

"The Stone Eclipse"

by

Ira Shelley

Brandon Hatch  
29 State Hwy 52 #28  
Longmont, CO 80504  
brandonihatch@aol.com  
970-652-1877

FADE IN:

INT. MARA'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

MARA, a playful seven-year-old girl, reads cross-legged on the floor near a bookshelf as her weary mother, ANNA, enters the room.

ANNA  
Time for bed, Mara.

Mara barely shifts.

MARA  
Sorry, busy.

ANNA  
What? Come on now, it's late. Into bed.

Anna pulls the covers down and pats the bed. Mara shuffles over to the bookshelf with a sigh, but takes her time putting the book away.

MARA  
Ok, coming.

Anna studies her delay with motherly intuition.

ANNA  
Did you dream it again?

As Mara silently nods, Anna again pats the bed with tender encouragement. Mara reluctantly joins her.

ANNA (CONT'D)  
Do you want to talk about it?

Mara just shakes her head.

MARA  
Will you tell a story tonight? A new one?

ANNA  
Hmm, I know just the one. Lexii:  
The Three Little Bears.

Mara smiles but squirms beneath the covers.

MARA  
No.

A little black ball in the corner of the room blinks awake and then projects a virtual overlay onto the walls, turning them into deep woods.

Three large, holographic bears roar to life, circle Mara's bed, and then plop down like curious children to listen to the tale.

LEXII

Once upon a time...

MARA

No! You tell it, mother. Lexii:  
Stop.

The holographic simulation disappears.

ANNA

Oh, Mara, I never remember how the stories go. I think the big bear drinks up all the little girl's dreams, until its belly is as round as the moon; and then it hiccups out the bad ones as bubbles that pop like this...

Anna smothers her daughter with popping kisses as she squirms.

MARA

No! No!

Anna's large, one-pearl necklace drops out of her shirt and Mara stops her to study the crack running through it.

MARA (CONT'D)

Father told me about your pearl, how it got cracked.

ANNA

Well, now we can both be mad at him together.

Anna tucks her in tight with a terse grin.

MARA

Tell me that story.

ANNA

Mara...

MARA

Please?

ANNA

If your father told you the truth, you know it was cracked at the fountain...

MARA

No, the story with the dove. The whole story.

ANNA

I don't recall a dove at the fountain,  
dear.

MARA

Lenore. The dove the raven fell in  
love with.

ANNA

Ah, your father has been telling you  
fairy tales again, has he?

MARA

The real story, he says. With Lexii?  
Please?

ANNA

He put it in there? The whole world?

MARA

Yes. A microchasm.

ANNA

Cosm. And then you'll go to sleep?

Mara beams and nestles into the blanket. Anna sighs as she  
glances at the little ball in the corner.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Lexii: I guess we'll try and tell  
the one with the dove and the raven.  
Although I'm not sure...

The little black ball twinkles to life and projects a  
holographic forest around the bedroom.

MARA

Once upon a time.

ANNA

Once upon a time...

MARA

Before I was born.

ANNA

Yes, before you...

MARA

When you were little.

Anna raises a stern eyebrow as Mara zips up with a grin. A  
holographic 8-year-old Anna projects into the bedroom with a  
smile to match Mara's.

MARA (CONT'D)

That was you.

ANNA

It happened like this...

The young Anna races into the holographic woods, which become more lifelike with each step.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH -- EVENING

Anna trots playfully along a few paces behind her barefooted mother, SARANNA, a beautiful goddess a little past her prime, as they wind their way up a forested mountain path.

They reach the summit to find AREK, a garden warden, and a MAIDEN COMPANION guarding the entrance to the sacred garden located here. As the guards reverentially bow to mother and daughter, a small hawk alights on the maiden's shoulder while its twin departs Arek's shoulder to take its turn monitoring the open air.

EXT. SACRED GARDEN -- EVENING

Anna skips to a flutter of butterflies enjoying a nearby patch of flowers. She whistles softly to one and it responds, alighting on her outstretched palm.

ANNA

Mother! Look!

SARANNA

Yes, you're getting the hang of it.  
I think you're ready for birds.

Saranna inspects the simple moon shrine in the center of the garden as Anna chases a large butterfly to the edge of the woods. In the deep shadows, a pitch-black claw snaps shut around the butterfly like an animal trap.

SARANNA (CONT'D)

Come now, Anna. It's time for you  
to learn the ritual.

Saranna removes the single pearl from her necklace and places it in a full moon engraving at the bottom of the water-filled basin. The pearl rolls into place and begins to glow as a veil of clouds withdraws and the full moon beams down on the little garden.

Within the shadows, Anna frightfully watches as SISTER FAMINE, a hollowed-out spindly witch wearing a necklace similar to Saranna's but with a small cracked skull for its jewel, hovers above the forest floor like a noxious cloud. She exhales putrid smoke over the lovely butterfly, turning it into a hideous, misshapen moth. Anna steps back, horrified, as the wicked claw passes the moth into her hands.

ANNA

Mother!

SARANNA

Come, Anna. We're ready.

Anna returns with a tear in her eye and reveals the changeling insect. At the edge of the woods, a large shadow skitters across the outlying tree branches like an enormous spider dashing towards its freshly caught prey. A hawk screech alerts the guards to the intruder.

Saranna shoots up instantly, laser focus replacing the weary tenderness of a moment before.

SARANNA (CONT'D)

Anna! Where? Where was she?

Saranna steps in front of Anna protectively as she searches the darkening woods.

SARANNA (CONT'D)

Guards up!

ANNA

In there.

As Anna points, SISTER FIRE, a voluptuous witch with an orange plasmic glow, glides out of the shadows to the edge of the clearing like a luminous ghost ship appearing out of fog. The sister's glow illuminates a sounder of grizzly-sized boars shuffling up to the edge of the woods.

SARANNA

Quickly, Anna. Over here.

Saranna leads Anna to a secluded stump behind the shrine and carefully secretes her in the shadows. Arek and a COMPANION WARDEN leap into the clearing with short swords drawn, and a QUARTET OF MAIDENS take up archer positions.

SARANNA (CONT'D)

Stay hid, child.

Saranna turns on Sister Fire now with eyes of red war and the chaos begins. The sister blows on one end of her staff, causing it to glow orange like an animated charcoal and then burst into flames. Sister Famine then holds up her own gnarled staff with a whistle and forest hornets begin to buzz through the trees behind her.

Sister Famine then sweeps her staff towards Saranna in a wide arc, creating a gust of wind that launches a nest of hornets out of the shadows and towards the shrine. As the hornets pass by the sisters, Sister Fire sweeps her staff behind them, setting them alight. Saranna dodges the blast but little fires begin to spring up around the garden.

MAIDEN 1

Maidens!

The wardens leap towards the sisters but the boars charge out of the woods, driving them into the corners of the garden.

MAIDEN 1 (CONT'D)

Loose!

The maidens loose a volley of arrows at the boars, causing them to break rank and turn on the archers. SISTER FLOOD, endlessly weeping behind her blindfolded eyes, joins her sisters and the three of them circle towards Saranna like hungry hyenas. Saranna leaps to the mystic shrine and takes a mouthful of the sparkling water.

SISTER FIRE

Here we go.

Her body takes on a faint glow as, like the moon illusion that makes it look twice its normal size, she quickly appears to match the size of all three sisters combined.

SARANNA

The three heads of the Dark Hound  
must lack their shadows this night.

SISTER FLOOD

A new god of nature awaits that pearl.

SARANNA

Your god cannot wield the pearl.

SISTER FLOOD

From the seventh branch of the Great  
Tree a seed will fall.

SARANNA

You quote prophecy to me? It's  
because of you the healings have  
failed. Return to your haunts and  
your vile bagpipe dances. You know  
I will never yield up the pearl.

SISTER FLOOD

If we thought you would be inclined  
to it, all three of us wouldn't have  
come.

Saranna takes another handful of the glowing shrine water and tosses it over a troop of oyster mushrooms clinging to a nearby stump. The mushrooms unfold, drop and begin to wriggle themselves into individuals. Another dousing of the mystic water causes them to swell, their caps becoming helmets as tentacle arms sprout from beneath them. The troop lurches towards the sisters, and as another volley of flaming hornets comes, they bow their heads and shield Saranna.

Sister Famine shrieks in anger and whistles fiercely. Several boars turn from the garden fringes to converge on Saranna,

but the faithful fungi roll towards her and form a little guard. A battle commences as still-growing mushroom fighters wrestle the boars and Saranna tosses another handful of the shrine water into the moonbeam enveloping the shrine.

The water condenses into an effigial cloud, alarming Sister Fire and causing her to send ball after ball of fire at Saranna. The mushroom guards unwaveringly face the onslaught but are scorched severely, and eventually allow one of the boars to break through to Saranna.

SISTER FIRE

The pearl is all that matters. Keep her engaged.

Sister Fire slips behind her sisters and approaches the shrine as Saranna fights off the boar with a dagger. Arek pulls his sword from the heart of a downed boar, but as he struggles to recover his breath and douse his smoldering sides, a second boar pulls its tusk from the heart of the companion warden.

AREK

No!

Maiden 2 leaps onto the enraged boar and Arek rushes to her aid, but Sister Fire appears over the pearl, still glowing in its fixed location at the moon shrine. She slowly reaches towards it.

AREK (CONT'D)

The shrine!

He leaps towards her, sword flashing. Caught off guard, she's thwarted a brief moment as she parries the attack and sizes up her foe. She then smiles as a dark red flame leaps from the end of her staff and then coils down its length like a serpent.

SISTER FIRE

We only want the pearl.

AREK

It belongs to the Mother.

He searches the garden in desperation. One of the maidens lies in a ball against a tree, her clothes smoldering.

AREK (CONT'D)

What have you done?

Saranna's effigial cloud gathers strength from the clouds above and fully forms. A pair of arms unfold and then launch a bolt of lightning towards the sisters. Arek, however, only sees Sister Fire raising her flaming staff towards him. He quickly cups a drink and then raises the pearl out of the water. He pauses a brief moment, holding the pearl above the shrine and marveling at the accompanying glow.



## SISTER FIRE

No!

Sister Fire lunges towards the pearl, but Arek plunges it into the basin and vanishes in a splash of watery light. The effigial cloud cracks with a streak of red lightning and then whirls to mist.

## SARANNA

What? What happened?

Saranna shrinks back down to normal as the mushroom troops groan and collapse into fallen soldiers, and the sisters regroup in the shadows. Maiden 2 pulls a dagger from the heart of the second boar and hustles to the shrine.

## SISTER FAMINE

He took the pearl.

## SISTER FLOOD

Who?

## SISTER FIRE

One of her wardens took it.

Sister Famine watches from the edge of the woods as Saranna wearily limps toward the shrine.

## SISTER FAMINE

She'll be weakened now. A hollow thunder clap, merely.

Sister Fire takes a bow from a downed maiden and creeps to the edge of the forest shadows.

## SISTER FIRE

Let's end it then.

Saranna inspects the empty shrine basin.

## SARANNA

He took the pearl?

## MAIDEN 2

Arek... it was forbidden.

Sister Fire takes aim at Saranna and then blows on the arrow, setting it alight.

## SARANNA

I'll find him. He couldn't have taken it far.

Anna finally stirs and approaches the shrine.

## ANNA

Mother?

