head to the cannons.

> You say "Sophie, I want you to be ready with your Belt of Elementals if things go bad. Water or Storm Elementals could make short work of whatever is out there. Summon them on my signal, okay?"
"Got it," she says.
Kate and you take your place behind one of the cannons. You load it as fast as you can.

> You try to make out whatever Locke spotted in the distance.
You squint out into the distance. You can barely make out something approaching the ship.
"Is that it?" Kate asks, pointing towards the object.

> You say "I think so. What is it? It doesn't look like a ship."
You both stare out into the distance, watching as the object comes closer and closer to the ship.
"It's a turtle," Kate says. "A giant turtle."
As it gets closer, you can see what Kate means. The creature is a giant sea turtle, at least three stories high. It is green, with sheets of ice covering its back, resembling an iceberg from afar.

> You say "Holy shit..."
You drop the cannon and Kate does the same. You both watch as the creature slowly comes to a stop in front of the ship. As it does, the wind quiets and dies.
The creature speaks, its voice deep and booming.
"I am Captain Yasu of the Ochirea Navy. State your purpose on this day."

Into Ochirea

> You look to Captain Olaf, waiting for him to respond to the gargantuan sea turtle.
The captain looks back at you, his face pale white.
"Tell him the truth," you say.
The captain swallows nervously and speaks.
"We were hired to transport these passengers."
The turtle doesn't respond, and for a moment you wonder if it did not hear. Then, it finally responds.
"I see. And who are they?"

> You say "I am Lady Emilia Stormbringer, a Knight seeking to slay the Great Evil Dragon of Larion that resides in the Northern Wastes! These are my companions, Kate and Sophie, who have sworn to see the same deed done!"
"We will hold you to your word, Lady Emilia," the turtle says. "Now I will take you to meet the others."
You are shocked by the turtle's statement.
"Wait, what others?" you ask.

> You say "You said you were a part of a navy? Who commands you? Is it the Ice Queen?"
The turtle lets out a booming laugh, which resonates throughout the deck of the ship.
"Oh no, we are no subjects of the Ice Queen. We are part of the Ochirea Navy. The Queen of Ochirea, Kitsu, commands us."
You are still confused.
"Who, or what, is Kitsu?" you ask.

The turtle's laughter grows louder.
"You will see in due time, human. We will be with you soon."
With those final words, the giant turtle disappears back into the depths of the ocean. You look to your companions.

> You say "Olaf, what the hell was that? Have you ever heard of this?"
"No, I haven't," he says. "But if they wanted to kill us they would've done it by now."
You sigh in exasperation and sit back down.

> You say "I suppose we have to just wait to see where he takes us..."
The captain nods in agreement and sits down. Locke rejoins you on the deck, having overheard the conversation. The five of you wait for a few minutes, but nothing happens.
You sit there in awkward silence until, finally, the turtle returns.
"We are ready to receive you now," it says, "Follow us."

> You watch as Olaf returns to the helm, following the turtle with the ship.
The turtle turns and swims forward. You sit on the deck, looking out at the water as you go. There is nothing but ocean for miles, with no land in sight. The waters here are relatively calm, although there are still a few waves here and there. After about an hour of traveling, the turtle slows down and leads you to a massive underwater cave.

> You say "Are we to dive, Yasu?"
"Yes, yes," he says. "Come, come, we have been expecting you!"
The turtle turns and swims forward into the cave. You look to your companions, who are nervous.

> You say "We should leave someone with the ship. Not all of us have to go. "
The captain nods in agreement.
"I'll go," he says. "First Mate Locke can remain here."
You, Kate, Sophie, and Olaf prepare to follow the turtle into the cave.

> You take a massive breath of air and dive into the frigid water.
You take a deep breath and dive underwater, following the turtle. The others are right behind you. You swim forward into the cave, which is pitch black. You follow the turtle for just over a minute and a half before you see faint lights up ahead. You swim forward and emerge in a massive underground cavern, glowing with

the faint light of Bioluminescence. You see hundreds of strange fish species that you've never seen before. They all seem to be ignoring you for now.
You follow the turtle forward into the water. He swims up to a platform, where four giant sea creatures stand. Two look like sentient, aquatic whales. They must be the Leviathans you've heard of in stories. The other two are strange humanoid fish that stand at the sides of the Leviathans.
"This is an honor," one of the humanoid fish says, in a strange accent you've never heard before. "We rarely get visitors."
"The honor is ours," Kate says. "We were not expecting to meet..." She pauses, trying to decide what to say.
"We are to speak to Queen Kitsu," you say. "The turtle, Yasu, said we were to meet her."
"Ah yes," one of the creatures says, approaching you. It looks at each of you in turn, judging you. "Yes, yes, yes, you will do. Come, follow us."
"What happens to the ship?" Olaf asks.
"We will take care of it," one of the humanoid fish replies. "Come this way."
The fish creatures lead you out of the underwater cave and into a massive underwater city. It's unlike anything you've ever seen before. The entire city is made from a series of massive coral formations that have been shaped and molded into buildings, with many other coral structures just sticking out of the water in a mass of un-mined stone. You can only imagine the amount of work that went into making this place.

> You say "It's beautiful..."
"Yes, it is," the fish man says. "Now come this way."

Lyssia, the Mad Svelk

You follow the fish people into a massive stone structure in the middle of the city. Inside is a single massive room, with a huge tank of water in the center. Inside the tank dozens of fish and sea creatures of all kinds swim about. A long, spiral coral staircase leads down into the tank itself.
"Wait here," one of the fish men says, as he and his companion head down the staircase. You wait patiently, looking over the tank. After a few minutes, you start hear loud noises.

> You glance between your companions and Olaf.
You look to your companions and Olaf, then glance at the staircase.
"I don't like this," Kate says.
"Neither do I," you say. "Sophie, keep a look out."
You move to the front of the group, peering down the staircase. You wait, watching to see if anything happens. After a few minutes, you hear a loud, high pitched scream from below, and you immediately jump back. The scream is so loud that it almost hurts your ears.
"What in blazes was that?" Olaf yells.
Suddenly, you see a creature flying up the staircase. It has a woman's head and torso, with long black hair, but the body of a large crab, with giant claws. In it's human hands, it holds a trident, which it uses to cling onto the staircase as it flies up it at a breakneck pace.
You stare at the creature in shock for a moment, as it screams once again.
"What the hell is that thing?" Olaf yells, taking out his axe.
"I've no idea," you admit.
You hear a loud crash as the creature smashes through the glass of the tank, water pouring out and flooding the room.

> You look around at the fish people, to see if they are panicking as well.
You turn, looking at the fish people gathered by the tank. They are all gathered around, watching the crab-woman with a look of awe and fear on their faces. "Oh gods, oh gods, it's her," one of them says, before looking at you.

> You say "Who is she?!"
"Her name is Lyssia, she is a svelk," the fish person says, clearly frightened.

> You say "Should we attack?!"
"I don't know if we can kill her!" the fish person says.
Lyssia climbs out of the tank, staring at you.
"Why are you here?" she asks.

> You ready your weapons and motion for your companions to do the same. "I am Lady Emilia Stormbringer! I was brought here by Captain Yasu of the Ochirea Navy! My group was crossing the sea to reach the Northern Wastes, and slay the Great Evil Dragon of Larion!" you shout in response to Lyssia.
"And you decided to kill my children instead?" Lyssia asks.

> You say "What? We have done no such thing! "

"You will return with me to my palace. There, you will face judgment for your crimes."
You look at Kate and Sophie, and then turn back to face Lyssia.

> You say "Like hell we will. Sophie, call Storm Elementals! Kate, flank her! Attack!"
"I was hoping you'd say that," Kate says with a grin.
Sophie begins to concentrate, while you turn and run at Lyssia, your blade in hand.

> You drop your blade to your side and charge with your impenetrable shield, seeking to bash her and knock her off balance.
You run at Lyssia, your shield out. She snarls, swinging her trident at you. She slams into the side of your shield, trying to knock you over and off of your feet. You swing your blade, slashing her across the stomach. Lyssia snarls, kicking your legs out from under you.

> You put your shield between you and Lyssia, blocking each of her blows as you try to roll away.
You drop your sword and raise your shield, blocking Lyssia's trident as she stabs it forward. She puts her entire weight behind the attack, growling as she tries to plunge the weapon into you.

> You say "Kate, Sophie, now!"
Kate begins to chant, raising her dagger into the air as it begins to glow. She hurls the dagger at Lyssia, and appears where it lands upon her carapace, desperately grasping for purchase before tumbling off out of sight.
Sophie slams her axe into Lyssia's side, sending her reeling. You roll to your feet, shield raised.

> You say "How are those Storm Elementals coming, Sophie?!"
"They'll be minute! I need to concentrate, OK?!" Sophie says.
You swing your blade, slamming into Lyssia's head and knocking her back. She staggers, before roaring.

> You say "We'll do our best! Hurry!"
"On it!" Sophie says, falling back to summon them.
You watch as Lyssia charges forward, knocking away your blade. She slams the butt of her trident into your head, sending you to your knees.

> You roll to the side and raise your kite shield above your head, bringing it down onto the trident with all of your strength.
You roll to the side and raise your shield above your head, bashing it into Lyssia's trident. She roars, pulling the weapon back as she prepares to strike again.

> You receive Lyssia's trident blow with your shield and desperately push back against it.
You lower your shield and grip Lyssia's weapon, pushing back against her as she tries to force the trident forward. The two of you push against each other, both struggling for dominance.
You manage to push her back a step, but she stabs her claws in the ground in front of you, growling. She pulls herself forward as you try to keep your ground.
You step back, growling.
"Not bad, knight," Lyssia says.

> You say "Not bad yourself, Svelk."
"I'm impressed you learned how to use that shield so well."
"You're just pissed I'm actually resisting," you reply.

> You distract Lyssia while Sophie finishes summoning the Storm Elementals.
Five Storm Elementals appear behind you, churning with lightning. Sophie shouts a command, and they simultaneously fling themselves at Lyssia.
She's blasted with lightning, roaring as the energy courses through her. She falls to her knees, growling.

> You say "Kate! FINISH HER!"
Kate runs forward, slashing her dagger into Lyssia's neck. The Svelk lets out a pitiful howl, falling forward as blood spurts from her neck.

> You pick up your blade and run it through Lyssia's chest.
You pick up your sword, and with one firm thrust you drive it through Lyssia's chest. The tip bursts through the other side of her human half, with her crab lower half writhing in pain. She gasps, shuddering before falling still.
"Good riddance," you say.
You stand there, catching your breath. You wipe the sweat from your brow as you realize just how close combat with a powerful foe can be.

> You look around and check on the status of Kate, Sophie, and Olaf.

You look to your right, and you see Olaf. He lies on the ground, unmoving.
"Captain Olaf!" you shout, running over to him and dropping to a knee.
You roll him over, revealing that he has a deep cut going across his chest. It's not particularly wide, but it's long, and you can see internal damage done.

> You say "Shit. Shit, shit shit. Come help me with him!"
You shout to the air, and Kate and Sophie come running over.
"He's hurt. Bad."
"I can see that. He's bleeding out," Kate says.

> You frantically look around at the cowering fish people in the chamber and shout. "Is anyone here a healer?!"
A few of the fish-people timidly raise their hands.
"Come on, then!" you shout. "He needs help!"
The fish-people quickly rush forward, two taking position on Olaf while a third fishes through their satchels.

> You watch helplessly with your companions while the fish people try to save Captain Olaf.
The three fish people work frantically to save Olaf, dipping towels in water and shoving them against the wound to stem the bleeding. One begins praying while the other two frantically search through their bags. After a moment, one fishes out a vial of something and another fishes out a plant you don't recognize. They crush the plant into the vial, mixing the contents, before pouring it on the towels currently being used as a tourniquet. After a few minutes, the two stop trying to save him and begin praying.
"What are they doing? Is he dead?" Sophie asks.
"I don't know. I can't tell," you answer.
The two fish people look up at you, their eyes meeting yours.
"He's gone," one says.
You stare at Olaf's corpse, trying to find the right words.
"He was a good man."
You look up at the fish people.
"Thank you for trying to help him."
They nod in response, turning back to their bags.

> You sit close to your companions around Olaf's body, the corpse of Lyssia the Svelk looming behind you. You assume Queen Kitsu or someone of import in Ochirea will eventually arrive.

You sit, staring at Olaf's corpse. A few tears fall from your eyes, but they're more out of exhaustion than fear or sadness. You feel numb, empty.

> You say "What happened to the Queen, I wonder?"
"I don't know," Sophie answers.
You shrug, and watch as the two fish people continue to pray over Olaf's body.

> You pull one of them aside and ask if you should go search for Queen Kitsu, through the shattered tank and down the staircase.
You pull one of the fish people aside and ask if you should go search for Queen Kitsu, through the shattered tank and down the staircase.
"She should be there, with a few of her personal guards," the fish person says.

> You say "We'll be back to collect Olaf's body and bring it to the ship. Please treat it well."
The fish person nods in response. You turn, and lead your companions to the staircase.
"Let's go find this Queen."

Usurper King Greusim

You walk down the staircase, leading your companions through the bloody waters. The waters are calm, now, but the countless corpses and shattered tanks make you nervous.
"Stay alert," you mutter.
As you walk, you notice that the waters are growing shallow. After a few minutes, you find yourself walking on dry land once more. You look up, and find yourself in a long, rectangular chamber.

> You look around for Queen Kitsu.
You see a single Svelk, in silver and red armor, with long, luxurious black hair. The Svelk stands, leaning against the wall, her arms crossed in front of her.

> You raise your weapons and shout at her. "Who are you? What have you done with Queen Kitsu?!"
She smiles, and slowly begins walking toward you. She draws two curved swords, her smile never fading.

> You back up slightly, with your friends ready to fight beside you.
The Svelk warrior approaches, and lets out a yell. The sound is terrifying and exhilarating, like the cry of a bird of prey. Then, she's upon you.

> You say "Just like before! Sophie, summon Storm Elementals! Kate, on me! I'll hold it off!"
You and Kate step forward to meet the Svelk, as Sophie begins to chant. The Svelk warrior grins, and slices at you with one sword, then the other.

> You block the strikes with your shield, pushing back against each one.
The Svelk's swords are pushed aside, and she grins.
"Is that all the power of man's weaponry can do?" she says, her eyes filled with a thirst for blood.

> You say "You wish. Kate, get her!"

You shove the Svelk backward with your shield, and Kate rushes forward. The Svelk parries Kate's dagger strike, and slashes downward, cutting open Kate's arm.

> You dive towards the Svelk, interceding between her and Kate with your indomitable shield raised high.
You slam your shield into the Svelk, and she is knocked to the ground. You slam your sword into her side, and a burst of blood splashes across the floor.

> You say "No one touches her."
The Svelk looks at you, and slowly begins to smile.
"We'll see about that," she says, and reaches out, grabbing your leg.

> You hack at her arm as it grabs your leg, praying that Sophie's elementals arrive soon.
You slam the sword down, cleaving through her hand and arm. The Svelk warrior screams, but doesn't let go of your leg.
"We'll take you down, and then we'll take the rest!" she yells, her voice filled with anger and bloodlust.
"That's not going to happen," you say, as you swing the sword again, beheading the Svelk.
"Kate! Sophie! You two OK?" you ask.
"I'm fine," Kate says, bandaging her arm.
"I'm okay," Sophie says. "I couldn't summon them in time. I'm sorry."
"It's OK," you say. "It all turned out OK."
You walk over to the Svelk body, and Kate follows.

> You say "How many of these are there? What did they do with the Queen?"
"I don't know," Sophie says. "I hope that was the last one."

> You say "We should keep looking. Kate, are you sure you are okay? Your arm looked pretty rough. Can you still fight?"
"I'm fine," Kate says. "My arm hurts, but I can still throw my daggers, and fight."

> You say "Okay. Let's continue then."
You walk through the halls, weapons drawn. You turn a corner, and find yourself facing two Svelk, one holding a bow, the other with a short sword.

> You say "Sophie, we need those elementals NOW! Summon them! We'll protect you!"
The Svelk lets out a cruel laugh.
"I don't think so. It's time to end this."
The Svelk raises her bow, and fires.

> You block the shot with your unbreakable shield as Sophie summons her storm elementals.
The Svelk's arrow bounces off your shield, and Kate charges forward, throwing her daggers with perfect precision, both hitting the Svelk in the neck. The Svelk falls to the ground, and Kate runs forward and slices her head off.

> You go on the offensive, charging the Svelk with the short sword with your shield held high.
The Svelk slashes at you, and you slam your shield into his face. His sword glances off of your armor, and you slam the sword out of his hand and break his arm. The Svelk grunts in pain.
Lightning crackles behind you as storm elementals surge forward under Sophie's command, immediately hurling themselves at the Svelk. They begin tearing into the Svelk, stabbing him with their jagged spears of lightning. The Svelk warrior screams as he is set ablaze, and the rest of the lightning elementals jump to attack him.

> You and Kate retreat to stand by Sophie as the elementals finish off the warrior.
You stand by Sophie and Kate, watching the storm elementals tear the Svelk apart. Eventually, there's nothing left but a pile of burnt bones and armor.
"Thank you, my Elementals. You are free to return to the skies now." Sophie says.

> You watch as Sophie's summoned elementals disappear.
"We need to keep moving," you say.
You, Kate, and Sophie continue through the halls.

> You search through room after room for Queen Kitsu.
As you walk through the halls, you come across many Svelk guards, but the elementals make quick work of them, melting their faces and blinding them or sending them fleeing in terror. Soon, you reach the throne room. You walk forward to the throne room, weapons ready. You see the large golden throne, and see a Svelk sitting there, a crown on his head.

> You say "Tell us what you have done to Queen Kitsu!"
The Svelk king lets out a cruel laugh.
"I have done nothing. She is my prisoner. I am King Greusim, and you will tell me what three humans are doing here, in the heart of my city!"

> You say "We are ensuring your rule is short. Sophie. Kate. Let's do this."
You charge forward, readying your blade. You swing your blade, but the king's golden armor protects him from your blow.

> You take several steps back, shield held high warily.
King Greusim readies his sword, charging forward. You wait patiently, waiting for the right moment to strike. You see the king swing his blade, and step backwards, preparing to block.
The king's sword flies forward, but instead of metal hitting metal, metal hits tile. You step to the side, and swing your blade. The blade bites into the Svelk's neck, and he lets out a pained scream as blood runs down his armor. You twist the blade, then pull it out.

> You say "Kate, get him!"
Kate charges forward with a yell, and slashes her blade across the king's face, drawing more blood. The king grunts in pain, but instead of attacking back he stumbles backwards and falls over.

> You press the attack while Sophie finishes summoning her elementals.
You move forward, readying your blade. You stab your sword forward, but the king rolls out of the way. He lets out a yell, and you feel an impact against your chest. You look down, and see a bolt lodged in your chest.
The king pulls out a small crossbow, and fires again. You let out a yell as the bolt pierces your leg.
Sophie's Storm Elementals surge past you towards the King. They knock the king down, and tear him apart. His final scream of agony turns to one of mere pain, then nothing but a pained whimper as the Storm Elementals tear him apart.

> You say "Sophie, Kate, come help me with these... Ugh..."
You feel your strength leaving you, and fall to the ground. You're losing blood quickly, and you don't have much time.
"Hang on, Em!" Kate says.

> You grit your teeth and bear the pain as the women treat you.

You grit your teeth as you feel their hands on your wound. They rip off pieces of your clothing to tie around the bolts in your leg and chest. They pack the wounds with something, but you're not sure what.
You grunt as you feel their hands on your wounds. After a few minutes, they let out relieved sighs.
"You'll be fine," Kate says.
You fall unconscious before you can reply.

The Great Underwater City of Ochirea

A Queen's Debt

Hours later, you wake up. You find yourself lying on a bed, with Sophie and Kate sitting next to you. You feel well-bandaged, though not particularly comfortable.
"You're awake!" Sophie says.
"How are you feeling?" Kate asks.
"My chest and leg are killing me," you say. "What happened?"
"The king shot you with a bolt," Sophie says. "But we managed to patch you up."
"Where is the king?" you ask.
"Dead," Kate says simply. "Sophie and I made sure of that."

> You say "Thank you... And Queen Kitsu? Was she alive?"
"She was alive, but barely," Sophie says. "We brought her with us out of there. She is with her attendants."
You nod, and sit up slowly.
"Ah, you shouldn't be moving too much," Sophie says.
"I need to go see the queen," you say. "Make sure she's okay. Will you help me up?"
Sophie nods, and offers you a hand. Kate does the same. You stand up, and find that your legs are steady. You feel a little woozy, but other than that you're fine.

> You say "Let's go."
You stand up slowly, and begin walking towards the exit. Kate and Sophie follow close behind. As you exit the room, you find yourself faced with a dozen guards. Queen Kitsu stands in front of them.

> You bow as much as your wounds allow with the help of your companions.
"Your highness," you say. "I am honored to finally make your acquaintance."
"The honor is mine," Kitsu says. "You've proven yourself to be a valuable ally and rescued me from certain doom. I am in your debt."

> You say "It was my duty as a knight, your highness. My name is Lady Emilia Stormbringer, and we are merely lucky to have been there when the attack occurred."
"The luck of the gods, my dear," Kate says, smiling.
"Indeed," Kitsu says. "I'm sure the gods had a hand in all of this. I'm glad they were on your side. Please, let me know if there is anything I can do for you. I owe you much.

> You say "Your highness, if it is not too much trouble... We were merely passing through your city on our way to our ultimate goal. My companions and I seek to slay the Great Evil Dragon of Larion that resides in the Northern Wastes. Any assistance you could render would be invaluable, and certainly fulfill any debt owed."
"The Great Dragon?" Kitsu asks. "My advisors tell me it is a dreadful beast of enormous power. It has destroyed entire cities."
"If I can do it, I will slay the creature," you say.
"You'll die!" Kitsu says. "I know you're a brave woman, but I doubt whether even you can slay such a beast."

> You say "I must try. "
"I'll help!" Sophie says.
"So will I!" Kate adds.
You stare at your two companions, smiling.

> You say "We'll be fine, your highness. Especially should you provide us with equipment or trinkets as aid. Ochirea seems to be a very special and magical place; I do not doubt that something here exists that can help us succeed on our quest."
"I will have to think on this," Kitsu says. "We do not want to send you off to your death, but I cannot deny the power of destiny."

> You say "If we may freely travel your city, I could certainly use some rest. I'm in no hurry to depart. Also, there was a woman with us that stayed with the ship. Her name is Locke. If she could be retrieved and brought down here, I would be ever so grateful."
"Of course," Kitsu says. "I'll have some of the servants retrieve her. I'm sure you and your friends will be most comfortable in one of the guest rooms."
You nod.

> You say "Thank you, your highness."
"Don't thank me, Emilia. Thank the brave women beside you. They are the only reason we are all alive."
You and your companions follow Kitsu through the halls of her palace. Eventually, you come to a large room filled with comfortable-looking beds and bedding.
You've never seen such luxury in your life.
You collapse into one of the beds, and fall asleep immediately.

> You dream.
You are in a large, lavender field. In the distance you can see a great castle of black stone. It is there that you must go.
"It's not safe out here," a voice says.
You turn, and see a young girl with long blonde hair and a pretty dress. By her looks, she might be of noble birth. She holds a bucket in her hand, from which emanates a faint glow.
"Who are you?" you ask.
"I'm Lavender," the girl says, matter-of-factly. "What's your name?"
"Emilia. But how did you... Are you real?"
The girl laughs.
"Of course I'm real! Nobody else is out here, are they? I guess you must be dreaming."
"I am," you say. "But how did you know?"
"I always know," she says. "We're bound together, you and I."
"What does that mean?" you ask.
"I have no idea," the girl admits. "I just know that we're friends, and I know you're in trouble. It's not safe out here. You have to get to the castle."
"Why? What's there?" you ask.
"That's where Mom and Dad are. They'll protect you. They love you. All of our family loves you. We've been searching a long time. They'll be so happy to see you."
"Searching?" you ask. "For me?"
"Of course. We'll always find you. Just try to stay safe. And don't forget us."
Lavender puts her hands over her eyes and runs in a circle. Then, she vanishes.

Exploring the City

You jolt awake in your bed. You're covered in a cold sweat. You're back in Ochirea.

> You look around for either of your companions.
You find Kate on the other side of the room, sharpening her dagger.
"Kate?" you ask.
She looks up at you, blinking. Her eyes are bloodshot.
"Hey," she says. "You're awake."
"How long was I asleep?" you ask.
"Couple days," Kate says. "I was worried."
"Worried about what?"
"You, of course," Kate says. "With Olaf dead, I didn't know... I didn't know if you'd make it either."

> You shake your head to clear the fog of sleep. "I'm sorry. I didn't intend to sleep so long... my body needed it, I think," you say as you check your wounds.
They've both closed, leaving you with thin scars across your stomach and left thigh.
"Good as new," you say.
"So what now?" Kate asks.

> You say "Let's stay in Ochirea a little longer... I want to make sure we all are fully recovered before we continue further north."
"That's fine by me," Kate says.

> You say "Also... thank you for keeping watch over me. I'm sorry to worry you."
"Don't worry about it," Kate says.
She gets up from her chair and goes over to your bed, where you're seated, and hugs you.
"I'm just glad you made it," she says.

> You linger in her embrace.
You hug her tightly, smiling.
"I'm glad to be alive," you say.
She laughs, and releases you from the hug.

"Me too, love," she says.

> You raise an eyebrow. "Love, eh? That is a new one."
"I'll call you whatever I wish," Kate says.
She winks at you.
You laugh.

> You say "So, how are the others? What is Sophie up to?"
"She's been helping other survivors in the city. She says she wants to help people get back on their feet before continuing on."

> You say "That girl's heart brings me strength."
"As it should," Kate says, smiling.
She rests her hand on your shoulder.

> You say "What of Olaf? Did you... did you bury him yet? While I was asleep?"
"We did," Kate says. "I'll take you to the grave once you are ready."
You nod slowly.

> You say "How did Locke take it? She didn't seem the type to be emotional, but he was her captain..."
"I think it shook her. She didn't say much, just went along with what we needed to do."
You nod.
"Alright. I'll get dressed and then we can go see her," you say.
"Sounds good," Kate says, standing up.
She turns and leaves the room, leaving you alone to get dressed.

> You gingerly strap on your armor, slinging your magic shield over your back and clipping your sword to your hip. You test your left leg, worried about how much weight you should be putting on it.
You stand and test your leg, pacing slowly around the room as you wait for Kate to come back. Eventually, she does, accompanied by Sophie. The tired-looking woman smiles wearily at you.
"Good to see you standing," Sophie says.

> You smile and extend your arms out for a hug. "It's good to be standing."
Sophie hugs you gently, careful of your wounds.
"Glad you're doing better," she says.

You pat her on the back.

> You say "Let's go see Locke. And... and Olaf's grave."
You walk out of the room, leaning on Kate for support as you make your way slowly down the hall. Eventually, you find the courtyard where Olaf was buried. His grave is marked by a short, engraved stone that reads "Captain Olaf Finsen".
"Here it is," Kate says.

> You kneel and pay respects.
You kneel by the grave and take a deep breath.
"Thank you, Olaf," you say.
You reach out and gently touch the grave. You feel nothing, of course. Olaf is gone.

> You say "I only knew you for a short time, but you seemed a fine man. May you rest in peace."
You, Kate, and Sophie take your leave of the grave and head off to find Locke, leaving Olaf in peace. Soon, you find her in the mess hall, eating a meal with a group of fishmen. When she sees you and the others, she excuses herself and meets you halfway.
"How are you feeling?" she asks.

> You say "Well... well enough, anyways. We just came from Olaf's grave. I'm terribly sorry."
"Don't be," she says. "It's a sailor's life. We all know the risks."
You nod.
"I suppose so."
"So what are your plans now?" she asks.

> You say "Rest, mainly. Once I can walk without pain again, we will continue north, but before then... Ochirea owes us a great deal. They won't mind us taking advantage of the Queen's hospitality for a while longer."
"I suppose not," she says. "Well, let me know when we are to leave."
"We will," you say.
You turn and walk back towards your room, leaning on Kate for support.

> You say "I think that was enough excitement for my first day up. I'll probably rest the remainder of the day."
"Probably for the best," Kate says.

You say goodbye to the women and slowly walk into your room, where you collapse onto your bed and fall into a deep, dreamless sleep.
In the morning, you awaken to a gentle nudge. You open your eyes and find Sophie standing next to your bed.

> You say "Good morning, Sophie."
"It is," she says. "Do you want to explore the city today?"
You nod.
"Alright," you say. "Give me a few minutes to get ready."
"Okay," she says. "I'll be in the hall."
Sophie turns and leaves, and you climb out of bed. After getting dressed, you grab your weapons and head out of the room to find Sophie.

> You say "I'm able to walk a bit more today, but I'm counting on you to catch me if my leg gives out."
"I understand," she says.
The two of you head to the courtyard, where you find Kate already there, leaning against the wall. She looks at you and smiles.
"Feeling better today?"

> You say "I am. Good morning, Kate."
"Good morning," she replies.
You lean against the wall next to Kate, while Sophie stands in front of you.

> You say "So what's the plan today? Either of you have somewhere particular in mind? Ochirea is a massive city, after all."
"I thought we might go the the Royal Museum," Kate says.
"Sounds good to me," you say.
"Me three!" Sophie says, excitedly.
You chuckle at her response.

> You say "Not every day humans get a chance to explore a hidden city under the ocean filled with mer-people, leviathans, and everything in between. Let's learn all we can, write a book about it when we all go home!"
"That sounds like fun!"
Kate smiles at your answer.
"Shall we go, then?"
You nod, and the three of you set off for the Royal Museum.

The museum is massive, but unlike most museums you've been to, it's very interactive. You walk past glass cases filled with different sea shells and sculptures, but also past exhibits where you can control a model ship with a windlass, or take a turn on a water-powered mill.

> You check out exhibits on how the city was founded.
The exhibit describes the city's history, starting with the exodus that founded it. The Royal Family and others fled a war-torn sea in the South, and swam North into uncharted waters in search of a new home. There, they faced hardship after hardship, from sea monsters to the harsh environment itself. Eventually, they found their new home.
It goes on to describe how the underwater city grew from coral and evolved from there, with various magical spells shaping it. You see paintings of Ochirea's evolution, from a small cluster of coral to the massive city-under-the-sea it is today.

> You say "Amazing..."
"It's certainly something, isn't it?" Kate says.
The three of you walk on, looking at the various exhibits. You reach an exhibit about the city's involvement in the Great Merrow War. You stop and read through it.
"Kate, look," you say, pointing at the description of how the Merrow attacked Ochirea.
"I know," she says. "This was... It was terrible."
You walk on, reading more of the descriptions.

> You gesture at paintings of monstrous half-human half-crab soldiers. "Seems the Svelk have been at the throats of the city for a long time."
"They have," Kate says, stopping to read the plaques. "The merrow attacked first, but that was just because they were paranoid and violent. The svelk, however... They're a different story."
"What do you mean? They're both horrible monsters," you say.
"The merrow are just violent. The svelk, though... They planned everything.

> You read over her shoulder as she explains.
"See, the merrow are strong, but they're not exactly strategic. The Svelk... Well, they're both," she says. "The svelk attacked because they wanted to take the city for themselves."

You continue walking, reaching an exhibit about how Ochirea managed to defend against the Svelk forces. You read over it, learning all you can.

> You say "Seems our encounter with the Svelk was a continuation of a centuries-long conflict. I'm glad we were there to protect the Queen..."
"As am I," Kate says.

> You grin at Sophie. "And that your elementals were there to protect us! You were a force of nature," you laugh.
Sophie smiles and blushes, looking back at you.
"I just did what I could," she says, smiling.
The three of you continue walking through the museum, examining all the different displays. Eventually, you reach the end of the museum.
"And that's all there is to see," Kate says. "Are you ready to head back?"

> You say "Do you think we could find somewhere to eat? I know the palace feeds us, but it might be nice to check out a local tavern."
"Oh, sure," Kate says. "I know just the place."
You and Sophie follow Kate through the city. Soon, you arrive at a large tavern.
"This is it," Kate says.

> You look at the aquatic tavern.
The tavern is covered in seaweed and other aquatic plants, giving it a fresh, humid look. The door is a large barnacle-encrusted shell, held up by two grey underwater rocks.
The three of you enter the tavern. Inside, several Merfolk sit at tables, drinking with each other. At the bar, a tall, sahuagin with ragged fins makes drinks for them. He smiles and nods at you as you enter.
"What can I get for you, land lovers?" he asks.

> You laugh as you look for a table. "At this rate, we won't be land lovers much longer! Your city puts most others I have seen to shame," you say.
"That's good to hear," the bartender nods. "What can I get for you?"
"Give me a rum, cactus juice and melon juice," Sophie says.

> You say "Something light for me, please. Your choice."
"I'll give you a light rum, orange juice and pineapple juice," the bartender says. "It's one of our more popular drinks."
"And you, miss?" he asks Kate.

"I'll have a whiskey, straight," Kate says.
The bartender nods and begins mixing the drinks. Soon, he sets them in front of you.

> You pass the menu between the three of you and order food.
The three of you pass the menu around and look it over.
"So, what are you having?" the bartender asks.
"Give us three fish and chips," Kate says.
"Make that four," you say. "I'm starving."
"Four it is," the bartender nods.
The three of you sit and chat as you wait for your food. Soon, the bartender returns with your food.
"Here you are," he says. "Enjoy your meal."
The three of you begin eating. The fish is fresh and delicious, and the chips are thick and warm. You enjoy the meal thoroughly.

> You propose a quiet toast. "To us," you say.
"To us," Kate and Sophie echo.
You all finish your drinks and enjoy the delicious meal, talking and laughing the whole while.

> You keep the drinks coming into the evening.
You continue drinking into the evening, enjoying the tavern. As night begins to fall, the tavern begins to fill up with more Merfolk. The three of you are having a wonderful time, and you're all quite drunk.
"So, do you think you'll settle here?" Sophie asks.

> You say "Honestly, maybe... It would be nice to retire here when adventures lose their luster. Not for many years, though!"
"Ha, yeah, you say that now," Sophie says. "I'm having a great time here! I'll probably settle down when all is done."
Kate is face down on the table, snoring softly, with a half-finished drink in her hands.
"Poor thing," you say, grinning.
"Well, she drank more than us," Sophie says, smiling as she watches Kate sleep.

> You say "So... Sophie, while the alcohol makes me brave enough to say it... Can I ask you a question?"
"Sure," Sophie says, smiling.

> You say "Do... do you think Kate likes me? "
"Well, I mean, she talks about you all the time. And you're cute. Of course she likes you," Sophie says.

> You say "I'm cute? "
"Of course you're cute," Sophie says. "And brave, and fearless."
You blush as Sophie smiles.
"Well, I have to be brave, for all our sakes," you stammer.

> You look down at the sleeping Kate. "I think I like her too, Sophie."
"Oh?" Sophie says.
"Yeah," you say. "I think I've got more than a crush."
Sophie smiles.
"Just go for it then, Emilia," Sophie says.
You look back down at Kate, and blush.

> You say "Maybe when the dragon is dead... "
"Maybe," Sophie says, giving you a hug. "Though she might not wait."
You look at Sophie, smiling. You feel your head spin as you try to focus on her.
"Whoa," you say. "I think I've had too much to drink."
You hear a loud rumbling from your stomach.
"I think that fish and chips has finally caught up with you," Sophie laughs.

> You say "Let's rouse Kate and get back to the palace."
"Yeah, let's," Sophie says.
You wake Kate with some difficulty, and the three of you head out of the tavern and begin the walk back to the palace. The walk is a short one, and soon you find yourself in your room. You collapse into bed, the room spinning.
"I'll leave you to sleep, then," Sophie says.
"Yeah... see you tomorrow, you two," you say.
"Sweet dreams, Emilia," Sophie says as she turns to leave with a barely-conscious Kate.
You close your eyes, and soon sleep takes you.

An Unexpected Observer

The next day, you wake to a knock on the door.
"Emilia, it's me!" you hear Kate say.

> You say "Ugh... Come in..."
Kate opens the door and enters, a wide grin on her face.
"Good morning, Emilia," she says. "I trust you slept well."

> You say "Terribly. How are you so chipper? You were even more drunk than I was."
"I don't know," Kate says. "I woke up before you, and I feel great. How are you feeling?"
"My head hurts, my leg hurts, and my chest... also hurts," you say. "But I'll live."
"That's the spirit!" Kate says, laughing.
You stare at Kate as she helps herself to a glass of water on your bedside table. She's an odd one. You're not sure if she's flirting with you, or what her deal is. You've spent a fair amount of time with her over the past few months, but she's still a bit of a mystery. You've never thought about her in a romantic way, but then, your mind has been focused on other things. Still, she's pretty, and seemingly interested in you. Perhaps it's something you should consider after all...

> You shake your head, grinning as you think back to dinner yesterday. "Damn you, Sophie..." you say under your breath before sitting up and stretching.
"What was that?" Kate asks, looking at you.

> You say "Nothing, nothing. Say, has there been any word from Quesn Kitsu? About whether she has decided to grant us aid as we go dragonslaying?"
"Not that I've heard," Kate says, shaking her head. "She's probably still thinking it over."
You nod, and step towards the dresser to grab your swordbelt and sheathe.

> You say "What do you say to some sparring today? Taking it easy, of course, but I think some mild exercise would be good for me."
You smile at Kate, who returns the smile.

"That sounds fun," she says. "I'll warn you if I think you're pushing yourself too hard."
"Thank you," you say, smiling.
You strap on your swordbelt, and then put on a tunic.

> You say "Hey, I have an idea. Do you think Sophie would be up to letting us practice against her elementals? That way she can work on her control of them at the same time."
"Yeah, I'm sure she'd be happy to do that," Kate says. "We will have to wait for her, though."

> You raise an eyebrow. "Is she not in the palace?"
"Oh, no. She said she wanted to explore the city a bit more, and that was a couple hours ago."
Kate smiles. "I'm sure she'll be fine."
A few hours later, Sophie arrives, carrying a glass jar full of purple vapor.
"Hey there, ladies," she says. "I'm back."
You raise an eyebrow, and stare at the jar.
"What's that?" you ask.
"Oh, this?" Sophie asks.

> You laugh. "Yeah, that!"
"A jar of concentrated purple mist," Sophie says. "The apothecary said it has healing properties."

> You say "Oh, wow. Nice find, Sophie."
"Thanks," Sophie says.
You and Kate exchange a glance, before turning to look at Sophie again. She raises an eyebrow, sighing.
"What?" she asks.

> You say "What do you say to some sparring? You summon an elemental or two for Kate and I to practice on. "
"Oh, yeah. Sure," Sophie says. "I'd love to see you two go all out."
You turn to Kate, raising an eyebrow. Kate nods eagerly in response, smiling.

> You say "Let's do it, then. The palace has to have a courtyard for training somewhere."
"Yeah, it does," Sophie says. "Come on, I'll take you to it."

You turn, following Sophie out of the room.
The three of you walk through the palace, heading down several flights of stairs and through a few hallways. The palace is huge, and you seem to be crossing all of it to get to the training courtyard. Eventually, you reach a heavy wooden door, which opens into a large stone courtyard. You step out into it, looking around. The stones are covered with dried mud, with patches of grass growing in the cracks. Tall trees line the courtyard, and you can see another, smaller wooden door on the opposite side.
"This is the training courtyard," Sophie says.
"It's perfect," you say, smiling.
Sophie smiles in response, and looks over at Kate.
"Well?" she asks. "Shall we?"
Kate raises an eyebrow, smiling.
"Let's," she says.
Sophie turns, walking over to the center of the courtyard, and begins to concentrate.