The fire arrow pierces Saranna's heart.

ANNA (CONT'D)

No!

Anna and Maiden 2 rush to Saranna as she collapses. The hideous cackles of the sisters scatter into the surrounding woods as the remaining maidens chase after them.

SARANNA

I'm sorry, Anna.

ANNA

Help! Her pearl...

MAIDEN 2

It's gone.

SARANNA

There was so much still... so much to teach you. The memories are there... with the pearl...

ANNA

I will find it. Hold on, mother. Mother!

Saranna gasps her last breath as she tenderly touches the tears running down Anna's cheek.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I will bring it back.

The maidens return to find Anna weeping over her departed mother. They sink to their knees in anguish as orange moonlight cuts through the dissipating clouds.

EXT. MOUNTAIN COVE -- NIGHT

PRINCE AEDON, the muscle-bound god of the sea, pearl-encrusted trident in hand, surfaces in a rush as orange moonlight bathes the little cove at the foot of the mountains.

AEDON

What? What happened?

Skating on the surface of the water, he studies the changed moon and the dispersing clouds above.

AEDON (CONT'D)

The mother pearl. Saranna...

Sister Flood appears on the beach, hovering eerily as her loose robes undulate in rhythm with the sea.

SISTER FLOOD

Prince Aedon...

AEDON

You shouldn't be here, witch! Get back to your dread sisters.

SISTER FLOOD

The face of the deep flushes with fever heat. The bright-blue veins of old run green with poisons from the machines of men. Has Saranna healed your waters? Are you not running out of time to heal them?

Aedon ruefully inspects the surface of the sea.

AEDON

What do you know about it, foulness?

Sister Flood beckons him to the shore. With a reluctant sigh, he walks across the waves to hear the witch's tale.

AEDON (CONT'D)

Now tell me, what has happened?

The pounding of the sea washes out the conversation and years of careful planning until we come to...

SUBTITLE FADES IN: 20 YEARS LATER

INT. ARTHUR'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

A ceiling light hums dully, rotating with a twinkle as it projects a cartoonish image of a tranquil mountain scene onto the walls of a small, darkened room.

The scenery pixelates and stutters as it illuminates one ARTHUR PENNINGTON, who serenely snores in a rickety cot against the wall. On the nearby computer desk, a light flashes and the equipment turns on, illuminating a recommendation letter tossed casually over a doctorate degree belonging to the slumbering scholar.

A pixelated owl lands on a virtual branch above Arthur with some harsh words.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Arthur! Wake up, Arthur!

Arthur just tosses once, causing the owl to shout.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Arthur!!

Arthur snorts, wakes, and checks the clock on the nearby end table: 8:57 p.m.

ARTHUR

Son of a... Lights.

The virtual outdoors disappears as the ceiling bulb winks back to normal, casting a flickering light over the ratty little apartment. Arthur flips the cot up and hastily stows it in a nearby closet.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

A professorship at the night school opens up once every decade or two, so I can check back with you around then if you like.

The real moon illuminates a plague of moths caked around the window as he finishes with the cot and removes a pair of mottled eggs from a two-way drawer built for deliveries. A drone whizzes by to deliver goods to an adjacent apartment as he places the eggs in a basket with a questionable looking lump of bread.

ARTHUR

On screen.

PROFESSOR LECTOR, a middle-aged academic, appears on a monitor near a VR-wired chair, the only furniture, and Arthur hustles to take his seat.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

You at least reviewed "Eternity Once and for All" and "Keloas Auguries and Echolocation", didn't you?

ARTHUR

The second one, was that the one with the talking bat?

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

You're not ready. This test will be reviewed by the entire board and they all remember your mother, you know.

Arthur takes a deep breath and inspects the prime memento adorning the mantle: A picture of him as a boy with his beautiful mother, DIANA, in a flower dress. A shell necklace hangs around the picture.

ARTHUR

I'm ready. Deified bats have always been good not to talk about me, so for this one lecture, I'll just avoid talking about them.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Arthur, you need to study those. They just might open your eyes. Listen, in your last qualifier, there were still some irregularities in your hippocampus function.

ARTHUR

I passed.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Yes, but the VR Campus was built to operate as a full-immersion program. Even with the gamma controls, delta brain waves occasionally occur among the other professors and those issues could potentially come out. Did you talk with him about the death of your parents?

Arthur clenches his jaw as he logs into the system.

ARTHUR

I'll pass again.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

We're hoping. Good luck. I'll be monitoring the session from here.

He puts his VR helmet on.

ARTHUR

VR Campus. Classroom: Neo-Camaquen Mythology -- Ancient Americas.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

You downloaded the latest patch, right?

EXT. VR LAKESIDE -- NIGHT

Arthur finds himself sliding down a mountainside towards a drop-off.

ARTHUR

What the...? Classroom: Neo-Camaquen Mythology -- Ancient Americas!

EXT. VR CLASSROOM -- NIGHT

Arthur lands on his butt at the front of the class in a dusty black suit.

About 12 STUDENTS come to order on the assorted stone picnic tables that adorn the brightly-lit courtyard of this ancient Incan temple-like classroom. The students study him dubiously as he attempts to brush the dust from his suit.

ARTHUR

Umm... good evening, class. And welcome to Mythology of the Ancient Americas.

TINA, a bubble gum-chewing girly girl, pivots towards HANNAH, her tomboy table partner, and eagerly participates.

TINA

Good evening, professor.

HANNAH

He's not a *real* professor yet.

As Arthur gives his suit one last dusting, it knocks his shadow off of his feet and sends it walking away.

ARTHUR

Today we'll be discussing the mythology of the Keloas tribes of Ancient America.

HANNAH

Which isn't *real* mythology.

Arthur's shadow fashions a shadow sword from a table leg, whets it on its arm and then cuts the shadow from Student 1. Arthur eyes the shadows with some concern but proceeds.

ARTHUR

Which, as you probably know, is a modern discovery, but curiously mirrors many aspects of the ancient mythologies, adding perhaps yet another star to the Jungian theory of archetypes.

TINA

Ah, uh-oh, we're studying that?

HANNAH

Which is a *real* drag.

Student 1's shadow whets its sword and then cuts the shadow from Student 2. Arthur warily directs his old-fashioned hand pointer to the empty oyster shell hanging behind him, which serves as a whiteboard.

ARTHUR

Now, in the beginning... was Darkness.

A small black mist swirls inside the shell, expands outward and then explodes, engulfing the sleepy class.

EXT. VR CLASSROOM, CHAOS -- NIGHT

The class hovers in utter darkness.

ARTHUR

To the Keloas, the Milky Way looked much like the surf on a beach.

Stars slowly twinkle to life around the students. The roar of the sea rises as the stars begin to appear like pebbles beneath a retreating wave of cosmic dust. A watery, undulating representation of the Milky Way Galaxy solidifies around them.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Their version of a sort of Cosmic Navel -- the source of all life in the universe -- was represented as Oalai or "The Mother Oyster", and was found deep in the heart of the cosmic surf.

Cosmic dust forms into a supernova-like oyster at the heart of the galaxy.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Life, in what was their version of a series of Mini Bangs, spewed out of the heart of Oalai in the form of pearls, cosmic pearls.

The Mother Oyster spews out pearl-like stars that begin swirling around the galaxy.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

The pearls came from the heart of creation and were bits of concentrated power. The Keloas thought of them almost like cosmic seeds, and wherever they would land, gardens of life would spring up around them.

We follow one of the pearls as it tumbles across the Milky Way. It comes to rest as if snagged, and as a cosmic wave rolls over it, it breaks open and forms our solar system.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

In typical anthropomorphic fashion, what we know to be the planets of our solar system, they worshipped as celestial deities sprung from the Great Mother.

EXT. VR CLASSROOM, SACRED GARDEN -- NIGHT

The class finds itself back at their tables in a barren VR representation of the sacred garden. The hanging moon basks the shrine in pale silver light as it did 20 years ago.

ARTHUR

So they built shrines, each one being aligned with a separate deity, or celestial body. This is an example of the moon shrine.

A young VR Saranna appears in ancient Inca-like attire and walks lovingly towards the class. The three sword-wielding shadows reappear and begin surreptitiously cutting the shadows from the remaining students.

Saranna removes the pearl from her necklace and places it in the shrine basin.

TINA

She's beautiful. Who is she?

ARTHUR

Oalai's daughter. And being the offspring of deity, she was given a token from her goddess mother, a small pearl; and every full moon she would commune with her at this shrine...

Saranna kneels at the shrine as it's shot through with a particularly strong moonbeam.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

...where she would renew her powers of creation, passed down to her from her mother, and would then use them to beautify the Earth.

Saranna rises and holds up the glowing pearl. The barren garden quickly transforms into a Garden of Eden, flowers springing up around the students' feet.

HANNAH

A mother of nature.

ARTHUR

A standard mythological figure.

The last student's shadow is cut from their body and the band of 12 shadows then coalesce into one super shadow. A few of the students begin to fidget and murmur nervously.

STUDENT 1

Yo?

The shadow sprouts ram horns as it becomes a three-dimensional nightmare that demands Saranna's attention.

TINA

And this is... the god of our shadows?

ARTHUR

No, um, some other lecture, maybe. The University is still working out a few bugs I think.



Arthur points his clicker at the shadow, but it charges and knocks over the shrine. Saranna quarrels briefly with the beast, and then takes her pearl and plunges it into the heart of the shadow, dissolving it but also causing herself to evaporate in a whiff of pixels.

STUDENT 2

Oh, we want that lecture!

TINA

Whoa. It looked like her childhood...  
in curlers.

Tina points at Hanna, who is wholly engrossed in the VR flowers and plucks one. It turns into a beautiful butterfly that flutters around her head.

HANNAH

It's always my fault.

ARTHUR

Yeah, sorry about that.

An open pipe gushes water from the base of the tipped-over shrine as if it were a park fountain.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Um, anyway, we'll be moving into the caverns next to see how their shrines were all connected through a subterranean network.

A pool rapidly forms beneath the class as Arthur attempts to fix the little spout with his clicker. Tina joins Hannah in plucking flowers and turning them into butterflies.

HANNAH

Beautiful.

TINA

She made too many moths, though.

Tina pets a butterfly on the nose as Arthur frantically tries to stop the flood. Several students stand on their chairs as the water continues to rise.

ARTHUR

Just a moment here, guys.

TINA

Your cousins... are too many. Did  
this Earth Mother make the moths  
too?

He gives up on the clicker and rights the fallen moon shrine.

ARTHUR

Um... well, the Keloas believed creation -- nature -- was representative: a symbolic language for the workings of the soul. Polarity being in all things, it naturally formed into pairs of opposites.

HANNAH

A language? So these pretty girls are a word?

Little diving bell-like spiders begin to skitter beneath the surface of the deepening pool of water. Some students panic and leap on their desks, others disappear completely in a blink of pixels.

ARTHUR

You guys, I'm not sure...

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Arthur!

Arthur continues to fumble with the shrine, searching for some way to stop the gushing water. One large shadow rises directly beneath the tipped-over shrine, causing several more students to disappear with a shriek.

STUDENT 2

Fail.

TINA

It was almost a happy ending, I guess. Let's go.

Tina winks out, but Hannah remains preoccupied with a butterfly.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Arthur! Get it under control!