> You say "Alright, Sophie! Summon whatever type of elemental you want. Tell it to go easy on us!"
Sophie nods, smiling at you.
"Of course," she says, smiling.
She stands in the middle of the courtyard, turning in a small circle as she looks up at the sky.
"Hmm..." she says, closing her eyes.
You stare at her, waiting for her to complete her spell. After a moment, you feel a gust of wind hit you in the face, and look up to see a whirlwind forming. The whirlwind grows larger and larger, eventually forming into a humanoid shape. The whirlwind stops spinning, and you find yourself staring at a human-shaped being composed entirely of wind.

> You say "Amazing, Sophie!"
"Thanks!" Sophie says, smiling.
The elemental tilts its head slightly, before exploding forward.

> You shout "Woah!" and raise your magic shield to block the coming wind.
Your shield shimmers and shakes as the elemental's wind smashes into it, keeping it from knocking you back. The elemental attempts to push forward, but your shield holds, and it flies back a few feet.

> You say "Kate, do your thing!"
Kate, quick as lighting, hurls several knives at the elemental. The elemental swats the knives aside with it's wind shield, roaring.
The wind elemental flies forward, faster than you would have expected.

> You raise your shield and shift your weight to your good leg to compensate for your injuries as you stand your ground.
The elemental flies forward, faster than you would have expected. Your shield takes the hit of the elemental, and you shift your weight, moving back a single step as you feel the wind buffeting your body.
The elemental slams into your shield again and again, and you find yourself being pushed back into the courtyard. You're slammed from the side as the wind buffets into you, sending you skidding across the ground.

> You stand back up and charge it with your shield while you watch Kate attack the elemental.
The elemental takes a single step back, almost wary of you. You keep your shield up, watching it carefully.
You wait for Kate's next attack, watching as she throws another set of knives. The knives fly forward and embed themselves into the wind elemental, which roars. Kate appears where the knives landed, ripping them out and kicking off, back out of the whirlwind creature's partially insubstantial form.
The whirlwind's eye seems to follow Kate, and it flies forward. Kate barely manages to get out of the way in time, landing on her feet as the elemental slams into the wall behind her.

> You charge forward and get between Kate and the elemental, shield held aloft to intercept its attacks.
You feel the elemental slam into your shield, the force of it nearly knocking you off your feet. The elemental begins to push forward, and you struggle to hold it back.

> You glance down at Kate and wink, lowering your stance so that she can use you as a springboard to attack the creature.
Kate leaps over you, using your shoulders as a step. She flies forward and jams both of her daggers into the creature, with more force than you thought she was capable of. The creature roars as it explodes into a whirlwind of pure air and disappears.
The two of you turn to see Locke clapping her hands as she approaches.

"That was incredible," she says.

> You walk over to meet Locke with Kate and Sophie, breathing heavily.
The three of you walk over to meet the woman, who looks you up and down.
"Quite the fight," she says.

> You grin cockily. "Figured it would be good practice for all of us. Are you here to train too?"
"No," says the woman. "I'm here to train you."
You frown, not sure what she means.

> You say "Do you mean to spar with the three of us, Locke?"
"No," she says. "I'm here merely to teach. But first, I'm going to do something rather unorthodox. Please, watch closely."
Kate takes a step back as the woman stands in the center of the courtyard, next to the rock. She closes her eyes, taking a deep breath. Slowly, her body begins to glow a faint blue.
The woman begins to float into the air. The glow around her intensifies for a moment, before dying down.

> You say "Locke... you're a mage?!"
"Yes," she says softly, opening her eyes. "I'm a mage."
The woman floats higher into the air, remaining there.

Magic

Locke and the Elements

> You look at Kate and Sophie.
Kate looks nervous, while Sophie looks fascinated.
"What are you doing?" asks Kate.
"I'm levitating," says the woman simply.
She hovers in the air, staring down at you.

> You say "Are you here to teach us... how to do that?"
"Yes," says the woman, nodding slowly. "I am here to teach you how to use magic. You three seem to have a natural aptitude for it."
"Natural aptitude?" asks Kate.

> You look down at your hands, confused.
Your hands are beginning to glow a faint blue. You watch as the glow fades away, then repeats.
"Yes," says the woman. "At least, compared to most people."
"And you can teach us how to use it?" asks Sophie.
"I can teach you a few tricks," says the woman. "Whether or not you'll be able to use those tricks in a practical situation is up to you."

> You look to Kate and Sophie, then to your glowing hands, and then back to Locke. "We would be honored."
"Good," says the woman. "Then let's get started."
She floats down to your level, her feet gently touching the grassy earth.
"Now, gather 'round. I'll be teaching you about the four main elements: fire, water, air and earth."
The woman pulls out a piece of chalk, drawing a circle on the ground. She then draws a cross inside the circle, with each line and curve making up.
"These are the four elements," she repeats. "They can be manipulated and used to your advantage."
She walks over to the circle, placing her hand over the fire symbol.

"The first element is fire. It is bright, powerful and dangerous. However, it can be harnessed to do great deeds."
She walks over to the water symbol.
"The second element is water. It is calm, cool and collected. But it can be just as powerful as fire."
She walks over to the air symbol.
"The third element is air. It's invisible to most people, but without it, we would all suffocate."
She walks over to the earth symbol.
"The final element is earth. It holds up our world, and everything on it."
The woman turns around, facing you three.
"These are the four main elements. You may or may not be able to use all of them, but you should try to find at least one you are comfortable with."
She steps out of the circle, walking towards you three.
"Now, we'll try with you first," she says, pointing to Sophie.
"Try what?" asks Sophie.
"A spell," says the woman. "To see what element you are most connected to."
"I've never cast a spell without my belt," says Sophie.
"You won't need to," says the woman. "Just try to do what I do."
Sophie steps into the circle, nodding as she does so. The woman walks back over to the symbol of fire, raising her hand. She presses her palm against the center of the symbol, closing her eyes.
"Imagine the element, but don't visualize it with your eyes. Visualize it with your mind," she says.
Sophie closes her eyes, immediately taking in a deep breath. She slowly opens her eyes, raising her hand. She places it on top of the fire symbol, but nothing happens. The woman shakes her head, and repeats the process with the next element.
"Now water," says the woman. "Try to connect with the element of water."
Sophie nods, closing her eyes once more. She slowly opens her eyes again, placing her hand on top of the water symbol. A few seconds pass, and water explodes outwards, forming a pool around the symbol.
"I did it!" she says in awe.
"Congratulations," smiles the woman. "You have a connection to water."
Sophie steps out of the circle, as Kate takes her place.
"Now, earth is a bit different. You don't need to close your eyes, but you should try to feel nature around you."

Kate nods, closing her eyes for a few seconds before opening them again. She places her hand on the earth symbol, and immediately begins to shake. She tries to hold her hand in place, but she ends up ripping it away after a few seconds.
"That one... wasn't right," she says, looking back up at Locke.
"Don't worry about it," you say. "You just need to find what you're best at."
"Thank you, Em," she smiles.
The woman steps into the circle and places Kate's hand on the air symbol. She closes her eyes, and begins to mutter something incomprehensible. After a few seconds, the wind picks up within the room, blowing all of your hair back. Your hair covers your eyes, and you have to brush it away to see.
"Ah, there it is," says the woman, smiling. "Now, keep focusing on it."
Kate begins to nod, and the woman steps out of the circle. Kate raises her hands up to the sky, as if trying to reach up and grab the air.As she raises her hands up, a whirlwind begins to form. It picks Kate up a few inches into the air, but she then freezes in place, hovering above the symbol.
"I did it! I did it!" she says in excitement.
The woman nods, and walks away from the circle. Kate slowly floats back down to the ground, as you all stand around the circle.
"One more," says the woman. "Your turn."
The woman beckons you towards the circle.
"What do I need to do?" you ask.
"Just place your hand on one of the symbols, visualize it, and I'll do the rest."
You look at the symbols, and quickly realize which one to pick.
"I'll try earth," you say.
You place your hand on the symbol, as the woman begins to chant once more. You close your eyes, and try to feel the earth around you. The room begins to shake, as the symbol glows brighter. You fall to your knees as the shaking intensifies, and open your eyes. You're greeted by a wall of stone, which begins to form around you, closing off the circle.
You try to stand, but the wall keeps you in place. The woman continues to chant, as your ears begin to pop. You close your eyes, and focus on your element: Earth. You try to move the earth, but nothing happens. You keep trying, and slowly you feel the earth move beneath you. You're not sure how, but you know you are causing it.
"Keep going!" Locke cries from outside the circle.
You begin to try and raise the earth further, but it's too late. The pressure has gotten to you, and your head begins to feel fuzzy. You collapse against the wall, and lose consciousness.

> You dream of suffocating earth.
You're buried under tons of earth, which pins your body to the ground. You try to struggle, but can barely move an inch. You scream for help, but nobody hears you. You're suffocating. You can't breathe. Desperately, you claw at the earth, but it's too late. You run out of oxygen, and your vision goes black.
As you slowly suffocate, your mind is filled with visions.
Your family and friends dance in front of you, mocking you. Your whole life passes in front of your eyes, but it's just a blur. Everything is pain, loneliness and misery.
You regret everything in your life. You regret being kind to people, because they only hurt you in the end. You regret being loyal, because people only take advantage of you. You wish you had been a sociopath, only thinking of yourself. It would have made life so much easier.
Then, your mind goes dark.
Your eyes shoot open and you see four hazy figures around you. You feel hands on your body, lifting you up. You begin to cough up dirt, and struggle against the hands. You manage to get to your feet, as your vision begins to clear and you are back in the courtyard.

> You say "What... what happened? Did I do it wrong?"
"No," says Locke. "You did everything perfectly."
You stare at the wall of stone that once blocked your escape, now destroyed.

> You say "Kate, Sophie, are you okay?"
"I'm fine," says Kate, slowly standing up.
"I'm okay," says Sophie, also standing up.
The three of you look at each other, shaken.

> You look around at the damage to the courtyard.
The courtyard is destroyed, the trees are gone and the stones are broken. You run your hand across the torn ground, visibly shaking.

> You say "Did I do... all of this? Was that my power?"
"Yes," says Kate, kneeling down and examining the stone ridges.
You kneel down and trace your fingers along the ridges of stone, tracing the path of destruction your power carved through the earth.
You realize that your power isn't evil. It's a tool, like any other. Like an axe. An axe can be used to build a house, or it can be used to take a life.

> But you couldn't control this tool. It controlled you.
"I couldn't control it. But I think... with training, I can."
Your heart beats rapidly, and your palms are sweaty.

> You lean against Kate and look at Locke.
"It's a lot to take in, isn't it?" asks Locke, as Kate leans her head against yours.
You nod slowly.
"It's terrifying."
"I know. But you'll get used to it. All magic wielders do," Locke says.
You slowly reach out and hold Kate's hand. She holds your hand back, squeezing it reassuringly.

> You glance between Sophie and Kate and, seeing the determination on their face, you turn back to Locke. "Teach us," you ask. "Teach us control."
"That's the spirit," says Locke, with a small smile.
Sophie smiles back, and Kate looks on with a steely gaze.
"But not today. Return here tomorrow, and we shall begin proper lessons."

> You say "Locke... One more thing, if I may ask."
"Yes?"

> You say "Why are you teaching us? "
"What do you mean?

> You say "You didn't have to reveal your power to us, or reveal our aptitude. You could have just taken us to the Northern Wastes, returned to your home, and left us to complete our quest and slay the Great Dragon. Why teach us?"
"You're right. I didn't have to. I wanted to."
"Why? Why go through the trouble? Why not leave us to fend for ourselves?"
"Kate, Sophie, Emilia. You three bear a great burden. I want to help you. You three are now part of a noble tradition. You three will be legendary figures in history. Future adventurers will look up to you, and children will be named after you. You three have a duty to your kingdom, and a greater duty to history. I want to help you achieve that."
"What about you? What do you get out of this?"
"Me?" asks Locke, raising an eyebrow. "I get the satisfaction of knowing I've made history's newest darlings into the heroes they will be known as."

> You study Locke's face, trying to discern any hint of another motive.

You search her face for any signs of malice, or any other ulterior motives, but find nothing. She seems to be telling the truth.

> You creakily stand, holding onto Kate for support. "I guess... I guess we'll see you tomorrow, then, Locke."
"Indeed. I'll see you all then."
You, Kate and Sophie slowly head out of the courtyard and begin the walk back to your rooms.
"What do you think?" asks Sophie.
"I don't know," you admit. "Something about all this seems... dangerous."
"Oh, I dunno," says Kate. "I trust her. She seems alright."

> You say "You didn't have your magic knock you unconscious... "
"That's true," says Kate, furrowing her eyebrows in thought.
"I'm sorry. I'm just afraid," you say.
"Why?" asks Sophie.

> You say "When I was trapped underneath the stone, I had horrible visions, of the earth overpowering me, suffocating me. I saw all of you, dancing around me, mocking, and I felt as if my life was worthless. It was nightmarish... I'm afraid of it happening again."
"Oh, honey," says Kate, stopping to cradle your head against her shoulder. "I'm sure that won't happen."
You nod, taking a deep breath. "I know," you say.

> You say "And even if it does... We need this strength. The upcoming battle against the Great Dragon seems more daunting every day. Magic will help."
"You're right," says Kate, kissing your head.
Sophie smiles and squeezes your shoulder reassuringly.
You all finish your walk in silence, returning to your rooms.
You collapse into bed, and sleep takes you almost instantly.

Kate

> You dream of you and your friends.

You stand, wearing armor made of interlocking iron rings, in the middle of a grassy field. The sky above you is cloudy and dark gray, and the wind is cold. You turn, noticing Kate and Sophie standing a few yards away. They are similarly dressed, in iron armor, with swords at their hips.
You begin to walk towards them, and they turn and walk away. "Hey!" you shout, and start walking after them. After a few steps, you realize their armor is much heavier than yours. You can see their arms moving, but you're not getting anywhere.
"Wait!" you shout, and suddenly you're falling, falling through the earth. You scream, but the sound is swallowed by the soil. You slam into the ground, and all is blackness...
"Em! Em, wake up!"
You groan, and open your eyes. You're lying on the floor, and Kate is shaking your shoulder. "What happened?"
"You were screaming in your sleep. I heard it from my room..."
"Just a nightmare," you say, sitting up and running your hands through your hair.
"You OK?"
"Yeah. I'm fine."
"Do you want to talk about it?"
You pause, then shake your head. "I... I'd rather not."
"Alright," she says. "I trust you."
You nod. "Thanks," you croak out.
"Are you OK to get back to sleep?"
You nod. "I'm fine. I just need to sleep this off."
"Alright. Get some rest," she says, leaning down and kissing you on the forehead.
You watch as she leaves the room.

> You say "Kate, wait..."
You follow her out the door, catching up with her. You grab her shoulder and turn her around. You kiss her on the lips, and she seems surprised for a moment, then she kisses you back.
"Thanks," you say. "For everything."
She smiles. "You're welcome. Now get some sleep."
You nod, and head back to bed.

> You dream of Kate.
You're standing in a dark, moonless night. The sky is cloudy and the air is cold. You shiver, but realize you're not even wearing a shirt. You look down at your body. You're back to your old, scrawny self.

The ground begins to crumble away beneath you, and you begin to fall into an abyss. You scream as you fall, curling up into a ball.
"Kate!" you shout, hoping she'll catch you.
The wind stops rushing by your ears, and you open your eyes.
The abyss stretches down into blackness below you as you feel familiar hands upon you. You're lowered onto solid ground, and you stand up, turning to face the one holding you.
"Kate?" you ask.
She smiles at you, although her eyes betray a hint of sadness. She's wearing a black cloak with a hood that's been drawn over her head, making it difficult to see her face.
"Hello, Emilia," she says in a shaky voice.
"What's going on? Why am I here?"
"I told you I would save you," she says. "That you would come back alive."
"I don't want to die," you say. "I want to stay here. With you."
Her smile falters. "I'm sorry, Emilia."
She draws back her hood, revealing her long dark hair and soft, beautiful face.
She opens her arms to embrace you.
"I love you," she says, "Goodbye."
"No! Wait! Please!" you shout, as she backs away and begins to disappear.
You scream as the ground beneath her crumbles away. She falls, tumbling down into the blackness...
"Kate!"
Your eyes snap open, and you sit up with a gasp.
You're in your bed in the palace, with light streaming through the window.

> You curl into a ball, pulling the sheets around you, and think about your nightmare.
You sit up slowly, and find yourself covered in sweat. Your heart is pounding, and you feel like you could throw up at any second. You take a deep breath, and climb out of bed.

> You shakily get dressed.
You put on your dark blue trousers, leather boots, a grey tunic, and a brown belt. You buckle it around your waist and tuck the end into your belt.

> You look at yourself in the mirror, and splash water on your face to mask the tears.

You walk over to the mirror, staring at your reflection. You quickly splash water in your face to mask the tears, before taking a deep breath.
You exit your room and walk out into the palace corridor.

> You go knock on Kate's door.
You walk over to Kate's room, and knock on the door.
"Come in," you hear Kate say.
You turn the door's handle and push the door open.
"Hey, Em."

> You say "Good morning... "
You attempt a smile. "Good morning, Kate."
"You alright? You look a little pale."

> You say "Just... more bad dreams."
You wring your hands and look at the floor. "Just... had another bad dream."
"Oh. Want to talk about it?"

> You say "No. I... I guess I just wanted to make sure you were okay."
"I'm fine, thanks. Come here."
You walk forward and embrace her. She puts her arms around you and holds you tightly, rubbing your back with her hands.

> You say "I'm afraid, Kate."
"I know. I am too."
You embrace for a moment, before sitting down on the side of the bed. You stare at the ground, as Kate sits beside you and wraps an arm around your shoulders.

> You say "What are you afraid of?"
"I'm afraid that I won't be able to protect you. That we'll get there and we won't be strong enough, and then what'll happen? I'm afraid of losing you."

> You say "My dream... I dreamed of you. Protecting me, saving me, and then... "
You take a deep breath. "I don't want to lose you, Kate."
You feel Kate squeeze you tightly, then she sits up straight and gives you a kiss on the forehead.
"We're all going to be together. We'll protect each other, and we won't lose anyone."
"I love you, Kate."

"I love you too, Em."
"Let's go find Sophie. We've got training soon."
You stand up, and head to the door. You open it, revealing Locke leaning against the opposite wall.

> You say "Oh, uh, hello Locke. Is it time already?"
"No, it's not time yet. I was listening to your conversation through the door."
You feel your face flush red as you stare at the floor. You're sure Kate's doing the same.

> You say "Uhm. "
"Relax. I'll leave you two alone. When you're done, meet me in the courtyard."
With those words, she strolls off down the hall.

> You say "What is with that woman?"
"I don't know, but I feel so embarrassed."
"It's fine. She didn't hear anything important. I suppose..."
Kate raises an eyebrow, smiling at you.
"You suppose what?"
"Nothing."
You grin and give her a quick peck on the cheek, then leave the room.

You Dream Of Infinity

> You gather your weapons and armor, and wait in the hall for Kate and Sophie. As you wait for your companions, you take a moment to admire the decorations of the palace. Many of the nobles and royals have paintings done of themselves, or have statues erected in their honor. While these people are definitely important, they all look the same to you. They're all variations of regal merpeople, with piercing eyes, iridescent scales, and serious looks on their faces. The only thing that really changes is their color scheme. Some have more green scales, some have more blue, some are even a mixture of both. Their expressions are always the same.

> You yawn and rub your eyes as you wait.
When your companions arrive, you all head to the courtyard from yesterday to meet Locke. When you arrive, she's already waiting for you.
"Hello, ladies. Did you sleep well?"

> You say "I wish."
"I'm sorry to hear that. Did you have a bad dream?"
You glare at her.
"Yes, as a matter of fact I did."
"Oh dear, what was it?

> You rub your temples. "Must you antagonize me? Weren't you just yesterday fawning over us as future heroes of the realm, or some nonsense?"
"I was, but I've realized that you're a lot more fun when you're angry."
You sigh, and Kate giggles.
"OK. Fine. Whatever."

> You look around, shaking the last of the sleep fog from your mind. "So what's first on the magic curriculum, Locke?"
"I'd say it's a primer on the nature of magical energy, but that would be too long for us to begin novices with. So, we're going to start off with the energy within you, and how to channel it."

The three of you sit in a circle on the stone ground of the courtyard, and begin to meditate. You close your eyes, and begin to concentrate on your breathing. You feel the earth stretch around you, with more clarity than ever before.

> You attempt to broaden your sense of earth, and see beyond the courtyard.
You open your eyes, and see that you are still in the courtyard, but you can sense the entirety of it. You can sense everything in the palace, and out to a few miles.

> You say "Locke, I... I can feel the earth around me, and... I can see everything through it. Well, not see, but... In the courtyard, the palace, and beyond..."
"You can sense everything? So you could find your way around anywhere in the palace?"
You nod.
"And you can feel the underground waterways that run from the river to the palace?"

> You concentrate, and try to feel running water underneath the ground.
"There's a lot of water, but..."
You close your eyes and concentrate harder. Suddenly, you are immersed in a feeling of pure coolness. You can sense the running water clearly now. There... That's the path it's flowing in.
"There's a river flowing underneath us, and I can sense it clearly now. It... It feels really cool."

> You push against your limits, and broaden your sense even further.
Your eyes snap open, and you feel your mind fill with a pure feeling of earth and stone. You can sense every grain, and feel the world around you.
It's immense. It's so much. It's too much. It's hurting. The pain is immense, and you fall to the ground.
"Emi! Are you alright?" Kate asks, but you can barely hear her over the pain in your mind. You can feel the world crumbling away.

> You say "I can't... It's too much. I can't keep... "
"What's going on? What's happening to her?" Kate asks.
You're dimly aware of your surroundings, and you feel them slipping away from you.

> You dream of infinity.

The world is nothing. There is no world. There is no anything. There is nothing to be. You are not, for there is nothing to be. You do not, for there is nothing to do. You do not exist, for there is nothing to exist.
The world, it's... Crumbling away? No, not crumbling. Splintering. It's splintering apart, and you can feel it all.
And then, suddenly, there's nothing.
There's nothing but you. There's nothing to see but you. There's nothing to hear but you. There's nothing to feel but you. You're alone, in the void. You're everything and nothing at the same time.
There is no world.
There is no infinity.
There is only you, in the void.
But then, something happens. A ripple, a movement, a change in the nothingness. A feeling, a sense, a concept appears in your mind. Something is there, other than you.
"Hello?" you ask.
Something is there, other than you.
"Who's there?"
You feel it. You sense it. There is something else, other than you.
"I am!"
The ripple appears again in your mind. It's a feeling, a concept, a word...
"Hello!"
The ripple becomes stronger. The ripple is a voice.
"Hello! Can you hear me?"
The voice is clear now. It's loud and strong and full of life. You feel it, you sense it, you know it.
"Yes! I can hear you! Hello!"
You feel the ripples again. It's a conversation, a dialogue, communication.
"I'm sorry! It was hard to hear! What is your name?"
"I'm Lavender. It's nice to meet you!"
The ripples fade again. The concept, the word, the name disappears from your mind. It's... Sad? Strange. But it's there, and you know it's a concept.
"My name is Emilia!"
You can feel the word appearing in your mind. You know the concept. It's your name.
"It's nice to meet you, Emilia!"
The ripple appears again. The word is strong in your mind now. The concept is clear.
"Hello, Lavender!"

The ripple becomes a voice once more. The concept becomes clear.
"It's nice to meet you, Emilia! Do you have a family? Where are you from? What do you like to do?"
A wave of emotions appears in your mind. You know the concept. Family, home, location, activity... All these things appear in your mind.

> You say "My friends are my family! I am from Larion! I am an adventurer!"
"You're an adventurer?" the voice asks.
"Yes! I want to see the world, and travel!"
The ripples appear once more. The concepts appear in your mind. You can see them.
"Do you like to travel?"
You feel happy at the concept of travelling. The concept of sight appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"Yes! I want to travel the world, and see everything there is to see!"
The concept of sight appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of sight appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.

> You say "Lavender, who are you?"
"I am your friend!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of friendship appears in your mind.
"Are you my only friend?"
The concept of friendship appears in your mind. The concept of sight appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of sight appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"I want to be your friend!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of friendship appears in your mind.

> You say "Where are you?"
"I am by your side!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"Where are you?"

The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world.

> You say "I don't know where I am."
"You are in Ochirea!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"But I don't know where that is."
The ripple appears in your mind.

> You say "It is under the sea. Are you in Ochirea?"
"Yes, I am!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"Where are you?"
The ripple appears in your mind.

> You say "I am in the courtyard of the palace, training with magic!"
"Hello!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind.

> You say "Are you here too?"
"Yes, I am!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"I'm scared!"
The ripple appears in your mind.
"You are not alone."

> You say "Who is with me? "

"I am!"
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind.

> You say "Lavender, I can't stay here! My friends need me!"
"I am here."
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"They need your help!"
The ripple appears in your mind.
"No, I am here."
The ripple appears in your mind.

> You say "Are there two of you?"
"I am here."
The ripple appears in your mind. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen. The concept of location appears in your mind. You can see the world. You can see everything you've seen.
"I need to go back."
The ripple appears in your mind.
"Yes, I am."
The ripple appears in your mind.

> You try to wake up.

Learning Control

You wake up.

> You look around the courtyard for Locke, Kate, and Sophie.
Kate is asleep on your shoulder, snoring softly. Locke is teaching Sophie water spells on the other end of the courtyard.
Sophie holds out her hands and makes water rise up from the floor, forming it into a ball. She throws the ball at the ground, and it splatters on the ground.
"Try to make the ball a little smaller," says Locke.
Sophie repeats the process, making a slightly smaller ball. The ball hits the ground and bounces back up, splashing Sophie in the face.
"I got it!" says Sophie.
"You sure?" asks Locke.
"Yes," says Sophie, making the ball disappear.
"Alright, then let's try something else."

> You watch them for a while.
You watch them for a while, before Kate wakes up.
"Hello," she says sleepily.
"Hi," you reply.

> You say "What... what happened to me, Kate? We were meditating, and then... "
"I don't know," says Kate. "You just... you just collapsed. I couldn't wake you up. I tried everything."
She stares at you for a moment.
"Are you OK now?"
"Yeah, I think so," you say. "I'm just... I'm really tired."
"Well, then let's get some rest."

> You say "Did Locke have anything to say when I passed out during her exercise? "
"She said that it looked like a 'energetic trance', or something. That you would be fine, and we should just let you rest until you came to."
"She didn't try anything?" you ask, surprised.
"No," says Kate, "she just told me to wait until you woke up of your own accord."

> You sigh as you watch Sophie continue to learn water spells. "I'm not very good at magic, I think."
You watch as Sophie makes a thin stream of water rise up from the ground and then break into a rainstorm around her.
"It's OK," Kate says. "Sophie is just a natural."

> You say "Were you able to learn air or wind spells? Like levitation, or something?"
"A little," says Kate. "I'm not very good at it."
"Show me," you say.
"OK," says Kate. "I can't do anything too big or too complicated, though."
She takes a deep breath, closes her eyes, and strains for a moment. Then, a large pebble rises slowly off of the ground and floats over to you.
You catch the pebble, surprised.
"I can only lift light things," says Kate. "And just for a few seconds."

> You say "Still, that's amazing. Well done."
Kate smiles.
"Thanks," she says.
You look over at Sophie, who is still making the rainstorm around her.

> You say "At least one of us took to magic..."
"At least one of us took to it," you say.
Kate looks over at Sophie.
"Yeah," she says, her voice dropping, "but not the way you did."

> You drop your voice to match Kate's whisper. "It was so much... It felt so powerful. I was insignificant compared to the magic, and had no control.
"I was scared, Kate. I thought I'd lose myself."
"Do you regret it?" she asks.
You look over at Sophie, then back at Kate.

> You say "No. I had to try. And... I won't give up. We need all the strength we can get to survive."
Kate nods.
"Yeah," she says, "I understand."
You watch as Sophie controls the water.

> You wait for Locke to finish teaching Sophie, and then approach the mage.
After some time, Sophie manages to control the water to Locke's satisfaction.
"Well done," says Locke, smiling. "Continue these exercises."
"Locke, may I speak with you?" you say.
"Of course," says the mage, walking over to you.
"What is it, Emilia?"
You look at Kate, then at Sophie, then back at the mage.

> You say "I want to try controlling earth again."
"You what?" Locke asks harshly.
"I want to try controlling earth again," you say. "I'm ready."
"You passed out during simple meditation a few hours ago. You are not ready."
"I'm sorry," you say, "but I've thought it over, and I'm not willing to give up. I want to try again."
"Why the sudden change of heart?" asks the mage. "You seemed so afraid a bit ago."

> You look back at Kate, and again at Sophie. "For their sake. Slaying the dragon is my quest. I need to be strong, and protect them."
You look back at Kate, and again at Sophie.
"For their sake. Slaying the dragon is my quest. I need to be strong, and protect them."
"That's... a nice thought," says the mage, her voice dropping in tone. "But it won't change anything."
"I'm ready," you say. "I want to try again."
"Fine," says the mage. "Come."
You nod, and follow Locke away from the other two. She sits down on the ground, and you do the same.
"Close your eyes," she says.
You do so, and immediately feel the energy of the Earth flowing through you.

> You say "Locke, is there a way to turn it off? In case it overwhelms me again?"
"There is," says the mage.

> You say "Please, I beg of you, help me learn it."
"I don't think that will be necessary," says the mage. "Just focus on the energy, and try to release it in a controlled manner."

> You say "But..."

You sigh, and begin to focus on the energy. It feels foreign, almost unnatural in your body. It swirls and dances about, flowing through you like a river of lava.

> You attempt to direct the energy towards the earth around you.
You focus, and feel the energy begin to flow through your body. You try to direct it towards the ground, but nothing happens.
"Concentrate!" hisses the mage.
"I am!" you snap.
"Concentrate, or this will be useless."
You grit your teeth, and try once again.

> You direct the energy out of your body and into the earth, and cause the earth to move.
You feel the energy leave your body, and the ground begins to shake. Your concentration wavers, and the energy flows back into your body.

> You say "I'm sorry, I just..."
"Shut up," says the mage. "You're not focused."
You grit your teeth, and try once again.
You take a deep breath, and focus.

> You empty your mind as much as possible, ignoring the sensations of the earth around you, as you attempt to create a pillar of earth between you and Locke.
You feel the energy leave your body, and a thick pillar of earth propels itself from the ground. You focus on it, trying to keep it stable, but it quickly crumbles.
"Good," says the mage. "You're learning."
"Good," you say, not really feeling good about it at all.
"You'll get the hang of it, Emilia," Locke says.

> You say "Can you teach me to shut off my... tremorsense, I suppose? It is hard to ignore all the sensations."
"You already know how to do it," says the mage.
"I do?"
"Of course. You did it instinctively when you were young."

> You say "I shut off my magic as a child? Is that why you had to unlock it yesterday?"
"I didn't unlock it," says the mage. "I merely let you know it was there."

> You say "Is it common, for children to repress their own power?"
"That... does happen. If a child's power is overwhelming, or they find it painful, they'll often reject it."
"Oh."
The mage smiles, and places a hand on your shoulder.
"You'll be fine," she says. "Just keep at it. Soon, you'll have full control over your power."
The mage removes her hand from your shoulder.

> You concentrate on your tremorsense, and limit the scope of what you can sense to within a few dozen meters of you.
You take a deep breath, and concentrate on your senses. You feel your mind push outwards, as you attempt to limit the scope of your tremorsense to within a few dozen meters of you. It's tiring work, but after a few minutes, you find that you can now only sense what's within that radius.
"Good," says the mage. "That will do for today."

> You bow to Locke. "Thank you. I may find you odd, but I was wrong to not trust you."
The mage looks taken aback by your comment, then smiles.
"I'm glad you feel that way," she says.

> You return to Sophie and Kate and check on how their magic practice is going.
"We were just finishing up," says Kate.
You look around, and realize that you had been sitting on the grass for several hours.

> You say "Ah... It's already sundown..."
"Yeah, we've been training for hours," says Sophie.
You look at the sky, and see that the sun is dipping below the horizon. You're exhausted.

> You glance over towards Locke. "Same time tomorrow?"
"Of course," says the mage. "I'll teach you a few more things."
You nod, and you all take your leave to return to your rooms for the night.

> You go to Kate's room to talk before bed.
"Hey," you say, knocking on the door.
"Come in," Kate says from the other side of the door.

You open the door and find Kate lying on her bed, staring up at the ceiling.

> You say "Magic, huh."
"Yeah," Kate says.
You take a seat next to her, and sigh.
"It's a lot."
Kate nods.
"It is," she says.
The two of you sit in silence for a while, before you speak again.

> You say "How did your training go after Locke and I went off on our own?"
"It went well," she says. "I have a little more control over wind magic now. Here, watch this."
Kate stands, and goes over to the window. She grasps the handle, then closes her eyes. The wind picks up outside, and you watch as Kate's hair begins to blow in the breeze.
"Whoa," you say, impressed.
"Right?" Kate says.

> You say "My session went... Well, I can control my tremorsense now, at least. Did I tell you about that yet? My tremorsense, that is."
"No!" Kate says, sitting back down on the bed. "Tell me everything!"

> You say "When we initially sat down to meditate, I... I felt the earth all around me. For miles. Beyond even the palace. I could sense everyone walking upon it, and all the coral buildings growing from it, and the water infusing it outside the magic boundaries of the city."
"That's wonderful," Kate says, smiling at you.
"I know," you say, and your face falls.
"What's wrong?" Kate asks, concerned.

> You say "It quickly became too much. I sensed more information, and more, and more, and every little grain of sand called out to be notice. It broke me down."
You stare at the floor, not wanting to make eye contact.
"I'm sorry," Kate says, patting you on the shoulder. "I shouldn't have asked."

> You say "No, it's fine. Locke helped me limit it to a few dozen meters. I can still sense it, but it isn't overwhelming anymore."
You sigh, and move your hand from the floor up to your chest.

"Thanks for listening," you say, looking into her eyes.
"Always," Kate says, smiling.

> You say "At least my wounds haven't been acting up."
You feel your chest, remembering the agony of your wounds a few days ago.
"It's a blessing," you say.
"I suppose it is," Kate says.

> You say "Hey Kate?"
"Yeah?"
"I'm glad you're here."
"Me too," Kate says, smiling.
You close your eyes, and take a deep breath.

> You say "Can I stay here tonight? With you."
"Yeah. Of course," Kate says.
You stand, and move over to the bed. Kate moves over, making room for you, and you lay down next to her.

> You say "Thank you."
Kate says nothing, and lays her head on your shoulder.
You close your eyes, feeling the weight of your lids, and fall asleep.

The Test

You awaken in the morning to find Kate's arm around you. You stare at her for a moment, marveling at her beauty. She looks so carefree when she's asleep. You gently move her arm off of you, and sit up.
You begin to stand, before a wave of nausea hits you. Grunting, you lower yourself back to your knees.

> You sigh and whisper "Magic..." under your breath, in a tired tone.
You close your eyes, and fall into a light meditative trance. Your breathing slows, and your heart beats softly. After a moment, you're able to rise, and stand.

> You shake your head. "Never gonna get used to this," you mutter, missing the weight of your sword on your hip.
You walk over to your knapsack, and pull out a fresh change of clothes. After stripping down to your undergarments, you pull on your trousers, a shirt, socks, and your boots. After a moment's thought, you decide to don your armor and shield as well.
You strap your knapsack to your back, and then pick up your longsword.

> You lean over and kiss Kate's forehead, whispering that you're going for a walk.
She stirs slightly in her sleep, but doesn't wake. You walk out of the room, and gently close the door behind you. You walk downstairs, and step out of the palace.

> You find an empty clearing out of sight of the path.
You find a suitable clearing, about twenty meters in diameter. You walk into the center of the clearing, and drop your pack.
You sit down cross-legged, and focus on your breathing for several minutes. After a few minutes, you feel the magic course through your body.
After about an hour of focusing, you stand, and channel the magic through your body.

> You summon a pillar of stone underneath you, raising you to the sky.
You stand in the center of the clearing, and focus on the feel of the rock beneath you. You feel the stone resonating underneath you, like a drum. You slowly begin

to feel the rumble of it through your body. You take a deep breath, and focus on that feeling, letting it consume you.
After about five minutes of focusing, you close your eyes, and begin to visualize what you want to happen. You see the stone beginning to rise up through your body, like an elevator carrying you skyward. You keep your eyes closed, and begin to visualize the clearing, with the Sun shining through the branches of the trees above you.
You slowly feel the ground shift, and the air begins to whistle past you as you are carried upwards on an earthen column.

> You focus on maintaining the integrity of the column.
The rumbling is more intense now, and you can barely hear yourself think over the roar of the stone being ripped from the earth. You begin to feel the sheer power of the earth through the spell, as you are carried higher and higher.

> You slow your ascent, stopping the pillar of earth from taking you any higher.
You stop your ascent, a few dozen feet off the ground. You can feel the power emanating off of you in waves, and it's all you can do to focus on containing it.
You slowly feel the energy dissipating, and the rumbling subsides.
You open your eyes, and blink rapidly as your eyes adjust to the light.

> You smile.
You smile, feeling the power coursing through your veins.
"I could do anything," you think to yourself. You reach out with your mind, and feel the nearby wildlife as they skitter along the ground. You reach further, feeling the presence of the city. Finally, you reach out with your mind to the palace, where you left Kate and Sophie. You know their exact location, in adjacent rooms on the second floor, currently asleep.

> You draw your senses back in, reducing your tremorsense back to the immediate area, and lower the stone underneath you until you are level with the ground.
You reduce the power of the stone, and slowly lower yourself back to the ground. You stand up, brushing grass and dirt from your clothing.

> You try something different, and imagine rooting yourself in the ground. You hold your shield aloft and lower your stance, with intent to become an immovable force.

You brace yourself as you lower yourself into the ground, feeling the earth accept you. You slowly raise your shield arm, and feel the weight of it in your hand. The wind whistles past you, but your feet are planted firmly in the ground.
You push your shield out before you, with a low grunt, and hold the position.

> You maintain concentration as long as you can before straightening up once more.
You roll your shoulders, and return your shield to your back.
You feel a twinge of pain in your chest as you stretch, but otherwise feel fine.

> You continue practicing earth magic until it is time to meet Locke with the rest of your party.
You continue to practice your earth magic, focusing on control and the manipulation of different types of stone. You try to imagine what it would be like to control something as large and heavy as a mountain, and are suprised when you can feel the pressure begin to build.

> You quickly release the magic and reduce your connection to it.
You release your power, and are rewarded with a splitting headache.
"I'll need to be careful," you think to yourself. "This magic is more powerful than I could have imagined."
The sun is high in the sky, and Kate and Sophie should be waking up soon.

> You return to Kate's room and quietly enter.
You creep over to Kate's bed and look down at her.
Her face is calm as she sleeps, her chest rising and falling slowly.
You smile.

> You stand by the window and enjoy the morning breeze while you wait for her to awake.
You step to the window, and stand by the window as the breeze ruffles your hair.
As the sun rises further, it warms your body, and you sigh in contentment.
You are startled from your reverie by a sleepy voice.
"Good morning, love."
You turn, smiling.
"Kate! You're awake."
"Of course I am," Kate grins. "Good morning."
You lean in and plant a kiss on her cheek, and she laughs.
"Come on, then. Let's get ready."

"Okay!" you reply happily.
The two of you wash, change clothes, and arm yourselves.
You leave the room together, to meet with Sophie.

> You wait in the hall outside Sophie's room for her to emerge for the day's magic training.
The two of you stand outside Sophie's door, waiting.
Soon, the door opens, and Sophie emerges, smiling.
"Good morning, everyone!" she says happily.
"Good morning, Sophie," you reply. "Are you ready to begin training?"
Sophie nods eagerly.
"Of course! I slept like a rock. I'm ready for anything!"

> You head down to the training courtyard to meet Locke for the day's instruction.
"Come on," you say. "Let's go meet Locke."
You set off towards the training courtyard, and after a short walk you find yourself at the stone arch that serves as the entrance.

> You stride in, your companions in tow.
As you walk through the arch and into the courtyard, you see that it's empty.
"Where is she?" asks Kate.
You shake your head.
"I don't know. Maybe she's running late."
Suddenly, a voice cries out, startling you.
"On your guard!"

> You whip around, going into a defensive stance.
You turn, going into a fighting stance.
Above you floats a tall woman with long, red hair, and narrowed eyes. She wears a vicious grin.
"Show me what you have learned," Locke commands, her eyes glinting with magical power.

> You feel the power of earth well up inside you, and look to see Sophie and Kate doing the same with their elements.
You feel the power of Earth well up inside you, and concentrate.
Suddenly, four glowing stones float into the air, and hover behind you.

> You hurl them at Locke while you and your companions scatter.
They hover for a moment, before shooting towards her.
As they near her, she waves her hands at them, and they explode in mid-air, shards flying in all directions.
Stones rain down from above, hitting the courtyard.
"Spread out!" Kate shouts.
You and your companions dodge the hail of stones.
"This is what you have learned?" laughs Locke. "I expected better!"

> You watch as Sophie wields her water magic spells against Locke.
As the stones come down, Sophie closes her eyes, concentrating.
From her hands, a blue light emanates, glowing brighter and brighter. The shards of stone floating in the air begin to freeze, and then burst into pieces.
You turn your attention back to the stones still falling. You reach out with your mind, bending the trajectory of the rocks. As the hail of stones nears, you close your eyes. When you open them, the rain of stones has turned to snow.
Sophie opens her eyes and looks at the snow falling around you.

> You say "Not bad, Sophie!"
"Not bad, Sophie!" you say.
"Thank you," Sophie says. "I've been practicing!"
She smiles.
You hear a yell from behind you.

> You turn to look at Kate.
You turn to look at Kate, and see a rock flying towards her.
You reach out with your mind, slowing the stone's descent.
The stone hovers in the air in front of her.

> You say "Use your wind, Kate! Help me hurl it back!"
"Use your wind, Kate! Help me hurl it back!" you shout.
Kate's eyes widen in surprise. She raises her hands, and the stone flies forward.
As it flies through the air, the stone begins to glow a bright red. The rock shatters in mid-air, and the pieces fly in different directions.

> You go into a defensive stance, warily watching Locke.
You prepare yourself for her next move.
"I'm not going to hold back," she says.
She pulls her hands back and sends a fireball hurtling towards you.

> You raise a wall of stone in front of you to block the fireball.
You raise your hand, and a wall of stone rises in front of you.
You feel the heat of the fireball on your face as it slams into the wall and explodes. You feel the impact on the other side of the wall. The ground shakes beneath your feet. Small stones rain down on you from above. You hear a yell from behind the wall, and turn to look.

> You watch as one of your companions counterattacks.
You watch as the wall explodes, showering you with rubble. You turn away just in time to avoid being blinded.
You look to your left, where you saw Kate standing a moment before. She's gone. You hear her voice from above, and turn to see her flying towards Locke, carried by the wind. Her hair whips behind her as she strikes at the mage.
"We won't hold back either!" she screams.
Kate slams into her, knocking her to the ground.
You turn to your right, and see Sophie, her skin glowing as bright as the sun.

> You watch as Sophie strikes Locke with her water magic.
Sophie raises her hands, and a bolt of lightning flashes down from the sky. It strikes the mage, sending her skidding across the ground.

> You say "Lightning... "
You watch as the lightning courses through her body, and feel a brief flash of satisfaction. Then, you hear a yell.
"I'm not done yet!" Locke cries with glee as she stands to her feet.

> You summon a pillar of stone beneath you to launch you towards Locke, shield held in front of you.
You plant your feet on the ground, bracing yourself. The pillar of stone rises around you, launching you towards the mage.
You slam into her, and knock her back to the ground.

> You say "Yes, you are."
You bring your shield down, knocking the wind out of her. She grunts, and you point the tip of your sword at her throat.
"Yes, I am," she says, her voice strained. "Well done."

> You sheathe your sword and offer a hand to Locke, helping her to her feet, as Sophie and Kate run up to join you.
"We did it!" Kate yells.
Sophie laughs, chest heaving from exertion.

> You say "Well, Locke? Did we pass your test?"
The mage smiles, and nods her head.
"You did. Well done. I am impressed," she says. "Though you still need to learn finer control, your quick thinking and teamwork are excellent."

> You bow to her as she begins instructing you on finer control over your elements, until dusk approaches.
After you are finished, you turn to face the sun, which is low on the horizon. It's been a long day.
"You will have tomorrow off to celebrate. I'd suggest you make the most of it."

> You say "Thank you, Locke."
"It was my pleasure. I look forward to our next session."

> You return to the palace with Kate and Sophie.
As you walk back into the palace, a servant approaches you.
"A message for you, Lady Emilia," she says, handing you a letter.
You thank her, and open the letter.

> You read the letter aloud to your companions.
"Lady Emilia,
I have come to a decision regarding your quest. Please come see me at midday tomorrow, in my throne room.
Signed,
Queen Kitsu of Ochirea"
You read the letter to Sophie and Kate.
"So, what do you think it means?" Sophie asks.
"I don't know. Maybe she's ready to give us help for the quest."
"I hope so," Kate says. "We need all the help we can get."

> You say "Plus, my wounds seem to have mostly healed. We could potentially depart Ochirea, and go north once more soon."
"You sure you're up for it?" Sophie asks.

> You say "I'm sure. Especially if Locke is with us. We'll be fine."
"I suppose you're right," Sophie says.
Kate looks out at the sea, deep in thought.

> You say "What's up, Kate?"
"Just thinking. We've spent only a couple weeks at Ochirea, but it feels like a lifetime. I'm not sure I want to leave it."
"Don't think like that," Sophie says.

> You say "Sophie's right. We won't be leaving forever. We saved the Queen! We can return anytime, and be honored guests."
"Yeah, I suppose," Kate says.
The three of you continue to chat until you reach your rooms. You and Kate bid Sophie goodnight, and both fall into a dreamless sleep.

Gifts and Goodbyes

The next day, you enter the throne room with your companions. The queen stands before her throne, waiting for you. She smiles as you enter.

> You bow deeply.
"Your highness," you say, bowing deeply.
You rise.
"Lady Emilia, I've thought about your quest, and the perils you will face," she says.
"I am ready to face them, your highness," you say.
The Queen is silent for a moment, before nodding.
"Very well," she says. "In that case, I shall give you my gift."
The Queen claps her hands. The doors to the throne room open, and four servants enter, carrying objects wrapped in cloth. They approach you, bowing before unwrapping the gifts and laying them at your feet.
The first gift is a longsword with a silver blade and golden hilt, with an intricate ivory grip.

> You grasp the longsword, feeling the magic within it.
You grasp the blade, and feel power course through your arm. You draw the blade, and the silver blade shines brightly, illuminating the room. You quickly put it away.
"Thank you, Queen Kitsu," you say. "This is a great gift."
"This sword will ever be a light in the darkness, and shall never break." she says.

> You bow deeply and watch as a servant presents Sophie with a gift.
The servant presents Sophie with a small pouch. She opens it, and looks inside, drawing out a large ruby, the size of an egg.
"The Red Dragon's egg," the Queen says. "It is said to contain the life force of a red dragon, and would restore health to a mortal wound. It is an old object with powerful magic. Take it, and may it serve you well on your quest."
The servant places the ruby in Sophie's hands, who holds it with awe.
"Thank you, your highness," she says, her eyes wide.

> You watch as a servant presents Kate with a gift.

The servant presents Kate with a dagger in an ornate sheath covered in jewels. She draws it, and the blade shines, clear and bright.
"The Svelk Venom Slasher," the Queen says. "It is the dagger that struck the final blow of the Great Merrow War. It is imbued with powerful magic, and will never dull. One cut is enough to fell any normal foe."
Kate twirls the dagger, a huge smile on her face as the light catches it.
"Thank you, your highness," she says. "I am honored to receive such a blade."

> You look to the last servant, and the last gift.
The servant presents you with a package, covered in gold and silver wrapping paper, with a purple bow.
"What's this?" you ask.
"A gift for you all." the Queen says. "Open it."
You rip the paper off, and find a box. You press the button, and the box opens. You gasp.
"What is it?" Kate asks, leaning over to look.
Inside the box is a snowglobe. The globe is silver, with a glittering scene inside. A black castle sits in the center, with fields of lavender surrounding it. Above it all, a moon can be seen.
"It's beautiful," you say.
"The Castle of Endless Moonlight," the Queen says.

> You say "Is it a real place? I feel I've seen it in my dreams..."
"Oh yes," the Queen smiles. "It's in a far away land, though exactly where remains unknown to most. It is a place of magic and peace. And that, heroes, is what I give to you through this gift."

> You say "Is it magical? It certainly feels like it... What does the enchantment do?"
"The Castle of Endless Moonlight is known for its healing magic. If you should find yourself wounded on your journey, turn the globe over, and place your hand inside. The magic will do the rest. I hope you never need to use it, but I know that you are destined for great things. I urge you to complete your quest. Journey across the sea to the Northern Wastes. Find the beast. Destroy the Great Dragon, and bring down a terror that has long enveloped the world in its shadow."

> You bow deeply as your companions do the same. "We will, your highness. Thank you."

The Queen's smile widens, as she curtsies deeply. "I am honored to aid heroes such as you upon your quest. May the gods be with you."
You curtsy, as your companions do the same. "And also with you."
You turn, and leave the room. Kate closes the door behind you.

> You say "Well. "
"That was something else," Sophie says, grinning. "The Queen is generous."
"And now we're off to a far away land to slay an ancient terror," Kate says.

> You say "Stronger than ever, and closer than before. We can do this."
"We can do this," Kate smiles.
You all continue down the hall. After a few minutes, you arrive at a door. Locke is leaning against the wall besides it.

> You say "Locke. We... we would like to depart soon."
"I thought as much," she says, pushing herself off the wall. "Not much happens that doesn't make its way back to me."

> You shake your head with a tired smile. "Could we continue our training on the voyage?"
"I don't see why not," she says, her cold eyes fixed upon you. "Though it might be wise to rest now, and begin again once you're settled on the ship."
"Thank you," you say.
"Follow me," she says, opening the door.
The next few days are spent preparing for your journey, and bidding those you wish goodbye.

> You walk around the Great Underwater City of Ochirea with your companions, strolling by the coral buildings one last time.
You walk through the city's market, Kate's hand in yours. She smiles at you.

> You say "I'm going to miss how peaceful this place is."
"This place has grown on me," Kate admits.
"I'm glad you liked it," a familiar voice says.
You turn, to see the Queen of the Ochireans swimming towards you.

> You say "Queen Kitsu!"
"Hello again, Emilia, Kate, Sophie," the mermaid queen says. "I've come to see you off."

"We're grateful for your hospitality," Kate says politely.
"And for the assistance," you add.
The Queen smiles. "I'm glad to have helped. Now, I believe the ship that will take you to the Northern Wastes is ready."
You nod.

> You say "Let us be off then. Thank you, your highness."
"Farewell, Emilia, Kate, Sophie," the Queen says. "May the gods watch over you on your quest."
The three of you turn, and walk towards the cave that you entered through what feels like lifetimes ago.

Mother's Embrace

A Chilly Reception

> You swim to the surface, and climb aboard the Windswept with Locke at the helm.
The three of you swim up to the surface, where you find the Windswept. Locke is at the helm, her face once again a stone mask.

> You say "Good afternoon, Locke... Captain Locke?"
"Hello," she says. "Please, just call me Locke."
"Okay... Locke," you say.
"If you three wouldn't mind, I need to speak to you ere we set sail. Follow me."

> You follow here belowdecks.
You follow her belowdecks, where she turns to face you.
"Things will get more dangerous from here," she begins. "I need to know that I can count on the three of you. Can I?"
"You can," you say firmly.
"Of course," Kate adds.
"I try my best," Sophie says cheerfully.

> You say "Is this about the Ice Queen? Olaf seemed afraid, but somewhat confident we wouldn't run into her."
"Olaf was too sure of himself," Locke says bluntly. "The Ice Queen is not a threat to be trifled with. Many have underestimated her, and they're all dead now. But I can tell you're not weaklings. You've survived this far, and that means you've got a head on your shoulders, at least."
"So... what is it that you need us to do?" you ask.
"I need you to stay alive," she says. "That's all I need you to do. So just keep your head down, and try not to draw attention to us when we get to the ice floes."

> You say "We are to hide belowdecks?"
"Yes," she says.

> You say "Even after all of your training, you would have us cower?"
"Yes," she says again. "It'll be safer for all of us that way."
"But what if we're seen anyway?" Kate asks.
"I'll do my best to get you out of there," she says. "Just don't jump into the middle of things."
You sigh, nodding in agreement.
"That's all I ask," she says with a smile. "I'll leave you three to yourselves. Good luck, sailors."
With that, she leaves you.

> You pass the rest of the voyage practicing small bits of magic and occasionally helping Locke sail the ship as you approach the ice floes and the Northern Wastes beyond.
The voyage to the Northern Wastes is not a short one, and you spend most of your days practicing your magic. As you become more in tune with the elements around you, your powers grow stronger. The three of you continue to bond as a team.
Eventually, the Windswept reaches the outskirts of the Northern Wastes. You spot a few abandoned villages razed by war, buildings almost entirely encased in ice and snow. Eventually, you dock at a larger island made entirely of ice.

> You say "Why are we docking, Locke?"
"It's not safe to sail around the ice at this time," she says. "The water is too rough during the day. We need to wait for nightfall, lest the larger chunks of ice crush our vessel between them."

> You say "Why dock, though? Isn't it dangerous? "
"Of course," she says. "But I need to negotiate passage, and I'd rather do it on land than aboard this vessel."

> You say "I suppose we will stay here, then..."
"Yes," she says.

> You nod, and stow away belowdecks while Locke departs to negotiate passage with unknown forces.
While you wait for her to return, you decide to practice your Earth magic. You spend an hour or so spinning pebbles with your mind, trying to maintain complex patterns. The pebbles orbit around each other, circling your head before

you fling them out of the cabin. You find the concentration helpful in clearing your mind.
Soon, though, you begin to feel tired.

> You say "Shouldn't Locke have been back by now?"
Kate nods, looking out the cabin window.
"She should have been back," she says. "I don't like this."
Sophie sits in silence, her face pale. You stand up, stretching your arms and looking out the cabin window. You don't see any sign of movement on the island or out at sea.

> You say "Let's try and get some sleep. Maybe she is just held up."
"Maybe," Kate says. "I hope so. I'm going to try and sleep."
You lay down on the bed that you were sitting on, as do Kate and Sophie.

> You snuggle close to your companions, warding off the frigid air as you try to fall asleep.
The three of you lay there, huddled together for warmth. Kate looks over at you, smiling faintly before she closes her eyes and dozes off. You follow her example, drifting into an uneasy sleep.

> You dream of the Ice Queen.
You stand on a vast, frozen plain. Mountains of snow and ice rise up around you, and you shiver in the cold air. Snow begins to fall around you, and your companions appear beside you. Soon, the snowfall is so thick that you cannot see more than a few feet ahead of you.
You are startled by a noise, and you turn around to see a woman in a black cloak standing behind you. The snowstorm whirls around her, moving in an unnatural way.
"You are the spawn of the sin," she says. "The oath-breaker. The vixen sent to corrupt and steal my son from me. Was his life not enough?"
You open your mouth to reply, but suddenly you find that you are unable to move. You stand there, your mouth opening and closing soundlessly.
"I thought you were supposed to be a powerful hero," the woman says. "You're nothing. A trickster, a jester. You dance around like some fool. Why would my family join with you?"
You feel a deep sadness run through you. Tears begin to run down your face, as you think of your past, your dead mother. You wonder what she thinks of you. You wonder if she is ashamed.

"Look at you," the woman says, her voice dripping with contempt. "You're a disgrace to the word 'hero'. You are not fit to be called my family."
The snow continues to fall. You feel the cold, bitter tears run down your face. The woman reaches out to you, and you flinch away, expecting her to hit you. Instead, she gently touches your face. Her fingers are as cold as ice.
"Do you know how I created the Frost Legions?" she asks.
You shake your head.
"I reached into their souls, and I twisted them," she says. "I made them into weapons, so that I may avenge my son. Can you understand that?"
You nod slowly.
"They are my children," she says, her eyes flickering over you and Kate. "And you two will be my children as well. I will reach into your souls and I will twist you as well."
You feel your heart fill with dread, and the snowfall intensifies. The woman raises her hand, and the world around you turns to darkness.
You awake in the cabin. You are lying on the floor, and Kate is gently shaking you.
"Wake up," she says. "Something's wrong."
You sit up, and see Sophie stirring in her bed. The door to the cabin opens, and you find the woman from your dream standing there.

> You say "Ice Queen..."
"Call me Mother," she says.
Her voice is cold, and chills you to your core.
The woman walks into the cabin. The wooden planks of the ship frost over with every step.

> You feel the terror well up inside you as you scramble backwards, grabbing your sword and shield from where they lay. Kate and Sophie also spring into action.
"My daughters," the woman says.
She steps forward, her hand outstretched. A wave of cold passes over you, chilling you to the bone.

> You heft your shield and draw your shining blade. "Stay back!" you shout as your companions form up alongside you.
The woman does not move.

> You say "What do you want with us!?"
"My other children have not yet met you. I would like to remedy that."
The woman raises her hand, and the freezing mist enfolds you.

Sophie attempts to stop the mist from approaching with her magic. She channels every bit of her power, but she is no match for the Ice Queen. Your companions are quickly overwhelmed by the unnatural cold, and they collapse to the floor.

> You attempt to resist the cold and strike forward at the Ice Queen with your blade.
The woman walks towards you, unperturbed by your attack. She grabs your sword by the blade and holds your hands with her other icy cold hand. Her fingers dig into your flesh. You scream in pain as her nails cut into your hands.
"I don't like disobedient children," she says.
She takes your sword and throws it across the room. She digs her nails deeper into your hands, and you feel the life draining from them.
"You will come with me," she says.
Your shield falls to the ground, and blood stains the floor. The Ice Queen picks up your barely-conscious body and carries you and your companions outside, to a large sled pulled by four monstrous beasts that you assume are Winter Wolves.
"I can't wait to show you how beautiful my kingdom is," the Ice Queen says.
She places you in the sled and binds your hands and feet to the wooden frame.
"You will be safe here," she says.
Your companions lie motionless on the floor of the sled. The Ice Queen climbs on the front of the sled and takes a rope in her hand. She pulls it forward, and the wolves begin to run. Your eyes close, and you fall unconscious as you are taken to the heart of the Ice Queen's kingdom.

The Prison

When you next come to, you are alone. Ice, stained black and red, forms a room around you. The door is barred. You are in a cell, and your companions are nowhere to be found.
A wave of despair hits you.

> You cough violently, and attempt to speak. "Kate?" you cry weakly. "Sophie? Locke?"
You cough up blood and your throat burns.
"Hello?" you say.
Your voice is too quiet to carry. You take a deep breath and attempt to call for help louder.
"Hello?!" you say.
Your voice reverberates off the icy walls of your prison cell. You hear an answering moan from another cell, and a low growl from still another.

> You say "Who's there?!"
The response comes in a broken whisper.
"Be silent, or he will come for you."
"Who are you?" you ask.
The voice is low and cold.
"You should not be here. This is no place for humans."
"What is this place?" you ask.
"It's a prison," the voice answers. "And you are the prisoner."

> You say "Last thing I remember was the Ice Queen taking me away..."
"The Ice Queen?" the voice says, surprised. "Yes... I suppose you would be her prisoner. The last one, in fact."
"Last one? Are my friends prisoners here as well?"
"Friends? You have friends?" the voice answers. "I doubt any of your kind would associate with a monster such as yourself."
"I'm not a monster," you say.
"Yes you are," the voice answers. "You're a wretched, filthy monster, and you should embrace your nature."

> You fall silent, ignoring the voice's taunting.
"Oh, so now you're silent?" the voice answers. "So much for having a conversation. I thought you wanted to talk."
You feel ice behind your back as you lean against the wall of your cell.

> You try to open your mind and sense the environment around you.
Your mind is bombarded with pain as you make contact with the unnatural cold that infests the prison. You clutch at your head as you try to shield yourself from the horrible feelings that the prison emanates.

> You draw back your tremorsense.
You draw back your senses, not wanting to be bombarded with the horrors that lie beyond the limits of your perception.
You hear a quiet, cold voice emanating from an adjacent cell.
"Who are you?"
"A prisoner," you answer, your voice trembling.
"Are you new? I don't recognize your voice."
"I'm from the Kingdom of Larion."
"Larion?" the voice asks. "I haven't heard that one. I'm from the Empire of Nalin."
"You're from Nalin? But... The Empire of Nalin fell centuries ago..."
"Really? Funny, it doesn't feel like it. What year is it?"
"It's 3354."
"3354... So that would make me... 422 years old. Time doesn't tend to flow right, here."

> You widen your eyes in shock. "I need to find my friends. Do you know where they would have been taken? There were two of them, girls named Kate and Sophie."
"Oh, the lovely girls. I can still hear their screams in my head. They're in the cages, a ways down the hall."
You look down the hallway, barely able to see in the darkness. You see a series of dim lights, barely visible.
"You can't see them from here," the voice says. "You need to get closer."

> You summon every bit of your strength, and kick at one of the bars of your cell.
You use your earth magic to bolster your attempt, willing the metal to give way.
You grit your teeth as you kick, sending a surge of strength through your leg.
Your foot slams into the metal, and it begins to give way... But it's too weak, and the bar holds strong.

"Hm. You can't escape that way. Good try, though."
You sigh, sitting down in the center of your cell.

> You open your mind a tiny fraction, and attempt to find stone within the ice that you can manipulate.
You reach out with your mind, searching for any stone you can find. You find a small deposit far beneath you, almost completely unusable due to its distance and the fact that it's embedded in ice.

> You try to summon the stone to you anyways, no matter how long it takes.
You close your eyes, trying to ignore your growling stomach and the painful cold. You concentrate, trying to draw the stone towards you. You grit your teeth, trying to ignore your body's protests, and continue. You can feel the stone beneath you begin to vibrate slightly as you strain.
You growl, continuing to concentrate. Your eyes snap open as you hear the sound of stone grinding against ice, and a small shard slowly rises from beneath you, moving towards you.

> You summon more, as much as possible.
The shard grows larger as it rises, until you're able to put your hand on it. You grit your teeth, pulling it towards you. It continues to rise, and you strain against it. You continue to pull the stone towards you, and it soon forms a small pillar that reaches only a third of the way up your body.
You continue to pull, and it grows larger, but you find that it's easier to pull as it rises. Soon, the stone pillar reaches your chest.

> You stop straining, and catch your breath.
You stop pulling, and sit down against the pillar of stone. You pant as you catch your breath, the dark walls oppressive around you.

> You wrap the stone around your fist and slam it into the bars, using the power of your magic and the rock to embolden your strike.
You draw your fist back, wrapping it in the stone as you raise it over your head. You growl as you swing it forward, sending the stone forward with incredible force. The stone smashes into the iron bars of the cage, and you find that you've smashed right through them. You tear the rest of the metal off, hurling it to the ground with a growl.

> You grab the sharpest and heaviest bar you can find, and hold onto it as a weapon.
You pick up the bar of iron that you smashed through earlier, gripping it in your hand. It's fairly heavy, and you estimate that it would be a suitable weapon. You can feel the iron vibrating against your palm, and you know that it would be able to break through even strong defenses with your magic bolstering it.

> You shape the stone into a buckler on your offhand for use as a makeshift shield.
You raise your other hand, and the rock flies into it, forming into a makeshift shield. It's small and heavy, being made of solid stone.

> You step outside of your cell and look into the adjacent cells that spoke to you earlier.
You look into the cells to see no one there. You're sure the kinder voice came from this one. You turn to the next cell, finding a massive figure laying in it. It's body is nothing but flesh, with it's stomach torn out and limbs broken. The figure lays there, a speechless corpse that is no doubt dead.

> You say "What the hell..."
You stop, your voice catching in your throat as the corpse's eyes shift to look at you.
"I'm hungry... so hungry..." The corpse says.

> You stumble backwards and turn away, heading down the hall to where Kate and Sophie are supposedly caged.
The corpse's voice sends a chill through you as you quickly walk down the hall. You head down the hallway, ice crunching beneath your boots.

> You creep quietly along, making as little noise as possible.
You creep through the hallways, moving slowly and carefully as you try to listen for anyone else moving around. You wish that you had your blade, but all you have is your newly created shield and the iron bar. You can feel it vibrating in your hand, a small comfort in this cursed place.
You continue along the hallway, stopping at a corner. You lean forward, trying to look down the next segment of hallway. You see no one there, but you also find that strange paintings hang on the walls, depicting various scenes.

> You quietly examine the paintings.

You creep forward, looking at the paintings. You see a picture of a young woman dressed in fancy clothes standing next to a handsome man in armor holding a sword and a shield. Underneath the figures are the words "Lady Claire and Sir Gregor" The next one shows the same man lying dead in a jumble of armor, with blood coming from his mouth. Above him stands the same woman, but her clothes are now torn and her eyes show an insane happiness. She holds a blood-stained dagger in her hand. Underneath is the words "Lady Claire and the Dragon".

> You shudder and move on, searching for where Kate and Sophie are kept.
The next picture shows a tall man wearing fine clothes and a crown standing before an odd, black tower. Underneath the figure are the words "King Victor and the Witch Tower". The next one shows the same man, older now, lying on the ground in front of the tower. He holds a dagger in his hand and has fallen to his knees. Tears stream down his face and his clothes are ragged. The tower looms over him. Underneath the picture are the words "King Victor and Lady Mortimer".

> You turn away from the paintings and continue to quietly move down the hall.
The next one shows a young man with black hair and black armor standing outside a tent. A girl with long blond hair is in front of him, and they are kissing. Underneath the figures are the words "Sir Kit and Bianca". The next one shows the same man, older and with a mustache, holding a newborn child in his arms. His face is filled with grief. Underneath the picture are the words "Sir Kit and his Dead Wife".

> You rip your gaze away from the paintings, quickly walking to the end of this segment of hallway, eager to search for Kate and Sophie.
You step into a new hallway, and immediately freeze. At the far end of the hallway is a tall figure in a ragged black cloak, his face hidden in the shadows of his hood.

> You press up against the wall and remain silent, unsure if he saw you.
The figure cocks his head to the side, and begins to walk towards you. You know he saw you. You ready yourself for a fight, but find that your legs are frozen in place.

> You say "Who are you?"
The figure's head snaps up, as if noticing you for the first time. His hood falls back, revealing undulating flesh that extends into a black beak. His single eye is a bright, glowing red.

"Outsider." He hisses.
"Who are you?" You ask again.
"You do not get to ask the questions." He says.

> You swing your iron bar down and break away the ice holding your legs in place.
The ice splinters and flies apart as you strike it, sending frost and frozen water droplets flying through the air.

> You step backwards and raise your makeshift weapons aloft, waiting to see what the creature does.
The creature steps forward, twisting his body so that his beak points directly at you. He reaches up with one of his four arms, and points at you accusingly.
"You are not welcome here."

> You grip your iron bar with both hands and swing at the side of his head with all your might.
The metal bar clashes against his beak, and you push with all your might. The creature barely moves, and retaliates by grabbing you with one of his other arms.

> You kick him in the chest and wrench free.
His beak opens as he roars, his one eye widening. He looks surprised. You slam the iron bar into his chest again, and feel it shatter the bones underneath.

> You jam the bar in his eye and push as hard as you can.
The creature reels backwards, shrieking as you jam the bar into his eye. You push it deeper and deeper, until the iron bar is a mangled mess of metal, the creature's flesh, and its eye.

> You twist the bar, seeking to snap the creature's neck.
You hear a wet crack, and the creature goes limp. You pull the bar from his face, revealing a bloody mass of broken bones and torn flesh.

> You listen intently to hear whether anyone else is approaching.
You hear nothing but the howling wind, and quiet sobbing from the room ahead.

An Unlikely Ally

> You rush into the next room. "Kate? Sophie?" you call out, fear in your voice.
The sobbing continues. You notice a series of thick iron bars crossing the doorway into the next chamber, each filled to the brim with a writhing mass of flesh and bone.
"Kate? Sophie?" you call out again.
The mass of tentacles and limbs convulse, shifting towards the sound of your voice. The mass parts, caving inwards towards the center, revealing two figures.
"Em?" Kate's voice quivers.

> You say "It's me! It's me! Are you two okay?"
"Yeah. Yeah, we're fine," Kate answers shakily.
You see Sophie jerk her head into a nod.

> You say "What is that... thing? That mass? "
"We don't know," Kate answers. "It's some sort of creature, we think."
"It hasn't hurt us," Sophie adds.

> You say "I'm going to get you out of there. Just hang on, okay?"
"Okay," Kate whispers.
You search the room for anything you could use to break open the cage, but find nothing of use.

> You examine the cage for any weak points.
The cage consists of iron bars crossing each other at right angles to form several strong X patterns, with smaller bars connected to each corner. The entire cage is covered in tentacles and limbs, which seem to be holding it up.

> You say "I'll be right back, you two. I'm going to go find a key."
"Be careful," Kate replies.
You exit the chamber and return to the room with the body.

> You search the body of the creature for keys.
You search the creature's belt, and pull out a large ring of iron keys.
You hear a terrified scream from behind you.

"Get it away! Get it away from me!" Kate screams.

> You rush back into the room where Kate and Sophie are caged.
You return to the room, and find Kate staring at you in shock. A large tentacle is wrapped around her throat from behind.
"Let her go," you demand.
The creature's many eyes narrow, and it releases Kate. She falls to the ground, gasping for air.
"I see you," the creature says, in a dull monotone voice.

> You say "I see you as well. Do you want out of this cage?"
"I want many things."
"I have keys for you. I can set you free."
"I want to leave this place. I want to go home. But there is no home there. Not anymore."

> You slowly unlock the cage door that contains the two women and the creature.
You open the cage door, and Kate immediately scrambles out. Sophie quickly follows, then freezes. The creature is looking at her. Slowly, Sophie turns to face it. The creature's eyes widen.
"You're going home," the creature says, in the same monotone voice.

> You say "Sophie, be careful..."
"It's okay, Emilia," Sophie says, staring at the creature. "It's just lonely."
"I'm not lonely!" the creature cries. "I have friends! Don't I, my pets?"
Several tentacles that had been resting on the ground now rise up. They twist and squirm, before twisting together to form vaguely humanoid shapes.

> You warily watch, makeshift weapons ready in case it attacks.
"These are my friends. See?"
Sophie walks over to the creatures, as they twist and squirm around her. She reaches out a hand, and strokes one.
"You don't need to be lonely anymore," Sophie says. "Come with us. We can escape this place."
"I... I don't know," the creature says, its voice wavering.

> You say "Sophie, are you sure about this...?"
"I'm sure, Emilia. I know what I'm doing."
Sophie continues to stroke one of the tentacles, as the creature's eyes widen.

"I... don't want to be alone anymore," the creature whimpers.
"You won't. I promise."
"My name is Ehburith," the creature says.

> You say "Ehburith, we're going to escape this prison. Do you know the way out?"
"There is no way out. There is no escape."
"There's always a way out," Sophie says, smiling. "Come on, show us the way."
Ehburith nods slowly.
"This way," it says.
Ehburith leads you through the prison, along dimly-lit corridors, up and down staircases.

> You say "Ehburith, do you know where the Ice Queen would have put our weapons and armor?"
"She's not your friend!" Ehburith screams.

> You say "We know. She's evil. She stole our equipment, and we need it back if we are to survive when we escape."
"She is the mother of snow and wind! She is too powerful to fight!"
"We don't intend to fight her. We just need to get our equipment."
"No! You will use it against her! Then she'll kill you!"
"We have to try," Sophie says.
Ehburith shakes its head, eyes widening.
"No... No..."

> You kneel down before Ehburith, not looking away from the writhing mass of eyes and flesh. "Please, Ehburith. We need our equipment if we are to escape. All of us."
Ehburith looks at you, its eyes darting all over your face.
"You promise you won't fight her?"
"We promise."
"I... I'll show you where she keeps her treasures."

> You say "Thank you."
Ehburith nods.
"Come on, follow me," it says.
You walk after Ehburith, deeper into the dungeons. After half an hour, you reach a large, metal door.

"This is it," Ehburith says.

> You listen through the door.
You press your ear against the door, trying to listen for sounds on the other side. You hear nothing, and after a few seconds you stand back up.

> You gently open the door as quietly as possible.
You slowly twist the door's handle, opening the door. The room is dark, with only a sliver of light in the bottom right corner, coming from under another door across the room.

> You look around the room for your stolen weapons.
In the darkness, you see your weapons glinting. They're piled in a corner of the room, near the wall.

> You point them out to Kate and Sophie. "Quickly now, and quietly."
They nod, and you walk slowly towards the pile of weapons. You gently pull your own sword from the pile, taking care not to make any noise. You slowly pass other weapons to Sophie and Kate, who take them.

> You quietly don your armor and equip your shield.
After a few minutes of searching, you've fully equipped yourself. Your sword feels heavy at your side, and your shield is strapped to your forearm. You turn, looking at Sophie and Kate.
You nod.

> You say "Ehburith, we have what we came for. Let's get out of this place before anyone discovers us. Lead on."
"Yes... Yes, this way."
Ehburith slides towards the door. You walk after it, with Kate at your side. You walk down a long, dark corridor, lit by torches that line the walls.
"There are a few guards in this next room, but not many. After that, we just walk down this hallway, until we get to the stairs that lead up to the courtyard."

> You say "We'll follow your lead."
Ehburith nods, and continues leading you through the castle. You walk down a hallway, lit by torches that line the walls. There are two guards in front of you, but they haven't seen you yet.
"These two are the only ones in this hallway," Ehburith says.

You nod, readying your sword.
"I'll take the one on the left, you take the one on the right," you say.
"Got it," Kate says.
"I'll back you up," Sophie says, gripping her axe.
You rush forward with a growl, swinging your sword.

> You drive your sword through the chest of the Frost Legion soldier.
Your sword slices through the air, slicing through the armor of the guard and sinking deep into his chest. You pull your sword out of his chest as he gasps, staring at you in terror before his body goes limp.
He slumps forward, and you catch his body. You gently lay him on the ground, checking to see if he's still alive: he isn't.
Next to you, Kate dispatches her soldier in a similar fashion. You look up, and see Ehburith writhing behind Sophie, eyes darting around in terror at the fight.

> You say "Come on. We're almost out. No one has raised the alarm. The Ice Queen won't know we're gone until it's too late."
"Yeah," Sophie says.
Ehburith's eyes dart to the soldiers. It slowly snakes its tentacles towards the limp bodies, before it whips its head back and hisses.
"Come. Come. We cannot stay."
You nod, and begin to walk past the dead soldiers.

> You ascend the stairs at the end of the hallway to the courtyard.
"So, what now?" Kate asks.
You look out at the courtyard. Far from empty as you had hoped, a gargantuan icy creature lies in the center.

> You examine the creature from afar, careful not to make a sound.
The creature looks vaguely like an elephant crossed with a jellyfish. It's frozen solid, its body entirely transparent and icy blue. Long, skinny tentacles stretch out from its body, hanging along the ground.

> You peer at it intently and whisper aloud. "What is that thing?"
"I don't know," Kate whispers back. "But I think it's dead."
You nod. Kate steps forward, before freezing in place.

> You say "Kate?"
"I heard something," she says.

"Where?" you ask, eyes darting around.
"I don't know. I thought it was outside."

> You listen to the creature as intently as you can.
You hear a faint scratching sound coming from the creature. You lean in, squinting your eyes to try and see inside the creature. You spot something small wriggling around in its body.
"Do you see that?" you ask.
"Yeah," Kate says. "What is that?"
"I have no idea," you say.
You watch as the small white worm makes its way around the creature's body, before darting back inside.

> You say "Let's just... not find out what that is. Ehburith, this courtyard leads outside the prison, right?"
"Yes," it says, its tentacles slowly crawling up the wall.
"Alright. Everyone follow me, and be quiet."

> You creep out into the courtyard, giving the dead monstrosity a wide berth.
You walk along the courtyard slowly, moving past the creature. The ground is slick with ice, making it hard to walk without making noise. You keep your head on a swivel, keeping an eye on the entire courtyard. There are two doors in the courtyard. One lies ahead, unlocked, and leads deeper into the prison. The other is to your immediate right, bolted shut.

> You quietly curse. "Don't tell the bolted door is our way out..."
"That's what the keys are for," Ehburith says.
You look over at the bolt. You walk over to it.

> You try the keys on the iron key ring you took from the creature earlier.
You try each key in the bolt, and with a satisfying click the bolt slides out of the way. You push the door open slowly, peering inside. The room is pitch black, too dark to see inside.

> You say "This leads outside...?"
"Yeah," Ehburith says. "But be careful."
You pause, glancing over at it. It looks back at you, eyes attempting to focus.

> You give the frozen monstrosity in the center of the courtyard one last look before ushering everyone inside the dark room and closing the door behind you. The room is pitch black. You put your hand against the wall, slowly making your way forward into the room.

> You unsheathe your glowing sword, illuminating the room.
A flash of white and blue light shines out from your sword, illuminating the room. You find yourself in a small room with one door. The walls are stone, covered with ice and frost. The floor is made of wood, and sways curiously when you walk. Several chains are bolted to it that run up into the ceiling, vanishing from sight.

> You say "Ah... It's an elevator..."
"What's that?" Kate asks, peering over your shoulder.
You push down on a protruding stone, and with a rumbling the floor sinks downward.

> You say "Be ready for anything, everyone. Hopefully this leads outside the prison. "
You and your friends find yourselves in a massive subterranean cave, the ceiling stretching high above you. A massive, empty space lies before you. You look around cautiously, sword in hand.

> You cautiously proceed forward, glowing sword held aloft to illuminate the area. "Stay behind me, you three."
The cave is bare stone, although it seems to have been carved out and dug through. It's difficult to see into the dark corners of the cave, and the shadows loom ominously. You walk forward cautiously, your sword's glow lighting the way. You hear the sound of dripping water echoing throughout the cave. You also hear something else. The clinking of metal on stone.

> You motion for your party to stop and try to ascertain where the noise comes from.
You put a finger to your lips and hold up your glowing sword. You and your companions remain still, listening. You hear the noise again, coming from up ahead.

> You hiss "Hide!" to your party, sheathing your sword to extinguish it's light as you duck behind a stalagmite.

Kate, Sophie and Ehburith hide behind some stalagmites of their own, although they remain close enough that you can keep an eye on each other. You sit there in the darkness, waiting patiently. The clinking grows louder, and you begin to make out the sound of footsteps, coming from multiple sources.
You peer out from behind your stalagmite, trying to spot the source of the noise. You make out the dim outlines of several figures standing at the front of a column of troops advancing in formation.