Arthur just watches, stunned, as the now eight-legged shadow skitters beneath the water. The moon above flashes red as Professor Lector intervenes.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Students, please disconnect immediately. Disconnect!

The remaining students disappear, all except Hannah, who finally turns around and studies the submerged shadow.

HANNAH

Your butterfly was better. This thing...

A bubble from the spider rises to the surface and pops with a hiss.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Whoa. It's not real, right?

ARTHUR

Umm... no. I don't...

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Arthur!

The shadow attacks. Arthur lunges towards Hannah, but she's taken by the spider and drug beneath the water with a yelp. The garden crumbles around him, red lights flashing.

INT. ARTHUR'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Arthur removes the flashing helmet, sucking in breaths and scrambling to end his VR session. The professor again appears on the monitor.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Arthur!

ARTHUR

I'm out, I'm out.

Lector shakes his head in disappointment.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

I should have known.

ARTHUR

What happened?

An alarm flashes on the professor's end and he checks the readout. Arthur realizes what the alarm must mean.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

The student at the end, how is she?

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

It looks like she's coming to, but she's going to have some short-term memory loss. We can't have that.

ARTHUR

I'll teach her for free.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

I mean we can't have this sort of thing happening. You were hosting the session, Arthur.

(MORE)

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

These full-immersion programs are designed to operate in close parallel to dream consciousness and require a stable host.

ARTHUR

That wasn't me. The program went haywire.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

That was you, Arthur. You need help. The campus psychologist warned me, especially about your mother... her suicide.

ARTHUR

You don't know that!

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

See, you're still in denial.

ARTHUR

You didn't even know her!

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

I knew her a little. We worked in the same department.

More alarms on the professor's end demand his attention.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I need to go. There's going to be fallout from this. Get some help.

ARTHUR

Wait, wait. Can't the board review what happened? Can't I get another chance?

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

Not after that. Look, Arthur, you're a good guy but you're not ready. There's nothing more I can do.

The professor winks out, leaving the screen black and Arthur's mood blacker. He looks grimly around the ratty little apartment and shakes a moth off his hand that had found its way indoors.

INT. SENATE FLOOR -- DAY

A raucous senate floor finds a gaggle of SENATORS taking their seats in mass confusion. On a dais at the front of the room, GOVERNOR VOSS sits at the largest desk, with his top ADVISORS arranged just below him.

Our man, Aedon, has been busy these past 20 years and finds himself in a modern suit, lounging easily now in a leather chair as the second-in-command. The governor rises to address the senate.

GOVERNOR VOSS

Please, please, be seated.

The senators quiet down as Aedon pulls a small notepad from his pocket.

GOVERNOR VOSS (CONT'D)

Before we begin, let me offer my condolences to the family of my predecessor. A most tragic house fire it was.

Aedon arches his eyebrows knowingly while he feigns sympathy and jots down the governor's words.

GOVERNOR VOSS (CONT'D)

I had never sought the position of Governor, but in keeping with our laws of succession, I accept it now with grave humility. Understanding, of course, the urgency of the times.

SENATOR 1

The people are starving. They want to suspend the currency and revert to the old barter system.

SENATOR 2

They're starving because of the drought. We must invest in digging deeper wells. The rains may never return.

Governor Voss puts on his coke-bottle glasses and distractedly leafs through a sheaf of notes.

GOVERNOR VOSS

Yes, we are all starving for change, which is why we're introducing a new fifteen-cent dime this quarter, and a thirty-cent quarter when it makes sense.

The senators look at each other and scratch their heads as the Governor flips over another page.

SENATOR 2

Would... is that good?

SENATOR 1

The first quarter... seemed to make more sense... right?

GOVERNOR VOSS

Which would be the biggest change to be introduced to the economy in a generation.

SENATOR 1

I don't know.

SENATOR 2

But the drought! We still need deeper wells!

GOVERNOR VOSS

Our new lieutenant governor, uh... Aedon, has introduced a bill that would allow a good number of the ground wells to be refilled with seawater.

Aedon smiles with satisfaction as the Senate unanimously boos.

SENATOR 3

No, no! It would poison the land.

SENATOR 2

The crops would fail completely!

Aedon raises his hand with casual aplomb and silence settles over the senators.

AEDON

Thank you. I understand your concern but my team has developed seven new species of crop genetically modified to thrive in saltwater irrigation.

SENATOR 3

What? What is this?

AEDON

More importantly, the seawater is a necessary foundation for a little virtual reality upgrade my team thought would fit in nicely with the recent changes.

SENATOR 2

What's he talking about? Who is he?

SENATOR 1

We have far more important things to concern ourselves with than VR.

MEMBER 1 appears on Aedon's desk monitor.

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

We found him!

Aedon signals the member to wait as he attempts to placate the senate.

AEDON

Of course, but as my team found a way to transmit a wireless VR signal through the extremely low frequency portion of the Earth's electromagnetic resonances, and the quality of that signal increases dramatically over saltwater, we found flooding the...

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

He's on his way to a scrub hub, sir.

AEDON

We'll get him out of there.

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

We can't get into the colonies. Only drones go in and out of there.

Aedon sighs as the senators thunder their objections.

AEDON

I'll send a sister.

The member initially chokes and then sputters out his reply.

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

Very well.

The senators stare at him, dumfounded, as he raises his hand for silence once more.

AEDON

Senators, all! I thank you for your warm welcome and, well, approval... so, until the clambake sleepover, excuse me.

SENATOR 1

What?

The senators gasp quietly in their seats.

GOVERNOR VOSS

I believe, therefore, the matter concerning saltwater irrigation to be resolved in the affirmative.

Aedon hustles towards the exit, but to his great delight comes across a jar of lollipops near the door.

He slows, looks back, and then takes one as the senators come to their wits and erupt in protest.

ALL

No! No!

EXT. VR SESSION, ANCESTRAL MANSE -- DAY

Arthur and a PHOENIX FAIRY, a cute, quixotic girl carrying a basket of goodies, wind their way up a stone pathway that ends at a magnificent old manse. Mist, owls, and enormous spider webs suffocate the haunted path.

ARTHUR

We got lost?

FAIRY

Well, now. Look at you.

ARTHUR

Me? I came to you to get a scrub certificate. You're supposed to be able to access my subconscious.

FAIRY

Hmm, dark windows and neglect. It looks empty. Consciousness develops in the home, genius. We have to go *inside* to get *inside*.

ARTHUR

Inside? Are you sure this is the right place? It was Arthur Pennington.

The fairy points to the mailbox just off the path, where Arthur reads the scribbled words: PENNINGTON.

FAIRY

Ready?

She holds out her delicate hand, Arthur takes it, and they step through the front door.

INT. VR SESSION, ANCESTRAL MANSE -- BEDROOM -- DAY

The pair find themselves in a magnificent master bedroom complete with a pair of bookshelves on opposite walls. The fairy trips her way to the first dusty bookshelf and takes a couple of pictures with a camera from her basket.

FAIRY

Not entirely empty. One point.

Picking up the lone book on the shelf -- "The Beetle in the Teapot" -- she looks back at him with a sarcastic smile.



FAIRY (CONT'D)

Wow, read much?

ARTHUR

Hey, I know that book.

FAIRY

Ah, here we go.

The fairy turns to the second bookshelf as Arthur retrieves the fairy tale.

ARTHUR

What is this place?

She reaches into her basket and pulls out a bright green cricket about the size of an apple. With a mischievous grin, she places the plump cricket in an empty spot on the bookshelf and steps back.

FAIRY

Well, professor, we're in the bright, erudite regions of a certain someone's psyche. Let's see...

A pair of gray spiders, each about the size of a grapefruit, creep out from behind the books, claim the cricket between them, and disappear. The fairy looks around disappointedly as Arthur reads the book.

FAIRY (CONT'D)

That's it?

ARTHUR

This was my favorite book as a child.

The spiders appear again, wobbling out from the books in opposite directions until they finally tip over, dead. She takes the camera from her basket and snaps another photo.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

What is that?

FAIRY

A couple of petty conceits, but nothing warranting a scrub.

ARTHUR

No, the picture.

FAIRY

Oh, I'm writing a book on the deranged.

ARTHUR

What?

FAIRY

Something to be remembered for. I'm not going to be a scrubber forever, you know.

ARTHUR

No, I'm not deranged. I was using the University's VR to teach class. It glitched and they blamed me, so now I need a certificate...

FAIRY

So you are a professor. Well, doc, in the fruit bowl of madness, a deranged professor is like the giant coconut that dwarfs all the wrinkled grapes and cherries you find in politics or on the streets. My publisher is going to love this.

She scribbles down a note and takes a picture of his face.

ARTHUR

Hey! No, I guess, I'm not a professor now. See, I hadn't downloaded the latest patch and I think maybe some lectures got crossed.

She flips back through her notes and checks a few boxes.

FAIRY

Hmm, the old crossed lecture trick. If we had a firecracker for each of those, we could set off this dreamscape like a roman candle. But anyway...

She steps to the magnificent bed. Arthur looks around the room like a hillbilly on the moon as the fairy expectantly places a couple of bright crickets along the base of the bed.

FAIRY (CONT'D)

You might not want to watch this part.

ARTHUR

I don't know what this is.

The fairy waits, but nothing happens as the dull crickets roll on their overly-round abdomens. Incredulous, she darts to the base of the bed and checks beneath it herself... nothing.

FAIRY

Well, I'll be, Sir Knight.

She rises with a newfound respect for Arthur as he checks inside a nearby armoire, still bewildered.

FAIRY (CONT'D)  
That's extremely rare, these days.  
Arthur, you said it was?

She looks over his entire body.

FAIRY (CONT'D)  
Look, I don't know what happened to  
you or why you're here but you're  
clean after all, guy.

Arthur sighs with relief.

ARTHUR  
I knew it. Thank You. If I could  
just get the certificate...

A trickle of water runs up the wall behind the first bookshelf, interrupting the thought.

FAIRY  
Whoa.

Arthur notices and steps towards the wall as the fairy steps back, snapping numerous photos of the phenomenon this time.

FAIRY (CONT'D)  
Bingo. You made the book, professor.

ARTHUR  
Where is that coming from?

She pulls a multi-colored pinwheel out of the basket.

FAIRY  
This can be a little... well, better  
hold your eyes the first time.

She helps him cover his eyes with his fingers and then spins the pinwheel. It wheezes like an old pipe organ as the colorful blades shoot their patterns across the walls and the room rotates like a carousel.

INT. VR SESSION, ANCESTRAL MANSE -- BASEMENT -- DAY

Arthur steadies himself dizzily and stretches his jaw as the music stops. The fairy snaps the pinwheel back into the basket and then studies his eyes.

FAIRY  
If you notice your eyes crackle, or  
if you feel them swell up like blown  
glass and then roll backwards into  
(MORE)

FAIRY (CONT'D)

the bottom of your mind like stained glass balls bouncing down a staircase, we'll have to go back one room. Don't keep that sort of thing to yourself. There are no refunds.

ARTHUR

I'm ok.

FAIRY

It's really your first time? Hmm, maybe you have a hidden talent.

They find themselves in front of the basement door, with water pouring from the top and spilling across the ceiling. The fairy takes a tentative step towards the door and cautiously feels the knob.

FAIRY (CONT'D)

Refunds are actually paid out to family members in the event of death, so you can relax about that a little bit.

She opens the door and several wasp-like spiders, pitch-black and about as large as pumpkins, buzz out of the darkness below and attack them. Arthur tries to help the fairy but she pushes him back, the girlish playfulness replaced with professional intensity, and handles them with crickets from her basket.

ARTHUR

What the...?

FAIRY

If you remember what happened here... please don't tell me. And if you don't, well, when we're done here you never will.

As the spiders die, they approach the now opened door once more. Water continues to pour out of it from the top, and a darkened set of stairs wind downward. Another pair of waspish spiders buzz out the door as something enormous wakes and bangs its way to the first steps.

FAIRY (CONT'D)

Better step back. Your family just might see that refund.

The fairy deals with the first spider, but the second channels a human voice and refuses to go for a cricket.

VICTOR (V.O.)

He's here. I found him.

FAIRY

Oh, no, no. Not now.

ARTHUR

What? How?

The fairy places a drawn cricket back in her basket as she studies the proxy spider.

FAIRY

You've been hacked.

Another bang on the stairs causes water pooling on the ceiling to fall, drenching the pair.

ARTHUR

Well, can you do something on your end? This is your outlet.

FAIRY

Sorry, hon. Only two kinds of people can hack into a spider: an elite government agent or an elite criminal mastermind. You've got about 10 seconds.

VICTOR (V.O.)

No, he still has his memories.

The fairy pulls a large, red apple bomb from her basket, the stem already lit, and gives Arthur a rueful look.

FAIRY

You won't remember the last few weeks if we use this, but it might be enough.

ARTHUR

Well, what's down there? What's wrong with me?

VICTOR (V.O.)

Pulling him now.

FAIRY

Arthur?

The yellow-eyed Spider Queen appears at the door, smashing her way through with a hiss.

ARTHUR

Do it!

The queen whirls on Arthur, and as the fairy tosses the apple bomb, she leaps at Arthur with the twin lances of her forelegs. The room explodes.

INT. ARTHUR'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Arthur comes to with VICTOR BRAND, a large, middle-aged official, looming over him and scrambling to remove an electronic spider from his VR helmet.

VICTOR  
What day is it?

ARTHUR  
What the...? How'd you get in here?

VICTOR  
I'm from the University. The day?  
Do you know what day this is?

Arthur shoves him across the room as he leaps up.

ARTHUR  
It's get-the-freak-out day, fella.  
What is this?

Victor just smiles as he pockets his little hacking device.

VICTOR  
Your mother, Diana Pennington, taught  
Ancient American mythology at the  
University, young Arthur. I worked  
with her and was a friend. Relax.

ARTHUR  
From the University? I'm not going  
to be working there after all, which  
means you can just get out now. And  
why are you here?

VICTOR  
Oh?

Victor picks up the picture of his mother and fingers the shell necklace.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
I thought they were just waiting for  
you there, you know, because of her.

Arthur snatches the necklace back.

ARTHUR  
I didn't get a fair shot. Goodbye,  
by the way, and thanks for picking  
up the scrub bill.

VICTOR  
Ah, kid, you can't trust those scrub  
hubs. That's why I came. You're  
lucky we got you out of there.

ARTHUR  
 We? Who's "we"? And how did you  
 know...

Sister Fire's reflection appears in the picture of Arthur's mother as she places a single hand on the apartment window. Arthur turns to watch the window slowly melt and flames engulf the moths packed around the edges.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)  
 What the...?

VICTOR  
 Let's go! Now!

Victor grabs him and pulls him towards the back as Arthur watches on, not believing his eyes.

ARTHUR  
 I'm still in VR! What did you do?

Arthur searches his head for a mystery helmet in disbelief.

VICTOR  
 Now, Arthur. Run!

ARTHUR  
 How are you doing this?

The window collapses and flaming moths flutter chaotically into the apartment as Sister Fire steps inside.

VICTOR  
 Go, go, go!

Victor forcefully pushes him through the electronically controlled back door.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY -- DAY

The decrepit hallway stretches away to adjacent apartments and exit signs as Arthur begins to believe his eyes again. Victor places another hacking device on the door control and the light turns from green to red.

ARTHUR  
 We're not supposed to be in here on  
 Thursdays.

VICTOR  
 Come on!

Arthur's apartment door begins to smoke as Victor pushes him through the exit. Sister Fire burns through Arthur's door, gliding towards them as flaming moths fill the hallway behind her and fire alarms fill the building.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING ALLEY -- DAY

Victor bars the door behind them, leads them down the alley, and finally to a manhole cover in the back. He lifts it up, revealing an inconspicuous debossment of a white rabbit.

ARTHUR

No way. No.

VICTOR

She's not going to stop, Arthur.

ARTHUR

This can't be real. How are you doing this?

VICTOR

If you were somehow locked in immersion VR and burned alive. What would happen to you in real life?

ARTHUR

Brain damage, I guess. Severe.

VICTOR

Then right now, what difference does it make?

ARTHUR

My home.

VICTOR

This right here is the real world, kid, but that's not your real home. Come on.

Arthur reluctantly turns to watch fire spread through a window as alarms continue to blare. He then turns and leaps down the hole with Victor.

EXT. GARDEN WOODS -- DAY

Anna evaluates the failing woods surrounding the sacred garden. She pulls a trio of large ladybugs from a pack and softly whistles to them in the palm of her hand. The bugs faintly glow as they're loosed to labor in the trees. A hawk shriek pierces the woods and KWAZHOL, an enormous brute of a warden, appears by Anna's side.

KWAZHOL

She's back.

He whistles and the hawk returns to perch on his shoulder. They step into a decaying cluster of trees and a lean wolf darts from trunk to trunk.



ANNA

Show yourself, witch!

A woman in a bright blue shawl and carrying a little red knapsack strolls through the black-blighted woods. She stops and looses a handful of bark beetles into the shadows as she hums to herself.

As the woman comes closer and finally looks up, we see Sister Famine's bone necklace and eventually those hollow eyes. A lean, horrid wolf peeks around a tree behind her.

INT. SEWER -- DAY

Victor and Arthur slosh through the darkness of the sewer.

ARTHUR

Pass to where?

VICTOR

Maybe you did lose some of your memory back there. I thought you knew about the shrines.

ARTHUR

The shrines?

Arthur slows suspiciously.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

"And then... he came to himself and found he held the coyote by the tail, the enchantment lifted."

Victor shakes his head with a sigh.

VICTOR

I thought we just went over this.

ARTHUR

What did you do at the University?

VICTOR

I said I knew your mother there, but I also worked with your father.

ARTHUR

My father never worked at the University.

VICTOR

There are a few things about your father that you probably didn't know.

ARTHUR

Like?

VICTOR  
Well, like where he's really from.

They round a corner and pass through a broken wall.

ARTHUR  
New Mexico?

VICTOR  
Yikes, kid.

Victor unbolts a rusty door in the dark and abandoned corner of the sewer. Arthur stops, stunned, as he sees an inconspicuous stone shrine sitting within the room.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
Here we go.

INT. SECRET SEWER ROOM -- DAY

A series of wax candles adorn the shrine and Victor quickly lights them in a criss-cross pattern. A dome of blue light springs up around them as water fills the basin to overflowing. Victor cups a drink.

ARTHUR  
Where is that coming from? Are you  
sure that's clean?

As Arthur steps to within a few feet of the shrine, beetle-like shapes begin to splash in the water.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)  
What? How?

VICTOR  
The veil is thin near a shrine.  
Something's happening on the other  
side.

Victor removes a small conch shell from his pocket, which roars supernaturally with the sounds of the sea as he holds it near the shrine.

ARTHUR  
What are you...?

He then takes Arthur by the arm.

VICTOR  
Hold on tight.

ARTHUR  
Wait!

Victor plunges the shell into the basin and a heavy splash of watery light washes over them.

EXT. SACRED GARDEN -- DAY

A pair of leaping wolves immediately knock Arthur down and he loses track of Victor. Kwazhol bounds over him, barreling into the wolves as arrows whiz through the air like hornets. A PAIR OF MAIDENS leap around the edge of the garden, downing wolves with bone daggers.

Anna nimbly dodges and then looses an arrow that knocks the basket out of Sister Famine's hands. The two square off, catching their breath.

ANNA

The garden is proof against your touch, Famine. You will only find ruin here.

SISTER FAMINE

Your threats are as the cries of the emaciated cub, still lingering at the mouth of the vacant natal den.

ANNA

And yet we hold.

SISTER FAMINE

Surrender the shrine now and we'll allow you to remain in the garden.

ANNA

We know you don't have the pearl. You're in no position to bargain.

SISTER FAMINE

He has found it. The prophecy states that when you fall into shadow...

Anna looses another arrow at the sister, but she vanishes into the woods.

ANNA

Babbles.

Kwazhol finally discovers the bewildered Arthur, who rises and stumbles back towards the mother shrine.

KWAZHOL

They're trying to sneak them in.  
Anna!

With one hand Kwazhol picks Arthur up by the throat and slams him into a nearby tree. The arrows cease as the last of the wolves falls. Anna spins back around to inspect Arthur.

ANNA

We'll keep his skull to burn in the shrine but bury his body with these carcasses.

ARTHUR

Wait! I'm not with them, whoever they were.

ANNA

Quickly, they may return.

Kwazhol pulls out a massive belt knife and puts it to Arthur's throat as Victor crawls out from behind a wolf carcass.

VICTOR

Wait.

Anna immediately leaps to Victor and draws an arrow over him. He throws his hands up in surrender.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Wait, wait. You need him.

ANNA

Now, Kwazhol.

Kwazhol moves to sever Arthur's head.

VICTOR

I'm a friend of Arek's. I knew him. We came to help.

ANNA

We don't know Arek.

KWAZHOL

Arek? The warden?

Anna finally recognizes the name.

ANNA

The... one who took the pearl?

VICTOR

Yes. And that's his son, Arthur.

Arthur's eyes go wide as Kwazhol releases him. He lands on his knees with a wheezing cough and when he gets back up, Anna immediately charges him, knocking him out cold.

INT. SENATE HALLWAY -- EVENING

NELL, a barefoot, 12-year-old shoeshine girl, works on the costly shoes of Governor Voss.

GOVERNOR VOSS  
How does that sound?

NELL  
Completely ripped-down-the-middle  
insane.

The Governor folds up a newspaper as a coin appears in his hand.

GOVERNOR VOSS  
Until we meet again.

NELL  
Aye. It's all true then, every bit?

GOVERNOR VOSS  
You'll be the Queen of Shoe Shines  
in the new kingdom. Would you like  
that?

NELL  
Yikes, me. I'd like it just fine.

Voss heads down the hallway to his private quarters as Nell looks after him. As he opens the door, steam pours from the room like a fog bank.

NELL (CONT'D)  
Aye, the coins for those pair of  
shoes. Lucky, lucky, but I've got  
soles of my own. One solid soul to  
begin.

She flips the coin, pockets it and packs up her things.

NELL (CONT'D)  
Soup's for the body, thank you much,  
sir; which makes a sole for the soul,  
that's two. You're right! Ha-ha!

INT. GOVERNOR VOSS'S PRIVATE CHAMBER -- EVENING

A hot bath pours heavily in the little chamber as the Governor practically gags on the steam.

GOVERNOR VOSS  
Maid! Not now!

Voss stumbles towards the bath, but then hears a nearby sink running as well. Shifting directions, he fumbles blindly towards it as a moth flutters out of the mist and then vanishes.