> You remain hidden and wait for the Frost Legion troops to pass.
The column of troops marches past, and soon they're out of your line of sight.

> You wait for the noise to recede before drawing your sword again, illuminating the room. "Let's keep going."
Your companions nod, and you draw your sword again, illuminating the room. You turn and head deeper into the cave, although you remain alert for any other signs of life.

> You try to find a path upwards, to the surface.
You follow the cave around, and it begins to slope upwards. After a few minutes of climbing, you emerge into the early morning sunlight, on the side of a steep hill. The endless fields of snow and ice blind you all for a moment as your eyes adjust. You climb to the top of the hill, and look out at the landscape. A vast, frozen wasteland stretches out in every direction, only broken by patches of trees struggling to survive and small mountains in the distance.

> You say "The Northern Wastes..."
Kate and Sophie both climb up the hill to stand by your side.
"The Northern Wastes..." Kate repeats.
"I've read about this place," Sophie says. "But never thought I would come here, before all this."

> You turn back to the writhing mass of tentacles. "Ehburith, this is where we should part ways. Our path leads us to even greater danger, and is not one you need follow."
Ehburith nods.
"Thank you. Thank you," it says. "I shall return to my home."
You nod, Sophie pats it one last time.

> You say "Best of luck."

Ehburith bows its head to you once more, then turns and disappears into the cave. You three wait a moment to see if it comes back, but when nothing happens, you begin walking in the opposite direction.

The Great Dragon of Larion

The Calm

> You say "We should find somewhere that offers a little bit of shelter and make camp."
Sophie and Kate nod in agreement. You set off across the snowy wastes, scanning the landscape for any possible locations. After an hour of searching, you find a rocky outcrop that could offer shelter.

> You say "This will do."
You set up camp inside the outcrop, and begin to settle down for the night.
"I'll take the first watch," you say. "Then Kate, then Sophie."
The other two nod in agreement.

> You all start a campfire, warming your frigid skin against the cold, as you talk.
Sophie and Kate start a fire, while you sit away from the flames, watching. After a few moments, you begin to talk.
"What do you think will happen?" you ask.
"We'll kill the dragon, of course," Kate says.
"What then?" you ask.
"What do you mean?"
"I mean... what then? We've killed the dragon. Our quest is over. What happens next?"
Kate shrugs her shoulders.
"We go home, I guess," she says.
"Home," Sophie repeats, dismayed. "I don't want to go back home."
"Well what do you want to do, then?" Kate asks.

> You say "You still want to settle down in Ochirea, Sophie?"
"Yeah," Sophie says. "Find a job, maybe meet a guy, settle down, you know?"

> You laugh. "Gonna settle down with a merman?"
Sophie laughs. "Well, if I happen to find a merman that I like, then sure!"
"He'd better treat you right," Kate says.

"Or I'll crush him," you say, cracking your knuckles.
"You'll crush anyone who doesn't treat Sophie right," Kate says.

> You say "Like you wouldn't be right there besides me!"
"Exactly," Kate says, grinning.
You all laugh, and settle down around the fire to sleep. You spend a mostly sleepless night; the cold is bitter, and the rocks hurt your back.

> You dream.
You dream of home. You dream of your family, and friends, and the people in the town. They're all so happy, so carefree. You watch them play, and laugh, and sing. They look so beautiful.
In your dream, you walk up to a young girl with golden hair, wearing a simple peasant dress.
"Hello," she says. "I'm Lavender."
"I'm Emilia."
"It's nice to meet you, Emilia. Where are you from?"
"The hills. The mountains. A cave. I forget."
"I see. Where are you going?"
"Home. I'm home."
You wake up, to the glow of the rising sun.

> You yawn and stretch, looking around for your companions.
You find Sophie, lazily poking at the ashes of last night's fire.
"Morning," she says.
"Morning," you reply. "Anything interesting happen while I was asleep?"
"Nope," Sophie says. "Although I had a pretty interesting dream."
"Yeah?" you ask.
"Yeah. It was about you and Kate."
You raise an eyebrow, curious.
"Really? What was it about?"
Sophie blushes, giggling.
"Don't be embarrassed," you say. "Tell me."
"It's silly," she says.
"If you don't tell me, I'll only be more curious," you say.
"Don't do that to me," Sophie says, pouting.
"Tell me."
"Fine. You promise you won't laugh?"
"I promise I won't laugh."

"Well... in the dream, you and Kate got married."
"Is that it?" you ask, laughing.
"No!" Sophie says, giggling. "You had a kid."
You laugh, again.
"What, us? Parents?" you ask, smiling.
"Yeah. And the three of you were happy."
"Sounds like a nice dream," you say.
"Yeah... it was."

> You turn to look at the sleeping Kate.
You gently shake Kate's shoulder, and she awakens.
"Morning," you say.
"Morning," Kate says. "Did you sleep well?"

> You say "Not really. Sophie did, though. And she had a great dream."
"Hey!" Sophie shouts, blushing.
"What kind of dream?" Kate asks, raising an eyebrow.
"A... a nice one," Sophie says.
"Tell her!" you demand, grinning.
"No! It's embarrassing!"

> You say "If you won't, I will!"
"If you won't, I will!" you say.
"Fine!" Sophie says. "I had a dream that you and Kate got married, and had a kid."
"What!?" Kate asks, surprised.

> You blush a little while still grinning.
You blush a little, still grinning.
"Well, if that happened in the future... I would be happy with it," Kate says.
Sophie smiles.
"Yeah. Me too," you say.
Kate smiles, before leaning in and kissing you on the lips.
"I love you," she says.
"I love you, too."
Sophie yawns, stretching.
"Well, if you two are done getting romantic..." she says.
You laugh, standing up.

> You say "You're right. We should be off. "

You grab your sword, and sling your shield over your shoulder.
"You're right. We should be off," you say.

> You look out over the icy wastelands, feeling the frigid air against your face as you peek out from behind the rocky outcropping.
The howling wind beats against your face as you stand on the outcropping, looking down at the lands below. There's no more trees now, only barren fields of ice and snow.

> You say "I wonder what happened to Locke."
"I wonder what happened to Locke," you say.
Sophie and Kate stand on either side of you, looking out at the frozen tundra before you.
"I'm sure she's fine," Sophie says. "Probably got a hot meal and a fire to herself right now."

> You say "She did say she lived beyond the wastes. We never got a chance to ask her about that, huh..."
You say "She did say she lived beyond the wastes. We never got a chance to ask her about that, huh..."
"Yeah," Kate says. "I wonder what it's like? Past the frozen lands."
"I dunno," Sophie says. "I had no idea there was anything up there."
"Me neither," you say. "But I'm sure it's... well, to be honest I have no idea what it's like. We should go there some day."
"Maybe we will," Kate says.
"So, should we head out?" Sophie asks.
You all nod, and head out into the wastes.

> You say "From the legends I've heard, the dragon lives in mountains beyond the ice fields. We should veer towards them."
"From the legends I've heard, the dragon lives in mountains beyond the ice fields. We should veer towards them," you say.
Sophie nods.
"I think that's a good idea," she says.
"Yeah, let's do that," Kate says.
You set off into the frozen wastes, moving towards the mountains in the distance. After a few days of trudging through the snow, you start to see larger shapes on the horizon, taking shape. You walk towards them, and as you do they seem to gain form. Huge, snow-crusted and ice-slick rocks. Mountains.

The mountains here are huge, soaring up out of the ground and dwarfing the sparse trees around them. You stare at them in awe, as Sophie grins.
"I think these are called the Drak Mountains," she says. "This is where we'll find the dragon."
You nod. "Can't imagine it being anywhere else."
"Come on," Kate says. "Let's get up there."
You all walk towards the mountains, staring upwards. They seem huge, and still days away.
You walk for hours through the cold, eventually stopping to make camp for the night. You set up your blankets, building a fire as the darkness falls over you. You sit around the fire, roasting pieces of meat on sticks and chatting.
"Want me to tell a ghost story?" Sophie asks.
"Oh really?" Kate asks. "I didn't know you knew any stories."

> You laugh, poking Kate in the side. "Well, go on, Sophie. What's the story?"
You laugh, poking Kate in the side. "Well, go on, Sophie. What's the story?"
"The story is... Nevermind," Sophie says.
"No, what story?" Kate asks, laughing.
Sophie sighs. "It's silly."
"Come on, Sophie. Tell us the story," you say.
"Fine," Sophie says.

> You snuggle close to Kate and listen to Sophie's story.
You snuggle up close to Kate, as she wraps an arm around you and smiles.
"It was a dark and stormy night," Sophie says dramatically.
You all laugh. "What the hell does that even mean?" you ask.
"I don't know," Sophie admits. "It's how all the best stories start, though."
"Fair," you say. "Go on, then!"
"So, it was a dark and stormy night. I was walking through the woods, to my parent's house. The moon was hidden, the wind was blowing... It was really spooky. I walked faster, before finally stopping and looking around. I saw nothing. I heard nothing. But I felt... something."
"That's good!" you say. "I'm hooked, keep going."
"As I stood, wondering whether I should keep walking or turn around, I heard the faint patter of footsteps behind me. I whirled around, drawing my knife. I stared into the darkness. I stared so hard I thought my eyes would pop. But after a few minutes, I saw nothing. No one was there. I decided I was just hearing things, and turned around... and found myself face to face with my boyfriend, Jake."
"No!" you say, mockingly offended.

"Yes!" Sophie says, also mockingly offended. "He screamed, and I screamed. I almost threw my knife at him. I apologized, and he explained he was just out for a midnight stroll. We talked for a bit, and decided to head off to his house. As we walked, a dark figure appeared in front of us. It was a woman, wearing a long black cloak. Her face was pale, her eyes hollow, her hair straggly. In her hands, she held a blood-stained knife and a human head."
"Oh, I know this one," Kate says. "Go on."
"The woman said only one word. 'Doom'. Then, she disappeared. I stared at Jake, and he stared at me. 'We're going to die,' he said. I asked why. He said, 'The ghosts are here.' I didn't believe him. I asked who the ghost was, and he said he had no idea. I believed him. He was shivering violently, and looked terrified. I looked behind me, and saw a new figure. This one was tall and muscular, wearing tattered rags. It was a man, or at least had been once. Now, it was nothing but a skeleton, covered in rotting skin. In it's hand was an old dagger, stained with blood. It looked at me, and I felt terror course through my veins. It began walking towards me. Then, Jake screamed. When I turned to look at him, he was gone. The ghost with the blood-stained dagger had appeared behind him, and killed him instantly. I screamed as his body fell to the ground, and the ghost disappeared. Then, I woke up."
"Well?" you ask. "What did you do next?"
"I woke up, and realized it was just a dream," Sophie says. "Just a dream."

> You start to laugh. "That's it? After all that, it was just a dream?"
"Yes," Sophie says, offended. "You don't think that was scary?"
"No," you say. "The fact that you can't tell a story worth a crap is terrifying."
"Shut up!"

> You laugh and shove Sophie into the snow.
"Give me a better ending!" you say.
Sophie pushes you back, and the two of you engage in a childish fight in the snow. Soon, the two of you are laughing. You help Sophie up, and she brushes the snow off her leather armor.

> You look at your snow-covered body, grin, and go to hug Kate.
You look at your snow-covered body, grin, and go to hug Kate. You wrap your arms around her and pull her close, pressing your cold lips against her warm ones. She pushes you away and hits you in the shoulder.
"Cold!" she says. "You're cold!"
You laugh and shrug. Kate looks up at the stars, trying to hide her smile.

> You say "We should probably go to sleep."
"We should probably go to sleep," you say.
"Probably," Kate says.
You sit in silence for a moment, staring at the stars.

> You say "I love you two."
"I love you two," you say.
"We love you too, Emi," Kate says.
Sophie nods in agreement, smiling.

> You go to sleep, preparing for the long days to come.
You close your eyes and drift off to sleep.

The Drak Mountains

> You dream of the Great Dragon.
You dream of the Great Dragon, a beast of unimaginable power. Dragons are creatures of legend and myth, they're said to be as powerful as gods. In your dream, you find yourself in the belly of the beast. It's a dark cavern, with the dragon's organs surrounding you. You walk through it fearfully, as the beating of the dragon's heart causes blood to flow around you. You peer through the darkness, looking for anything. Suddenly, you hear a voice.
"Do you think I haven't seen what you've done?" the voice hisses.
You turn, and see a young girl in Kate's clothing. The Kate specter drifts towards you, it's hands outstretched, and it's face twisted by hatred and anger.
"What are you?" you say, terrified.
The specter ignores your question.
"You're not real!" you say.
"I am very real!" the specter hisses. "I'm sorry you had to see this, Emi. I didn't want you to know how sad and broken Kate really is."
"What are you talking about? Kate loves me!" you say.
The specter laughs derisively.
"That's right, Emi. Just keep telling yourself that."
The specter drifts towards you, and its face twists into an expression of anger and hatred.
"She doesn't love you, she never will, and you're too stupid to see it. She's using you!"
You stare at the specter in disbelief.
"No, that's not true! I love Kate!" you say.
"Ha! Why would Kate love you?"
"I... I saved her life!"
The specter laughs.
"You think that's what love is? Just a silly schoolgirl infatuation? No. You're wrong, and I'll prove it to you. Just you wait, just you wait."
The specter's expression then softens. It approaches you, and strokes your face. It's icy cold, and it makes you feel uneasy.
"Just you wait," it says, its voice quiet and melancholy.
The specter then drifts away from you, fading into the background as you jolt awake.

> You rub your eyes uneasily.
You rub your eyes, trying to get the specter out of your mind. Your dreams haven't been pleasant lately. You're too tired to think about it anymore, so you drift back to sleep.
You wake up the next morning and find Kate sitting at the campfire, chewing on a piece of dried venison.
"Morning," she says, smiling at you.
You stare at her for a second. The girl in your dream, the one that looked like Kate... It can't be. She loves you, not hates you. You're just stressed. Just a bit stressed, that's all.
"Morning," you reply.
You stare at the fire.

> You say "Sophie still asleep?"
"Yeah, she took first watch last night. I'll go wake her up in a few minutes."

> You hug Kate.
You walk up to Kate and wrap your arms around her.
"What's this for?" she asks, smiling.

> You say "Nothing."
"You're a silly person, you know that?"
You smile.
"Yeah."
Kate and you walk over to Sophie and wake her up. She sits up quickly, rubbing her eyes.
"Hi," she says groggily.
"Morning, Sophie," you say.
"Mornin'," she replies.

> You say "Ready to get going? We should be nearing the base of the Drak Mountains today."
"You woke me up just to tell me that?" she asks.
"No, I woke you up because it's time to go."
Sophie groans.

> You grin and pat her head. "We can wait a bit, if you want a little more sleep."
"Nah, I'm awake now," she says. "I'll go grab my stuff."

Sophie jumps up and walks over to her bag.

> You say "Let's be off then. Who knows? We might be hearing the roars of the dragon, soon."
You, Kate, and Sophie begin walking north. As you cover more and more ground, the terrain slowly begins to change. It goes from being flat and open fields to hilly and then finally to mountainous. Stone begins to periodically break through the ice as you get closer.

> You say "So. We should probably figure out what we are going to do when we find it."
"Yeah, we should," Kate says.
"It's not going to be an easy fight," you say. "We need to be prepared."
You all walk in silence for a few minutes.
"Maybe we should just not fight it," Sophie says.
You and Kate stop and stare at her.

> You say "What do you mean?"
"I mean, we don't need to fight it directly. I just don't like our chances in a straight fight."

> You say "What do you propose? We cause an avalanche, or something?"
"Maybe," Sophie says, looking up at the mountains. "I'm not sure yet. I'll think of something, though."
The three of you continue walking.
You eventually pass into the Drak Mountains.

> You say "Let's try to stay out of sight from here. Wasn't worth bothering in the plains, but we don't know if the dragon is the only thing in these mountains."
The three of you are careful to make as little noise as possible from here on out.
Eventually, you see something: a large mountain, much bigger than the rest, with a cave leading inside it.

> You quietly point it out to your companions and grimly nod. Over the past few hours, the mood has turned more and more serious.
The three of you make your way to the cave and peer inside. Nothing. The cave mouth is easily a hundred feet in diameter, and the inside shows no sign of shrinking.
You walk further in.

Still nothing.
You walk deeper in.
Still nothing, but it gets colder.
You walk deeper in, and suddenly hear a soft growling sound coming from up ahead.
You look at Kate and Sophie.

> You nod to the girls and embrace them.
The three of you embrace each other.

The Storm

You emerge into a gargantuan cavern. The walls and ceiling are slick with ice, with the room being dimly lit by thousands of glowing crystals embedded in the ceiling. The cavern floor slopes down in front of you, eventually disappearing into a frozen lake. You see tunnels snaking off along the edges of the chamber. A singular stone path rises above the frozen lake surface, two dozen feet wide. It snakes its way to the center of the lake, rising to a plateau. Your eyes follow the path until you see it. The Great Evil Dragon of Larion, sleeping upon his throne.

> You look at the dragon.
The dragon is the size of a small castle. It sleeps, its chest rising and falling slowly. Its scales are blue and black, with horns protruding from its head. Ice and frost coat the creature, seeming to be a part of its hide. Your gaze travels along its body to the dark wings that cover most the creature's body, and then to the talons the size of four men, lain end to end.You shudder at the thought of what it would be like to feel those ebony monstrosities crash down upon you.
All three of you stare at the creature for some time.
Your mind races. This is it. This is what you've been working towards. This is the day you make your mark on history. This is the day you get your revenge.
But your sword arm shakes. Your legs shudder, and your armor feels heavy. How can it be so big? How can you defeat this thing? This beast is as old as empires. It has consumed entire cities. Your heart sinks.
You see the rows of sharp teeth that line the mouth, and tendrils of smoke spewing forth from the nostrils as the great beast slumbers.
You look to your companions. Kate's eyes are wide, and she grips her dagger so tightly her knuckles are white. Sophie has her battleaxe drawn and raised, its polished metal gleaming in the low light.
You look back at the dragon, and your mind continues to race. How can something that big even exist? How can it even move? How can you possibly kill it? The dragon's head is larger than a castle's drawbridge. Its teeth are bigger than swords with the width of tower shields. How can you kill such a beast?
It doesn't matter. You have to try. For your mother. For your father. For your friends. For everyone that helped you get here. For everyone you left behind. And for who you stand with, facing down certain death.

> You swallow, and close your eyes as you let your senses expand, feeling the stone that makes up the chamber around you.
Your mind expands, feeling the earth and stone that makes up the cavern around you. You feel the rumblings of the earth, great and small. The mountain almost feels alive, and for a moment, you are a part of it.

> You snap your eyes open and roar as you crack the ice on the ceiling above the dragon and send the weight of the mountain hurtling down.
"Now!"
The ceiling collapses down on the dragon, and you quickly jump back as a wave of dust and shattered rock hurtles towards you and your companions.

> You root yourself in the earth with your magic, holding your shield aloft to stem the oncoming wave. "Get behind me!" you shout to Sophie and Kate.
"Did it work?" Kate asks, bracing against you.
"I don't know. I can't see it."

> You wait for the dust to clear and look to where the dragon lay sleeping moments ago.
The dragon seems to be gone.

> You draw your sword, willing the magical light of the blade to illuminate the room and reveal where the beast hides.
The cavern is revealed, seemingly empty aside from a thick layer of dust and rubble that coats the ground. You step forward, inspecting the cavern, when a voice echoes off the ice and bounces all around you.
"Pathetic."

> You say "Show yourself, monster!"
A voice booms throughout the cavern, shaking it to the core.
"Pathetic!"
The dragon's voice is like the grinding of ice, like the low rumble before an avalanche.

> You close your eyes and try to ascertain the dragon's location with your tremorsense.
You close your eyes, focusing on the tremorsense that allows you to feel the movements of everything around you. The dragon's voice came from the right, but you know that it could be tricking you.

You feel the tremor of a clawed foot crushing rock as it steps slowly to the left.

> You say "There!"
Your blade meets scales as the dragon's hiss cuts through the cavern. The creature roars, and you backpedal, barreling into your companions.

> You say "Spread out and keep moving! Sophie, summon your elementals!"
The dragon spews a torrent of flames, the inferno filling the cavern and blocking off your retreat. The fire dies down, revealing that it blocked off your retreat by creating a wall of flames. You and your companions dart away from each other, moving away from the dragon. Kate's magical knives flit through the air as she disappears, teleporting away from the beast. Sophie waves her hands and launches herself through the air on a column of ice, frantically chanting as she concentrates on summoning her elemental warriors. You charge forward, towards the lake, hoping the dragon will follow you.
You quickly turn to the left, finding that the dragon's burst of speed has closed the distance. It's massive maw opens as it attempts to bite off your head.

> You raise your unbreakable shield as you block the bite and scramble backwards.
The shield holds, but you skid along the ground and into the icy lake as the dragon's head slams into it.

> You stab your sword into the thick ice of the frozen lake to stop your momentum.
Your blade cuts through the ice, and you disappear into the freezing water.
You gasp as the frigid water envelops you, hoping that your armor doesn't pull you down as you sink deeper and deeper.

> You call forth the earth underneath the lake and summon a pillar to shoot you out of the lake and back towards the dragon.
You command the pillar of stone to shoot you out of the lake, and the pillar erupts underneath you. You break the surface of the lake and find yourself flying towards the dragon as it unfurls its wings and lifts itself in the air.

> You roar as you fly towards it with your shield.
You ram into the dragon, and the pair of you crash to the ground as the force of your descent slams it back down to earth.

> You roll away from the beast and try to put some distance between you and it.
The dragon's head turns towards you, its teeth snapping as it tries to bite you. You roll away, the creature's jaw crashing shut inches away from you.

> You uncork the potion of speed Edgar of Jicol gave you long ago, downing it with a gulp as you run.
You gulp down the contents of the vial, your body shaking as you suddenly begin to feel an intense heat. You turn back towards the dragon, finding it halfway through its charge towards you.

> You, feeling time seem to slow down around you, you wait for the last second before leaping to the side and attempting a slash at the dragon's flank.
You leap to the side, avoiding the dragon's snap and cutting at the creature's side as you pass. Your sword cuts deep into the dragon's flank, and you can see blood pouring from the wound.

> You turn back to face the dragon as you see Kate's knives slam into the tip of the dragon's wing, teleporting her above them, ready to strike.
You turn back towards the dragon, finding Kate leaping off of it and onto its back as her daggers bury themselves into the dragon's wing. You can see the wing damaged, and the dragon's flailing is only serving to make it worse.

> You say "You fight us on the ground, dragon. Face me! "
The dragon turns towards you, revealing its scaly and awful face as it stares at you. The creature opens its maw and lets out a burst of flames, the fire rushing towards you faster than you can possibly react.

> You raise a wall of stone before you to part the flames around your body.
You raise your hand, a solid sheet of rock shooting up from the ground and parting the flames that threaten to engulf you. The fire burns around you on all sides, leaving you unharmed.

> You catch movement out of the corner of your eye, and see Sophie's elementals surging towards the dragon to join the fight.
You watch as the dragon roars, spewing gouts of fire towards the elementals that surge forward to meet it. The fire engulfs them, burning the beings of earth and stone. You wince, and can only hope that they can endure the heat of the flames. The elementals vanish within the flames, and for a moment you think they are gone, but then you see them. You see them inside the flames, burning but not

vanishing. You see their forms solidify within the fire, faces twisted in anger as they attack the dragon from within.

> You charge towards the dragon to strike while it is distracted by the elementals.
You sprint towards the dragon, your sword held tightly in your hand. The dragon's head snaps around, meeting you with a gargantuan pair of yellow eyes.

> You continue your charge with your shield aloft, prepared to intercept whatever blow comes your way while you wait for the elementals to strike.
You raise your shield, bracing yourself for the dragon's charge. You see its head snapping down towards you, and a jet of flame erupts from its mouth.

> You sink into the earth around you, bracing yourself as you part the fire with your magical shield.
You sink into the earth, your magical shield protecting you from the fire as you brace against the ground. The dragon's fire rushes all around you, burning the earth and melting ice but leaving you unscathed.
The dragon smashes into your magical shield, its jaws snapping closed just a few feet away from your head as it roars. You raise your head slowly, still braced against the ground.
Out of the corner of your eye, you see the stone and earth elementals reach the dragon and leap forward towards the beast. The dragon roars, flames bursting forward to destroy the elementals, but you can see from here that the two are under the dragon, gripping its body and holding it in place.

> You say "Kate, with me! Strike now!"
You raise your sword and charge towards the dragon, Kate's yell ringing out as she leaps through the air, carried by wind towards the monster.
You run forward, lunging with your sword as the dragon twists and writhes to avoid your blow. You hit, but the dragon's scales are so tough that you only manage to carve a wound in its side. Still, you did some damage, and as the dragon twists in pain it lets out a deafening roar.
Kate's airborne strike comes down, her dagger slashing the dragon's snout as she lands. The dragon bellows, twisting around and flinging its tail towards Kate.
Kate's flung aside by the massive tail, smashing through the earth and into the rock wall beyond.

> You scream. "Kate! No!"

You scream, rage building up inside of you. You leap forward, stabbing your sword into the dragon's side as it twists around to crush you with its claw.

> You summon a pillar of earth underneath you and rise to meet the dragon's claw, shield above your head.
The dragon's claw slams into your shield, and you brace your legs against the ground to push yourself higher. You push yourself up, the dragon's claw coming down on top of you as you hold your shield above your head.
You are flung up into the stone ceiling of the cavern, shoved skyward by the dragon's massive claw. You scream in pain, the weight of the dragon crushing your entire body as it pins you against the ceiling. Its damaged wings strain to keep it aloft as it looks at you and laughs.
The dragon's laughter is deafening, and you scream in pain as you're slowly crushed to death. You gasp for air, the pain overwhelming you as you find yourself unable to move.
As you weaken, you see Sophie's Storm Elementals rush from the edge of the lake, slamming into the dragon and hurling mighty lightning. The lightning flashes through the dragon's body, it bellowing in pain as it releases its grip and tumbles back.
The dragon soars through the air, smashing into the ground with a mighty thud.

> You fall from the ceiling through the air towards the frozen lake, wind roaring past your ears.
You fall from the ceiling, screaming as you plummet towards the frozen lake below. You see Kate lying on the ground, her leather armor broken and torn, her face pale and drawn.

> You say "Sophie! Catch me!"
You drop from the ceiling, hurtling towards the ground. As you do, you see Sophie leap forward, dashing through the air as she grabs your hand, her other arm held out at her side. A whirlwind of water is beneath her feet, propelling you both to the side of the cavern.
You sail through the air, rolling across the ground as you slide along. You slow down, sliding to a halt, water splashing around you two as you stop on the surface of the frozen lake.

> You say "Sophie, give me the jewel! The one the Queen gave you! Kate's wounded!"

You scream, rushing over to Kate as Sophie holds out her hand, the red jewel in her palm.
"I'll cover you," Sophie says grimly.
You nod, grabbing the red jewel as you rush past her.
Sophie begins chanting anew, and elementals of all types appear around her. She raises her battleaxe above her head and points it towards the recovering dragon, commanding her warriors. She stays there, keeping the dragon distracted while you rush to Kate's side.
You drop to your knees, holding out the red jewel as you activate it.

> You channel the healing magic of the jewel into Kate's broken form. "Please work... Please work..." you mutter.
Kate lies on the ground, her armor broken and shattered and her dagger off to the side. She looks up at you, her eyes full of pain and terror.
You take her hand in yours, squeezing it as you kneel by her side. You raise the red jewel to her chest, and begin channeling the healing magic into her broken form.
"Please work... Please work..." you repeat.
You see the magic mending her broken bones, healing her bruises and closing her wounds. After a few moments, you see her breathing steady, and her eyes refocus.
"Thanks," she gasps.
You smile, nodding your head.
Kate grabs her dagger, standing up as she wipes the blood off her blade.

> You turn to look at the dragon as it battles Sophie's elementals.
You watch as the dragon snaps one of the elementals in half, tossing the top half at another elemental, which smashes into a wall and crumbles to dust. You look at Sophie, who stands with her back to the wall, knees bent as she prepares to dodge whatever the dragon throws at her.

> You say "Let's finish this, Kate."
Her eyes glint and a savage grin appears on her face.
"Let's finish this," she says.
You begin sprinting towards the dragon, dashing to the side to avoid an elemental's deteriorating form as it sails past you. You slide to a halt in the dirt, raising your shining sword above your head, taunting the creature.
The dragon twists its neck, letting out a burst of flame that illuminates the cavern.

> You meet the flame with your shield, shoulders low for Kate to springboard off and leap towards the dragon, aided by her wind magic.
You step into the flame, your shield raised in front of you as you push through it. You feel your hair and clothes begin to burn, but you keep going, barreling towards the dragon's head. Kate leaps off of you, twisting in the air as she raises her dagger, driving it into the dragon's left eye.
You drop down in front of the dragon's head, sliding against the ice-slicked ground as you slide past the dragon's snout and under its jaw. You roll to a stop, swinging your sword and slashing the dragon's underbelly. You turn and sprint towards the dragon's tail, sliding along the ground once more to come to a stop under the dragon's tail.
"Now!" you shout.

> You call upon the earth around the dragon, attempting to pin it to the ground for your companions to attack.
You plant your feet in the ground, feeling it give way as the earth rises up around the dragon's wings. Kate leaps off of the rising earth, stabbing the dragon through the wing and narrowly avoiding its claws. She rolls to her feet, twisting as she slashes the dragon's chest. Sophie runs up behind it, hefting her axe as she slams it into the dragon's neck.

> You say "Bring! It! Down!"
The dragon lets out a pained cry, thrashing as it attempts to turn and bite you. It flails, roaring as its wings beat at the air, but you hold it down with pillars of stone, preventing it from moving. Kate drives her dagger into the dragon's other eye, Sophie slamming her axe into the dragon's skull, cracking it.

> You say "You die here, beast! "
You run your sword through the dragon's neck, twisting it as you yank it out and slash again, tearing through its scales.

> You keep slashing, carving deeper and deeper into the great beast's neck.
You hack at the dragon's neck as its blood spills out, staining the ground and soaking into your clothes. It lets out a weak roar, muscles beginning to give way. It falls to the ground, letting out a pitiful whimper as it struggles to rise.
"Finish it!" you shout.

Kate charges forward, leaping onto the dragon's neck as she runs along it, leaping off as her dagger glints, slashing the dragon's throat. Sophie's battleaxe comes down again and again upon its skull, bone splintering with every strike.
You raise your sword, stabbing it down into the dragon's skull as its blood spills out onto the ground. The dragon lets out a pitiful moan, its body shuddering before going limp.

> You rip your sword out of the beast, as the cavern goes quiet.
The cavern goes quiet as you stand there, panting. You rip your sword out of the dragon's head as its blood stains the ground, forming a pool around its body.
"We... we did it!" Sophie says, laughing as tears roll down her face. "We killed a dragon!"
You release your hold over the earth, and it drops away from the dragon.

> You say "We actually did it..."
Kate puts her arm around you, and the three of you laugh as you celebrate your victory.
"We did it!" Kate says.
You smile, kissing Kate on the cheek as you embrace her tightly.
"I love you," you say.
"I love you," Kate replies, smiling as she hugs you.
You look over at Sophie, smiling as you go to hug her as well.
"I love you too, Sophie," you say.
"I love you both," Sophie replies.
The three of you laugh and smile, embracing in a group hug as you celebrate your victory.

> You drop to the ground in exhaustion with your companions, arm in arm.
The three of you lie there, side by side, exhausted. You've done it. You've killed the dragon. A far away goal became an insurmountable one in front of you, and yet you did it.
You rest your head on the ground, panting as you feel the cool ice against your skin. Your strength is fading, but you're alive, and that's what matters.

> You gaze at the glimmering jewels locked in the ceiling of the chamber. "Thank you," you whisper. "Thank you two."
You smile, and let exhaustion take you, trusting your companions to watch over you as you rest.

End Book One.

Book Two

The Ice Queen

Aftermath

Dreams

> You dream.
You dream of a village.
Of fields and pastures, of woods and roads. Of women and children, men and warriors. Of laughter and joy, of food and love, of life.
A green village, alive and well.
Then, a shadow. A black cloud approaches the village, and it begins to rain. At first it is a gentle rain, refreshing and cleansing. The villagers look to the sky, noticing the change in weather, but do nothing. They continue about their work, their labors, their lives.
The rain intensifies. It begins to pour. The villagers run for cover, closing the doors and windows of their huts to keep the rain out. Still, they do not understand. They think it is a storm, and the rain will soon pass.
But it doesn't. The rain becomes a downpour, and then a flood. The village is soon destroyed by the water, which increases in intensity. The rain isn't just water. It is terror and pain. It is fear and destruction. It drowns the village, destroying the lives of those who dwell within it.
And then, it stops.
The sky clears, the rain ceases. The villagers begin to rebuild their lives. They forget the terror that they have faced, and go about their work.
But the rain returns. It falls from the sky once more, destroying all in its path. The villagers rebuild once more, and the cycle continues.
You see yourself standing outside the village, watching it get destroyed over and over again by the merciless rain. You can do nothing to help.
"You have a choice," a voice says.
You turn, to see a shadowy figure standing behind you. You gaze into the face, but find nothing but a blur.
"Who are you?" you ask.
"You may call me the Fool," the Fool says. "Most do."
"Why have you brought me here? What is this place?"
"A dream. Your dream. This is what you fear, isn't it?"
You don't answer.

"This is but a glimpse of your subconscious. The fears that plague you, the fears that drive you. Look around. Recognize anything?"
The Fool disappears, and you're alone again. You look around, and recognize the village as your childhood home. Fairhall.
Then, you see it. The shadow on the cliff. The black cloud in the perfect sky. It approaches Fairhall, and the rain begins to fall once more.
"That's it," the Fool says. "That's your fear."
"No," you say. "I stopped it. I ended the cycle."
"Did you? How?"
"I confronted it. I faced my fear."
"Are you sure that's what happened?"
"I..." you pause, as the shadow engulfs Fairhall. The rain begins to fall, and the village is destroyed once again. "No. No! I stopped it once. I can do it again!"
You walk forward, towards the shadow. It begins to fade away, but you can make out the vague shape of a dragon. You stop walking, and hold your ground. The dragon appears in front of you, but makes no move to attack. You look up at its pitiless eyes, and shudder.
"Do you fear me?" the dragon asks.
"Yes," you say.
"A wise answer, little mortal," the dragon says. "Now, return me to my slumber."
You raise your sword and stab the dragon, piercing its side. It roars, and blasts you with a jet of fire. You're thrown into the air, and land in the lake. You swim to the surface, and find that the water has frozen around you. You break through, and find yourself in the grip of a giant. It squeezes, and your bones begin to break. You're dropped to the floor, where all around you is black ice. You look around in horror as the frost spreads across your body. You scream, but there is no sound. You're trapped in a silent nightmare.
You awake with a start. You find yourself by a campfire, next to Kate. She stirs, and smiles as she sees that you're awake.

> You take a shuddering breath.
"You're awake," she says. "How do you feel?"
"Alive," you say.
You take a few more breaths, and begin to calm down.

> You say "Did... did we actually do it? "
"We did," Kate says. "The dragon's dead."
You look up at her, and she smiles.
"So it's over," you say, struggling to get up.

"So it's over," she agrees, and helps you up.
You stand up, weakly, and she hugs you.

> You look around you.
You're in the cavern where the dragon's corpse lays. The blood that spewed from its wounds has frozen into a thick sheet. The wind is cold, and it carries with it the smell of smoke.
"Where's Sophie?" you ask.
"She's on watch," Kate says. "Over there."
You look to where she's pointing, and see Sophie at the edge of the cavern, lazily turning her head between each of the tunnels that go deeper into the mountain. She waves to you, then goes back to scanning the area.
"How long was I out for?" you ask.
"Fourteen hours," Kate says. "We were getting worried."

> You say "I hope you two got some rest too while I was out."
"We napped for a few hours," Kate admits. "But not much."
You take a deep breath, and realize you're starving. You pat your belly, and sigh.

> You say "I'm going to cook some food. If you want to rest, I'll wake you when it's ready."
"Thanks," she says, and lies down on the ground next to the fire.
You set about preparing some venison, and have it cooking in no time. After the meat's cooked, you grab yourself a piece and eat it, then sit down next to Kate.

> You say "Hey sweetie. Food's done. I'm going to bring some to Sophie."
"Mmm. Thanks," she says, and stands up.
You grab another piece of meat, then walk over to Sophie.

> You say "Hey Sophie. For you."
"Thanks," she says, taking it.
You sit down next to her as she eats.

> You say "How are you doing?"
"I'm fine," she says. "A little tired, but it's alright."

> You say "If you want to go rest with Kate, I can keep watch for a while."
"I'm fine here," she says, looking at you. "Go eat. You need your strength."
You sigh, then nod and head back to the campfire. You sit down next to Kate.

"Thanks for the food," she says, yawning.
"Of course," you say.
You eat a few more pieces of meat, then lean back and close your eyes.

> You say "So what now?"
"Now?" Kate says. "We get the hell out of here and live happily ever after."
You chuckle.
"You think we'll manage that?" you ask.
"We have so far," she says.

> You smile, eyes still closed. The smile fades, however, as a thought won't leave your mind. "Before we go..."
"What is it?" Kate asks.

> You say "We should try to find Locke. At least make an attempt."
"I... suppose," she says. "We'd need to be careful, and we might not find her at all. She might have just gone home."

> You say "That, or she was taken by the Ice Queen, same as us."
"Mm. Maybe," she says. "But I doubt it. She seemed able to handle herself."
You sigh, and close your eyes again.

> You say "I wanted to see her homeland. I was hoping we could convince her to take us there, when all was done."
"It is a nice thought," she says.
You lie down on the ground, and doze off once more.
Soon, the dream begins. You're in a vast white land. You don't know where you are, exactly, but you can feel that you're not in the world you were before. The snow crunches beneath your feet as you walk forward.
Soon, a woman appears. She's clad in fur and hides, with heavy leather boots. Her feet leave no prints in the snow. Her long dark hair runs down her back, and comes to a point slightly past where her hips begin. Her green eyes seem to draw you in, and you can feel her searching your mind.
"Who are you?" she asks.
"My name is Emilia Stormbringer," you reply. "I think I'm dreaming."
"What makes you say that?" she asks.
"I'm in a land of perpetual snow, talking to you," you say. "We're both aware this isn't really happening, right?"

She smiles.
"What if it is?" she asks.
"Then tell me, who are you?" you ask.
"An old friend," she replies. "One who would like to help you, if you'll let me."
"With what?" you ask.
"Everything," she replies.
You find yourself floating in darkness once again. You feel a buzzing in your mind, growing louder and louder. Then, the darkness clears, and you find yourself in the middle of a blizzard. Snow begins to fill your mouth and nose. You begin to shiver uncontrollably.
"Emilia!" a voice cries.
You turn, and find Kate stumbling through the snow towards you. Her eyes are wild with fear.
"Kate?" you say.
She reaches you, wrapping her arms around you. The warmth from her body keeps you alive in the cold.
"I can't lose you," she says. "I can't."
"You won't," you reply, rubbing her back. "I'm not going anywhere."
Suddenly, you find yourself pulled backwards, out of her embrace. You feel the buzz in your mind get louder and louder, until it's all you can hear. Then, it fades.

The Snowglobe

You find yourself lying on the floor of the cavern, with Kate shaking you.
"Hey!" she says. "Wake up!"
You blink, your eyes refocusing. You find yourself staring into Kate's eyes.
"What happened?" you ask.
"You stopped breathing," she replies. "For a second there, I thought you died."