GOVERNOR VOSS (CONT'D)  
Maid!

A moment later, Sister Flood's blindfolded, weeping face hovers in front of him.

GOVERNOR VOSS (CONT'D)

What the devil?

INT. SENATE HALLWAY -- EVENING

Nell momentarily stops at the exit as a thud and throttled scream come from somewhere down the hall. Not sure what she heard and not hearing more, she whistles her way out the door.

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

Surrounded by a copse of dead trees, A PAIR OF WORKERS secure dark red ropes to a dry Saranna fountain perched on a hill in the center of the park. Prairie dog burrows have largely overtaken the neglected park and a few of the curious rodents gather around the workers.

WORKER 1

She was a lovely one.

WORKER 2

A goddess, they said.

WORKER 1

The goddess of loveliness unimaginal?

WORKER 2

Ah, no, no. It was something to do with the trees here, maybe the park.

WORKER 1

These trees have been dead for years now.

WORKER 2

The goddess of decay, I think. Ready?

Worker 2 grips the rope and readies to heave while Worker 1 continues to gaze at the goddess's majestic form.

WORKER 1

It makes me a little sad, though. It feels wrong, somehow.

WORKER 2

The governor's clearing out the old all over the city. He's going to pump seawater through the new one and it'll spout. Imagine that. And they're adding a mini ferris wheel even, just across the way.

WORKER 1

I've known this fountain my whole  
life. It spouted when I was a child.

Worker 2 rings the base, stirring the rat's nest inside.

WORKER 2

It's going to spill a flood of rats,  
anyway. Ready? Ah, there it is.

A REPLACEMENT TEAM pulls into the park with a large, shiny fountain secured neatly to the back of their vehicle with bright blue ropes.

WORKER 1

Oh, wow. Look at that.

As the vehicle nears, the fountain looks suspiciously like Aedon riding on the back of a spouting whale.

WORKER 2

Marvelous. A spouting whale in the  
park, our little park.

The workers pull the Saranna fountain down. It crumbles on the dead grass as the new fountain arrives.

EXT. KELOAS TRIAD MOUNTAIN -- EVENING

Arthur wakes to Anna lowly whistling to the empty sky. As he blinks himself back to life another whistle brings a snow-white dove, which alights majestically on her outstretched arm.

ARTHUR

Where are we?

Atop the summit of the sacred mountain, Anna waves goodbye to her COMPANION MAIDENS as they depart on saddled eagles. Arthur stands to find a bleached stone temple stretched out behind him like a great white tiger in the sun. Anna turns to the temple doors, dove in hand.

ANNA

We're ready.

ARTHUR

Victor, what is this? They're not  
going to kill us.

VICTOR

They believe me for now, enough to  
find out anyway. And we're at the  
Temple of the Three.

ARTHUR

Three?

KWAZHOL

The Keloas Triad. The ancestors  
will know.

Anna nods and Kwazhol heaves open the doors to the entrance  
of the temple.

INT. KELOAS TRIAD TEMPLE -- EVENING

An enormous living tree pillars the ceiling of the unassuming  
interior of the temple. Two crescent moon-shaped windows,  
neatly paired like yin and yang, allow sunlight to spill  
across a colossal, ivory statue of the winged Thessa, the  
goddess of the unborn, as she rests with a pair of dolphins  
beneath the boughs.

As Arthur approaches the ivory shrine near Thessa's feet,  
friendly squirrels appear from behind the statue. One climbs  
up the shrine and into the basin as another climbs up Arthur's  
shoulder.

ARTHUR

The Keloas? Where in the world...?  
It's beautiful.

Kwazhol closes the doors behind them. Anna, still cradling  
the dove, leads the others to the back of the temple, where  
a large stone door awaits.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

You can communicate with your  
ancestors here?

ANNA

This way!

ARTHUR

What? What is this?

Kwazhol opens the back door, revealing a stone stairway  
winding down into the catacombs. The squirrels immediately  
scamper away in fright, disappearing into the branches of  
the tree.

ANNA

Thessa is the goddess watching over  
spirits yet unborn.

ARTHUR

Unborn spirits?

KWAZHOL

But do not trust her to watch them  
far.



ANNA

We, since you haven't been paying attention, need to find a spirit that has already died.

Anna introduces the dusty pathway to Arthur.

ANNA (CONT'D)

And for that... we go down.

ARTHUR

What...? What's down there?

VICTOR

Your own blood and bones, apparently.

ARTHUR

Mine?

KWAZHOL

Just the bones.

VICTOR

Ah, yes. You'll bring the blood, if you catch their meaning.

KWAZHOL

Arek's body was found soon after he stole the pearl.

INT. KELOAS TRIAD CATACOMBS -- EVENING

They enter the stone tunnel and head down, Arthur bringing up the rear.

ANNA

But the pearl was never recovered. And there's no way to contact a departed spirit without a living relation.

KWAZHOL

Which we didn't have until now. Now we will find out the truth.

As they head down, the marble walls of the stairway give way to the limestone walls of a cavernous catacomb. They exit the stairway to find a rickety rope bridge extending over a wide underground river, with a pair of raven statues perched on the bridge support towers. A large stone crypt awaits them on the other side as they slowly make their way across the bridge.

ARTHUR

Victor, if you worked with my mother then you're familiar with the Keloas  
(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

mythology, right? How come there's no mention of this in the textbook?

VICTOR

The University's course is based largely on the finds from the two dig sites. At the time the textbook was written, they had essentially found finger bones and took them for the whole skeleton.

As they near the end of the bridge, they find an identical pair of raven statues atop the support beams.

ARTHUR

So, the goddess of the unborn, the god of the dead, and then I take it the third is some kind of raven god guarding a river?

VICTOR

This isn't actually a river.

KWAZHOL

It's the Dream.

ARTHUR

An actual, material... dream?

Arthur peers over the side of the bridge to notice the depths of the underground river flow with multicolored flashes, as if it were somehow infused with lightning.

VICTOR

Which makes the third the god of dreams.

KWAZHOL

Aezhos. And his Dream realm bridges the planes of the living and the dead.

ARTHUR

And the ravens are from his dreams?

KWAZHOL

The raven is Rahzsha. A demigod only, but known to consort with Ammanon, the god of the underworld, and play the trickster in the Dream. He's best to be avoided.

Kwazhol exits the bridge and again works on the large stone door to the crypt. With the others distracted, Victor reaches into his pocket, pulls out some yellow dust and suspiciously sprinkles it across the bottom ropes.

Curious rats appear out of the shadows and scamper towards the bridge.

ANNA

Let's go.

INT. KELOAS TRIAD CRYPTS -- EVENING

The narrow entrance opens to a large crypt and Anna quickly lights a torch hanging nearby. As the light spills inward, it sends a flurry of rats skittering into the shadows and reveals rows of dusty coffins, along with rows of skeletons resting in the alcoves.

SIR EDMOND, one of the restless dead, sits up and bangs his head on the stone alcove.

SIR EDMOND

Ouch!

Anna pays him no mind as she lights a couple of torch sconces, illuminating a hideous, volcano-shaped obsidian shrine on the far side of the tomb. A statue of Ammanon, the shark-headed god of the underworld, looms over the shrine. A pair of small ram horns curve over his angular head and a few stone vultures perch around him in manic glee, with smaller stone raven statues joining the macabre group in frozen frolic.

ANNA

This way.

The skeleton slides out of the alcove and Arthur's jaw drops.

ARTHUR

No way.

KWAZHOL

See? Just bones.

SIR EDMOND

A rescuer? After all these years.  
Thank you, thank you for coming for me.

ARTHUR

What? Rescue?

Sir Edmond attempts to leap into Arthur's arms like a rescued maiden but Arthur just steps backward, causing the skeleton to land on its back and break into pieces. He then hops up, his bones joining back together, and shadow boxes Arthur.

SIR EDMOND

Hey, tough guy. Hey, now.

Anna secures the torch near the statue and begins inspecting the shrine carefully. Sir Edmond, undeterred, hops on Arthur's back and rides him as they all near the shrine.

ARTHUR

What is this? Who are you?

KWAZHOL

It happens when they have unfinished business.

Anna lights a sequence of candles, nods her head in satisfaction, and then lights the brazier in its center. An orange, misty light engulfs the shrine and charcoal-stained water flows into a trough circling the brazier.

ANNA

One way, one way. That should do it.

As Anna dips her fingers into the water, Sir Edmond dashes to the side, hiding behind a coffin.

SIR EDMOND

What are you doing? Ammanon speaks through that flame. Every word from there is a live coal.

KWAZHOL

Timid soul, a coward probably.

SIR EDMOND

Put it out. Put it out.

Kwazhol finally takes a concerned interest in the skeleton and reads the name on his alcove.

KWAZHOL

Sir Edmond, was it? What happened? Were you supposed to fight in a war? Save someone, perhaps, and failed? Do you know?

Sir Edmond throws his hands up as if surrendering to Kwazhol.

SIR EDMOND

Put it out and I'll tell you.

Anna prepares the dove, searching for the right spot to place it on the shrine.

ANNA

Forget him. Let's do this. Arthur!

Unseen near the bottom of the shrine, a lone raven statue rotates slightly as a little gust of wind blows through it and out its beak, extinguishing a candle.

ARTHUR

You're going to sacrifice the dove?

ANNA

No, we need it to bring him back.

ARTHUR

Bring who exactly?

ANNA

Your father, if he truly was.

SIR EDMOND

No, no. Let's go, let's go.

KWAZHOL

Shush.

Sir Edmond punches Kwazhol but immediately falls down.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

The already dead can't play dead.

The skeleton leaps up and shadows boxes again as he retreats.

ARTHUR

Wait, what? You're going to resurrect him as a dove?

ANNA

We've got rats down here, if you think that's what he'd prefer.

ARTHUR

No way. I'm not doing this.

SIR EDMOND

Atta boy! I think we're done here then. Quickly, quickly now.

ANNA

The dove is a pure body, as good a body as we'll find on such short notice. He was once a warden, after all. That deserves some respect.

VICTOR

I'd take it, kid.

ANNA

Good?

She takes a drink and the orange glow envelops her. Arthur shakes his head in a stupor as she holds out her hand.

ANNA (CONT'D)

We'll need blood for a resurrection.

ARTHUR

What is this?

ANNA

We're going to resurrect your father into the body of this dove, then I'm going to ask him where the mother pearl is, and then we're going to go get it and restore the mother shrine. Got it?

ARTHUR

My father?

KWAZHOL

It's the only way, Arthur.

She takes his hand and lifts her knife.

ANNA

Well, then.

She cuts his hand and splashes it into the basin.

SIR EDMOND

Nooo!

INT. AMMANON'S SUBTERRANEAN CAVERN -- EVENING

In the underworld of a subterranean cavern, the roots from a colossal tree above stretch through pools of water scattered around the cavern floor. Luminescent shells operate like lamps within the pools and give the otherwise dark interior a hazy glow.

AMMANON, a large shadowy beast with hooves, a shark's head topped with small ram-like horns, and a voice like an earthquake, inspects the tadpole-like souls swimming in the murk. A troop of ravens with glowing eyes squabble on a horizontal section of root as DOBIE, a pale-skinned, worm-like minion, arrives on a saddled bat and leaps to his master's feet.

DOBIE

The sisters were unable to procure the mother shrine. The daughter yet holds the garden.

AMMANON

Hmm, the little cub has grown a deadly claw.

Ammanon steps to a volcano-shaped shrine at the edge of a pool and gives the water in the basin a stir. An enormous tree appears in the reflection with a single apple clinging to the highest branch. Shadows churn beneath the little piece of fruit like a maelstrom.

AMMANON (CONT'D)

But the prophecy cannot be  
forestalled. She will fall, and our  
rise...

The shrine suddenly quivers, causing the vision in the water  
to disappear.

DOBIE

What... was...?

A flash of brilliant light blinds the pair and the ravens  
scatter. As they blink their eyes back into focus, they  
find a ring of pure white smoke lingering just above the  
shrine.

AMMANON

No!

Ammanon dashes back to the murky pool to find a duplicate  
ring of smoke. Tadpole souls swim away from the smoke in a  
panic, but Ammanon knows exactly who was taken.

AMMANON (CONT'D)

They took him! Not him!

DOBIE

Of all the inappropriate...

Ammanon leaps back to the shrine in a rage and plunges his  
clawed arm deep into the smoky water. It vanishes into the  
depths of the shrine.

INT. KELOAS TRIAD CRYPTS -- EVENING

Arthur finds himself on his butt about 10 feet from the shrine  
as Anna rushes to it. They all stare dumfounded at an  
enormous raven sitting in the center of the now smoky shrine,  
black feathers fluttering down around it.

ARTHUR

Is that...?

The raven squawks hideously.

ANNA

This isn't right.

VICTOR

Arek?

SIR EDMOND

Arek? Do I know an Arek? Wait, who  
are you?

The raven squawks again and ruffles its feathers. Smoke  
pouring from the shrine takes on the brief appearance of

Ammanon's claw as it slams to the floor. Rats scurry out of the shadows and flee out the door. Kwazhol takes a wary step back.

KWAZHOL

Is that him, Anna?

SIR EDMOND

Arek, Arek. I do remember an Arek.

Anna just frantically scours the shrine, reviewing the runes and the lighted candles.

ANNA

Where's the dove?

The tomb begins to shake as the lingering smoke swirls, pulling waking bones out of the surrounding coffins. The bones clack and tumble towards the shrine as the crew takes a collective step back. The bones form into Ammanon's enormous claw as the tomb lurches awake.

SIR EDMOND

He's here! He's here! Run!

Anna tries to blow out the shrine candles, but the claw lands a vicious swipe and sends her flying. Arthur immediately picks up a loose thigh bone and leaps to her defense.

Kwazhol roars in with his enormous knife drawn and the two men occupy the claw while Anna escapes. She gets back to her feet as the summoned raven flaps madly around the tomb trying to escape the raking claw.

ANNA

We need him!

Ammanon's claw at last snatches the bird and begins to retreat back through the shrine. Kwazhol leaps at the claw and hacks at it with his belt knife.

ANNA (CONT'D)

The shrine!

ARTHUR

Anna!

Anna dashes to the shrine and begins extinguishing candles with her fingers, but the claw turns on her and forms a hammerfist. Arthur appears at the last second, deflects the blow, and gets brutally knocked into a stone coffin. The lid flies into Victor, burying him in dust and bones.

Anna puts out the last candle, preventing the claw from retreating further. Kwazhol lands a herculean strike against it and the severed tip from one of the digits lands on his boot.



He picks up the smoking thing but quickly pockets it as the claw flies into a rage.

KWAZHOL

Get out!

SIR EDMOND

You heard him! He's the boss, right?  
I think he's the boss.

ANNA

Not without Arek!

KWAZHOL

It didn't work! Let's go.

Anna leaps out of the way of another swipe as Arthur returns to the fray with an even larger bone, landing a heavy crack. The claw retaliates and knocks Arthur into the wall.

SIR EDMOND

Arek. Yes, Arek. My own great  
grandson. That's him!

With a deadly hammerfist poised over the downed Arthur, Sir Edmond finally leaps onto the claw.

ANNA

Edmond.

The others gape in wonder as Edmond's skeleton is enfolded into the maddened claw. Kwazhol rushes to the crypt door.

KWAZHOL

Let's go!

The claw finally slows as a skeleton head appears on the middle knuckle and the bones rearrange into a hulking body. Edmond, now in control of the arms, releases the raven and Anna quickly snatches it once more.

SIR EDMOND

Go!

ANNA

You heard him! I think he's the  
boss, right?

ARTHUR

Victor!

Arthur scrambles to Victor and hefts the coffin lid off of him. Victor wakes to realize he's helmeted with an odd two-faced skull. Arthur helps him remove the curious thing, but quickly discards it as they rush to the exit.

Sir Edmond grins triumphantly but the bones begin to splinter with the conflict. He gasps with the struggle until the bones finally snap back into a claw. His skull pops out of the bones and lands near the door.

SIR EDMOND

Run!

The crew fly through the door. The claw lurches into its dying rage, smashing bones, coffins, and anything it can find until the smoke disappears and all lies lifeless once more on the stone.

INT. AMMANON'S SUBTERRANEAN CAVERN -- EVENING

Ammanon removes his arm from the now smokeless basin of water. Dobie runs his hand along the edges of the shrine.

DOBIE

They closed it.

Ammanon holds up his hand for close inspection. The tip of one of his claws was cleanly severed and now leaks black smoke.

INT. KELOAS TRIAD CATACOMBS -- EVENING

Kwazhol rolls the stone door back in place as the dust shoots from the interior of the crypt. As the crew catch their breath outside, Kwazhol again inspects the severed claw. He rolls it in his palm and sees a beam of light shoot down from a crack in the cavern ceiling, illuminating Edmond's soul as it ascends.

KWAZHOL

He did it.

A LINE OF ANCESTORS appear on the other side to greet him.

ANCESTOR 1

Hey, it's Edmond!

ANCESTOR 2

Edmond!

SIR EDMOND

I'm redeemed. Oh, thank the gods...  
and my haymaker.

Edmond's spirit rises to the Great Beyond with one last shadow punch. Kwazhol smiles as Anna eyes him warily.

ANNA

Kwazhol, is that...?

As the beam of light disappears, Kwazhol realizes the others are staring at him and did not see the vision.

ANNA (CONT'D)

That's from that thing?

Kwazhol studies the lightly-smoking claw intently.

KWAZHOL

It's imbued. It carries a sliver of his shadow now like a dark ember smoldering in birch bark.

ANNA

A sliver of the god of the dead. Kwazhol, you should bury that down here.

ARTHUR

It's from Ammanon?

KWAZHOL

A talisman hasn't come to us in an age, Anna. Once we are finished with Arek and have recovered the pearl, I will see it safely destroyed. If it doesn't fade on its own.

Anna shakes her head with a sigh, but they turn to the bridge where Victor quickly takes the lead.

VICTOR

How do you know that's Arek?

ANNA

We don't.

ARTHUR

I thought you could talk to it.

ANNA

It was supposed to be a dove. Doves are easy to talk to, and they're good listeners. Ravens...

KWAZHOL

Let me see.

She hands the raven to Kwazhol for inspection. Victor surreptitiously looks around the bridge as if waiting for something to happen.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

We can give it to Tsili. If she eats it, we'll know it wasn't a natural bird.

ARTHUR

That sounds helpful.

Kwazhol hands the bird back to Anna.

KWAZHOL  
Personally, I think it's either not  
him or he was really stupid.

VICTOR  
His son is right there.

ARTHUR  
That is not my father.

ANNA  
Let's keep it until we can find out  
what happened at least. Let's go.

Victor grudgingly takes a step forward but a single rope finally snaps, sending rats skittering away from the bridge. Victor slowly turns as Arthur fearfully eyes the drop into the river.

ARTHUR  
The Dream?

ANNA  
Oh, no. Go!

KWAZHOL  
Go!

As they all rush forward, another rope snaps and they plummet into the rushing river.

INT. SENATE FLOOR -- DAY

Aedon presides from the dais at the front of the room. As one of the senators walks by, he clutches the three lollipops on his desk and eyes the senator suspiciously. Once the threat is gone, he rises to address the senate.

AEDON  
Please, please, be seated.

The senators quiet down as Aedon pulls out the little notepad he used to record the previous governor's speech.

AEDON (CONT'D)  
Before we begin, let me offer my  
condolences to the family of my  
predecessor. Suicide by drowning,  
that's a tough one.

A pair of senators scratch their heads as déjà vu sets in.

SENATOR 1  
Did we just...?

AEDON

I had never sought the position of Governor, but in keeping with our laws of succession, I accept it now with grave humility. Understanding, of course, the urgency of the times.

SENATOR 2

Who was he again?

AEDON

As the matter of refilling ground wells with seawater has been resolved...

SENATOR 3

No it hasn't!

AEDON

My team has begun pumping...

ALL

No! No!

As the senators erupt in protest, Aedon sits back with a sigh and unwraps a lollipop.

SISTER FAMINE (V.O.)

Show them.

He drops the lollipop with a start and looks around for the absent sister. He then rubs his temples to clear his head as the senators continue to gabble.

AEDON

Imagination is a chimney to vent a boiling brain.

He looks back up to see Sister Famine glide across the back of the Senate chamber. With a nod he then reaches beneath his desk and removes a semi-transparent, bowling-ball sized orb set in a flat base like a snow globe. He stands and pounds the gavel for order.

AEDON (CONT'D)

Well, I'm certainly glad that's over with. It's Friday at the Senate, as you know, so let's move on to the Show and Tell portion of the day's activities. Um... I'll go first.

Aedon spins the orb on its base and a purple pearl embedded in its center twinkles to glowing life. Disco-like flecks of light spin around the room, eventually coalescing into ripples of lightning that shoot up the walls.

AEDON (CONT'D)

My fellow kings.

A VR overlay envelops the room, transforming the senate chamber into a scene from the bottom of the sea: Benches and chairs suddenly seem made out of coral and oyster shells. The crystal-blue walls sparkle and undulate as if they were the surface of a calm and loving sea as the senators gasp in wonder.

AEDON (CONT'D)

Or should I say gods.

Another ripple of lightning shoots up the walls, and the overlays shift to celestial settings: The chandeliers become ringed moons; the tapestries transform into swirling, cosmic-dust seahorses and crabs; and the thrones become throne-shaped golden nebulae, with twinkling stars encrusting the edges like gems.

SENATOR 1

What is this? How is this possible?

AEDON

It's just the demo of the day: The virtual reality of the future. We use the Earth's electromagnetic resonances to send wireless signals directly into the brain.

SENATOR 2

It's... it's not real?

AEDON

And what's more, by integrating the University's immersion programs, we have nearly perfected the technique of tapping directly into the hippocampus.

SENATOR 3

Why would you need access to the hippocampus?

Aedon sighs at the absurdity of the question.

AEDON

Memory. But, anyway, that's it for my turn. Who's next? You didn't forget it was Friday?

The senators whisper amongst themselves, acknowledging the profound wisdom.

SENATOR 2

Of course. Memory.

SENATOR 1

We... can be gods?

AEDON

Oh, well, not now, no. The signals weaken dramatically over land and require a bed of seawater to extend beyond a single room such as this. It's too bad the earlier vote didn't pass.

The senators erupt.

SENATOR 3

I call for a new vote!

SENATOR 4

I second the motion!