> You say "I'm sorry... Just, a weird dream. Second one today..."
"What happened in it?" Kate asks.
"It was about a woman. I think it was Lavender."
"Lavender?"
You nod slowly.

> You say "She's... She's someone I see in my dreams. She never looks the same, or is even the same age, but always seems to be a friend..."
"That's... Strange."
"It is," you agree. "She said she's an old friend, in this dream."
"When did you first see her?"

> You say "In Ochirea. After we killed the svelk, and after I first spoke to Queen Kitsu. When I was asleep for days..."
"Really?" Kate asks.
You nod.
"I'm certain."

> You fish around in your pack, and pull out the snowglobe Queen Kitsu gave you, the one with the Castle of Endless Moonlight in it, surrounded by fields of lavender. "And... I know this sounds crazy, but where I met her... It was outside this castle."
"What?" Kate asks, confused. "How? Why didn't you tell me?"
"I just... Didn't think of it at the time," you stammer. "There was a lot going on. It didn't seem important."
"And you only remembered it now?" Kate asks.
You nod.
"So... What did she say then?"

> You say "She said that we were bound together. That I was in danger, and that I had to get to the castle, where her parents were. She said they loved me, and that they had been looking for me. That she'd try to find us... and to not forget them."
"What do you think she meant?"
"I don't know," you say, shaking your head. "She said she didn't either."
You stare into the globe. The Castle of the Endless Moonlight is beautiful, surrounded by lavender fields, lit by the soft glow of the moon. You turn it over and look at the base, finding a small message etched into the glass.

> You say "Was this... always there?"
Kate peers over your shoulder, leaning in. Her breath warms your neck, sending a tingle down your spine. She smells like ash.
"I've never seen it before," she says.

> You read the message aloud.
"To the bearer of this gift, I give you hope. I give you a friend. I give you an escape from the world. I give you the chance to change everything."
You frown, confused.
"What do you think it means?" Kate asks.
"No idea," you say.

> You turn the snowglobe back over, watching the particles swirl around. "The Queen said to use it, we turn it over and stick a hand inside..."
"Like this?" Kate puts her hand into the snowglobe. She closes her eyes, as a light emanates from the globe. She opens her eyes again, looking around, but not moving her arm.

> You say "Kate? Are you okay?"
"I'm fine," she says, slowly pulling her arm out of the globe. "I think."
She holds up her arm. It's no longer battle-worn, scars and blemishes on her skin vanished. It's smoother and fairer than it was when you met her.
"I feel... Better."

> You say "Kitsu did say it was meant to heal... May I try?"
Kate nods, passing you the globe. You take it, looking into it. The particles seem to swirl slower and slower as you watch, until they're barely moving at all.

> You turn the globe over, and reach inside.

Your hand tingles as it passes into the globe. It feels like when you put your foot to sleep, but warmer. A comforting heat.
You pull your hand out of the globe. It's healed. The burn that you got from the dragon's fire is gone. In its place is new, soft skin, as healthy and fresh as that of a child.
"Let me see," Kate says, grabbing your hand and turning it over. "Same as mine..."
"What does that mean?"
"I don't know," Kate says. "But it's better, right? You're not in pain anymore."

> You say "It felt like I was reaching into another world."
"That's how it looked," Kate says, smiling. "It's beautiful, in a way."

> You say "Kate, I'm going to try something. Pull me back if something goes wrong, okay?"
"Got it," she says, nodding.
You put your hand back into the globe. The same tingling heat rushes through your body once more, but you don't try to remove your hand.

> You push your arm in further.
The heat begins to fade. You push your arm further, past the point where it was before, until your whole shoulder is inside the globe. You close your eyes, taking a deep breath.

> You say "I'm just going to take a look."
"Be careful," Kate says, nervousness in her voice.

> You put your head inside the globe, and open your eyes.
You find yourself floating in a black void. Strange, multicolored lights float through the void, and you feel as if you're being watched. You're no longer in any pain.
"Hello?" you say.
You wait for a response, but hear nothing but silence.
You look down at your body. You find yourself naked, and utterly healed. No scars, no burns. The dried blood and grime, vanished.

> You attempt to leave the globe.
You reach out, trying to find something, anything to grab onto. You feel nothing.
"I'm stuck," you think

"No you're not," a voice says.

> You say "Lavender?"
"She's not here right now," the voice responds.
"Who are you?" you ask.
"A friend," the voice answers. "We don't have much time. I need to give you some information."
"What kind of information?" you ask.
"About the girl," the voice responds.

> You say "Lavender? Is she in danger?"
"Yes," the voice responds. "She is in danger. She is in constant danger, and has been since she was born."

> You say "Can I help?"
"Your help is limited," the voice responds. "This isn't your fight. It's hers."

> You say "There must be something I can do. How can I reach her?"
"You can't," the voice responds. "Not from here. You're but looking in, anchored in your world."
"Is there a way for me to go to this other world?" you ask.
"Yes," the voice answers. "But you'd have to find the keyhole."

> You say "What is the key?"
"You already have it," the voice answers. "You just have to use it at the right spot."

> You say "The snowglobe?"
"Yes," the voice answers. "But only at the right moment."
"What's the right moment?" you ask.
The voice stays silent.

> You say "Hello?"
No answer.

> You say "Are you there?"
Still, no answer.

> You say "Kate, can you hear me? Pull me out!"
You hear Kate's voice. "Em? What happened?"

"I don't know," you say, as Kate pulls you out of the globe.
Kate holds the globe in her hand, looking at it.

> You say "I spoke to someone."
"What did they say?" Kate asks.

> You say "They said Lavender was in danger. Always had been, since she was born. And that she exists in another world."
"Anything else?" Kate asks.

> You say "They said that in order to go there, I'd have to find a keyhole, and at the right moment, use the key. The snowglobe, apparently."
"Interesting," Kate says, looking up at you.
"What does it mean?" you ask.
"I don't know," Kate says.

> You say "Kate... Do you remember, back in Jicol? When Captain Matthias took us to Edgar? The first thing he showed us was a compass, right? That pointed towards another world?"
"Yes," Kate says.
"Do you think that it points towards the keyhole?" you ask.
"Maybe," Kate says.
"Do you think we could go there?" you ask. "Back to Edgar?"
"Maybe," Kate repeats. "It's very far, but..."

> You look at Sophie, still lazily keeping watch on the tunnels throughout the cavern. "I don't think Sophie will want to come," you say.
"Even if she doesn't," Kate says, softly. "I will go."
You look at the globe in Kate's hands, the little snowflake design seeming to glow.

> You say "Let's not decide this now. We have to get out of the Northern Wastes, first."
"Alright," Kate says. "We should probably get moving, then."
You nod.

> You pack up the makeshift camp, and beckon Sophie over.
"Hey, Sophie. We're moving out."
"Now?" she asks.
"Yep," you say.

"Alright," she says, hefting her axe from the ground and hopping up.

> You look back at the corpse of the great black dragon. "We should probably take a trophy," you say. "As proof. The head's too big, but maybe something else?"
"Let's take one of it's claws," Kate says. "It should be big enough to make an impression."
You nod, and Kate heads over towards the dragon.

> You help Kate sever a claw.
With a couple of swings, you hack at one of the dragon's claws. It takes a while, but eventually it breaks clean off.

> You say "Think you can wind magic that along while we walk? Not fond of the idea of carrying it through the mountains by hand."
"I think I can manage," Kate says. "Let me try."
You hand the claw over to Kate, who closes her eyes and begins chanting under her breath. The claw begins to levitate in front of her, and she smiles.
"Got it," she says.

> You say "Perfect. Let's get out of this cave."
You all begin walking down the tunnel.
You walk for a few minutes, before sunlight streams in and you hear wind howling up ahead.
"We're out," you say, relieved.
You all quickly walk through the tunnel, and emerge into the light.

Wolves in the Night

> You gaze about at the Drak Mountains.
The three of you walk out of the cave. You're standing at the edge of a cliff that faces the Drak Mountains. They're frost-covered and imposing, with a harsh, biting wind sweeping through the valley.

> You say "We're gonna have to find a boat to get out of the wastes. Oh, I wish Locke were here..."
Kate puts a hand on your shoulder.
"She's fine," she says. "I'm sure she'll catch up to us soon, or has already returned home, or something. She's a powerful mage, after all. She can handle herself."
You look into Kate's bright green eyes, and nod slowly.
"Yeah. Let's keep going."
You continue down the path from the cliff, around the mountains.

> You journey southward, camping when necessary.
After several days of walking, you find yourself on the southern side of the Drak Mountains. The terrain's changed quite a bit; the cliffs and rock have been replaced with a field of ice and snow.

> You say "This again, huh. Well, we got through it once. Nothing to it."
The three of you continue on, trudging through the snow.
The snowstorm only gets worse as you continue, and night begins to fall.

> You find a place to make camp and hunker down for the night.
You walk on for a few minutes, before you see a large rock jutting upwards, braving the howling storm. It would provide shelter from the wind and snow.

> You point it out to your companions.
"This looks like a good place for the night," you say.
"Let's find somewhere else," Sophie says. "I have a bad feeling about it."

> You say "Where else are we supposed to go? The storm is only getting worse, and it's nearly dark."

"There's another rock over there," Sophie says, pointing a short distance away. "It looks smaller, so it won't shield us from the wind as well, but it's worth a look."
You look where she's pointing.
"That one looks worse, if anything," you say. "It'll probably collapse when one of us leans against it."
"Fine," Sophie says. "Larger rock it is."
You all continue walking towards the large rock.

> You make camp under the large rock, huddling together for warmth.
You walk under the large rock. You, Sophie and Kate huddle together for warmth. You lie down and try to get to sleep. It's impossible; the snow's only getting deeper, and it's piling up against the rock.

> You say "Sophie, can you like... make an igloo? With your water magic?"
"What? Now?" she asks.
"Why not?" you say. "It would keep us warm, and safe."
"I... guess I could," Sophie says. "Let me try."
Sophie's eyes glaze over for a moment. The snow begins to move, swirling around the rock and piling up into a large mound. You and Kate watch as an igloo takes shape before your eyes.
"It's not big," Sophie says. "But it'll keep us safe."
The three of you walk into the small igloo, and quickly make a fire.

> You warm yourself by the fire with your companions.
You lie down in the cramped space, teeth chattering. Sophie lies down next to you, and Kate squeezes in between the two of you.
The warmth from the fire is the best thing you've felt in a while.

> You say "Thank you, Sophie... "
"You're welcome," she says.
The three of you lie down in the cramped space, quickly drifting off to sleep.
The morning arrives with the sound of an explosion. The walls of the igloo are blown away, and you find yourself lying in a snowdrift. You jump to your feet, grabbing your sword.

> You say "Sophie?! Kate?!"
You quickly scan the area. You see Sophie's body lying in the snow, motionless.
"SOPHIE!" you yell, running to her side.

You turn her over, and find that she's still breathing. She has a deep gash in her forehead, and you can see that her arm is broken, but she's alive.

> You find Sophie's jar of healing purple vapor and hold some of it up to her mouth.
You hold some of the vapor up to her mouth, and her breathing begins to even out.

> You say "Kate? Kate, where are you?!"
You hear a low groan. You turn around and spot Kate, lying against the base of the large rock. She's unconscious, but alive.
You run to her side and grab her hand.
"Kate!"

> You hold the jar of vapor up to Kate's mouth to heal her wounds.
You hold the jar over her mouth, and she begins to sputter. After a moment, she regains consciousness.
"Emi?" she says.

> You quickly close the jar to save what is left of the mist inside.
You quickly close the jar, saving what is left of the mist inside.

> You say "Kate, can you move?"
"I think so," Kate says.
You grab Kate's hand and pull her to her feet.
"Sophie?" Kate asks, looking around.

> You point Sophie out. "She's unconscious, but breathing. Her arm is broken; help me make a splint!"
You and Kate walk over to Sophie.
Kate pulls a few pieces of wood from the snow and hands them to you.
"I'll tie them together," you say.
You tie the wood into place as a splint, then lie Sophie's arm across her lap.

> You scan the area. "What caused that explosion...?" you ask aloud, looking at the large rock you took shelter under.
"Let's take a look," Kate says.

You walk over to the rock and examine it. The base of the rock seems fine, but the top is shattered and cracked.

> You look at your destroyed igloo, searching for the fallen top of the spire.
You spot the top of the spire, laying shattered and broken against the base of the rock.
"Well, that explains that," says Kate.

> You say "Come help me carry Sophie! We don't know how stable the rest of it is, we have to get her away from it!"
"Right," says Kate.
The two of you carry Sophie away from the rock. After several minutes, you set her down in the snow.

> You say "Curse this storm..."
"It's getting worse," Kate says.

> You continue trudging forward into the blizzard.
The wind and snow seem to beat down on you. You walk forward slowly, trudging through the snow.
You hear a howl.
"Winter Wolves," Kate breathes, fear in her voice.

> You shudder, remembering the wolves that drew the Ice Queen's sled. "Let's hope they don't find us... Come on."
You turn and walk forward, continuing on. The howls of the Winter Wolves ring through the air.
"Em, they're getting closer," Kate says.

> You say "Shit... Urgh, I'm not sure about this, but let me try something. Set Sophie down for a second."
You set Sophie down in the snow.
"What are you doing?" Kate asks.
"Trust me," you say.
You close your eyes, and concentrate. You hear howls, growing closer.

> You manipulate the earth under the ice, hollowing out a small chamber. You carve a small tunnel down to it with your magic, as quickly as possible.
"What are you doing?" Kate repeats, panic evident in her voice.

"Hush," you reply.
The howls suddenly cease, and all of your hair stands up.

> You say "In the tunnel! Now! You get Sophie!"
You dive into the tunnel.
"Ugh! Come on, Sophie!" Kate shouts, before you see her dive into the tunnel. You watch as she drags Sophie into the tunnel.

> You widen the pocket of earth slightly, enough so that you can all fit as long as you stoop.
You wait patiently, listening. After a minute, you hear the howls of the Winter Wolves, from what sounds like just outside.
"Can you make the hole smaller?" Kate asks nervously. "So they can't fit their heads in?"

> You say "I can try... We need some way to breathe, so I have to leave a little hole, but I can try."
You close off the hole as much as you can. The only air comes through a small makeshift chimney. You hear scratching noises coming from above.
"They're trying to dig down to us..." Kate says.

> You say "I'll dig a little deeper... It's risky to go too far, but I can try."
You quickly dig down, making a little more room. You hear the scratching noises getting closer.
"I hear them. They're getting closer," Kate says nervously.

> You say "How can they even dig through this? It's ice and solid stone!"
"I don't know! But they can!"
You hear a low growl.
"They're right outside," Kate says nervously.
The sound of claws scratching at the dirt and stone grows louder and louder.

> You curse and condense the earth around your pocket as much as possible, nearly closing off the hole you left for air.
You wait patiently in the darkness. After a few minutes, you hear a snarl just above you.
"They're still out there," Kate says softly.
"I think it's too tough for them to dig through," you say, breathing as little as possible.

> You reach out with your tremorsense to try and find out how many wolves are outside, and if there is anything else there.
"Maybe it's just a wolf pack, and they'll lose interest soon."
You feel the cold air flowing in from the small hole you left for air. You slowly breathe out, as quietly as possible.
Your mind travels up through the earth, attempting to distinguish how many creatures are above your shelter. You see a half-dozen blurred shapes.
"There's six of them out there," you say softly.
"Are they leaving?" Kate asks hopefully.
"No, they're just sitting there."

> You concentrate and try to distinguish whether they are accompanied by a sled.
You concentrate, trying to feel for the presence of a sled. You find something cold and metal.

> You say "...metal. There's something metal up there... The Ice Queen's sled was made of wood, though?"
"Maybe she has a different one?" Kate asks.
You wait patiently, trying to keep calm and breathe as little as possible. After a few minutes, you hear a howl.
"Do you think that's the call to retreat?" Kate asks hopefully.
"I don't know..." you say.
The scratching sound stops, and you breathe a sigh of relief. You wait patiently for several minutes.
"I think they're gone," you whisper.
You slowly make the hole bigger, until you can just about see out of it. There's no sign of the wolves.

> You say "Stay here with Sophie. I'll check it out."
You stand up slowly, readying your sword. You carefully climb out of the hole, and look around. There's no sign of the wolves.
"I think it's safe," you call down to Kate.
The snow crunches behind you. You quickly turn around, raising your sword. You see the vague shape of a human, covered in a fur coat.

> You say "Who are you?!"
You shout, as you prepare to swing at the figure. The figure raises their hands.
"Easy there, Emilia," a female voice says.

You pause, and see a face you recognize.

> You say "...Locke?!"
"Good to see you again," she says.
You stare at her in shock, before looking behind her. The six wolves from before are prowling around her.
"How... Why... What..." you say, your mind racing.
"I tracked you down," she says. "I wanted to make sure you were alright."

> You shout down the hole. "Kate, it's Locke! It's alright! Locke found us!"
You hear a thump from below as Kate leaps to her feet.
"You're alive!" she shouts.
The ground begins to shake.

> You say "Locke, what is happening?"
"It's the giants," she says. "They've woken up. Get on the sled. We have to go."

> You help Kate drag the unconscious Sophie out of the hole and onto Locke's sled.
Kate and you haul the unconscious Sophie out of the hole, and set her on the back of the sled. Kate grabs your hand.
"Come on!" she says, pulling you on.

> You huddle close to Sophie and Kate in the back of Locke's sled.
You lean close to Sophie and Kate as the sled hurtles across the ice plains. The wind whips your hair in your face, and the frost begins to coat your skin. Your muscles burn as you huddle against Sophie and Kate. The cold bites at your face and your fingers, but you push yourself closer to the other two girls for warmth.

> You say "We're gonna be okay. We're gonna be okay..."
You whisper the words as you huddle close to Kate and Sophie. The wind is colder than you've ever felt before. You feel like you can see your breath. You wonder if you're developing hypothermia. You've heard of people losing their minds when they get too cold. Are you losing yours?

> You try to shout over the rushing wind. "Locke! How much longer?"
You hear a shout in response, but the words are unintelligible.
You feel Kate shivering next to you, and Sophie's hand in yours is like ice.

> You cling to each other and trust Locke to take you somewhere safe from the storm.
You feel your eyes closing. The cold is overwhelming your senses. You can barely feel anything anymore. You can't tell if you're falling asleep, or losing consciousness.
The cold is all that's left.

> You dream of cold.
You dream of ice. You dream of snow. You dream of frost. You dream of freezing cold. You dream of mountains of frozen corpses. You dream of oceans of blood. You dream of warriors marching off to war. You dream of Kate. You dream of Sophie. You dream of a wolf's howl.
You wake up.

The Luden-Bay Tribe

Thawing Out

You're lying on a wooden bed. There's a fire in the corner of the room.

> You groan and sit up.
You sit up, and the room spins. You wince as pain shoots through your body. Your muscles are sore and weak, and you're cold all the way to your bones. You notice that you're wrapped in several furs and sheepskins, but they aren't enough to warm you. You're chilled to the core.
You shiver as you look around. You're in a small room, with fur covering the walls. There's a fur rug covering the floor.

> You try to speak, voice hoarse. "Hello?"
The door to your room opens, and Kate steps inside. She smiles when she sees you.
"Hello," she says. "How are you feeling?"

> You say "Cold..."
"You're freezing," Kate says. "I'll fetch you a few more skins."
Kate fetches you some sheepskins, and you wrap them around yourself.

> You say "What happened?"
"We made it," Kate says. "Locke brought us here."
You look around the room. You see Sophie lying on another bed, under a pile of sheepskins, fast asleep.

> You say "Sophie... Is she okay? "
"She's fine," Kate says. "A bit cold, like you. I was worried, but she's going to be fine."
You look up at Kate. Her face is tired, but she smiles at you.
"You're safe now," she says.
You smile weakly back. The warmth of the fire spreads through your body, battling the cold that permeates you.

> You say "Is this... Locke's home?"
"Yes," Kate says. "She's gone to fetch more firewood."
"We're not... are we still in the Wastes?"
"No," Kate says. "We made it to her homeland."

> You say "Beyond the Wastes..."
Kate nods, and then purses her lips. "Worry about that another time, love. Focus on resting."
The fire in the corner of the room glows softly, and you can feel the heat from it warming your face.

> You say "Kate, can you..."
You wince and hold your head in your hands.
"Can you get me some water?" you ask.
Kate nods, and steps out of the room.

> You stare into the fire as you wait for Kate to return.
You stare into the fire as you wait for Kate to return. The flames dance and flicker, moving with a life of their own. You watch them dance for a while, and after a few minutes Kate returns with a skin of water.
She hands it to you, and you take a drink. It's lukewarm, and slightly bitter, but you gulp it down eagerly.

> You say "Thank you."
"Of course," Kate says.
You smile, and Kate smiles back. You take another drink of water. The warm liquid runs down your throat, and you feel a little bit of energy returning to you. You look up at Kate, and hold out the water skin.

> You say "I think that's all... that my throat can take. For now."
Kate nods. "Okay."
She takes the water skin from you, and sets it down on a table next to your bed. You're silent for a moment, and then you look over at Sophie.

> You say "How is her arm?"
"Her arm?" Kate asks. "Oh, the break? It's set properly, and she won't need it set again. She'll be fine."

> You say "Thank the gods..."
You sigh, and sit up.
"Thank the gods," you say.
Kate looks down at you and smiles.
"Thank the gods," she says.
You look over at Sophie again.

> You say "We kill a dragon, and emerge with only scratches... One snowstorm, and we break bones and nearly die. Isn't that some irony... "
Kate nods slowly. "It is."
The two of you sit in silence. The room is quiet aside from the crackling of the fire.
After a few minutes, Kate stands up.
"I should... go find us some dinner," she says. "Do you want anything in particular?"
You think for a moment.
"A big cut of meat," you say.
Kate smiles. "I'll do my best."
"I know you will," you reply.
Kate kisses you on the forehead, grabs her dagger, and heads out of the room. You watch her leave, and then turn to look at the fire again. You lay down and pull the blanket up to your chin.

> You try to meditate and clear your pounding head.
You sit in the silence for a while, your mind completely blank. The fire pops and cracks in the corner, the only sound in the room. Your headache begins to subside, but your stomach begins to grumble. Soon, Kate returns with a large piece of cooked meat.

> You smile weakly. "That's my girl."
She hands it to you, and you take a bite out of it. It's warm and soft and juicy, and your taste buds burst with flavor. Your throat hurts, but you push through the pain and swallow. You look up at Kate, who watches you eat.
"How is it?" she asks.
You nod slowly. "It's... really good."
You take another bite, and then another. Soon, the entire hunk of meat is gone, and you're feeling more energized. Kate sets your plate on the table and sits next to you.

> You say "You always seem to be the one taking care of me, Kate. One of these days, I'm going to nurture you at your bedside, you know?"
Kate smiles. "Not if I can help it."
The two of you sit in silence for a moment, and then the door bursts open. Sophie wakes with a start, craning her head to look.

> You flinch closer to Kate.
A tall, thin man with wild eyes rushes in. He wears furs and hides over most of his body, and in one hand he carries a spear and in the other a bow. He looks like a barbarian. His eyes dart around the room, staring at everything. Then, grins broadly and steps into the room.
"Good!" he says. "You're awake. No point in waking you all if you're already awake."
You stare at him as he closes the door.
"You must be the dragon huntresses!" he says, staring at you all. "I'm Hunt, son of Chief Hunt, the leader of the Luden-Bay Tribe."

> You say "Hello... Hunt. My name is Lady Emilia."
Hunt looks you up and down. "Hello," he says, finally. "You don't look like dragon huntresses."

> You say "Hey now... We've seen better days, sure, but still!"
Hunt nods slowly. "I suppose so. But you don't look like any huntresses I've ever seen."

> You say "We're not exactly from here, Hunt. We come from much further South; the Kingdom of Larion."
Hunt thinks for a second. "Laron? Never heard of it."
"It's far away," you say.
Hunt nods. "I see."

> You say "Is Locke a part of your tribe, Hunt?"
Hunt thinks for a second. "Yes. Yes, she is."
"She grew up here?" you ask.
Hunt nods. "Yes. I have known her since I was born. She is a good friend."

> You look at Kate and Sophie before returning your gaze to Hunt, waiting for him to tell you what he came here for.
"The whole village has gathered to see you," he says. "Will you come with me?"

You look at Kate and Sophie. Then, you look back at Hunt.
"Sure," you reply.

> You say "Kate, can you help me walk? Sophie, are you okay?"
Kate looks at you and nods. She takes your arm, and hoists you up to your feet. You stand for a second, waiting for the world to stop spinning. Once you're confident in your ability to walk, you take a step forward. Then another, and another, until you're walking slowly towards the door. Sophie gets up from the bed, and follows behind you.

Feasts and Firelight

Hunt waits patiently for you to catch up, and leads you outside. The sky is red, with clouds covering part of it. The sun is falling down, and the light it provides is weak. You stare out at the village from the edge of the cabin you were in. In the village square, a large group of people has gathered.

> You look around at the tundra village.
The houses are wooden, and very ramshackle. The thatch roofs seem almost ready to fall off the houses, and many of them have animal skins covering the holes in the roof. The villagers are dressed in layers upon layers of animal skins to protect from the cold. Most of them seem to be standing around a wooden platform in the center of the village.
Hunt leads you over to the crowd. You stare up at the platform.
"It's Kate!" you hear a voice cry. "The dragon huntress is back!"
The crowd cheers as you and the others reach the base of the platform.

> You stare at Kate. "Popular, aren't you?"
You stare at her in amazement. She smiles sheepishly, and shrugs. "Sorry. Dragonslaying is a big deal, turns out."
You snort in response.
Hunt jumps up to the platform and speaks. "Friends, our dragon huntresses are awake!"
The crowd cheers again.
Hunt looks down and beckons for you and the other two to join him.

> You nervously step up onto the platform before the crowd.
You climb onto the platform, and stare out at the crowd. Kate stands next to you. Sophie stands next to her. You all wave awkwardly. The crowd cheers again.
Then, the village's hunters begin approaching you. They offer you skins and food.
"This is an honor!" one of them says, offering a deer skin to you.
"The least we could do for dragonslayers!"

> You sheepishly accept their gifts until your arms are full.

You accept the gifts, until your arms are full. You struggle to carry them, and a villager gives you a wooden box to place the rest of the items in.

> You say "Thank you."
You say "Thank you," and the crowd cheers. The hunters all return to the crowd, and stare at you expectantly.
"Well, now that we're done with the gifts..." Kate says, trailing off.

> You look to Kate, the only who seems comfortable with what is going on.
"Kate, do you know what's going on?"
"I have no idea," she admits.
You stare at the crowd. They all seem to be staring at you expectantly.

> You shift your weight from foot to foot. "Hello. I'm Lady Emilia... the Dragonslayer."
You clear your throat awkwardly.
"Uh... I'm Lady Emilia. The... Dragonslayer."
The crowd cheers again. You, Kate, and Sophie look at each other.

> You scan the crowd for Locke.
You look through the crowd, and find your mentor in the crowd. She smiles and waves at you. You wave back.
"Well, now what?" Sophie asks.
"Now?" Kate asks, mischievously.

> You look between Kate and the expectant crowd, heart sinking. "They want to hear the story, don't they?"
You look between Kate and the expectant crowd, your heart sinking.
"They want to hear the story, don't they?" you ask nervously.
Kate laughs. "I've told it too many times already. Your turn."
You groan. "Fine."
You walk up to the center of the platform and face the crowd. Kate stands next to you, as does Sophie.

> You tell the story about how you three slew the Great Dragon of Larion.
You take a deep breath, and begin to tell the story. Your voice is halting at first, but slowly gains strength. Kate and Sophie jump in to add details as you talk.
The story of how you three slayed the Great Dragon of Larion is a long one. The sun sets completely and darkness takes the village by the time you finish.

The crowd applauds as you finish the story.

> You bow as deep as your aching muscles allow.
You bow as deep as your aching muscles allow, and the crowd goes wild. They cheer and clap and hoot and holler, and Kate and Sophie join in.
A man from the crowd approaches you. He's tall, dressed in furs and hides. An axe hangs from his side, and he walks with confidence. Two bright blue eyes shine out from under a fur cap, staring at you. He looks you up and down.
"Well! You three certainly do deserve a feast! My name is Hunt. You've met my son, Hunt, already."
You blink.

> You say "Chief Hunt, of the Luden-Bay tribe. Thank you for your hospitality."
You bow your head towards the man. "Chief Hunt, of the Luden-Bay tribe. Thank you for your hospitality."
Hunt smiles. His teeth are bright and healthy. "No thanks needed, slayer of dragons! It's our duty to offer help to those who need it. Enough talk, though! Plenty more of that later. Now, we feast!"
Hunt claps his hands, and villagers begin bringing tables out. There's an entire pig, roasted, being carried out by the time you've stood back up. You feel your stomach rumble. Despite having just eaten a bit ago, your body cries out for more food.
The three of you are led to a table at the front, and are seated. A much lower table is brought out for the rest of the villagers.
The meal is excellent. The three of you are served thick slices of juicy pork and piles of vegetables. You eat with gusto, and wash it down with wine. After the meal, you're stuffed. You have to force yourself to stop eating.

> You look to Kate and Sophie and sheepishly grin.
The three of you make small talk with the villagers. The villagers are extremely friendly. The children run around, play games, and generally enjoy themselves.
Hunt appears from the crowd of villagers, holding three small, black objects. He walks up to the three of you and smiles.

> You look at the black objects, wondering what they could be.
The three objects are small, black and glossy, with a crossbar at the back. The metal glints in the light.
"A gift from the tribe," Hunt says, passing you the objects.

> You look at the object Hunt handed you.
A small chain falls from the object, hanging from your hand as you examine it and realize what it is. A black dragon scale.

> You say "A dragon scale necklace... It's beautiful..."
"A dragon scale necklace... It's beautiful..."
Hunt smiles. "It's to commemorate you slaying the beast."
Hunt begins talking with your companions, but you're too distracted by the scale to pay attention. You run your fingers over the smooth, glossy surface. It fits snugly in your palm as you reflect light off of it.
It's beautiful.
You continue to stare at the scale for a while as your companions talk to Chief Hunt. After a while, he leaves to speak with his son Hunt. Sophie turns to you, smiling.
"I'm going to go talk with the other women, Emilia. Want to come?"
You shake your head. "I don't think I can handle more small talk right now."
"Alright," Sophie says.

> You smile at her, staring at her matching dragonscale necklace, before turning to Kate at your side.
You look to Kate. She's wearing the necklace as well, and the light reflects off of it, shining onto her face. She grins at you.

> You say "I'm glad I woke up on my own, before all this excitement! "
"I'm glad I woke up on my own, before all this excitement!"
Kate chuckles. "They didn't want to wait any longer."
You lean in and give her a kiss on the cheek. You wrap your arms around her and give her a warm embrace, not caring who is watching.
She hugs you back, smiling.
"Thank you for everything, Kate," you say.
"Of course, Em."
You hold on to her for a while longer, enjoying her warmth and the beating of her heart.
After a while, you let go of her.

> You look up at the stars, listening to the conversation of the crowd around you.
You look up at the night sky, and a thought crosses your mind.
"Can I ask you a question?" you ask Kate.
"Of course," Kate responds.

> You say "When we were on the sled... the ground began to shake, and Locke said that the giants had awoken. What did she mean?"
"When we were on the sled... the ground began to shake, and Locke said that the giants had awoken. What did she mean?"
"Oh," Kate says. "Well, when the giants sleep, they fall into a deep slumber. Sometimes, when one wakes up, it's enough to shake the earth."

> You say "I've never heard this story before."
"I've never heard this story before."
"It's an old one," Kate says. "Mostly, it's a story to scare children."

> You say "Apparently not just a fairytale."
"Apparently not just a fairytale."
Kate smiles.
"Well, that's true," she says.

> You say "Did Locke say anything about why they awoke, or?"
"Did Locke say anything about why they awoke, or?"
"No," Kate says. "Just that they had."
You're about to respond when you're interrupted by a hand on your shoulder. You turn around, and find yourself face to face with Chief Hunt.
Hunt looks you in the eye. He seems more weary than last you spoke, but a few minutes ago.
"The giants have awoken," Hunt says. "It is true."

> You say "Why? What happened to wake them?"
"Why? What happened to wake them?"
Hunt pauses, before replying in a low whisper.
"Locke."

> You cast a startled look out at the crowd, looking for Locke. "She what?"
"She woke them. Or she caused them to wake up. I don't know how."
Hunt looks around, and then continues.
"We saw giants begin to emerge from the ice," Hunt says. "We were far out of their path, and they moved so slowly, but..." Hunt exhales.

> You say "Wait, from the ice? They were frozen under the ice?"
"Wait, from the ice? They were frozen under the ice?"

Hunt nods slowly.
"The ice here is everlasting. Some say it is from the Ice Queen's eternal rule, others say it is natural. It hides many things."

> You say "Did... did Locke say what happened to her? When she initially disappeared. She had gone to negotiate passage, presumably with the Frost Legion..."
"Did... did Locke say what happened to her? When she initially disappeared. She had gone to negotiate passage, presumably with the Frost Legion..."
Hunt shakes his head.
"She said... she said she saw her." Hunt inhales, and exhales shakily. "She looked into the eyes of the Ice Queen."

> You say "I can imagine what that is like.."
"I can imagine what that is like.."
Hunt looks at you.
"No. You can't," Hunt says.
Hunt closes his eyes, and continues.
"I know you believe in your gods. I know you believe in your power. I know you believe that the sun will rise tomorrow."
Hunt opens his eyes.
"Just as I believe in the absolute power of the Ice Queen," Hunt says. "And as I fear her."
Hunt looks out at the crowd.
"We all do."

> You say "When she took us, we could hardly even resist... It was all we could do to escape the prison she held us in."
"When she took us, we could hardly even resist... It was all we could do to escape the prison she held us in."
Hunt looks at you.
"What do you mean?" Hunt asks.

> You spare a glance at Kate, then look back to Chief Hunt. "The Ice Queen, she stole us away to her castle. We escaped from her prison before continuing on towards the dragon."
"The Ice Queen, she stole us away to her castle. We escaped from her prison before continuing on towards the dragon."
Hunt looks at you, then over to Kate.

"Is this true?" Hunt asks.
Kate stares at you, and nods slowly.
"Yes," Kate says slowly.
Hunt looks over to you, looking into your eyes.
"You... actually saw her?" Hunt asks again.
You nod.
"The both of you saw her?" Hunt asks.
You and Kate nod in unison.
Hunt pauses, then turns away from you, and begins walking with a purpose.
"Please, come with me," he says.

> You glance at Kate before getting Sophie's attention and motioning for her to follow.
You and Kate follow Hunt. Sophie follows you both.
Hunt walks back into his hut. He opens a chest, and pulls out... something. A handful of dust and a few... small bones? Teeth? You aren't sure what they are, but they're about the size of your pinky fingernail. He sprinkles the dust onto the fire, which causes it to turn a dark, smokey grey.
"Please, take a seat," Hunt says, gesturing towards a few pillows set around the fireplace.

> You sit down and watch as Hunt casts the bones.
Hunt closes his eyes, then casts the bones onto the ground. He spreads the bones out with his hands, then tilts his head to the side.
"What does it say?" you ask.
Hunt pauses, then speaks.
"It says... it's hard to say." Hunt picks up the bones, and hands them to you.
"Please, try yourself. I will read them for you."

> You gingerly cast the bones.
You spread the bones out with your hands, as Hunt did.
The scattered pile of bones means nothing to you. You watch Hunt's face as his eyes search it, discerning a meaning unknown to you.
Hunt swallows, his countenance dark.
"It... says that you will be victorious. But at a great cost."
Hunt doesn't look up, staring at the bones with a deep frown on his face.
"At a great cost," he whispers to himself.
The three of you sit in silence for a moment, as the only sound is that of the crackling fire.

> You say "Against what enemy? The Ice Queen? The Giants?"
You look at the fire, as Kate places a hand on your shoulder.
"What enemy?" you ask. "The Ice Queen? The Giants?"
Hunt looks up from the bones, his face dark.
"It doesn't say," he says.
Hunt sits in silence, the fire popping as the only sound in the room.

> You say "I feel all of us have some questions to ask of Locke."
You turn to Kate and Sophie.
"I feel all of us have some questions to ask of Locke," you say.
Hunt looks up from the fire, and nods slowly.
"I agree. I will go find her. Wait here."

> You nod, mind whirling.
Hunt leaves the room, leaving you, Kate and Sophie alone.

> You glance between the two of them. "We're owed some answers."
"Yes," Kate says. "We are."
Sophie nods in agreement.
Hunt returns a minute later, with a familiar woman following him.
"Hello, ladies. It's about time we talk," Locke says, a glint in her eye.

Plans

> You look the woman up and down. "I believe first, gratitude is in order. That snowstorm may well have killed us had you not arrived. Sophie was unconscious with her arm in a bad way. Kate and I were well on your way to freezing to death..." Your voice softens. "Thank you, Locke. It really is good to see you again. Kate and Sophie were confident you could handle yourself, but I was worried."
"As I told you I would be."
The woman smiles, and moves forward to embrace you.
"It is good to see you too," she says.

> You watch as Locke embraces your companions in turn.
The three of you watch as she moves from one to the other, embracing them in turn.
"I was worried about you all, in truth," she says, smiling at Kate.

> You chuckle. "Warranted, perhaps. Though who would have thought it would not be the Ice Queen, or the dragon, but a simple snowstorm that brought us low?"
"Well," Sophie says, "it's done now. And here we all are."
You nod at Sophie's words.

> You say "What happened, Locke? When you went to negotiate passage with the Frost Legion, before the Ice Queen took us. What went wrong?"
The woman smiles, her gaze distant.
"Not a great deal went wrong, from what I saw. They were reasonable, if strict. It took longer than I hoped, but such is diplomacy. It was only after I returned that I heard what the Ice Queen did."
Locke's eyes flash with anger.
"She took you from underneath my nose."
You nod slowly, and the three others exchange a look.
"What happened next?" Sophie asks.
"I pursued her, of course."

> You say "You pursued her? On your own?"

"Yes," she says, simply.

> You say "It was all we could do to escape her prison... I think we got lucky, getting out before she dealt with us."
"I can't imagine facing her alone," Kate says.
"She was certainly powerful," you admit.
"So am I," the woman says with a shrug.
Sophie looks up at her with admiration.

> You say "What happened? Obviously you didn't find us, but... Chief Hunt said you saw her. Did you fight her?"
"I did," she says.
The woman looks grim.
"And?" Kate asks.
"I lost," she says simply.
You all exchange a look.

> You say "At least you escaped..."
"Did I? I can still feel her chill."
Sophie shakes her head.
"You're here now, and safe. That's all that matters."
Hunt steps forward.
"You can feel her chill?"
"I think she means her frost magic," you say. "It has a way of lingering under your skin."
Hunt looks concerned, and you realize how cold the air has gotten.

> You shake off the chill and speak. "Sophie's right. We are all alive. That's what matters. But... Locke, I have to ask. What does this have do with the giants waking up? Did the Ice Queen do something while you fought?"
The woman sighs.
"I did. Fire has always been my best element, and the spells I cast as we dueled... it awoke something under the ice."

> You say "The giants..."
"It was a tremendous cavern of ice and frost, and the heat of my magic caused it to thaw. It released what was frozen inside, slumbering"
"What are they like?" Kate asks.

"Giants," Locke says. "Are no normal foe. The age of the giants is long over, but a rare few still remain. They are uniquely unaffected by even powerful magic. The Ice Queen and I could barely withstand them. Their rise is the only reason I escaped."