AEDON

All those in favor of flooding the city with seawater say "aye".

ALL

Aye! Aye!

The god of the sea glories in the cheers as the long-sought for power is voted in. He then clicks the COM on his desk.

AEDON

Get the vendor carts off the streets, we're a go.

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

Will do.

AEDON

And the one on the corner that makes those twirling ones...

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

The cotton candy?

AEDON

Yeah, yeah, seize it on my orders and bring it to the University. For cultural heritage.

MEMBER 1 (V.O.)

Roger.

EXT. CITY PARK -- DAY

WORKERS put the finishing touches on a pool of concrete that encircles the whale statue and looks very much like the foundation for an enormous shrine atop the hill.

A moon-engraved recess in the center of the pool seems the perfect fit for the mother shrine basin.

On the other side of the park, WORKERS begin building a brightly-colored, kid-sized ferris wheel. A large prairie dog lazily departs its burrow to amble over to the workers like the plump mayor of the little town. His chatter seems to approve of the quality of the workmanship.

EXT. RIVER, DREAM REALM -- DAY

A riverboat chugs its way up a wide river. A pod of dolphins lead the antique craft on, and one leaps up to sparkle in the open air.

EXT. RIVERBOAT DECK, DREAM REALM -- DAY

The band of heroes untangle themselves as if from a Twister game gone horribly wrong. Kwazhol walks to the bow and sits cross-legged in meditation. Anna finds herself on top of Arthur, who holds her hand with tender concern.

ARTHUR

Are you alright?

Initially finding comfort in this position, she snaps out of it and hops up. She then looks him up and down, shaking her head in disappointment.

ANNA

Disaster, this. Falling into the Dream. Is the bird okay?

Arek, having changed into a blue jay, dances away.

ARTHUR

What happened to him?

ANNA

The Dream works funny like that sometimes.

ARTHUR

The Dream? We're dreaming?

Arthur finally notices he's in naught but his boxers and tries to cover himself in embarrassment.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Um, hey, wait a minute.

ANNA

How the bridge broke...

Arthur sheepishly covers himself with a coil of rope as Anna turns away. Kwazhol unfolds himself and returns to the crew.



KWAZHOL

I can't wake up.

ARTHUR

What? What happened?

KWAZHOL

Our bodies are submerged in the river still.

ARTHUR

And we're not drowning?

VICTOR

The river belonged to the god of dreams. We won't drown in it, just sleep.

KWAZHOL

And we're stuck.

ARTHUR

We can't jump off a mountain or something. The fall...

KWAZHOL

Would kill us. We won't be able to wake up until our bodies are out of that river.

ANNA

The shrine network travels through the Dream. If we can find Thessa's, we could use it to contact the maidens.

KWAZHOL

But then her shrine may accidentally loose a swarm of blood harpies that shred this dream like a paper bag. It's all the same to her.

ANNA

Kwazhol, that's not fair.

ARTHUR

Wait a minute, I thought we were just at Thessa's shrine.

Anna looks back at Arthur and pointedly straightens an imaginary tie on her neck. Arthur looks around helplessly, covers himself more fully with the rope, but then just shrugs.

ANNA

Entering the Dream generally refracts your position a bit but it shouldn't

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

be too far. How did the bridge break like that?

KWAZHOL

Hard to say. Hellmouth Minotaurs roam the depths of the catacombs. The smoke from their dark moon cannibal bonfires is known to hasten wood rot. Maybe...

VICTOR

I suspect that was it. Unfortunate, really, now that we know.

Anna eyes the jay as it hops up on the rail.

ANNA

We'll need help getting anything out of that jay now. Thessa might also be the only one who can...

A colossal raven rolls towards them like a thunder cloud.

ARTHUR

That's... um...

KWAZHOL

Rahzsha.

The single raven breaks into a murder and then noisily rolls out of sight. A number of the ravens find a new home aboard the boat, causing the blue jay to screech angrily at the trespassers.

ANNA

If Rahzsha knows where we are...

Kwazhol turns to the wheelhouse in acquiescence.

KWAZHOL

We should be able to just follow the dolphins to Thessa's temple. But I will honor the truthful stones without more than anything found within.

ANNA

Thanks, Kwaz. Come on, Arthur. You can't walk around like that.

Anna leads Arthur below deck. As they depart and Victor finds himself alone, he removes a purple whale lure from his pocket and with a furtive glance to the wheelhouse, hooks it to the end of a fishing line. He finds a fishing hat hanging nearby, plops it on, and has a little fun with it.

VICTOR

Well now, the gods go a-fishing in the wake of stars and among the streams of time. "Don't tread on the worlds" the signs say, which makes the footpaths hard to follow.

He casts, takes a seat and kicks back leisurely.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Ah, well. It's really best to just wait for the gods to come 'round.

INT. UNIVERSITY FOYER -- DAY

THREE MEMBERS wheel Aedon's high-tech machinery into the University, but a statue of Sir Isaac Newton holding a telescope in the center of the foyer just won't do. As a couple of members place a stick of dynamite on the statue, our old friend Professor Lector rushes to them in a huff.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Whoa, whoa, what are you doing?

The members stop and look to Aedon, who appears busy talking to himself near a wall.

MEMBER 2

Sir?

Aedon snaps out of it and walks to the group, shaking his head to clear his thoughts.

AEDON

You brought brooms, right? You have a broom?

One of the assistants nods assuredly, prompting Aedon to give Lector the look: "So what's the problem?"

PROFESSOR LECTOR

This statue was a gift from the University's first benefactor. It's been the centerpiece of the foyer ever since.

AEDON

I see.

Aedon signals to one of his assistants.

AEDON (CONT'D)

We'll make a wall painting that will essentially be an exact duplicate.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

No, no, you don't understand.

AEDON

He's very good. He was a student of Professor... uh...

MEMBER 1

Hardenay.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Prof... the bowling coach?

Aedon signals one of his assistants to light the fuse.

AEDON

Yes. But keep the head for the professor, guys. We're not here to be destructive.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Wait! Just wait. We'll move the statue. But let my guys do it.

Lector sighs, defeated, and motions for a couple of his own ASSISTANTS to join him.

PROFESSOR LECTOR (CONT'D)

We'll move it to the top floor. Grab a few dollies, will you? The antiquities area has a space in the corner. Take it up the freight elevator and then through the back corridor...

Aedon returns to the central hub, where half-opened crates of electronics clutter the area. He clears away a mound of bubble wrap to reveal what appears to be an old, stone birdbath recently excavated from the seafloor. Mythic engravings of sea monsters adorn the base and the figure of a giant clam is etched into the bottom of the basin.

Aedon quickly fills the basin with water from a nearby vase and places his aqua pearl inside. He then stirs the water and an image of AEZHOS, the god of dreams, appears on the surface.

AEDON

Aezhos? We're in.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

The Raven entered the Dream. Your guy was supposed to prevent that.

AEDON

What do you mean? I thought they were using a dove.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

No, Razhsha himself. He interfered with the resurrection at the shrine. I told you his psychological state resembled a decaying trunk in the Dream. I fear of late he's shut himself up inside of that trunk with a colony of fire ants.

Aedon sits back with a frown as Member 2 hands him a bag of green cotton candy. He signals that he'd like one more.

AEDON

He won't be able to stop us. Anna will still be able to find the mother pearl, right? You're sure it's still in the Dream?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

I'm sure about that, but I'm not sure about this crew of the daughter's. So far they've been conducting this mission like a baboon conducting a nightingale choir.

AEDON

They should be easy enough for you to follow. Victor will use a tracer inside...

AEZHOS (V.O.)

He used the tracer but Anna isn't able to speak with Arek. He's a... blue jay. And honestly, jays are so off-putting. Would you believe a jay that told you the location of the mother pearl?

SISTER FAMINE (V.O.)

Yes.

Aedon again jerks his head around but finds himself alone.

AEDON

I think... yes. The jay knows. You can still trap her in the Dream once she has it?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

They're in open water now and I suspect nowhere near the pearl. But, more immediately, if the Raven has followed them into the Dream...

AEDON

You don't think...?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

Your brother won't be far behind.

The image disappears, leaving Aedon to brood alone.

INT. RIVERBOAT WHEELHOUSE, DREAM REALM -- DAY

Kwazhol sits cross-legged inside the chalk outline of a hawk.

EXT. KELOAS TRIAD MOUNTAIN -- DAY

Kwazhol sees through the eyes of his hawk, Tsili, as she soars through the heavens. The hawk breaks through the bottom of the clouds to investigate a stream pouring from a cavern at the base of the Keloas Triad Mountain.

INT. DREAM POOL CAVERN -- DAY

Flying into the bat-invested cavern, the hawk finds a deep subterranean pool. A spot of land in the center of the pool carries a small black shrine surrounded by red-berried shrubs.

The hawk circles the pool, and with its keen eyes pierces the surface to locate four sleeping bodies near a wicked black chasm at the bottom. The hawk's screech scatters a few of the bats, but Kwazhol intervenes.

KWAZHOL (V.O.)

No, Tsili. The berries.

The hawk then lands near one of the shrubs, plucking off a branch laden with berries.

KWAZHOL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now, Tsili, fly. Fly to the maidens.

She leaps off with a screech as several of the bats wake and flutter over the pool.

INT. RIVERBOAT WHEELHOUSE, DREAM REALM -- DAY

Kwazhol returns to himself with a deep breath. Arek squawks madly from the front of the wheelhouse, and as Kwazhol checks on him, he finds the reflection of Ammanon's face has replaced the sporting dolphins in the river.

With a start, he smudges the chalk outline on the floor and the reflection disappears, leaving an empty, quiet river in front of them. He rubs his eyes and turns to Arek, who squawks in disapproval.

KWAZHOL

Tsili is outside the Dream. He cannot track us with Tsili.

EXT. RIVERBOAT DECK, DREAM REALM -- DAY

Victor's whale lure hums in the water, leaving a little trail of purple behind it. The pole sits unmanned at the rail, and as the line snaps tight to Victor's surprise, he leaps up to grab it.

VICTOR

Oh!

The pole goes over the railing and splashes down near a large black shark that glides menacingly in their wake. Victor scratches his head uncertainly.

INT. CAPTAIN'S CLOSET, DREAM REALM -- DAY

Arthur tucks a black shirt into a pair of jeans and checks the closet mirror.

ARTHUR

So Kwazhol doesn't trust her?

ANNA (O.S.)

When he made an offering at Thessa's shrine during his wife's pregnancy, he received a vision of himself on a moose hunt with his unborn son. He was so excited, but then both his wife and son died from Titus basilisk poisoning before the child could even walk.

ARTHUR

Oh, wow. And what did you think?

ANNA (O.S.)

I think Thessa can't lie, which makes a vision like that very hard to understand.

He decides he looks just fine, but as he turns towards Anna, the pants flare out wildly like a pair of disco pants.

ARTHUR

Well, happy? A little bit, maybe?

Anna slides off the captain's bed and enters the closet.

ANNA

Ok, so... wow. How do I explain this? From the front, from your point of view, you appear normal. But from the side, from another point of view, well... let's see what we can do.

She grabs his pants by the waist and his breath catches.

ANNA (CONT'D)

These pants are hopeless.

ARTHUR

Um... well, there's just very little help going on in the closet today. I don't see...

She rotates the pants and they flare out wildly in the mirror.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Ah.