> You shudder at the thought of something that could best both Locke and the Ice Queen.
"What do you plan to do?" Sophie asks.
"Get revenge on the Ice Queen, for one," she says.
Hunt shoots her a look of fear.
"You can't. She'll kill you."
"I can take her. I just need these three, and you to hold off the giants."
Hunt opens his mouth to protest.
"Locke, she'll kill you. Or worse, turn you into a monster."
"I'll take that chance," she says, softly. "Our tribe has lived in fear long enough."
Chief Hunt vigorously shakes his head.
"No. Our tribe needs protection. Not to go on a hunt that begs for death."
His knuckles turn white as he clenches his fists.

> You say "Locke, are you sure we can do this?"
"You can't take her alone," the chief says.
"We can take her together," she says, softly.
The chief slowly shakes his head.
"No. That's suicide. I won't allow it."
"Hunt, it's OK," you say. "We can handle this."
You look over at Kate, who nods, and Sophie, who is biting her lip.
"We can do this," she says.
The chief looks over all of you.
"Fine. But when you die, it's on your head."
The three of you nod grimly.

> You say "Chief Hunt, we did kill the great dragon. We're the Dragon Huntresses, as you say! With Locke on our side... We can take her."
Hunt looks at the three of you. He sighs, then says,
"I want to believe you. But I just..."
"Can we count on you for help, Chief Hunt?" Locke interjects.

> You say "Locke, if the giants defeated you and the Ice Queen... What makes you so sure the Luden-Bay hunters will fare better?"

"We've lived in fear of the Ice Queen for so long," he says. "But giants are different."

> You look up at Chief Hunt, surprised by his sudden determination. "You've hunted them before?"
"We have. They're slow. Powerful, nigh immune to magic, but slow. If you four can hold off the Ice Queen, my hunters can return any number of giants to their rest."

> You say "Even giants can't handle old-fashioned steel, eh?"
He smiles grimly.
"Especially not our steel."

> You smile, ignoring the fear that still grips your heart. "Let it be done, then. But... We can't right now. We're still recovering, and with Sophie's arm..."
"Take your time," Hunt says. "You'll have a chance to rest. I'll speak to our healers about aiding you. They are reluctant to spend what little strength they have on wounds that will heal naturally, but they will make an exception for you."

> You smile at Sophie as you echo Kate's words. "I suppose slaying a dragon is a pretty big deal."
Sophie laughs, then winces and clutches her broken arm.
"Healers would be nice," she says.

> You say "Chief Hunt, Locke, is it alright if the three of us return to our cabin to rest? I feel weary, and I can see in my companions eyes that they are too."
"Of course," Hunt says. "I'll have some hunters guide you back."

> You say "Thank you, Chief Hunt. And Locke... Thank you. For more than just the rescue. Without your tutelage, we never would have slain the dragon."
She smiles.
"I would have it no other way."
You bid Hunt and Locke farewell, and set off back towards your cabin.

> You enter the cabin with Kate and Sophie, grateful for the warm interior.
You enter the cabin with Kate and Sophie, and collapse into bed. You are exhausted from the day's excitement.
"Well," you say. "That was a thing."
"A thing?" Kate asks, sitting next to you.

"A thing," you confirm.
You look at her.
"Are you alright?" you ask.
She nods.
"I just... I dunno. That was scary. The storm."

> You look at Sophie across the room, on her own bed. "What about you, Sophie? You've been quiet all day. I know you were unconscious for most of the snowstorm, but are you okay?"
"I'm fine," Sophie says, staring blankly ahead. "Just thinking about some things."
She gets under the covers and lies down.
"We should rest," she says.

> You frown in concern. "Sophie, what's up? You can trust us with anything."
"It's noth..." she begins, then sighs. "I dunno, it's nothing. We should sleep."
You look at her in concern, but you're far too tired to press her any further.

> You say "We can talk in the morning, I suppose. Love you two."
"Love you too," Kate says.
"Love you three," Sophie says.
You settle into your bed and close your eyes. You are asleep in minutes.

Resolve

> You dream.
You are in a different world. It is misty, and cold. You are on a hilltop, in a barren field.
"Lavender?" you ask.
Your voice is swallowed by the mist. You wait patiently. Nothing happens. You wonder if you should call out again, when you feel a hand on your shoulder. You turn, to see Lavender standing there.
"There you are!" she says, smiling. "I was wondering when you'd show up."
"What's going on?" you ask.
"I think you're supposed to figure that out for yourself."
"What?" you ask.
She smiles, and takes your hand.
"Come on," she says.
You follow her through the mist. After a few minutes, you find yourself at a graveyard.
"Welcome," Lavender says.
The graveyard is covered in flowers. A fresh grave stands in the middle, with a headstone bearing your name.
"What the hell is this?" you ask.
"You're dead," she says simply. "Well, dead in this world, at least."
You look at her, and the grave again. Then, you see something. A figure in a black cloak, watching you from behind a headstone.
"Who the hell is that?" you ask, terrified.
The figure does not move.
"Don't worry about him," Lavender says. "Come on, I'll show you around."
She takes your hand, and leads you around the graveyard. Many of the graves are not marked, just simple wooden crosses stuck into the ground.
"Most of these people are nameless," she says. "They're forgotten. I try to keep them alive in my dreams, but it's getting harder."
"What's going on?" you ask.
She stops, and looks at you.
"My mother created this place. She first found me here. This is where I woke up after I died in your world."
"What?" you ask.

"This is the gateway to the other world," she explains. "The other world... the real one. When people die in one world, some wake up in the other. Not most. But some."
You frown.
"How do you know this?" you ask.
"My mother told me," she says.
"Who is your mother?" you ask.
She smiles, and begins walking again. You follow her past rows and rows of graves. Some are fresh. Most are rotten and decayed, nearly illegible.
"My mother is the Queen of the Moon," she says.
You don't respond. Suddenly, you stop. Something isn't right. You feel as if you're being watched. You turn quickly, but no one is there.
"Is something wrong?" she asks.
"I feel like we're being watched," you say nervously.
"We are," she says simply.
"Who is it?" you ask.
"My mother, of course."
You open your mouth to ask another question, but she puts her finger to your lips.
"Sshh," she says.
She leads you out of the graveyard. You follow her to a small wooden door, set in the side of a small hill. She opens it and holds it open for you.
"After you," she says politely.
"Where are we?" you ask.
"My home," she says simply.
You walk through the door, into complete darkness. She shuts the door behind you. You're blind for a few seconds before light suddenly illuminates everything around you. You are in an endless field of lavender. They softly sway in an invisible wind, lit by the light of a massive moon. You look around you, and see a black castle standing alone in the field.
"That's where my mother is," she says. "I have to go now."
"Do I get to meet her?" you ask.
She looks at the castle, then back at you.
"I don't think that's a good idea," she says sadly.
You open your mouth to complain, but she places a finger on your lips again.
"Goodbye, Emilia."
She turns, and walks away from you. You start to follow her, but she disappears into the moonlight before you can get a few feet. You turn back to face the castle.

A gust of wind causes you to blink, and when you've opened your eyes, you've woken up.

> You open your eyes slightly to find the roof of the cabin above you, and Kate's familiar breathing noises by your side.
You lie in bed, staring at the roof of the cabin for a while. A week ago you would have been sure it was all just a dream, but now you know it was more than that. It was real.
You slowly sit up, and Kate shifts in her sleep beside you. You quietly stand, not wishing to wake her, and grab your clothes from a nearby chair.

> You glance over at Sophie's bed.
You look over at Sophie's bed. She isn't in it. You silently throw your clothes on, and go outside.

> You quietly walk around the village, enjoying the early morning air and looking for Sophie.
You walk through the village, quietly looking around for Sophie. You walk past the many homes of the villagers. Some greet you with a quiet wave. After a few minutes, you spot her. She's sitting on a rock, at the edge of the village. She looks sad.
"Hey," you say as you walk over to her.
She jumps a little when you sit down next to her.
"I didn't mean to startle you," you say.
"It's fine," she says, looking down.
"What are you doing out here?" you ask.
"I couldn't sleep," she says. "I just... was thinking."
"About what?" you ask.
"Do you think this is all worth it?" she asks.

> You say "Going after the Ice Queen?"
"Going after the Ice Queen?" you ask.
"I mean, I know we have to do it, but..." Sophie says, not finishing her sentence.

> You say "We don't... We don't have to. Locke seems to want to take her down, but we did accomplish our goal already. We killed the dragon. We could just leave."
"Yeah, we could," Sophie says, looking out at the horizon. "But I also know that's not what you want to do."

> You say "No. She hurt you two. Bad. I'm not one to forgive easily."
"No. She hurt you two. Bad. I'm not one to forgive easily."
Sophie smiles, a small laugh escaping her lips.
"I know you're not," she says.

> You say "...but I care more about you and Kate than revenge."
"But I care more about you and Kate than revenge."
"So you're willing to just forget about it?" she asks.

> You sigh and stare out at the horizon, watching the rising sun. "I think so. We'd have to ask Kate whether she was okay with leaving, but if you really want to just go... I don't want you to be hurt chasing after my vengeance."
"Thank you," she says, looking down.
"You're welcome," you say.
The two of you sit in silence for a while, watching the sun rise over the horizon.

> You say "Do you think Locke will go on her own?"
"Do you think Locke will go on her own?" you ask.
"I'm sure she'll try," Sophie says. "I don't know if she'll succeed, but she'll try.

> You say "I'm worried about her. And the Luden-Bay tribe. If Locke fails and invokes the Queen's wrath..."
"I know," Sophie says.
Silence falls again as you two shield your eyes against the bright snow. After a while, Kate comes out to meet you.
"Hey!" she says. "What are you two doing out here?"
"Talking," you say.
You look at Sophie.
"We need to talk to you about something," you say. "It's important."
Kate comes over and sits down next to you and Sophie.

> You say "Kate, what if we were to just leave? The dragon is dead. We could just go. As tempting as taking down the Ice Queen is, she isn't really our problem."
"No!" Kate says, a little too quickly. "We need to go back and kill her! She deserves to suffer."
You look at Sophie. She looks worried.
"Kate," she says. "We just want you to know that if you really want to go back to kill the Ice Queen, we'll help you. But... if you don't, no one will blame you."

Kate looks at the ground for a minute, before looking up.
"I think... we should go back," she says. "I think we should go back and kill the Ice Queen."

> You say "Can I ask why? I'm not going to pretend I don't feel the same way, but I'm curious why."
"Can I ask why? I'm not going to pretend I don't feel the same way, but I'm curious why."
"She needs to die," Kate says. "Not just for what she did to you. Not just what she did to Sophie. Not just what she did to me. You saw it. You know what she's done. What she does."

> You visibly shudder, remembering the prison and your dream, with her telling you how she twists souls to serve her as the Frost Legion.
"Yes," you say. "I do."
"And she needs to die," Kate says, "for what she does to everyone else."

> You look at Sophie. "Sophie?"
"I don't like this," Sophie says. "But I think you're right. She needs to die."

> You say "Then we're in agreement. We rest until healed, and then ride with Locke to kill a Queen. "
"Then we're in agreement," you say. "We rest until healed, and then ride with Locke to kill a Queen."
You all sit together in silence, watching the last of the sunrise as the village awakens behind you.

Before the War

> You say "So what's the plan for today? I presume the healers will be seeing your arm today, Sophie?"
"Yes," she says. "I was hoping I could spend some time with them, learn a little, too."
"I don't see why not," you say. "Kate?"
"I'll just be around the village today," she says. "I'd like to track down Locke and practice a little more magic."

> You smile. "I guess I'll find something to keep myself busy, then."
You all stand, and part ways. You find yourself smiling as you walk through the village. The fear of the Ice Queen still lingers, but having aired everyone's concerns has steeled your resolve.

> You play with your black dragonscale necklace, admiring it in the morning light.
You play with your black dragonscale necklace, admiring it in the morning light. It's a beautiful object, with a black luster unlike anything you've ever seen. You acquired it only recently, but have quickly grown attached to it.

> You pause for a moment while looking at the piece, a thought having occurred. Curious, you go to find Chief Hunt and ask a question.
You pause for a moment, a thought having occurred. Curious, you go to find Chief Hunt and ask a question.
"Chief Hunt," you say, finding him sharpening his axe near his hut. He looks up at you and nods.
"What can I do for you, Emilia?"

> You say "I just had a question. These dragonscale necklaces you gave us. Did you send people to the dragon, to verify it was dead? Or did hunters in the area see it and bring them back?"
"Ah," Hunt says, stroking his beard. "It was brought to us by hunters in the area. They couldn't believe it, so took it as proof. We've already sent more hunters to scavenge the corpse, however. They should be returning this evening or next."

> You say "Oh. Well, that answers that. I'd love to see whatever trophies they bring back, so let me know when they do, okay?"
"Of course, Emilia," Hunt says. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an axe to sharpen."
You nod, and thank Hunt for his time.

> You wander off, trying to find something more substantial to occupy yourself for the day.
With the question settled in your mind, you wander off, trying to find something more substantial to occupy yourself for the day.
It's midday by the time you start to wonder about lunch.

> You wander over to the cooking fires to see whether anyone you recognize is eating lunch.
You wander over to the cooking fires to see whether anyone you recognize is eating lunch. One of the hunters, a stocky man with dark skin, waves at you as you approach.
"Hail, Dragon Huntress!"

> You wave back. You grab food and go to sit by the man. "Hail, hunter. I don't believe we've formally met?"
"I am Zamed, of the Elam Tribe," he says. "Pleasure to meet you."
"Likewise," you say.

> You say "Are there many tribes up here, beyond the wastes? I didn't know any existed until I woke up here in Luden-Bay, to be honest."
"A fair few," Zamed says.

> You say "Can you tell me about your tribe, Elam?"
"Of course!" Zamed says, nodding. "I'll tell you what I know about the tribes of the north, Dragon Huntress."
He tells you that the tribes in the far north, near the mountains and past them, are far too isolationist to trade with anyone. In fact, it's common for tribes to go their entire existences without meeting an outsider. This keeps them isolated, but also allows them to maintain their cultures and languages much more easily.

> You say "I take it you are an exception to the rule, then?"
Zamed nods.
"I am," he says.

> You say "What made you come here to Luden-Bay?"
"Curiosity," Zamed admits. "I wanted to see what other tribes were like. I'd heard stories, but didn't know anyone that had actually been around."
"Have you found it to be everything you expected?" you ask.
Zamed pauses.
"Not exactly," he says. "But that's okay. There's much to learn."
You take a bite of some berries, nodding.

> You say "Ever considered traveling the world beyond the wastes?"
"I've thought about it," Zamed says. "I'm not sure I could, though."

> You say "Why not? "
"I don't know if I'd survive," Zamed says, shrugging.

> You say "The world can be dangerous, but... if I'm to be honest? Where we are now is among the most dangerous and inhospitable places I've been in. You might find traveling isn't nearly as bad as you fear."
Zamed smiles at you.
"Perhaps you're right," he says. "I'll consider it, at least."
Zamed and you speak for some time. He tells you about his family, who are all in the Elam tribe. He tells you that he loves them all, and hopes they are all well.
"You don't know?" you ask, surprised.
Zamed shakes his head.
"No," he says.

> You say "How long has it been since you've seen them? Is it when you left the tribe to come here?"
Zamed nods.
"Yes," he says. "It's been many years now."
Zamed looks down at his feet, clearly sad.

> You say "Hey. They should be proud of having a son that is brave enough to go see the world beyond what they know. There's no shame in setting out from home. "
Zamed smiles at you.
"You're right, of course," he says. "I'm being silly."
He looks at you with a smile.
"Thank you for listening, Dragon Huntress."

> You say "You're very welcome. Say, Zamed. Are you going to take part in the upcoming hunt, to put down the giants?"
Zamed nods.
"I am," he says. "It's rare for us to get the opportunity to fight such a great foe."
He looks at you.
"Do you think we'll win?"

> You say "Yes. Your chief spoke with assurance, and I have no reason to doubt his wisdom. He would not throw the lives of his tribe away on a foolhardy task. The foolhardy task goes to us, after all."
Zamed smiles.
"That's true," he says. "The mightiest hunters are always called upon to do the most dangerous work."

> You laugh. "Isn't that the truth."
Zamed and you speak for a while longer, until the rest of the hunters begin to gather. The chief stands in front of them all, raising his hand.
"This is a proud day," he says. "Our tribe has never had the honor of a Hunt of this kind. Now, we will be remembered in stories for thousands of years to come."
The chief points south, out of the village and towards the Ice Queen's territory.
"As soon as the Dragon Huntresses are healed and ready, we shall set out to slay giants. Every generation or so, a giant must be beaten to submission, but we are the chosen few to have many to slay, and all at once."
The chief points to where the weapons are kept.
"When we are ready, take up your weapons, and we will beat back the frost with steel and fire. All of our ancestor's struggles led to this moment! We will not leave them disappointed!"
The hunters cheer, and the chief nods with satisfaction.

> You quietly listen, smiling at their cheers.
You stay quiet, watching the hunters prepare themselves for the quest. The chief is a good speaker, and knows how to keep his people's morale up.
"Dragon Huntress Emilia, a moment?" a hunter says, tapping on your shoulder.

> You say "Yes? What is it?"
"The chief wants you to meet him after he is done here," he says.

> You say "Is this about the hunters returning with the dragon corpse?"

The hunter shrugs.
"I do not know," he says. "He just told me to find you and tell you to meet him after the preparation."

> You say "Mm. Do you know if those hunters returned?"
"Yes, the hunters returned. I don't know anything else, though."
"Alright. I'll go ask the chief myself, then. Thank you."

> You wait until the Chief is done speaking and follow him back to his tent.
You wait until the chief is finished talking to the other hunters. Once they're gone, you approach him.
"You wanted to see me, Chief Hunt?"
The chief turns to you.

> You say "Is this about the hunters returning with the dragon parts? I'm very interested into what I can use those for, my apologies for being insistent."
"Yes, it is about that," the chief says, his face suddenly serious.

> You say "Is something wrong?"
The chief sighs.
"I don't know how to say this, but when we got there, the corpse was gone."

> You say "It... what? How does a corpse that large go missing?"
"I don't know. We got there, and it was gone."
"Well... that's unfortunate."
The chief shakes his head.
"It is troubling indeed. We have too much going on to worry about one lost prize, though, even as big as it might be."

> You say "I suppose... Thank you for letting me know."
"I'll let you know if anything changes. In the meantime, you should rest up. We have a great hunt ahead."
"Right," you nod.
You turn to walk away, thoughts troubled.

> You track down Sophie at the healer's huts, to see how her arm is and what she has learned.
You walk to the healer's huts, and find Sophie there. She has her arm in a loose sling, and is busy cleaning bandages.

> You say "Hello, Sophie. How's the arm? Are you going to be able to fight soon?"
"Hello, Emilia," Sophie says. "It's fine, I'll have it healed up within a day. These people know their stuff. How did the chief's speech go?"

> You say "Well! He's a good speaker. Got his hunters well and riled up. Though, there is something I wanted to talk to you about..."
Sophie looks at you expectantly.
"The chief just told me that the dragon corpse is missing."
"Really?"
"Yeah. I have no idea what's going on either."
"Hmm," Sophie says. "Maybe some other tribe took it?"

> You say "Maybe. I don't know. I'm a little disappointed; I wanted to bring back some of those scales for armor."
"Me too."
Sophie chuckles.

> You say "Did you learn anything about healing? You know, with magic?"
"A little," Sophie says.

> You say "Anything helps. During the snowstorm, I had to use that purple healing mist you picked up in Ochirea, so we're fresh out of any healing magic besides what you can learn."
Sophie nods.
"Yeah. Hopefully I'll be able to pick up the magic fast enough."

> You say "Anything you can show off yet?"
"Nothing fancy. I just know how to do the most basic of spells."
"That's fine, don't worry. Everyone has to start somewhere."
You eventually take your leave and leave the hut.

> You say "Suppose I should go check up on Kate, see how her magic training with Locke is going."
You walk over to where Kate is. You find her with Locke, in front of a hut, surrounded by several other tribespeople.
"Fireball! Fireball! Fireball!"

> You stand back and watch the commotion with interest.

You watch as Kate, face full of determination, tries to show off some of the magic she has learned. The fireball she throws goes off course, and hits one of the huts.
"Uh oh," Kate says sheepishly.
The crowd groans in dismay as they look at the burning hut.
"Kate!" you shout, shaking your head.
"I'm sorry!" Kate says, looking thoroughly apologetic.

> You help the tribespeople extinguish their hut.
You and the rest of the tribespeople run forward to help put out the fire. After a minute, you manage to get the fire under control.

> You grin at Kate. "I'm still impressed. Fire, eh? That's a new one!"
"Yeah. I was a little too excited."
You and Kate laugh.
You look at the burnt hut and the few people beginning to rebuild it. "I take it training went well then?"
"She still needs much practice," Locke says.
"I think I did well," Kate says, pouting.

> You say "I haven't even felt a hint of an aptitude towards elements other than earth. I'm impressed regardless."
"Thanks," Kate says.
You and Kate go back to your cabin.
"That was cool though," you say. "Fire's a pretty useful element."
"Yeah," Kate says, smiling.

> You say "What with you learning fire magic basics, and Sophie healing magic basics, I feel like I was useless all day!"
"You can't feel useless, you're the leader."
You laugh.
"Alright. I suppose."

> You sit down on the bed, enjoying the heat from the fire. "Oh, yeah. One other thing. Less than great news, I'm afraid. The dragon's corpse is missing."
"What?!" Kate says in surprise.
"Yeah. The Chief sent hunters. When they got there, it was gone. No one has any idea why."

> You kick at the ground a little. "Kinda wanted to make armor from that... Sophie reckons some other tribe took it."
"Who else would take it?" Kate asks.
You shrug.

> You say "I suppose we'll never know."
"Yeah," Kate says, looking a little troubled.
The two of you chat idly for a while until Sophie returns.

> You say "Hey, Sophie. "
"Hey," Sophie says, smiling.
"Hello," Kate says, returning the smile.

> You say "We should probably get to bed. Lot of preparations to finish up if we want to head out tomorrow."
"Right," Kate says.
"Yeah," Sophie says. "I suppose we should."
The three of you climb into bed, and soon you are the last one awake, staring at the ceiling. You think about the future.
Soon, you drift off to sleep.

Assault

The Grand Hunt Begins

When you awaken in the morning, Sophie is already gone. Kate is next to you, awake and clearly lost in thought.
"Morning," you say.
"Morning," Kate replies, not looking at you.
"What's wrong?" you ask.
"Nothing."
You sigh. "Kate. I can tell something's wrong. What is it?"
Kate looks at you, her eyes filled with tears. "I don't want to lose you."

> You sit up and pull her close, resting her head in the nook of your neck. "Bad dream?"
She nods against your chest.
"We'll be fine. I promise."
She nods again. "I know."

> You say "Do you want to talk about it?"
She shakes her head. "No."
"Are you sure?"
She nods.
You are silent for a moment, holding her in your arms.

> You say "I love you, Kate. We'll be fine. We're prepared for her this time. Poor Ice Queen doesn't stand a chance against us, Sophie, and Locke. She'll be dead before she says a single one-liner."
You kiss the top of Kate's head.
"I love you too," she says.
The two of you sit together for a moment in silence, and then eventually get up.

> You say "Let's go find Sophie. If her arm is fully healed, we should be heading out tonight. "
"Right," Kate says. "Let's go."

The two of you head outside, into the light.
In front of you, the village is bustling with life.

> You gaze about at the tribe as they prepare for the upcoming giant hunt.
You see Hunt speaking with his father, Chief Hunt. He is gesturing wildly at a map of the area, which is sprawled out in front of him. You presume they are discussing the plan for the giant hunt.
Nearby, you see Sophie speaking with another member of the tribe. Her arm is free from its sling, and she seems to have full range of motion.

> You look around for Locke.
You see her standing in a group of three men. Under her direction, they seem to be loading and unloading things onto her sled.

> You say "Looks like everyone is ready, Kate."
"Right," she says. "Everyone's geared up and ready for the hunt."
You nod, and the two of you approach Sophie.
"Sophie," Kate says.
"Kate," Sophie replies, "I'm glad you're here. Could you help me with something?"
"Sure thing," Kate says.
Sophie hands her a small knife.
"Slit my palm, please."

> You raise an eyebrow. "Gonna show off some healing magic, eh?"
Sophie nods.
Kate cuts Sophie's palm, and a thin line of blood forms.
"Now watch," Sophie says with a small smile.
She cups her hands over the cut, and after a few moments, Sophie's bleeding has stopped. A fresh scar is all that remains of the cut.
"See?" Sophie says, flexing her hand.

> You say "Damn, Sophie. You learn quick. That'll be handy."
Kate nods in amazement.

> You say "So. We head out tonight, no?"
"Yeah," Kate says. "Hunt's discussing the plan with his father, I think."

> You say "We should probably let them be. Want to go talk to Locke? She'll be leading our mission, anyways."

"Sure," Kate says. "We can see if she's ready."
The three of you head where Locke stands, ordering the men about.

> You say "Locke!"
"Yes?" she asks, not looking at you.
"We're ready to go."
She turns to look at you, and smiles.
"Perfect. Is everyone ready?"
You nod.

> You say "What's the plan when we head out? I assume we will be going with you, and splitting off from the Luden-Bay tribe. Are we luring the Ice Queen out somehow?"
"Not exactly," she says, an evil glint in her eye. "We're going to be heading straight to the bitch's castle, and bringing down a tower."

> You say "Uh. Wow. I mean, uh, how? "
"Easy," she says. "Magic."

> You glance between Sophie, Kate, and Locke. "I've done some major damage with my earth magic before, and Sophie can handle ice well... But can we really rip down a tower from afar? Finding stone in her prison was always hard for me."
"Hah. You also have me. I have my ways," she says, turning away to bark more orders.

> You glance nervously between your companions.
"We really doing this?"
"Yes," Kate says.
"If anyone can do it, we can," Sophie adds.

> You say "Then it will be done. Let's go tell Chief Hunt that the Dragon Huntresses are all ready to head out."
The three of you walk to where Hunt stands, his son standing beside him.
"We're ready," you say.
"Good. Then we can head out soon. Anything you need to do, you had better do it now."

> You shake your head. "No. We're ready. We're going to go wait with Locke, and depart when your hunter teams do."

"Very well," he says, and you all walk away.
You wait by the exit to the village, where the hunters and huntresses are assembling.
"Everyone, listen!" Chief Hunt shouts. "The Dragon Huntresses will be accompanying us, but they have their own task. The responsibility of the giants falls to us, and only us. You all know what needs to be done. Are we going to let them down?!"
The tribe cheers loudly, and you eventually find Locke among the lines of Winter Wolf-drawn sleds.

> You step up onto Locke's sled as you continue to listen to the Chief's speech.
"We're ready!" Hunt says. "We will prove our honor today! For the tribe!"
"For the tribe!" everyone cries.
"For our ancestors!"
"For our ancestors!" the crowd responds.
"And for the Dragon Huntresses! Move out!" The tribe cheers, and the sleds take off.

> You stand arm-in-arm with your companions as you rocket through the snow on Locke's sled.
"Let's do this," you say.
The three of you raise your fists, and the line heads straight towards where the giants roam.

The Approach

An hour passes.

> You shout over the rushing wind. "Locke! How long until we start seeing giants?"
"Not long!" she calls back, sporting a vicious smile.
"We're almost there!"
You spot a shape in the distance, far ahead of you.

> You say "Are we going to split off, or weave between them as the hunters engage?"
"We're sticking with the tribe," she shouts back. "The giants will be distracted by them, giving us the chance to slip by!"
"Alright!" Kate shouts, as she grips her dagger.

> You hold onto Locke's sled as the army of hunters speeds towards the field of giants.
You continue to fly through the snow towards the approaching giants, and you can see them now. They stand well over sixty feet tall, each wielding a club the size of a tree trunk.

> You say "Good gods..."
"We're almost there!" Hunt shouts from the lead sled. "Prepare your spears!"
As he shouts, the ground begins to shake. From a crack in the ice ahead, a gargantuan hand rises up as a giant pulls itself out of the ground.

> You turn to the sleds behind you and shout with all of your might. "Fight well, Hunters of Luden-Bay! We're counting on you!"
"For the tribe!" Hunt shouts, pulling his spear back.
The giants now rise up from the earth in front of you, and as one they begin to charge.

> You say "Get us through here, Locke!"
"On it!" she shouts, as the giant army charges towards you.

You can see that the other hunters are about to clash with the giants.

> You hunker behind your shield as Locke speeds her sled past the line of giants and towards the Ice Queen's castle.
You speed past the giants, their massive clubs coming within inches of you as they swing. The wind rushes past you as you shield your face, before you finally pull ahead of the charging giants.
The other hunters' sleds do not fare as well. You turn, and see that three of the giant's clubs have smashed into three of the sleds. Two are destroyed instantly, and the third is sent flying into the distance.
Two of the tribesmen hang onto the third's railing, and begin to draw weapons as the giants charge towards them.

> You wrench your gaze away, and focus forward, towards your objective. "Chief Hunt will see them through... He must."
Your team speeds across the snow towards the Ice Queen's castle. Kate keeps looking over her shoulder, and you turn to follow her gaze.
The giants have reached the other tribesmen, who have taken up spears and axes to fight the giants. Some sleds remain, but on the whole, the battlefield is chaos.

> You say "Focus, Kate! They have their mission, we have ours. We have to trust them!"
"Right!" she shouts, turning away from the battlefield.
The distant image of the castle begins to sharpen as you draw away from the sounds of the clash.

> You look at the cursed castle of the Ice Queen.
The white castle stands atop a mountain of ice. It's highest towers reach above the clouds. A drawbridge, made of the same ice as the mountain, leads up to the entrance.

> You say "Locke, how close do we need to be to kick down the door?!"
"We're a little too far away right now, but we can still take some steps to prepare!"
The three of you look at the castle.
"Alright," Kate says.

> You close your eyes and focus on the magic within you, opening them again when you have hold of it. "What should we do?"

"I'm going to try to get us as close to the castle as possible," she says, "and I need you all to protect me!"

> You gaze in horror at the looming castle. "From what?!"
"Whatever the hell the Ice Queen throws at us!"
"Right!" you say.
The air around you begins to freeze, and a sheen of frost forms on your armor.

> You say "Sophie, keep the frost off of us!"
"Right!" she says.
The frost on your armor and your friends' armor melts, reducing the winter chill.
As you get closer to the castle, you begin to make out more detail.
The front doors of the castle are wide, with a portcullis gate behind them. The walls of the castle are slick and sheer, impossible to climb.
The massive moat around the castle is frozen over with ice, but you can see dark shapes moving beneath the ice.
You approach the castle, and suddenly the ground begins to collapse beneath you!

> You grit your teeth. "Not if I can help it!" you shout, as you hold the ground underneath you steady with your earth magic, preventing it from collapsing.
The ice cracks and falls into chasms around you, but your path remains clear.
"Thanks, Em!" Kate shouts.
You nod to her, and then turn to look at the strange shapes moving under the frozen water.

> You say "Kate, lift the sled with your wind magic! Get us across that moat!"
"Right!" she says, and a gust of wind picks up the front end of the sled.

> You use your earth magic to form a ramp right before the moat. "Kate, Locke, now! We're going over!"
The sled begins to go over the ramp, but then a burst of wind knocks your sled into the moat! You fall into the ice-cold water, and struggle to keep your head above the surface.

> You summon a pillar of earth underneath you, raising you out of the water, as you look for your friends.
You see Kate on the other side of the moat towards the castle, the wind carrying her to a stop. Sophie rises above the moat on a whirlwind of water, charging across. Locke is levitating forward alongside her.

> You grin as you launch yourself to the other side of the moat with a pillar of earth. "Kate, I need some wind! Catch me!"
You feel a gust of wind carry you over to her, and Kate raises her hands to catch you. You land on the other side of the moat, looking up at the castle walls.
"Thanks, love!" you say, giving her a quick peck on the cheek.
"Not the time!" she shouts, gazing upwards in fear.

> You follow her gaze to the top of the frozen castle wall, trying to see what has her spooked.
You look up at the top of the castle wall, and are just in time to see a massive bolt of lightning shoot down from the sky.

> You say "Sophie, lightning! Redirect it! This is all you!"
"What do you think I'm doing?" Sophie shouts.
The lightning seems to bend away from you, as everyone safely touches down on the other side of the moat.

> You say "Alright, Locke, how are we bringing this tower down?! We need to draw the Queen out quick!"
"Yes, yes!" she says. "I need you and Sophie to focus on finding the weak points in its fortification in the ice and stone! When you have, shout for me and we'll crack it open!"
> You say "Yes, ma'am! Sophie, with me!"
"Got it!" she says.

> You reach out and touch the frigid castle wall, beckoning Sophie to do the same.
"Counting on you, Locke, Kate. Keep us safe," you say as you close your eyes and extend your mind into the stone parts of the castle.
You hear Kate shout out an alarm, and then the ground shakes as a massive roar bellows out.
"It's some sort of abomination! Keep your guard up!" Kate shouts.

> You keep your eyes closed and focus on finding a weak spot that you can bring down the tower with. "Handle it, you two!"
You hear the roars of some beast as your magic scans the wall, trying to find a weak spot.
Suddenly, you find one! It's very weak, but if you concentrate all your strength into that one point you could easily bring down a large section of the tower.

> You say "I got one... Sophie, how's it coming? You find a weak spot yet?!"
"Yes! I'm concentrating on it now, but it's gonna take quite the push..."
You nod, and begin to pour all your magic into your section of the tower.

> You say "Locke, now's the time! Give us whatever juice you got, we're bringing this thing down!"
"Right!"
You hear a loud humming sound, and a large spike of lightning hits the tower you're concentrating on. Another follows it, and another, and another.

> You push with all your might and magic, simultaneously with Sophie, and bring the tallest spire of the Ice Queen's castle crumbling down.
"YES! WE DID IT!"
The tower begins to fall with a thunderous crack, as a large plume of snow and ice fill the sky.
You turn around to see the beast that Kate is fighting... It's a large, white monster, with long black claws and freezing cold breath.

> You charge forward, your shield aloft, shouting to get the monster's attention.
The beast turns, and stares at you.
"Well, what do we have here?" it snarls, its voice like an avalanche. "The little mage draws a blade."

> You warily creep forward, shield held high. "Come closer, and see how deep my blade bites, monster!"
The beast roars, and charges towards you.
You hold your ground, waiting for the last second to move out of the way.
The beast swings, but you easily duck under the blow.

> You carve your sword along its side as it skids past.
The sword cleaves through its side, drawing forth a howl of pain.
The beast backs off for a moment, to regain its strength.

> You say "We don't have time for this small fry! Help me kill it!"
Sophie nods, and casts a bolt of lightning at the beast. It turns to look at her, and that's all the time you need.
"Die, abomination!" you shout, and charge forward.

The beast tries to get out of the way, but you're faster. You bury your sword into its neck, severing its head from it's body. It roars one last time, and then collapses to the ground, dead.

> You look up at the crumbled tower.
You're about to head up to the ruined spire when Kate stops you, her face pale. "Em, we have a problem..."
You hear a thunderous rush of air as a tremendous wing pushes against it, followed by a roar that shakes your bones.

> You say "It can't be..."
You turn, to see a dragon perched atop the crumbled tower, mottled black and blue scales riddled with frost. Patches of skin are missing, and a talon has been shorn clean off and replaced with a massive chunk of ice.

Round Two

"No..." Sophie says softly.
"Everyone, get down!" Locke screams.

> You dive into Kate and tackle her to the ground, trusting Locke and Sophie to do the same.
You leap, wrapping your arms around Kate and tackling her to the ground.
There's a roaring sound as a wave of frost blasts out from the dragon's mouth, flash-freezing everything it touches.

> You scramble to your feet after the wave passes. "Everyone alright?!"
Kate, Sophie, and Locke are all unharmed.

> You look at the undead frost dragon.
The dragon lets out a hiss, a cloud of frost condensing around it, as its neck leans forward, revealing a figure atop its shoulder blades.

> You say "The Ice Queen... gods above."
The Ice Queen lets out a laugh, her voice high-pitched and terrifying.
"You could've been one of my own! But instead you come to kill my children! Come! Meet your fate!"

> You look to Locke for guidance.
"We need to split them up! Two and two, divide and conquer!" the mage shouts, eyes fixed on the Ice Queen.

> You say "You and Sophie take the Queen; you'll be better in a magic duel. Kate and I will handle the dragon!"
"Gladly!" Kate says, readying her dagger.
You ready your sword, waiting for the dragon to make the first move.
The frost dragon shifts into a low crouch, slowly creeping forward towards the edge of the castle wall.

> You find the earth underneath you and ready your magic. "Hold on, everyone. We're going up to meet them!" you shout, as you summon a large column of earth beneath you to raise your party towards the undead dragon and its rider.
"Look at this, little one! What do you think?" the Ice Queen shouts, speaking to her mount.
The dragon lets out a roar, before lunging forward off the edge of the wall. It unfurls its wings mid-fall, the massive batlike things propelling it forward as it aims straight for you.

> You scream "Scatter!" to your companions. Hearing them all take flight, you launch yourself forward and rocket towards the dragon, shield in front of you as you roar.
You meet the dragon head-on, your shield smashing into the creature's snout. You clamber up the dragon's face as it tries to shake you off, before reaching its neck.

> You stab at the dragon's neck with your blade. "Kate, rip apart the wings! We need to ground this!"
Kate nods, running forward with her dagger held tightly in her hand. She leaps up onto the dragon's wing and begins stabbing at the thin wing membrane, ripping holes into it.

> You look up towards the Ice Queen as Locke and Sophie engage the witch.
The Ice Queen floats high above the fray, watching as her mount attempts to shake you off its face. She's smiling faintly, and looks almost as though she's enjoying the sight.
The dragon smashes into the earth with a thud, sending you skidding along the ground as you cling on for dear life. You pull yourself up, scrambling back onto the dragon's face.

> You say "Killed you once, you bastard, and I'll do it again!"
The dragon snaps its jaws at you, but you roll under the creature's head and jab your blade upwards underneath it's head.

> You roll out of the way, snapping your shield upwards in preparation to receive any counterattack.
The dragon attempts to twist its head around to snap at you, but you twist your blade deeper and the beast lets out a howl.

> You keep a defensive position, rooting your stance in the ground. "Come on, Kate..." you whisper yourself, looking on as your partner slides along the undead beast, dagger held high.
"Come on!" Kate shouts, sliding along the dragon's wing as she holds her dagger in her hands.
She stabs her blade deep into the wing membrane, ripping it upwards. The wing begins to tear.

> You charge forward and attack to keep the dragon's attention away from Kate, feinting and readying your shield.
"Kate! On your mark!" you shout, readying your sword.
Kate grunts as she puts all her strength into her blade, the dagger tearing through the wing.
The wing rips apart, and the dragon screams as it writhes, smashing the ground around it.

> You look towards Sophie and Locke as they attack the Ice Queen, high in the sky.
Sophie floats high above the Ice Queen, drawing her axe and charging it with lightning as she flies through the air.
"Now, Locke!" she shouts.
Locke reaches her hand out, firing a beam of light through the air. It strikes the Ice Queen in the side, but shimmers and dissipates as her wards protect her.
"It's not working! Keep going!" Sophie calls.
The Ice Queen floats high above, her arms outstretched as she charges an incredibly powerful blast of frost.

> You return your attention to the writhing dragon as Kate lands next to you on a gust of wind.
"Now!" she shouts, both of you stabbing your blades into the dragon's neck.
The dragon lets out a pitiful moan as it collapses onto the ground, its head wobbling as you pull your blades out.

> You say "Again!"
"Again!" you shout, charging forward and leaping onto the dragon's snout as it lays on the ground.
You put your sword to the dragon's head, running it through its skull. The beast shudders and lays still, its eyes rolling into the back of its head.

> You leap off as you look at the undead dragon, looking still. "Did we do it?"
"Yeah...we did it," Kate says, panting.
Then the dragon begins to move again.
Head lolling, eyes unfocused, the undead beast stands to its feet, torn wings dragging upon the ground.

> You say "Kate, I don't think we're done yet..."
"Kate, I don't think we're done yet..." you say.
"Come on!" Kate shouts, leaping onto the dragon's back as it rises to its feet.

> You charge forward and slash at the tendons of the undead frost dragon's limbs, seeking to sever them.
You stab your blade into the dragon's foreleg, twisting and cutting as you try to lop it off. It snaps off, but the creature hardly notices.

> You leap away, shield raised in case it should strike at you.
The dragon's jaws snap forward, biting into your shield and flinging you into the ground as it lets out a powerful breath, freezing you in place.

> You encase yourself in a dome of earth as you chip away at the ice, freeing yourself.
You quickly raise a small earthen dome, as you feel the frost slow and then stop your movements. The cold pierces your very soul, chilling you to the core, but you hold out.

> You tear away at the ice with your blade as quickly as possible.
You slash the ice, carving off bits and pieces as you quickly melt the deadly cold frost with your intense heat.
The frost dragon charges forward, smashing into the dome. You bounce off and into the air as the dome explodes, sending you high into the sky.
You land on top of the castle wall, looking down at the monster below.

> You look up at the duel between the Ice Queen, Locke, and Sophie.
The Ice Queen stands in the center of the battle, encased in a shimmering shield of blue energy, with her two adversaries on either side.
Locke has balls of fire swirling around her form and streams of heat blasting from her hands towards the Queen. Sophie, axe still crackling with lightning, swings at the Queen with each pass.

"You've made a grave mistake, challenging me in the heart of my lands!" the Ice Queen roars.
"No, the mistake was making an enemy of me!" Sophie shouts.
Suddenly, a gargantuan shape blocks your vision of the duel, as the undead dragon leaps up onto the castle wall, snarling at you. Kate clings to one of its spines, trying her best to maintain her grip.
The undead dragon takes a swipe at you with its claws, tearing off the top of the wall. You fly through the air, grasping at the crumbling stone as it falls away.

> You slow and stop the stone with your earth magic, willing it and you to hurtle back towards the dragon.
You plant your feet on the crumbling stone wall, channeling the last of your energy into keeping it from crumbling. You will not fall to some beast.
The gargantuan shape barrels towards you, swinging its claws. It tears through the stone, shattering it as your momentum carries you forward.
You tumble through the air, as the dragon slashes again.

> You lower your shield to meet the dragon's strike and push off the claw, attempting to fling yourself onto the beast's rotting hide.
You turn your shield, angling it into the dragon's swing, using the momentum to launch yourself forward. Your feet slam into the dragon's foreleg, but you push off, jumping onto its back.

> You drag your blade along its back towards its hindleg, attempting to slash another leg off.
The blade bites deep into the dragon's rotting flesh and thick scales, tearing a gash in its thick hide. The dragon roars, twisting and snapping at you with its jaws.

> You stand your ground with your magic shield, counterattacking when you can.
The dragon's jaws snap forward, but your shield holds. The jaws slam against it, as you jab your sword at an eye, but the dragon pulls its head back.

> You hack again at the leg.
You continue to hack at the dragon's leg, tearing off chunks of flesh and scales with every blow. The dragon bellows in pain, twisting and trying to reach around with its other foreleg to get at you.

> You slide down the dragon's side with your blade in its hide towards the ruined castle wall.
You slide down the dragon's side, blade first. The dragon bucks and twists, but you hold on tight with your legs around its side.

> You push off, skidding to a stop on the frigid stone.
You quickly push off from the dragon's side, flying towards the castle wall. You slam into it, rolling to a stop on the frigid stone. You groan in pain, but you've taken worse beatings.

> You leap to your feet, shield ready, as you scan around for Kate.
You look up, as the dragon smashes into the wall not far from you. It crashes to the ground, sliding in a heap of scales and broken bones. You stand, staring at the dragon.
You stare at the dragon, panting. The beast isn't done yet, but it's close. It tries to breathe frost, but only wind comes out. Its muscles give out when trying to stand. The dragon lets out a pitiful moan, a dying noise you've heard many times before. You walk over to the dragon, raising your sword.

> You say "Stay dead this time!"
"Stay dead this time!" you scream as you drive it into its skull.
The dragon's eyes go dim as its head rolls to the side.
You stand there, panting and heaving. You slowly lower your sword.

> You say "Kate, where are you?!"
"Kate! Kate! Where are you?!"
You scream, looking around. You hear a groan from behind the dragon's corpse.
"Here," Kate says, struggling to pull herself up.

> You hold the dragon's corpse aloft so she can wriggle out from under it.
You hold the dragon's corpse aloft, Kate wriggling out from under it. She slowly stands, groaning and rubbing her shoulder.
"Thanks," she says, looking at the dragon.

> You say "You alright?"
"You alright?" you ask.
"Yeah," Kate says. "I've had worse."

> You scan around for Locke, Sophie, and the Ice Queen.

You look around for your friends, but you can't see them anywhere. You hear the crack of thunder and explosions, but can't locate where it is coming from.

> You say "They're still fighting... Do you see them? They can't be far!"
"They're still fighting," you say, "Do you see them? They can't be far!"
Kate looks around, looking for your friends. Suddenly, a light flashes from within the crumbled tower and flame spills forth from a crack in the wall.
"There!" Kate points out to you, raising her voice to be heard over the howling wind. "They're in there!"

> You say "Then let's go! We have to get into the collapsed tower! Find a way in!"
"Then let's go!" you say. "We have to get into the collapsed tower! Find a way in!"
Kate nods. She picks up her dagger, jamming it into her belt.

> You sheathe your sword and charge towards the ruined tower.
You run forward, straight towards the ruined tower. You jump, grabbing the stone window frame with your hands and pulling yourself up.
"Come on!" you yell to Kate. "There's a way in here!"
Kate scrambles forward, grabbing your hand and pulling herself up. You pull, and she stands, straightening her shirt.
"Thanks," she says.

> You look around at the crumbled tower interior.
You look around, seeing the ruins of a tower. A wall has fallen down, opening up a pathway deeper into the heart of the tower. The entire place is wrecked, covered with debris and dust from the collapsed wall.

> You say "You ready, Kate?"
"You ready, Kate?"
Kate nods, staring at the opening.
"Let's go," she says.
The two of you share a glance and turn, rushing forward into the tower.

Within the Castle

Pursuit

> You stumble forward over the rubble as you proceed deeper into the collapsed spire, helping each other along as you go.
You walk along, carefully stepping over the stones. You hear a sudden laugh as Sophie suddenly appears from behind a collapsed portion of wall.
"There you are!" she says, smiling.

> You hold a hand in front of Kate, signalling her to stop. Something doesn't smell right. "Sophie? What happened?"
"What happened? We won, that's what happened! Look!"
Sophie points behind her. You turn, staring at the collapsed wall in front of you. Suddenly, a massive blast of frost explodes out from it.

> You intercept the blast with your shield before it reaches you and Kate. "Kate, it's not Sophie! It's a trap!"
You quickly slam your sword into a nearby stone and hold your shield in front of you. The blast of frost slams into your shield, sending you skidding back. Kate screams, stumbling back as frost covers her armor.
"It's a trap!" you yell, running forward with your sword raised.
You stab forward, but the grinning Sophie leaps backwards with unnatural agility.

> You say "Who are you?! Where's Sophie?!"
"Who are you?! Where's Sophie?!" you yell.
The woman laughs, not answering you as she turns and sprints along the wall of the spire.

> You keep your eye on the woman as you shout over to Kate. "Kate, you okay?"
You turn, looking over to Kate. She stands there, frost covering her armor.
"I'm fine!" she shouts, her voice ragged but determined.
"What the hell are you?" you shout at the woman.

"I'm your friend, obviously!" she answers, her voice ringing through the air as she disappears deeper into the spire.

> You pant and help Kate thaw her armor with her fire magic. "Some sort of shapeshifter. We have to be careful to not get separated, otherwise we might not know which of us is real."
You help thaw Kate's armor, before the two of you set off in pursuit. The two of you slowly walk forward, holding your weapons at the ready.
"I don't like this," says Kate.

> You say "Me neither... Kate, if you aren't sure if I'm real, ask me where I grew up. The answer is Fairhall. Anything else, it isn't me."
"Me neither... Kate, if you aren't sure if I'm real, ask me where I grew up. The answer is Fairhall. Anything else, it isn't me."
Kate nods, her expression serious.

> You say "Do you have something I can ask you, to verify?"
"Do you have something I can ask you, to verify?"
Kate nods, pausing for a moment.
"What's my favorite color?" she asks.

> You pause. "We've been a couple for a while and I don't know that. I think that's on me... Well, what is it?"
"We've been a couple for a while and I don't know that. I think that's on me... Well, what is it?"
"Green," Kate answers, her face expressionless.

> You sheepishly grin. "I'll make that up to you once we are out of here. For now, noted. For Sophie... Maybe we ask her where she wants to settle down?"
"For Sophie... Maybe we ask her where she wants to settle down?" you ask.
Kate nods in response. The two of you quickly reach the bottom of the spire.

> You listen for the sounds of magic that you followed in.
The sound of an explosion rings through the air, along with a scream of pain.
"That was Sophie!" Kate yells, sprinting forward as she charges her fists with fire.

> You charge alongside her, shield held aloft.

You run forward, shield held aloft. You burst through the doorway, sprinting into the room beyond. You find yourself in a massive library, filled with books of every kind.

> You say "Sophie?! Locke?!"
"Sophie?! Locke?!"
A massive figure looms in the center of the room, wielding a gargantuan frost-covered club. The figure looks humanoid, with a bald head and a massive black beard.

> You say "Never runs out of lackeys, does she... Ugh, we don't have time for this! Let's kill him!"
"Never runs out of lackeys, does she... Ugh, we don't have time for this! Let's kill him!"
You charge forward with a yell, your shield held ahead of you. You slam into the Behemoth, your shield hitting his gut. The Behemoth grunts as he slides back, but quickly recovers, grabbing your shield and swinging his club into you.

> You summon a wall of stone to stop the club and slash at his wrist that holds your shield.
You summon a wall of stone, slamming it into the Behemoth's wrist as he holds your shield. He grunts in pain, dropping the shield as you slash at his face. He grabs your sword with his hand, stopping it just short of his eye. The Behemoth slams his fist into your stomach, before grabbing you by the head.

> You say "Kate, little help here!"
"Kate, little help here!"
Kate appears from behind you, stabbing the Behemoth through the leg with her dagger. The Behemoth roars, dropping you to the ground.

> You leap to your feet and cover Kate with your shield, anticipating a counterattack.
As you stand, you raise your shield to protect Kate from a crushing blow. The club slams into your shield, knocking you and Kate backwards. You slide back, smacking into a shelf filled with books.

> You say "Kate, think you can torch him?"
"Kate, think you can torch him?"
"Gladly," Kate smiles, twirling her dagger.

You raise your shield, readying yourself for the next blow.

> You rush forward and feint, keeping a defensive stance as you distract it from Kate while she readies fire magic.
The Behemoth swings, and you barely manage to stop the blow with your shield. You slide to the side, dodging a second blow. As it twists to swing again, a fireball rushes past you.
The Behemoth lets out a pained howl, twisting away. The fire lights the Behemoth's fur and flesh, and it quickly sets the whole library ablaze.

> You say "Okay, maybe we didn't think this through! Kate, let's get out of here! Through the door, deeper in!"
"Okay, maybe we didn't think this through! Kate, let's get out of here! Through the door, deeper in!"
You turn and run, bursting through the doorway. You run through the hallway, heading deeper into the castle, past twisted statues and paintings of torture.
Suddenly, you hear a snicker from above you.

> You skid to a stop and raise your shield above you. "Kate, above!" you warn, trying to discern where the laughter came from.
You turn, and see a tiny figure standing on the chandelier. He leaps off it, plummeting at you.
You raise your shield to protect yourself, and the tiny jester crashes into it.

> You receive the tiny jester's momentum with your shield and smash it downwards, seeking to crush him.
As you intercept the tiny jester on your shield, you slam it into the ground. The jester bounces off, rolling to the side as he hits the ground. He skids to a stop, and you drop your shield, readying your sword.
"You'll have to do better than that!" the jester laughs, drawing a red blade.
The tiny jester wears a tiny leather armor suit, with a horned helmet on his head.
The tiny jester wields a shortsword.

> You glance at Kate. "Torch this one, I suppose?" you say, trying not to snicker at the impish creature's bravado.
"Torch this one, I suppose?" you say, trying not to snicker at the impish creature's bravado.
Kate raises her hands, sending a fireball hissing in the jester's direction.

The jester leaps to the side, landing on one of the paintings as the fire engulfs the canvas. He lands in a crouch, readying his sword.
"Come on, then!" he laughs.

> You roll your eyes. "Oh my god, are you serious? Fine," you say, as you stab at the creature with your magic sword.
"Oh my god, are you serious? Fine," you say, as you stab at the creature with your magic sword.
You slash out at him, but he dances away, snickering.
"Oh, is that the best you can do?" he laughs.

> You look at Kate to see if she is as unamused by this opponent as you are.
You look at Kate to see if she is as unamused by this opponent as you are.
She raises an eyebrow, before looking back at the jester and firing another jet of flames at him.
The jester leaps over the jet of flame, before rolling to the side to dodge a swing from you.
"No, no, no! You're not letting me entertain you!" he says.

> You say "We are kind of in a hurry!"
"We are kind of in a hurry!" you say.
"Yeah, yeah, I know," the jester says.

> You summon a pillar of earth beneath the tiny jester's feet, attempting to crush him against the ceiling.
"I don't have time for this," you grunt.
You summon a pillar of earth beneath the tiny jester's feet, attempting to crush him against the ceiling.
The jester leaps into the air, flipping upside-down and landing on the ceiling. He runs along the ceiling, scampering away from you.
"Can't catch me, can ya?" he taunts.

> You say "Oh. My gods. Kate, keep flaming him. We'll get him eventually."
"Oh. My gods. Kate, keep flaming him. We'll get him eventually."
Kate raises her hands, shooting fire at the jester.

> You rush the jester, striking with your sword.
You rush the jester, striking with your sword.

The tiny jester leans backwards, letting your sword slash sail under him as he stays upside-down.
"Come on! Come on!" he laughs.

> You growl at him and continue attacking, trying to maneuver him into Kate's flames.
You growl at him and continue attacking, trying to maneuver him into Kate's flames.
The jester holds his sword out, blocking your next attack. He kicks your ankle, making you stumble.

> You stomp on the tiny jester.
You stomp on the tiny jester.
The jester leaps into the air, flipping over your foot. He lands behind you, smiling.
"Come on, come on, let's see what you've got!"

> You punt the taunting bastard.
You punt the taunting jester as hard as you can.
The tiny jester is sent flying into Kate's direction.

> You say "Toast him, Kate!"
"Toast him, Kate!"
Kate raises her hands, shooting fire at the jester.
The tiny jester is engulfed in flames, screaming in pain.
"Got him," Kate says, as the flames slowly die down.
The tiny jester lies still, the top half of his clothes burnt off.

> You walk over to the tiny jester's body and crush it under your boot, just to make sure.
You walk over to the tiny jester's body and crush it under your boot, just to make sure.
"Good," you say. "Enough of that."
"Let's keep going," Kate says.

Deception

> You warily continue onward. "I'm still nervous about that shapeshifter. I'm surprised we haven't been attacked again."
"I'm surprised we haven't been attacked again," you say.
"Me too," Kate says. "We should be careful."
You keep going, heading down a staircase.

> You listen intently for any sounds of combat, trying to locate where Sophie, Locke, and the Ice Queen could be dueling.
You listen intently for any sounds of combat, trying to locate where Sophie, Locke, and the Ice Queen could be dueling.
You hear an explosion coming from one of the rooms ahead of you.

> You say "That's our cue. Let's go!"
"That's our cue. Let's go!"
You enter the room. A massive, frozen wolf stands in the center of the room, surrounded by dozens of ice beasts, all with glowing blue eyes. The wolf stands on its hind legs, its massive jaws open as it howls towards the ceiling. It is at least five times your height.
The jester laughs, perched on the back of the wolf's head.

> You skid to a stop. "Okay, not our cue! That was not our cue!" you shout. You notice the jester and curse. "Are you FREAKING kidding me?"
You skid to a stop. "Okay, not our cue! That was not our cue!" you shout. You notice the jester and curse. "Are you FREAKING kidding me?"
"Run!" Kate shouts, turning towards the door you came in.

> You follow her through the door to the previous chamber.
You follow her through the door to the previous chamber.
You sprint down the corridor, towards the massive room with the staircase. You hear a howl, and feel a rush of cold air.

> You whip around and brace with your shield, feeling the gargantuan wolf barreling down the hallway towards you.

You whip around and brace with your shield, feeling the gargantuan wolf barreling down the hallway towards you.
You push with all your might, but the beast is too heavy and has too much momentum.

> You shove your shield to the side and let the beast surge past you, striking at its haunches as it passes.
You shove your shield to the side and let the beast surge past you, striking at its haunches as it passes.
Your blade slices through the thick fur and flesh, opening a grievous wound.

> You continue attacking, trying to get its attention.
You continue attacking, trying to get its attention.
The creature whirls around, pinning you with its icy gaze and roars. Blood runs from its maw, staining its white fur.

> You savagely grin. "Good doggy... Easy now... Kate, light it up!" you should, rushing it with your shield.
You savagely grin. "Good doggy... Easy now... Kate, light it up!" you should, rushing it with your shield.
The beast leaps towards you, hitting your shield with incredible force. It knocks you off your feet, sending you sliding across the floor. You bash into the stone wall and crumple to the ground, dazed.
The creature prowls towards you, growling, as a fireball strikes it in the side and flame engulfs the beast. It yelps, collapsing to the ground as its fur and flesh burn.
It struggles to rise, but you are upon it, stabbing it through the neck and silencing its yelps of pain.

> You prepare yourself for the other ice beasts sure to spill out of the room the wolf did. "Come on then! You all want to die?!"
You prepare yourself for the other ice beasts sure to spill out of the room the wolf did. "Come on then! You all want to die?!"
The other creatures do not pour out, however. After a tense moment, you stand in the silence.
"You okay?" Kate asks, running up to you.
"Yeah, I'm fine," you say.

> You say "Where did that damnable jester go?"

"Where did that damned jester go?" you ask.
"How would I know?" Kate asks, shrugging. "He disappeared after the wolf jumped through."

> You growl. "Damn it all. Between the shapeshifter and that little prick, I'm not liking how many enemies might be shadowing us..."
You growl. "Between the shapeshifter and that little prick, I'm not liking how many enemies might be shadowing us..."
"They're fools to mess with us," Kate says.
"Probably," you say.

> You say "Kate, can you keep an eye on me for me for a second? Sprinting through these corridors is getting us nowhere. I'm going to try something."
You say "Kate, can you keep an eye on me for me for a second? Sprinting through these corridors is getting us nowhere. I'm going to try something."
"What?" Kate asks.

> You say "Just watch over me. Trust me."
You say "Just watch over me. Trust me."
"Fine," Kate says.
You crouch down, touching the ground, and close your eyes.

> You bracing your mind for the pain that comes from using tremorsense in the Ice Queen's castle, slowly expand your mind through the stone to try and locate your missing companions.
You extend your tremorsense through the stone, feeling it out as you try to feel your companions. The pain in your head is incredible, and you let out a scream, collapsing on the ground.
"Em?" Kate asks. "Are you alright?"
"No," you moan.

> You say "It's really hard, using tremorsense in here... Constant backlash. Urgh... I have to try again, though. Cover me."
You say "It's really hard, using tremorsense in here... Constant backlash. Urgh... I have to try again, though. Cover me."
"Okay," Kate says.

> You reach out your mind once more, snaking awareness through the stone with as little of it in your mind as possible, searching for any sign of your companions or the Ice Queen.
You expand your awareness out once more, as you slowly crawl along the corridors of the Ice Queen's castle. You feel a few faint traces of humans in the castle, but your awareness is quickly obstructed.
You have a hard time feeling anything through the pain in your head, and feel like you're about to pass out.

> You retract your senses and open your eyes. "I can't do this. It's not working. We're going to have to find them the old fashioned way."
You release your senses, opening your eyes. "I can't do this. It's not working. We're going to have to find them the old fashioned way."
"Alright," Kate says. "Let's go."
You quickly hurry along the corridors, checking every room as you try to find the missing members of your team.

> You listen intently for battle sounds as you search.
You listen intently for the sounds of battle, as you walk along the corridors. You hear a distant cry of pain, which seems to echo throughout the entire castle.
"Is that... ?" Kate asks.

> You say "Hard to say. Which way did it come from?"
You say "Hard to say. Which way did it come from?"
"I'm not sure," Kate says.

> You continue onward through the Ice Queen's castle.
You continue walking along the corridors, as you hear a distant cry. You sigh as you trudge along.
"I'm getting really sick of this," you complain.
"We'll find them soon," Kate says, concern in her voice.

> You say "I know. I just feel like we're being taunted."
You say "I know. I just feel like we're being taunted."
"What do you mean?" Kate asks, as you walk along the corridor.

> You say "No matter where we go, ever sound ahead that tells us we are almost there is a trap! Something is wrong here, Kate, I know it! "

You say "No matter where we go, every sound ahead that tells us we are almost there is a trap! Something is wrong here, Kate, I know it! "
"Like what?" Kate asks.

> You say "I don't know! Magic? We're going in circles!"
You say "I don't know! Magic? We're going in circles!"
"We're not going in circles," Kate says.

> You stop walking abruptly. "Kate... What's your favorite color?"
You stop walking abruptly. "Kate... What's your favorite color?"
"What does that have to do with anything?" Kate asks.
"Just answer the question!" you ask, exasperated.
"Blue," Kate says.

> You draw your sword and level it at Kate. "You're not Kate. Got you, shifter."
"What? Emilia, what's gotten into you?" Kate asks, backing away from you and raising her hands defensively.

> You say "Where did I grow up?! Answer me!"
You say "Where did I grow up?! Answer me!"
"I don't know, where did you grow up?" Kate asks.

> You summon pillars of earth to pin her down to the ground. "You're lying! You're not Kate! How do I get out of this trap, shapeshifter? Answer me!"
You summon pillars of earth to pin her down to the ground. "You're lying! You're not Kate! How do I get out of this trap, shapeshifter? Answer me! "
"I'm not a shapeshifter! I swear to God, I'm Kate!" Kate begs.
"You're lying! I can tell!" you say, raising your sword.
"No, I'm not!"
Suddenly, you hear a rumbling from behind you. You quickly turn to see a wall of frost coming straight at you.

> You curse and raise a wall of stone to block it.
You curse and raise a wall of stone to block the frost, as the frost smashes into it. The wall holds, but only just, as it absorbs most of the frost, although some does leak through.

> You turn back to the captive shapeshifter.

You turn back to the captive shapeshifter. "Change out of Kate, or I swear to every god I will end you!"

The captive, trembling, begins to change form. Soon, the Kate-form shapeshifter begins to change. The long hair falls off, and is replaced by short hair. The face twists and contorts, becoming slightly more masculine and losing all resemblance to Kate. The eyes turn a bright blue, and horns begin to grow out of the head. Soon, the transformation is complete. The being before you is unlike anything you've ever seen.

> You level your sword at the creature's throat. "Now. You're going to give me some answers, shifter."
The creature gulps, and nods. "Ask away, knight."
"What's your name?" you ask.
"My name? You may call me Az."

> You say "Alright, Az. First question. How do I get out of this magic trap? I know rooms are looping."
"I can help you with that," Az says. "Just keep walking forward, and eventually you'll reach the Ice Queen."

> You say "Just... Forward? No turns? That's it?"
"That's it," Az says. "Unless you want to loop back to where you came from."

> You say "Next question. What the hell did you do with Kate?"
"I haven't done anything with Kate. She's still here, trapped in the same loop you are."

> You say "If I break free, will she be freed as well?"
"I don't know," Az admits. "I think so, yes."

> You say "You've been very cooperative. Thank you. Last question. Does the Ice Queen have any weaknesses I can exploit?"
"Well, if I were you, I'd aim for the eyes. Destroy the eyes, and you can destroy the whole... Body."
You nod. "Thank you, Az. You've been a great help."

> You plunge your sword into Az's throat, twisting the blade as you do so. "That's for Kate."

Az gurgles and twitches as you twist your sword in their throat. Then, they stop moving. You pull your sword out of them, then turn and begin walking forward again.

Regicide

> You charge forward, taking no turns, as you follow Az's instructions to break out of the trap.
After a few minutes of walking, you find yourself in a room made of frost. It is strangely shaped, almost like an hourglass.

> You say "Kate? Kate, where are you?"
You walk forward, and then see a figure in front of you. It's Kate, standing still.

> You gently grasp her and pull her out of the enchantment.
You gently grasp her arm and pull her towards you. She seems to move in slow motion, as if she's struggling against some unseen force, but you manage to pull her close enough to touch.

> You say "Just keep walking forward, Kate. You'll break out of it if you just go forward. No turns, just straight. Trust me."
Her face twitches, sharpening as you feel almost a slight nod. You continue to hold her for a minute or two before she suddenly stirs and opens her eyes.

> You say "Hey you. Good to see ya."
"What happened?" she asks, voice quavering.

> You say "We were separated and trapped in a series of looping rooms by magic. I got out, and killed that shapeshifter in the process. Are you okay?"
"I'm... I'm fine. Thank you."
You nod. "We should keep going."

> You say "I think I can hear Sophie and Locke fighting the Ice Queen up ahead. About time we relieve them."
Kate nods. "I think so too."
The two of you continue walking, out of the hourglass room and towards the sounds of battle.

> You kick down the door.

You pull the door open, revealing a tall woman with long, pale white hair and blue eyes behind it. She wears an elegant dress, made of a shimmering silver-blue material. Her eyes glow an icy blue and she is coated in a web of magic, floating in the air.

> You look around the room for Sophie and Locke.
You find them both, each in a separate glass tube. You can see Sophie in the tube to your right, frantically pounding on the glass. Locke is in the tube to your left, unconscious.

> You say "Ice Queen! What have you done to them?!"
The woman smiles at you, a cold, pitiless smile.
"I am the Ice Queen. They are mine. And now, you are too."

> You say "Like hell we are! Kate, smash the tubes, free Locke and Sophie! I'll take the Queen."
Kate nods and takes a step forward, before the Queen speaks again.
"You... You will not be going anywhere."

> You rush forward and launch yourself towards the Ice Queen on a pillar of earth, shield in front of you, in an attempt to stop whatever she is planning.
You slam into the Ice Queen, wrapping your arms around her in a bear hug. She freezes, as you hold her tight, struggling against her.
She glares at you, then whispers "Sleep."

> You grunt as you feel the magic command begin to affect you. "Screw you," you growl, calling on a pillar of stone from the ceiling to slam you both to the ground.
You collapse to the ground, hitting the ground with a thud and a crack as you feel a rib break. You grunt in pain, rolling off the Ice Queen.

> You look to Kate, to see whether she has freed Locke and Sophie.
You see Kate, still standing in the same place, unmoving. You look back to the Ice Queen, who looks at you with a smirk.

> You roar at her. "Stop your gods-damned smiling!" you shout, turning and hurling your sword at the tube containing the struggling Sophie, seeking to shatter it and free her.
"Now now, dear. Is that anyway for a future princess to behave?" the Ice Queen smiles.

Your sword stops in mid air, hanging in front of the tube.

> "Go to hell!" you shout, as you concentrate on the stone around the tube, trying to use your earth magic to shatter it.
"I think not. Sit down, daughter of mine. We needn't fight. Let us talk."
You feel your rage subside. You feel the compulsion take over, and you sit down on the cold stone.

"Good girl," the Ice Queen says. "Now, we can talk."

The sword drops from the air, clanging on the ground. You wince as you feel Kate sit down next to you, slumping into her seat.

> You stare at the Ice Queen in compelled silence, eyes full of hate.
"Ah, yes. I can see this will take some getting used to for you." She smirks at you, staring into your eyes.

> You spit towards her.
The glob of spittle bounces off the barrier, landing on the ground.
"My, my. I'd expect that sort of thing from your little friends outside the castle, but I thought you had more self-control," the Ice Queen smiles.
"I'll tear your throat out," you growl.
The Ice Queen laughs, the laugh turning into a coughing fit. She looks up at you, her face pale.

> You give a low chuckle, voice straining against her magic. "So much for being all powerful. Sophie and Locke got a few hits in, huh?"
"Shut up," the Ice queen spits, her voice weak.
The two of you sit in silence. The cold reaches your very core, and you shiver.

> You focus on the magic inside of you, letting it flood your body in an attempt to release her hold on you without her noticing.
You feel the magic flowing through your body, as the Ice Queen lets out a sigh.
"You're very skilled. I can tell you have natural talent. A shame that it will be the cause of your death."

> You lock eyes with her, full of defiance despite your magical restraints. "And yours, witch."

"Yes, yes. We'll see about that," the Ice Queen smiles.
She lets out a cough, straining to speak once more.

> You seek to anger her into slipping up, and continue to taunt her. "Split us up and my friends still almost brought you down. You're lucky you had that pet dragon to cover for your weakness, queenie. Emphasis on had, of course. It was even easier to kill the second time."
You feel the air grow colder around you, and your eyes flicker to your right, where a small spout of ice has erupted from the wall. You narrow your eyes, staring at the Ice Queen.

> You say "Entire castle of freaks and abominations couldn't stop us from getting here, getting to you. Don't try that 'mother dearest' supreme ruler shit on me. "
Your voice becomes sharper, more commanding. The barrier darkens, and you hear the Ice Queen gasp as her spell wavers.
"Don't you dare-" she begins to say, but you interrupt her.

> You recall back to your first meeting with the Ice Queen in your dream, and make a desperate bluff. "You can craft as many monsters as you want, enslave every soul in the land! None of it will bring back your dead son, the one YOU failed to save, tyrant queen and useless bitch of a mother!" you scream at her, readying to spring to action the moment she loses control of your restraints.
"You will pay for your insolence, peasant." The Ice Queen's voice is cold and dark, sending a chill through you.
"Your words don't scare me, monster. They never will. Not now, not ever." You narrow your eyes, staring at her barrier.
"I am no monster. No, that title is far below me. I am the Ice Queen, Mother of Ice and Snow, and you-" She points at you, and your breath catches in your throat.
"You are nothing."
In that moment, everything goes dark. You feel your breath leave you, and the blood drains from your face. Your heart pounds in your chest, and you shudder involuntarily.

> You cling to the magic within you, using its energy to ward off the fatal cold of her magic.
The magic within you surges as the Ice Queen's magic attempts to freeze your blood solid, but you manage to overpower her and resist the spell.

> You slacken your muscles and unfocus your eyes, slumping onto the ground next to Kate and playing dead.
You feel the magic slacken as the Ice Queen seems to believe your act. Her chest heaves as her magic barrier drops.
"Weak..." she whispers, and then with a shriek of rage, she stands. Her eyes flit to Kate besides you. She lets out a growl, and then lifts her foot.
"No!" Sophie screams, the glass around her shattering as she flings herself forward and fires an arc of lightning at the Ice Queen.
The lightning arcs towards her, but the Ice Queen deflects it with a word and smashes her fist into Sophie's head, knocking her across the floor. She slams into the wall, collapsing to the ground.

> You use the opening Sophie gave you. You launch your sword towards you with a tiny bit of earth magic, catching it and roaring as you hurl it towards the vulnerable queen.
The sword flies true, slamming into her side and passing through her. She lets out a shriek as she topples to the ground, the blade in her side.

> You charge her, sending your gauntleted fist towards her skull.
The Ice Queen screams as your fist smashes into her face, knocking her head against the stone floor. You pull your sword from her side, and she begins to bleed from her mouth.
"Y... you..."

> You kick her across the jaw. "This is for Locke!"
Your foot flies into her jaw, snapping her head back and sending her head against the ground with a sickening thud. She lets out a pained moan.

> You stomp down on her kneecaps. "This is for Sophie! This is for Kate!"
You smash your armored boot down on her kneecaps, shattering them and sending shards of ice into her flesh. She lets out a shriek, then goes limp.

> You take out your knife as you kneel down besides her head. "And this... This is for ME!" you shout, as you gouge out her eyes, the source of her power.
You gouge out her eyes, and she lets out one last scream of pain before her body begins to freeze, shatters into pieces of ice, and then fades away into nothing.

> You drop the knife, chest heaving, as you turn and rush to where Sophie collapsed.

You run over to where Sophie lay, dropping to your knees as you see her. She's lying on the floor, breathing slowly, a bruise already forming under her eye.
"Sophie!" you gasp.
"I'll... be fine," she manages with a pained smile. "Thanks to you."
You lean over, hugging her tightly. You feel Kate join you two, squeezing you both as tears begin to stream down her cheeks.

> You say "We did it..."
"We did it," Sophie smiles.
"Of course we did... We have each other," Kate says, resting her head on your shoulder.

> You say "Let's... let's get Locke out of that tube..."
"Yes, let's do that," Sophie nods.
The three of you work quickly to free her, setting her gently on the ground. Her breaths are shallow, but steady.

> You say "Sophie, can you try healing her?"
"Yes, yes," Sophie nods, pressing her hands to her teacher's side.
You watch as the glow of magic envelopes her wounds, before fading away. Sophie lets out a sigh.

> You say "She going to be alright?"
"Yes. She'll just need rest, and she'll be fine," Sophie nods.
You sigh in relief, leaning against the wall as you feel your head swim.

> You say "We actually did it. We killed the Ice Queen, and all survived..."
"I'm just glad we all made it out alive," Sophie nods.

> You say "I'm starting to think that you have a point, Sophie. Maybe the three of us taking a vacation back in Ochirea for a while would be nice..."
Sophie smiles, nodding.
"I'd like that," Kate admits. "We can catch up with everyone, spend some time relaxing."
"Sounds perfect," you nod.

> You lean back against the wall, holding Kate and Sophie close.
You rest against the wall, feeling your head swim. You let out a groan as you slip down to a sitting position.

"Emilia! Are you alright?" Sophie asks.

> You say "Yeah. That just... took it out of me. "
"Are you sure?" Kate asks, worry evident in her voice.

> You say "I'm sure, love. We all made it. Me included."
You feel your strength returning, as the feeling in your limbs returns. The numbness fades away, leaving only a dull ache in its place.

> You say "We should probably get out of this castle. Get Locke to safety... "
"Yeah," Kate says, nodding. "I think it's time we left this castle."
You nod, smiling at your friends.

> You say "I should be able to find a way out with my earth sense, now that the Ice Queen is dead. Let me concentrate for a second..."
You close your eyes, focusing on your abilities. After a moment, you smile.
"I can sense the way out. It's a little unclear, but I can tell which way to go."
"Okay," Sophie nods. "Let's go."

> You turn to leave the cursed throne room. Look back towards where you slew the Ice Queen and her body disappeared, and breathe a long sigh of relief.
You reach out towards the door, companions right behind, when a sourceless voice ripples through you.
"Oh, children. Don't be going yet. Stay a while, would you?"

Sacrifice

A thick sheet of ice suddenly encases the door, blocking your path. You look around, spotting a large, monstrous figure forming behind you. Its body seems to be entirely made of transparent ice, with red blood coursing through frozen limbs. You can see a heart within the chest, slowly pumping blood as the hulking creature shudders and rises to its feet. Four arms grow from its side, cracking and shattering as they lengthen and continuously reform. Wicked claws of ice slide emerge from the ends of each of the fell limbs as they all slam to the ground and lift the nightmare. A cruel face rises from the torso, a jagged crown of iron upon its head. Its facial features are hard to make out, aside from the dominating feature. Two inset orbs glowing a sickly blue serve as eyes, and look at you, burning with malice and hate.

> You say "No... But we killed her..."
The monster stands, towering over you as it snarls. The jaws of the beast part to speak, "Yes. You did. But I am far from dead. It takes more than that to put down a Queen!"
The Ice Queen begins to laugh, an unnatural sound that grates on your ears.

> You say "Kate... Take Locke and get her to safety. We can hold her off until you get back."
"No, Em. I'm not leaving you," Kate says, her gaze fierce.
You stare at the monster, then back to Kate, and nod.
"Then let's end this," you say.

> You nod towards Sophie grimly. "You okay? Ready for one last bout?"
Sophie's expression is determined, and she flexes her hands, raising her axe.
"I'm ready. Let's go."

> You turn back to the golem of ice and hate and unsheathe your sword. "This ends now, Ice Queen. Whatever form you take, it won't be enough! Whatever magic you cast, we will overcome it! We will slay you, again, and again, and again! As many times as it takes!" you roar, leveling your weapon at her. "Today is the day you die!"

You begin to run towards her, as she leaps back. The four arms of the creature swing forward, sending shards of ice flying towards you with remarkable speed.

> You raise your shield to block the incoming projectiles. "Kate, hold back and wait for an opportunity to go for her eyes! Destroy those, and the body crumbles!"
You turn on your shield, using it like a battering ram as you speed forward. The ice shards slam into your shield, but it holds strong, and you smash into the creature.

> You slash at the frozen limbs of the ever-reforming creature, intercepting them as they strike at you.
The four arms strike at you, and you slash out with your sword, striking through one of the ice arms as it slams into you. You roll to the side, and the Ice Queen recoils back.

> You say "Sophie, bring the heat! Fire elementals!"
Sophie nods, raising her hands as she summons a trio of fire elementals, which race forward. The Ice Queen's face twists into a mask of rage as the fire spirits slam into her. She roars, and swings forward with her arms, smashing through two of the elementals. The third manages to dodge, and races around to the side of the Ice Queen, pressing against her ice with its roaring flame.

> You charge the distracted ice golem, shield held aloft.
The Ice Queen's attention turns to you, as she swipes at you with one of her four arms. You lift your shield in time to block it, feeling the ice shatter against the steel.

> You strike in tandem with Sophie's remaining fire elemental, seeking to combat the expanding ice and constrain the Ice Queen from growing any larger.
You strike out with your blade, feeling it crash against the Ice Queen's frozen chest, and letting out a roar of your own. The Ice Queen's roar of anger and pain is inhuman, but it sends a chill down your spine regardless.

> You roll backwards and raise your shield, anticipating some sort of counterattack.
The Ice Queen advances, ice spurring from her fingertips as she sends a flurry of razor-sharp shards at you.

> You hunker down behind your shield, weathering the attack as you hold her attention.
The shards slam into your shield, and you grit your teeth, holding the line and preparing for the counterattack.
The Ice Queen's face contorts as she prepares to send another burst of shards your way. Kate takes the opportunity to speed forward, lunging with her dagger, the blade wreathed in flame. She plunges it into the Ice Queen's eye, and she howls in pain.
You take the opportunity to charge forward, shoulder slamming into the Ice Queen's chest and knocking her back as you roar.

> You say "Keep it up! It's working! Push her back!"
Kate nods, keeping up the pressure as you force the creature back. The Ice Queen lets out a roar of pain, but that roar is quickly joined by a screeching howl.

> You disengage from the Ice Queen, shield raised. "Eyes up! There's something else here!"
You duck down, rolling to the side as a massive, wolf-like creature with white fur and a massive jaw full of teeth leaps over you. It lands with a thud, and begins prowling towards you.

> You circle the creature, waiting for it to charge. "Sophie, pin the Queen down with fire elementals! Kate, on me! Light this thing up!"
Kate nods, sheathing her dagger as her hands begin to glow and flicker with flame. The two of you circle the massive creature, waiting for it to charge. It paces forward, then begins to lunge towards you.
The creature slams into you, and the air is driven from your lungs as massive jaws close around your arm.

> You punch the creature in the snout. "Now, Kate! Fire!"
You grit your teeth, slamming your fist into the Alpha's face as hard as you can. The creature yelps in pain, as Kate's flames burst over it, licking across its fur and engulfing it.

> You wrench your arm free.
The creature yelps, rolling to try to put out the flames, which only burn brighter and begin to consume it.

> You turn your attention back to the Ice Queen as the ice golem duels Sophie's fire elementals.
The Ice Queen stands, tall and terrifying, eyes glowing blue, with the damaged one sputtering and flickering. She turns her head slowly, glaring at you through the flames that surround her.
The flaming Alpha pounces, bounding towards you with a snarl even as its body burns.
The Ice Queen bursts towards you, speeding faster than anything you've ever seen.

> You summon a wall of stone on each side of you, to intercept your attackers.
You quickly raise up a wall of stone, just in time to block the Alpha as it slams into the wall. The Ice Queen vaults over the wall, landing on her feet with a cracking sound as the golem towers over you.

> You raise your shield and meet her gaze. "You won't break us, bitch," you growl.
The Ice Queen's eyes narrow, and a massive sword begins to form in her grasp. Hilt to point, it is made of ice, with one edge glowing blue. She grips it with two of her arms as she returns your gaze.

> You grin viciously and bark out a laugh. "Come on then! Let's see what you got!"
The Ice Queen steps forward, moving with supernatural grace despite her size and unstable form. The sword in her hand begins to glow brighter and brighter, almost to the point where it blinds you.

> You use your tremorsense to concentrate on her every footfall, anticipating her strikes and intercepting with your magical shield.
You feel her move forward, and begin to concentrate on her footfall. You can't quite match her inhuman grace, but you manage to catch the subtle variations in her movements. You raise your shield, as the blade crashes into it, sending you stumbling back.

> You slide to a stop and duck, feeling another attack incoming.
The blade flies just over your head as you duck down. The Ice Queen steps forward, the blade in her hands moving almost too quickly to see.
"Is that the extent of your power, child?" she asks.

> You ready yourself for her next strike. "You wish!" you shout back.

She steps forward once more, and you begin to match her once again. Her blade crashes into your magical shield with an incredible force.

> You push your shield back against her blade and strike down with your sword on hers, seeking to shatter the glowing magical ice of her weapon.
You press your sword forward, and it meets the ice sword. Your blade holds firm against the larger weapon, as you use your magical energy to try to shatter her sword.
You feel your blade begin to slide along the ice of her blade, as it begins pushing back against yours. She uses her other hand to grip her blade, adding to the force pressing against your sword.
She begins pushing your sword back slowly, as the ice of her weapon begins to crack and splinter.

> You grip your weapon with two hands and push against hers, committing to the contest of strength against the ice golem.
You grip your sword with both hands, putting your weight and strength into it. You push back against her sword, as the two blades continue to clash together.

> You say "This castle will be your tomb!"
The Ice Queen slowly begins to lean into her sword, as it slides against yours and your magical energy begins to drain with the force you're exerting.

> You lower your stance and grit your teeth, magically bracing yourself with the stone beneath your feet.
You dig your heels into the stone floor, bracing yourself against her sword. Your legs strain to keep you from being pushed back as your arms tremble with effort.

> You push back against the Ice Queen's titanic blade with every bit of your strength.
The Ice Queen leans in, pushing her sword forward. You continue to grip your blade, struggling against the other woman. Your magical energy pours into your blade, trying to shatter her weapon.
"Is that all you have, child?" she asks, her breath freezing against your face as the cold of her sword begins to seep into your blade.

> You say "Kate! Sophie! Help me!"
"This is one you need to finish yourself," the Queen says.

The Ice Queen steps forward, her blade sliding against yours as you struggle against her. You grit your teeth, pushing forward with all your might.

> You say "I won't fall here... Not to you."
The Ice Queen leans in, her gargantuan form nearly pressing against yours.
"Good," she says, "Give me your best."
You grit your teeth, shoving your sword forward with all your might.
Your sword drives through the Ice Queen's blade, running it through her frozen shoulder.
"Well struck," she says.
You feel your blade shatter into pieces, as the hilt flies from your hand.

> You bash her blade away with your shield and fling yourself backwards away from her, raising a stone wall between you two.
Your shield slams into her blade, giving you a chance to disengage. You step back, flinging up a wall of stone between the two of you.
You catch your breath, panting hard as you struggle to get your bearings. You stand up, staring at the wall you erected between you and the Ice Queen.

> You look around to see how Kate and Sophie are faring in the battle.
You look around, to see Kate and Sophie both engaging a horde of armored men that are pouring into the room. Fire elementals toss the men every which way, but any lost are immediately replaced. Kate weaves in and out of the line of soldiers, crippling them as she passes. She deflects a sword swing, kicking a guard in the chest before leaping over a swing, cutting the man's hamstring.
Sophie moves like lightning between the Frost Legion, bashing and slashing. A soldier tries to stab her with a dagger, but she blocks it with her axe before slamming the butt of the handle into his face.
The stone wall behind you crumbles as the twisting and cracking golem form of the Ice Queen crashes through, her blade dragging along the ground behind her as she pursues you. You turn, staring at her. She pulls up short, magical eyes burning with rage. You stare at her, breathing hard and sweating despite the freezing temperatures of the castle.

> You draw your knife, holding your shield aloft and readying yourself for her attack, face full of defiance.
"I won't be your slave," you growl, staring at her.
The Ice Queen charges forward, her blade dragging along the ground. She strikes like a viper, slashing at your head.

> You block her blade with your shield and hurl yourself at her massive form, trying to scramble to her head.
Your shield clangs into the side of her sword, sending it off-course and preventing it from cleaving open your head. You sprint forward and leap at the golem, dodging its swipes as you climb upwards.

> You stab at the damaged orb in her eye socket with your knife.
You slam the knife into the Ice Queen's eye, shattering the orb. You hurl yourself at her head, stabbing the blade into her face as she bellows in pain, flinging you off.

> You skid to a stop, whipping around to face your adversary. "One down, one to go," you pant. "I guess this is what Az meant. Let's see how you do while down an eye, bitch!"
The Ice Queen staggers, but she does not fall. She leans forward and starts to lurch towards you, her blade raised.
"I will not be stopped!" she roars.

> You roll to the side, attempting to dodge her frenzied strikes, waiting for an opportunity to close the distance.
The Ice queen cleaves through the air, and you duck under the swing, skidding forward as you attempt to get inside her reach. She whirls around, her sword cutting through the air as it streaks towards your neck.
You roll to the side, barely avoiding the strike. You twist around, leaping backwards and away from her as a fist craters the floor where you just were.
You dart around the golem, attempting to get behind it. The golem swings around, following your movements as you dance around it. The Ice Queen stands in front of you, blocking every advance.

> You glance back to where Sophie and Kate are fighting the Frost Legion.
You see Kate continuing to fight the guards. Dozens of bodies lie around her, but there are still twice that amount still fighting, and they are flanking her on both sides. You wince as one of them manages to nick her in the side, but she guts him as payback. Sophie is off on the side, guarded by elementals, as she blasts the soldiers that approach her with lightning, just barely holding them back.

> You turn back to the Ice Queen as she hefts her blade once more, well aware you need to end this as quickly as possible.

You sprint forward, the queen raising her sword once more. You watch the blade, staying just ahead of it as it traces a white line through the air. It cuts deep into your shoulder, but you keep moving. You swing your knife once, twice, three times, hacking off three claws as they descend towards you. She roars in pain as you pull back, dodging the blow that would've taken your head clean off.

> You kick up loose bits of stone and fire them at her with your earth magic, seeking to pelt her and enable you to approach.
You pull up clumps of rock and dirt, flinging them forward. The stones pelt the Ice Queen as she reels backwards, roaring in pain as blood begins to seep through her form.

> You charge forward and up her body, clinging to the head.
You leap forward, running up her arm. You feel a gash open up as her claw scrapes your side, but you clamber onto her shoulder. You leap upwards, climbing onto her head.

> You roar as you stab the knife into her remaining eye and the last source of her strength. "Begone!"
You slam the knife forward, driving it into her eye. She screams in pain, before a gust of freezing wind emanates from her mouth. You scream as you are flung off her head and into the distance. She pulls at the knife left in her eye, seeming unable to remove it as the blue light sputters and sparks.

> You weakly stand, watching her struggle.
You stumble to your feet, watching as the Ice Queen slowly falls backwards. The knife flings from her eye, clattering onto the ground as she collapses. You force yourself to move towards her, clambering over the golem.
You grab the knife from the ground and drive it again into the orb of her eye, twisting the blade. You pull your arm back, feeling the blade slice through the stone as light pours out from it, the orb shattering before you.
You stand, staring at the remains of the Ice Queen as she lets out her last breath.

> You look to Kate and Sophie fighting the Frost Legion as the Ice Queen's magic fades from them.
You stand and watch as the fight plays out, the two of them taking down the remaining legionaries. Soon, you're all left standing alone. Three battered, exhausted women, among a mountain of dead soldiers, beasts, and a shattered Queen.

> You say "I think... I think we did it for real, this time..."
"Yeah," Kate says.
The three of you limp over to each other.
"Em," Kate says, panic creeping into her voice.

> You say "...yeah?"
"You're bleeding."
"I am?" you ask, surprised.
You look down to see your side is gushing blood, as well as your shoulder and arm.

> You say "...shit."
"We need to stop the bleeding," Sophie says. "I'll... I'll try to use my magic."
You nod, as Sophie's eyes begin to glow.
Your vision grows fuzzy as the pain from your wounds finally registers in your mind.
Your knees buckle as you collapse. You feel your skin knitting itself back together, and hear Kate shouting, but all sensations become a cacophony of meaningless noise as you writhe.
The pain grows and grows, as does the feeling of falling, growing, stretching, contorting...
You're in a void. Everything is dark and still. Your body doesn't hurt. You don't feel the need to breathe. You don't feel anything. You just are.
Then, a presence appears in the void. You feel them searching for you, touching your mind with theirs.

> You say "...Lavender?"
You find yourself standing on an endless plane of darkness. Standing before you is a beautiful woman, with long black hair and fair skin. She wears a long, ornate dress that shimmers in the darkness. Her lips are a deep red that contrast her pallor. She smiles at you.
"Hello, Emilia," she says.
"Lavender?" you ask.
"In the flesh," she replies.

> You say "Where am I?"
"You're in my world now, Emilia," the woman says, tears in her eyes.
"What do you mean? How?"

"I'm afraid you died."

> You say "No... Kate, Sophie... I can't leave them behind..."
"I'm sorry, but you did," the woman says.
You stare at the woman in shock.

> You say "Are they okay?"
"I don't know. I'm sorry."
The woman walks up to you, placing a hand on your shoulder.
"I'm sorry you had to die this way, Emilia," she says.

> You say "...no. No, this isn't happening. No! I won't accept it. There's, there's a way into this world. A keyhole, and Kate knows the key. I'm not... I won't accept this!"
"Emilia, please," the woman says.
"NO! I won't accept this!" you scream, wrapping your arms around yourself. "I won't die here. I won't!"
The woman walks over to you, wrapping her arms around you. You stare at her in shock.
"It's okay," the woman says.

> You sob into her shoulder.
You sob into the woman's shoulder, great tears streaming down your face. The woman holds you tightly as you weep, your legs unable to hold you up any longer.
"It's all right, dear," the woman whispers, stroking your hair. "It'll be alright. Just let it all out."
"I'm scared," you say.
"I know you are, honey," the woman says.

> You say "They'll come for me. I know they will. Kate knows the way."
"I'm sure they will," the woman says.
You stare up at the woman, who stares back.

> You say "You sure?"
"I promise," the woman says.
You nod, slowly, wiping your eyes. The woman holds out a hand to help you up. You grab it, and she pulls you to your feet.
"But we've got our work cut out for us first," she says.
"What do you mean?" you ask.

The woman turns, and looks behind her. You follow her gaze and see a longsword, dripping with fresh blood.
"You'll find out soon," the woman says.
You look at the sword, and slowly begin walking towards it. The woman follows after you, a sad smile on her face.

> You pick up the sword.
You grab the sword by the hilt, and slowly lift it up off of the ground. You feel the blade quivering in your hands as it leaks blood down the blade.
"Are you ready?"

> You say "...yes. Whatever it takes."
The woman smiles.
"Then come with me. My mother is very excited to meet you."
She reaches out a hand and you take it, following her out of the darkness.

End Book Two.

Book Three

Lavender

[Ongoing]

The Castle of Endless Moonlight

> You emerge into the light with Lavender, sword clenched in your fist.
You find yourself lying in a field of grass. A brilliant moon casts light all around you, and you feel a soft wind on your face.

> You look around.
The field is bathed in a brilliant white light by the moon, and is the same beautiful purple hue you remember from your dreams. Your eyes are immediately drawn to a monolithic black structure that breaks up the landscape.

> You say "The Castle of Endless Moonlight... "
You look to your side, and find yourself holding a sword. An elegant longsword with a shining silver blade, covered with intricate engravings that intertwine in complex patterns unlike any you've seen before.

> You examine yourself, checking what you are wearing and if you have any belongings.
You are wearing the same clothes as when you fell, but they are no longer the torn and blood-stained messes they had become. Your armor is gone, as is your shield.

> You check if any belongings came with you when you died besides your clothes.
You find that you are holding something in your hand.
The ring is silver, with a single sapphire set in the center.

> You look closer at the ring, checking for engravings or runes.
You find that the ring is engraved, but the engravings twist and wind in such a way that they form a blur with no distinguishable patterns.

> You slip the ring on the third finger on your right hand.
The ring fits perfectly on the third finger of your right hand.

The back of the ring has two smaller notches, allowing it to be swung around your finger and flipped.

> You flip the ring around, curiously.
You turn the ring around your finger and flick it, to see what happens. The ring tumbles off of your finger and into the grass.

> "Oh, well, okay," you grumble as you pick up the ring.
You pick up the ring and put it back on your finger.

> You return your gaze to the Castle of Endless Moonlight.
You slowly stand up, holding your sword in your right hand. You begin walking towards the castle.
You walk for several minutes, down a gentle hill, towards the massive castle.
The castle is several stories tall, with turrets around it, and a large moat of softly glowing water surrounding it. It's the only thing you can see for miles.

> You look for the entrance.
You search around the castle for the entrance, but find nothing.
The moat is too wide to jump across, and you don't see any ladders or bridges.

> You sit cross-legged on the ground and close your eyes, hesitantly trying to tap into your earth senses.
You close your eyes and take a breath, trying to clear your mind. You reach out with your senses, feeling the air still and cool on your face. You can hear the grass growing, and the water in the moat lapping against the walls.
You feel something else there, something powerful and ancient...

> You focus your tremorsense on the energy, attempting to discern a location or nature.
You reach out with your senses, feeling the power like a monstrous heartbeat. It beats slowly, steadily, and you feel it shake the earth with its powerful throbs.

> You broaden your tremorsense, seeing how far the heartbeat carries.
You feel the heartbeat all around you. It's everywhere, every inch, every mile. The planet itself is alive with its pulsing energy.
You open your eyes, coming back to reality.

> You stand up, shaking your head to rid yourself of the pounding sensation. Look again at the inaccessible castle, then down at the ring on your finger.
You stand up and walk towards the moat. You look down at the water, seeing your own face looking back up at you.

> You reach down and touch the water.
You reach down to touch the water, and your hand disappears under the surface. You feel a sharp prickling sensation, causing you to quickly pull your hand back.

> You shake the water off your hand and circle the castle once more, keeping an eye on your sapphire ring.
You circle the castle once more, the moat still looking too wide to cross and too deep to wade through. You pass by a section of the wall near one of the turrets and notice something carved in the wall. It looks to be an old carving of an ouroboros, a snake eating its own tail. The ouroboros is carved in a circle with intricate patterns immediately outside of it.

> You say "Hmm."
The symbol is intriguing, but you cannot dwell on it for too long. You walk past it, circling the castle once more.
You begin to notice the patterns in the moat. It's not just ripples that you're seeing. The water is moving in long, thin lines... Lining up... To spell out words! You lean forward to try to read the message forming in the water. The lines of water move beneath you, and just as you are about to read the message another line is carved, moving you away from it.
You step backward, watching as the message forms. You read the words as they appear, feeling a cold chill run down your spine as you do so.
"Enter," the ripples say, "end her suffering."

> You say "How do I enter?"
The ripples do not answer. You wait patiently, but nothing more is formed in the water.
You sigh, shaking your head. You look up at the massive walls and towering spires of the castle.

> You say "Couldn't have given me a little more to work with, Lavender? Ever a mystery with you."
You look at your reflection in the water, noticing the blue sapphire on your ring finger.

A thought strikes you. Maybe... Just maybe...
You press your hand against the water, sending the ripples around your ring finger. The water stops moving, and seems to be frozen in place.

> You hesitantly retract your finger, and nudge the seemingly-frozen water with the tip of your boot, testing to see if it will hold your weight.
Suddenly, the water bursts out from around your foot and the ripples flow together again, forming more words.
"Soon," they say, "all will end."
The water flows outwards again, as if nothing had happened.
You back away from the water instinctively, and consider the message. Soon...

> You say "...all will end."
Does it mean the world you are in now? The world you came from? Or is it something else? The water doesn't seem to give any indication.

> You stick your ring finger in the water again.
Once again, the water is frozen. Once again, it bursts out and you read a message appearing in the water.
"Soon," it says, "the last thread shall be cut."

> You say "Are you the earth? Is that your heartbeat I felt?"
"Soon," it says again, "it ends."
You watch as the water returns to normal. Soon... Soon... Soon... It plays on your mind as you think about it.

> You return to where you can see the ouroboros symbol on the other side of the moat.
This time, you think of the carving in the wall as you touch your ring finger to the water. The ripples stop moving, and a message appears once more.
"Soon," it says, "all shall return to the soul of the world."
You watch as the water returns to normal. The soul of the world...?

> You draw your sword and touch the tip of it to the water of the moat.
The water stops. The ripples grow larger, wider, longer, reaching out to the edges of the moat. They almost seem to be solidifying as they do so, becoming a strange, murky blue ice.

> You plunge the sword in deeper until the water is frozen enough to offer a path across.
You do so, looking at the newly-frozen ice with interest. It looks almost as if it is a solid sheet of blue glass.

> You test your weight on the ice, to see whether you can cross.
You carefully step out onto the sheet of ice, weighting it down as you do so. You tentatively place your foot down, waiting to see if it will hold you.

> You hesitantly proceed across the moat, towards the Castle of Endless Moonlight and the ouroboros symbol.
Feeling confident that the ice will hold your weight, you proceed across the moat. As you do so, something about the other side of the moat catches your eye. Something glints in the moonlight on the other side of the moat, something that looks very much like... metal.
You narrow your eyes at it, carefully extending your hand out toward it as you approach.

> You pick up the object and examine it after you cross the moat.
You pick up the object once you have made it across the moat. It is a key, made of sturdy iron and styled like a snake.

> You walk forward to examine the ouroboros symbol, looking for a keyhole.
You walk up to the ouroboros carving, looking for a keyhole. You find a small one carefully hidden in the mouth of the snake, where it intersects with its tail.

> You insert the key and turn.
The key turns smoothly, without any resistance. You hear a click from the other side of the ouroboros carving.
A secret door opens in the ground, leading downward.

Hall of Heroes

> You descend into the Castle of Endless Moonlight.
The stairs leading downward are narrow and dark. You walk down them, feeling a great, pulsing weight upon your mind as you do.
You keep walking downward until you reach the bottom of the staircase. A long hallway extends out before you, with strange, dark doors lining the hallway on both sides. The pulsing in your head is almost unbearable.

> You proceed down the hallway, looking for stairs upwards into the castle proper.
You start down the hallway, passing door after door. Each door has a strange symbol upon it, each one seeming to pulse in your vision. You are starting to feel nauseous as you walk down the hallway.
Finally, you come to the end of the hallway, where you see a final door, a great ouroboros painted upon it.

> You open the door.
You push the door open, entering a massive chamber. The walls and ceiling are covered with murals, which seem to move and shift like living beings. Each one depicts one or two figures as subjects, all locked in a struggle. There's a man fighting a multi-headed beast, and a woman riding a dragon through a storm. A child holding a blood-covered dagger glares unflinchingly towards formless shadows. A young woman stands atop a pulpit, passionately orating to a crowd of armored knights fixated on her every word. Lovers sharing a kiss as fire licks up around them, a last moment atop an unasked for funeral pyre. An ancient, bearded man scrawling away at a book, signing a page and handing it to a waiting servant as the door to his chambers is beaten down behind him. Each mural seems unique, and all alive, endlessly repeating the single moment they chronicle.

> You marvel at the murals. "Heroes..." you murmur, before a thought occurs. You browse more of them, searching for any depiction of you or your friends, Kate and Sophie, as you fought your various great foes. "Ice Queen, the great dragon, even King Greusim... Wonder if our fights are here anywhere."
You carefully study each mural, looking for any sign of yourself, but find nothing.

> You say "Maybe this shows their greatest moments... and we haven't had ours yet."
The thought that you and your friends are still outside of these heroes' stories, and that your stories are yet to be finished gives you pause.
"We haven't had our stories end yet."

> You close your eyes. "I'll come back for you, Kate. I promise. I'll find a way," you silently pray, surrounded by the shifting images of heroes across ages.
You spend a moment, silently praying for Kate's and Sophie's safety, before you are suddenly blinded by light.
Shielding your eyes, you open them to see that the murals have somehow become much brighter.

> You say "What? What's going on?! Is anyone there?"
You hear a pealing laughter as the light seems to swallow you whole. You try to shield yourself from the intense light, but find yourself unable to move.
"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

> You say "Do what? And who are you? Where am I?"
The voice chuckles, and you feel a caress upon your mind. You shudder in terror as you feel something enter inside your head. Images of rusted, blood-encrusted weapons fill your mind, as you hear the voice speak again.
"I am Marik, the Primarch of Iron and War, and you have no place here."

> You say "I was called here, by Lavender! Daughter of the Queen of the Moon! Told to go to this castle, to meet with the Queen!"
"Lavender? Bah! That girl does not know her place. She has become a threat, a danger not only to this plane, but to all the realms."

> You say "Why? Where am I? Marik, answer me this: What is this world!?"
"This is a gift of the Old Gods, friend. A world of endless conflict and warfare. Look, you can see it all!"

> You say "You mean the murals? Are these not of heroes?"
The terrible laughter of Marik again grinds against your mind.
"Ah, yes, heroes of every realm! Those who linger in this plane, shades of their past selves. Those that would wish for more life, after a life well-lived, end up here. To live on, to fight on."

> You shudder involuntarily.
"What is it that you want from me?"
"Your assistance, of course! This is your home now, however, and you will be called upon to fight soon."

> You say "Fight what?! Where is Lavender?"
The voice of Marik crackles with rage, and you wince in pain.
"The girl knows not of what she speaks! She will be dealt with. I want you to fight by my side, however. I have seen you fight. Your ferocity, your tenacity. You would be honored among my ranks."

> You say "I refuse. I do not come to this world to fight! I will make it back to my realm, this I swear!"
There is a silence, and you begin to feel worried, before the voice barks out once more.
"Ah, the arrogance of youth! If you could return, why have others not? No, don't answer; it seems I will have to break you in."

> You say "I do not fear you, Primarch."
"You hav--"
Marik's voice is interrupted by a booming, monstrous laugh that fills your very being with dread. Each laugh is a second of pain and horror, and you feel as if your mind is shattering.
"I must say, I agree with the girl. You are arrogant, Marik."
"The girl is an ignorant child, and you are a monster. You would not understand."
"I understand more than you know. I was there at your birth."

> You struggle to shut out the voices from your mind and move your limbs again, grasping for your sword.
The voices continue to argue as you slowly, painfully move your arm towards your sword.
"I helped you birth this world of warfare!" Marik shouts. "Why do you interfere?"
"You gave me nothing I did not already have. I owe you nothing, and you owe me all."
The voices carry on for what seems like forever, debating and arguing. You barely hear them as you continue to focus on moving your arm. Eventually, you find your hand has closed around the hilt of your sword.
"I gave you purpose!" Marik shouts angrily.
"You gave me nothing. I took it."

> You lash out with the sword towards the direction of Marik's voice.
The sword connects with something, and the voices immediately stop. You feel as if a great weight has been lifted from your mind.

> You wait for your vision to clear, and look at what you struck.
There is nothing there, and the same monstrous laugh booms out. The voice seems to come from all directions at once, and it shakes your very core.
"You are amusing, little girl," you hear.

> You say "Who... Who are you!?"
The laughs continue. "You'll find out soon enough."
Your mind begins to fade as you feel yourself slipping into unconsciousness.

> You say "Lavender... Help me..."
You hear a woman's voice, responding to your call, just before everything goes dark.

Storyweaver

> You wake up.
Your eyes flutter as you find yourself in utter darkness. Listening, you hear little save the tiniest noises of the earth shifting you are particularly attuned to. Underneath you, there is some sort of silky fabric, complete with a cushioned mound supporting your head. The material clings to your skin slightly, following your motions before detaching and fluttering down.

> You say "A cave... hello? Is anyone there?"
An unpleasantly familiar voice responds, "Over here." Though it lacks the mind-numbing horror of earlier, you're sure this was the second voice -- the one that admonished Marik, the one that shook your bones with its laughter.

You turn your head to the left and see a miniscule spark of light further in.
"I can't see," you say.
"Of course not," she says, a bit of irritation in her voice.

> You tear yourself away from the strange, sticky fabric, and unsteady come to your feet.
Your vision flickers and your head pulses from the motion, forcing you to slow your ascent and rest on a knee. Carefully feeling around, your hand eventhally comes to rest on a wall. Curiously, it has the same clingy texture of the bedding you were on, though you can feel cold rock underneath it.

> You using the wall as support, stumble towards the voice and the strange light.
As you take your first step, you feel the fabric slide under your foot as it the material moves with it.

> You shudder and try to suppress the thought of what it is and what awaits you, moving on towards the light.
You feel the wall circling around you, and can follow it with your hands. As you do, the texture changes from a thin layer of clingy silks to a much thicker substance, with rope-like strands woven together along the wall.
You pause, considering the change, but the voice calls out again, "Did you fall asleep? I thought you had great endurance!"

The voice seems to be coming from everywhere and nowhere.

> You say "It's been a rough day. I did just die, you know."
The voice responds instantly, "Ah, I suppose that's true. Everyone, our hero has returned from the dead! Let's give her a round of applause!" A chorus of tiny noises fills the cavern, barely perceptible.

> You steel yourself and make the last few steps towards the eerie small light.
As you draw near, blinking, you make out a tiny flame, no larger than your thumb, dancing in the air.

> You fall to one knee, half in exhaustion and half in an attempt at courtesy, and bow your head while you catch your breath.
"Ah, refreshing to see one with some decorum left in this day and age," the booming voice chuckles, "Not even a foolhardy attempt at an attack? That's a nice change."

> You say "I am in no state to fight, nor am I certain you are an enemy. At the very least, where I awoke was more comfortable than the last time I was kidnapped and woke up underground."
"Kidnapped?" the voice asks.

> You pause for a moment. "Nay, considering the circumstances I last recall, perhaps rescued is more appropriate. In which case, I would be in your debt."
"That's better. Now, you must have questions. I have much to say, but know you heroes don't listen well. I would prefer you not merely be waiting your turn during our talk, so ask now."

> You dip your head in assent, ignoring the slight. After a moment's thought, you open your mouth to speak. "Then, by your grace... your name is Emilia Stormbringer. you perished in another world, and with the help of a girl named Lavender, you awoke here." You pause before continuing. "What may you call you?"
There is a moment of silence before the voice answers. "You may call me the Storyweaver."
With that, you take a deep breath.

> You say "And... what are you, Storyweaver?"

The Storyweaver chuckles, a warm, motherly sound, far removed from the monstrous boom of earlier. "What am I? A storyteller, of course. Don't you think?"
You pause for a moment, unsure how to respond.
"Shield your eyes for a moment, and I shall increase the light. Know that if upon beholding me, you try to flee, there is nowhere for you to go that I cannot follow."

> You dutifully close your eyes and bury them in the crook of your arm.
A few moments later, you open your eyes to a bright, steady light.
Wherever you are, it's huge. The ceiling is invisible to you, and the narrow walls you were following quickly spread and open into a massive chamber. Every surface is coated in a white material, from the walls to the floor you stand upon. Looking at your clothes, you find that much of it has clung to you as well. It is what you feared.
Spidersilk.
You raise your eyes and finally meet the gaze of the Storyweaver.
She is a massive thing, towering three or four times your height, with eight long legs that slowly sweep side to side beneath her body. She is, no doubt, the source of the silk that coats this place. Her nest. Her body is white, interspersed with patches of peeling and burnt flesh interrupting the mottled color. Upon her face, eight glowing red eyes glisten in the light, dull pupilless orbs you nevertheless know are all trained on you.

> You swallow your fear, and bow your head. "Thank you for granting my request."
The Storyweaver slowly nods her head, and you feel the air around you move.

> You hesitate. "I am not of this world, as I said. I do not know it's nature, nor that of my connection to it. The dreams of Lavender and others were scattered and contradictory. Storyweaver, if I may... Why am I here? Why did I not simply die? What is this world?"
"The nature of stories is contradiction. Contradiction and mystery. Each of those silly children you met dreamed of a different tale, and each of them are but fragments of truth, seen through a lens of ignorance."

> You wait for the Storyweaver to continue, not understanding.
She continues to stare at you, waiting.
"I don't understand." You admit, helplessly.
"But you will." She says.

You're not sure how, but you know she's right. You're not sure how, but you feel as though you're understanding her with each passing moment.
"I know your story," she says. "I have seen it from afar, and heard tell of it from those that build the murals. I have witnessed the fragments you dreamt. I lurked and listened as that foolish girl promised you that which is outside her power, and saw her lose you during the crossing."

> You raise your head slightly. "Lavender?" you ask, already knowing the answer. She nods.
"I have seen her fate, and the fickleness of its indeterminate end. I have heard her plight, and what she hopes of you. Thus, I know you to be a creature worthy of attention, despite seeming no different than the many dead heroes that come here."

> You silently curse your still-foggy mind as you listen to her words. Winding and vague as her style of speaking is, you know better than to assume it devoid of import.
"I am not here to give you purpose, Emilia. I am here to give you options. You must choose your path, your thread, and choose it soon. Should you falter, it will be chosen for you."

> You say "What option do I have? You say Lavender is foolish, and she lacks the power to fulfill her promise to me. But, knowing my story, you must know I'm not one to give up on hope so easily. To give up fighting."
"To give up fighting," she says, pausing. "Yes."
She looks up past you, and then looks at you again.
"It's true. You have never stopped. Never considered backing down. You made many choices, but they were all between which fight to pursue. Never whether to stop."

> You wither under her gaze, feeling the weight of her words. You're brought back to an early morning on a field of ice, where your party considered whether to pursue the Ice Queen. Even as you said you would leave should your companions wish it, your heart never wavered. You never deviated from the path towards the fight.
You stare back at her, wordlessly asking her why. Why she, through describing your resolve, wracks you with guilt for how it ended up. Her face remains unreadable, as she continues to talk, her many eyes fixed upon you.

"I will offer you more threads. A chance to decide your own weave. Though I know you would never choose one without fighting for what your hero's heart burns, some battles lead to eternity. Some lead to an end."

> You say "And what end would that be?"
She smiles, but it isn't a cruel grin. It's a sad smile, one that you can feel sympathy for, even for someone who has never met her. "That is for you to decide. I cannot pick for you. But, believe me when I say that it will be an end, compared to the endless abyss you unknowingly walk towards."

> You lower your eyes and carefully choose your words. "Storyweaver, please trust that I mean no slight when I say this," you say, returning your gaze to her eightfold stare. "But I am in no position to decide anything. I am in a world that is not my own, guided by forces I know terrifyingly little about, and as much as I can try to heed your warnings -- I couldn't even begin to guess what they speak of."
"I understand the position you are in," Storyweaver says reassuringly, bowing her head in understanding.

> You dip your head as well. "Then please, answer me plainly, for more riddles will only leave me more uncertain. Who is Lavender? Who is her mother, the Queen of the Moon? And why does she need me?"
The Storyweaver looks at you, unblinking eyes glistening in the flickering light.Slowly, she answers your questions.
"The girl's thread was cut early. She awoke here a child, and the Queen of the Moon took pity upon her and claimed her as her kin. She perished in your world, just as you did. The Queen, however, is something else entirely."

> You nod, and wait for her to continue.
She looks at you, terrible eyes peering into your soul, making you feel as if she is examining your very essence."The world is made of stories," she says after a moment. "This one, more than most."
Her form shifts as her eight legs bend at once and she slowly rests her gargantuan body against the ground.
"There are many gods that walk this realm, each bound to a duty that perpetuates the world and allows it to exist. They are called Concepts, and the Queen of the Moon is one of the few that remain awake."

> You follow her lead and shakily sit, grateful to no longer be kneeling. "Awake?"

She nods slowly. "The Concepts did not choose their duties, nor did they have them foisted upon them. They exist because of their duties," Storyweaver says. "They were birthed by their purpose, and given thought and form only because the world needed characters with them."

> You nod along, trying to keep up.
"But not all of them have kept their beings," she continues. "Many have faded away as their purpose ebbed. Those are the ones that sleep."

> You say "I think I understand... what is the Queen's duty? In one of my dreams, Lavender said she made the graveyard where souls woke up. Does she handle the, well, crossing between the planes?"
"She did not create the graveyard. It is a natural process, one that has occurred since the beginning of time," she says dismissively. "She merely gave it that form.""What is her actual purpose, then?" you ask, frustrated.
"She is the keeper of the world's morality," Storyweaver says.

> You say "...I don't follow."
"This world does not allow for life to blossom within it, yet stories are both its essence and its drive to persist. Thus, those fallen in your world come here," she says. "But only those deemed heroes."

> You say "And the Queen is in charge of deciding who qualifies?"
She nods. "The souls of the wicked, the forgotten, the unnoticed: they all go to another place. One that the Queen does not watch."

> You say "What happens to those who fall here?"
"They are forgotten as well. Their names and beings are lost, and fade away as if they were never here. Memories do not last here, and when the last is gone, the soul is as well."

> You say "...and, what is the other place?"
She chuckles. "That is not for me to tell. Now, if you'd like your original question answered, and to know why you are needed..."
She raises a single pedipalp to silence you before you can speak.

> You stifle the words in your throat, and allow her to continue.

"The girl thinks you may help her bring an end to the wars here. That you will aid her mother and silence the Concepts that blight the serenity they have come to enjoy."

> You think back to the grating voice you heard before. "Is Marik one?"
"He is the one that has plagued them the longest. His voice has not stopped, as his purpose is to endlessly war. Arrogance," she pauses. "Is merely a part of his design. He believes himself essential to things far beyond his ken."

> You say "Why did the world even... well, create such a force? If create is the right word. Wouldn't his presence disrupt it?"
"The world is made of stories," Storyweaver says, her head looming closer. "The Concepts that walk it exist to perpetuate the world. Marik is an impetus; one that incites stories in all he disrupts. Thus, the world persists."
You shudder, feeling as if she is expecting something from you.

> You haltingly try and put together your thoughts. "Then, isn't he essential to the world's function? Why would the Queen, another Concept, want him gone?"
"She does not," Storyweaver says. "But her daughter does, in her ignorance. And the Queen is rapidly losing herself as a Concept, and listens to her not knowing of the consequences."

> You say "What would happen?"
"The world would die, and with it all the worlds it has touched."

> You say "How do you know?"
"Because I am very, very old," she says. "And I have seen this cycle many times before."

> You suppress a shudder and stare into her many eyes. "Storyweaver... what, exactly, are you?"
"A story that was never completed," she says while coming within a foot of your face. "A tale that was abandoned by its author, left to rot and be fed upon by the worms."

> You say "Your... author?"

"The true god. The one who poured his life into this realm. The one who, in his final act, wove me to it as he bled," she hisses. "The one I killed."

[Ongoing]

> You close your eyes and rub your temples. "I'm starting to think this is all a little over my head."
"You needn't worry yourself," she says. "The weight of the world is not on your shoulders, or those of any other ghost. Even in death, you are powerless to do anything meaningful."

> You raise an eyebrow. "And if I wanted to change that?"
"Then you need my help."
Storyweaver shifts and draws upwards to her full height. Her eight eyes gaze at the ceiling of the nest, before abruptly turning back to you.
"I am a precursor of this world. I can manipulate small threads, yes, but it is not enough. I need a body, something physical, to contain my spirit, for I cannot leave this place under my own power."

> You say "You wish to use me as a vessel, then."
"Yes, but fear not a lack of control. You will retain your independence. Think not of what you have to lose, but what you have to gain."
Storyweaver leans close to you, pedipalps twitching.
"Once called here, heroes do not leave under their own power. Even you, of interest to that girl and the Queen, are no different. But with my power, that may change."

> You stare back at the massive spider, keeping your voice steady. "And what is it you seek in return?"
"Your powers. Your strength. Your word, your promise that you will help me escape this place."

> You narrow your eyes warily. "This cavern, or...?"
"Nay. This world."

> You shake your head. "Before I can make such a promise, I will need your word in return. I have two conditions, stipulations that must be met."

"Go on," she replies, her voice almost a purr.
"I'm leaving this world too. That's the first, and an absolute."
"Granted. I have no need to keep you here."

> You nod. "Then," you say. "My other request should be simple. My allies of my world may come here after me. I want your guarantee that they will be unharmed and we will all return safely to my world."
"I will not cause them harm, nor prevent you from going to them. Much of the onus of their protection will fall to you, should they have the misfortune to end up here," the giant spider rumbles. "But worry not for my designs causing them undue struggle."

> You close your eyes and let out a breath. "Alright. One last question, then. Not a condition, but an inquiry," you say. "Lavender. Is there nothing we can do for her?"
"Unless you wish to rip her from this world, I'm afraid not, little one," Storyweaver says. "Heroism can only go so far."

> You hesitate and open your eyes. "Is that possible? To free her from this world?"
"Not without jeopardizing your own exodus."

> You dip your head. "I understand. I will do what I can regardless, but returning to my allies is paramount," you say, letting out a sigh. "I believe we have a deal."
You extend a hand, and Storyweaver presses one of her pedipalps into it, nodding solemnly.

"It is done, then," she says.

Your vision blackens within seconds, and you feel something within you stir. An awful, crawling sensation permeates throughout you, and your body feels as if it is being torn apart.

> You say "W-what?!"
"Endure, little one."
You can only wretch and clutch at your stomach as it cramps painfully, before a blackness overtakes you.

[Ongoing]

ugh ai dungeon is melting down ill move this somewhere new eventually tm

As always, @riremakar, Emily (Rire)#0001, /u/RireMakar, or emilybellavia42@gmail.com to get in touch with me with comments, feedback, or whatever the heck you wish.

Cheers, loves. Thank you for joining me on this journey of mine.
-Em