Arthur steps further into the closet but when he moves a rack of clothes, a doberman-sized spider appears within his shadow and coils with a hiss.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Son of a... get back. Anna, get out of here.

Anna calmly nears as Arthur quickly empties a nearby drawer. He bashes the horrid thing with it a couple of times, but it just lunges with Arthur, mimicking him until the drawer breaks.

ANNA

It's mimicking you.

ARTHUR

Get out of here. I can handle this.

As Anna exits the closet, Arthur removes the rod from a rack of clothes, but each strike with it just sends sparks flying off the spider's seemingly impenetrable exterior.

INT. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS, DREAM REALM -- DAY

Anna retrieves a lantern from the captain's footlocker as Arthur's valiant yells continue to spill from the closet.

INT. CAPTAIN'S CLOSET, DREAM REALM -- DAY

Arthur retreats a step as the spider moves deeper into the shadows of the closet with a hiss.

ARTHUR

It wearies. If it kills me now I think it's going to be tired. Use my dead body...

Just as the spider crouches for a pounce, Anna returns with the lantern and thrusts it into its face. The spider shrinks with a hiss, lurching this way and that, seeking a shadow in which to hide but pinned in at every side by Anna. Soon, it's just a spider hiding in the corner of the closet.



ANNA

You have to do it.

He looks at her doubtfully, but then squishes the little creature with the pole. It hisses as if suddenly filling up with air, but then pops like an overblown balloon, melting into a shadow and vanishing.

ARTHUR

How did you do that?

ANNA

The problems you find in the Dream are usually the solutions in hieroglyph.

ARTHUR

Huh. So, I'm okay now?

ANNA

I doubt it. Not from that, no. A spider of that size usually represents a pretty serious issue.

ARTHUR

What issue then? What's wrong with me?

Anna sighs as she rifles through a rack of clothes, which is now a rack of costumes in the surreal way of dreams.

ANNA

I don't know. The symbols aren't necessarily static, where you can say this always represents that and that this, but just taking a look here it's probably an identity thing. You don't know who you are.

As Arthur looks deeper into the closet, Anna removes a clown costume and holds it up to see if it would fit him.

ANNA (CONT'D)

But then lots of people go through that without ever generating a spider of that size. There must be something else going on as well.

Deeper in the closet Arthur finds a flower dress with a dark man's suit hanging right next to it.

ARTHUR

This was my mother's.

ANNA

Was? What happened?

ARTHUR

She died.

Anna holds the dress fabric up to the light, revealing the real and living flowers.

ANNA

These flowers are alive. How did she die?

ARTHUR

I was told she committed suicide after my father...

Anna releases the dress and feels the man's suit.

ANNA

I know about your father.

ARTHUR

I was very young. The deaths happened within a couple of days of each other.

ANNA

What did they tell you about your father?

Arthur turns his attention to the suit.

ARTHUR

That he drowned in a diving accident. He was diving for clams off the coast when some kind of freak rock slide pinned him in a little crevice. They told me that by the time his body was recovered it wasn't in a condition that I, as a child, would be allowed to see. But that's not what happened to him, is it?

ANNA

No, it isn't.

ARTHUR

What happened?

ANNA

The truth isn't any prettier. You can probably guess.

ARTHUR

He was killed?

Anna just nods.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

By one of these dark gods?

ANNA

The sisters aren't gods but they work out of the dark powers of the Earth, to be sure. What did they tell you of your mother?

ARTHUR

They said out of grief and despair she committed suicide at the same spot a couple of days later.

ANNA

I didn't know he was married.

ARTHUR

They wouldn't show me her body for the same reasons, but it felt wrong from the beginning. I asked questions but was just taken to my grandparents. Do you know anything at all?

ANNA

None of us knew about her, but I guess that would be enough to explain the spider.

Anna takes up the dress again.

ANNA (CONT'D)

This is curious here.

ARTHUR

The flowers?

ANNA

I've never seen this. Usually dreams just reveal an internal psychological conflict, but falling into the Dream through the river the way we did brings us close to wachiin.

ARTHUR

Watch what?

ANNA

We're floating on a river that passes through the collective subconscious. Below that is wachiin. It's pure primal consciousness; a bed of energy that permeates and sustains all life.

ARTHUR

Pure energy?

ANNA

Yes, and once in a while some glimpse of what's happening in the depths comes through. Something you know is not just a reflection off the surface.

She curiously fingers the living petals as Arthur's eyes go wide.

ARTHUR

You think maybe she's ...?

ANNA

I don't know, Arthur. It may be that this just reveals she's very much alive in your psyche, which is understandable. Or... we may be deep enough for it to reveal that she's actually, physically...

Arthur snatches the dress and studies it intently.

ARTHUR

My father, that raven.

ANNA

Well, blue jay now.

ARTHUR

Do you think that's really him?

ANNA

Yeah, I do, but I tried. I can't communicate with him. If we could have brought him back as a dove...

Anna exits the closet with a sigh as Arthur at last finds a warden's outfit and removes it from the rack.

INT. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS, DREAM REALM -- DAY

ANNA

My mother died before she could teach me the dark languages, and the maidens and wardens don't have that gift.

ARTHUR (O.S.)

They're not in a book?

ANNA

Nature is the binding on the one living, breathing record, and anything written on a page proves inferior. I've been able to learn some on my own, but ravens and jays... are just garbled.

ARTHUR (O.S.)

And this Thessa can help?

Arthur steps out of the closet in a warden's outfit. The clothes fit him now but the back of the shirt is untucked and the collar folds awkwardly against his neck. She finally sees him as a man.

ANNA

If we can find her. Kwaz is excellent at navigating the Dream, but it does come with some spatial complexities.

She steps to him and gently fixes the wayward collar. As she checks the fit of the rest of his outfit his breath catches again.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You did ok. There's a very slight possibility this will do.

Arthur flexes his muscles a little bit as she tucks in the back of his shirt.

ARTHUR

Thanks for the help. You know I think... this dream body doesn't really quite reflect... I mean if you could feel my real body I think it would be a little more... you know, maybe... we should set aside a time for you to do that.

She smiles and checks the way he's looking at her, then gives him a playful shove back.

ANNA

Dreams don't count, silly. Don't get ideas.

ARTHUR

Well, if they don't count it seems like an invitation to countless ideas. I mean, I only have about seven right now but even... oh, eleven.

ANNA

I don't like you, and it wouldn't mean anything. It's a dream.

He takes her by the hand and as he reaches for the other, she holds it up freely and then clenches it as if to strike. He doesn't flinch and just looks at her. She softens considerably and finally steps into him, grabbing him and kissing him hard.

ANNA (CONT'D)

See? Nothing. Let's go.

It takes him a moment to come to his wits.

ARTHUR

So, that was actually one of my ideas  
but if it was nothing, then I still  
have my original eleven... oh,  
thirteen...

He reaches for her and as she lets him catch her, the boat  
lurches to a stop. They sober up as a shadow falls outside  
the window.

ANNA

Oh.

ARTHUR

What was that?

KWAZHOL (O.S.)

Anna!

ANNA

Come on.

EXT. RIVERBOAT DECK, DREAM REALM -- DAY

The pair burst from below deck to find Victor peering over  
the railing at the stern.

ANNA

What is it?

They approach him and he just points at the numerous sharks  
now prowling in their wake.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Oh, no.

ARTHUR

Is that bad?

ANNA

Ammanon's dream avatar is a shark,  
and sharks forerun his appearance in  
the Dream like tremors before an  
eruption.

Anna rushes around to the wheelhouse, where she finds Kwazhol  
near the bow. Finally looking up, she sees Thessa's golden-  
domed temple perched majestically on a cliff in the distance,  
but a pair of colossal raven statues guard either side of  
the river.

KWAZHOL

It's Rahzsha.

ANNA

We have no choice, Kwaz.

KWAZHOL

Anna, that is not where we want to be.

ANNA

Did you see behind us? Ammanon is coming.

KWAZHOL

Ammanon? You're sure?

ANNA

We need to go.

Kwazhol reenters the wheelhouse and the boat lurches forward again. But as they pass between the statues, a murder of crows begin pecking at the three golden domes covering the temple.

Arthur joins Anna near the bow, and they notice the crows tearing golden threads from the domes and dropping them down the side of the cliff.

ARTHUR

What is that?

ANNA

He's changing the dream. Rahzsha!

Striding forward out of the cacophony to stand at the temple doors, RAHZSHA, the raven demigod, beckons to them with a pair of spindly arms just beneath his long black wings. A white, egg-shaped crystal hangs from his feathered neck.

KWAZHOL (O.S.)

We're in trouble.

VICTOR

You guys!

Victor points to a colossal shadow growing deep in the river behind them. The sharks snap with excitement as they leap near the railing.

ANNA

We've got to get inside the temple before he changes it.

VICTOR

Guys! Go! Go!

Anna grits her teeth as a colossal ram-horned shark surfaces in the shallowing river and steams towards them like a missile. She whistles with all her might. The mystic whistle causes the dream to shiver, and three snow-white eagles leap from the temple domes like chicks hatched from golden eggs.

The crows attack the eagles but are easily shrugged off as they swoop towards the little boat.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Here he comes!

ANNA

Mount up! Go!

The three eagles land on the deck. Arthur takes hold of the first and holds his hand out to Anna, but Victor hops on and flies away. As Arthur reaches for the second, Kwazhol scoops up Arek and leaps onto it. Anna halts her eagle.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You can stay if you...

He leaps on and she places his arms around her.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Ok.

They lift off just as Ammanon splinters the boat like a ram smashing into a rickety barrel.

EXT. THESSA'S TEMPLE, DREAM REALM -- DAY

The eagles race through the swarm of crows, flying over the stone path leading up the mountain and finally landing at the temple grounds.

The eagle shrieks manage to part the crows, but as the black curtain is withdrawn, a squadron of BRUTE RAVENS guarding the temple doors turns on them. Overwhelmingly outnumbered, Anna leads the heroes off of their mounts to boldly stare down the guards.

ANNA

Rahzsha! Let us pass!

The demigod steps through his little army to confront the pinned crew.

RAHZSHA

Little Anna, not so little anymore.

ANNA

Open the doors.



RAHZSHA

Oh, we were ready for that. We had an answer for her, didn't we?

One of Rahzsha's guards nods "yes" assuredly.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

Yes we did: No.

ANNA

We're on an errand from the gods to retrieve the mother pearl.

RAHZSHA

Well, lovely. And what says the Mother these days, eh? I know! Nothing.

ANNA

I speak for her now. I'm her daughter, her only daughter.

RAHZSHA

You don't! And why? Hmm? Why? You are not a god! She's not a god?

Rahzsha's guards nod "no" assuredly.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

You never performed the ritual and you don't have the pearl. But what? What do you have, eh? There's a bit of a reward for that guy there. And by bit I mean I'm willing to kill you all for it.

Kwazhol cradles the bird protectively as the brute squadron surrounds the little crew.

ANNA

He's essential to our errand.

Ammanon roars in the distance and a colossal wave rolls up the path towards the temple.

RAHZSHA

Well, listen to that. The great god calls. He calls for you?

ANNA

Open the doors.

RAHZSHA

You know what this is. For the bird. Your lives for the bird.

KWAZHOL

No, Anna. We'll fight.

The raven brutes respond instantly to Kwazhol, drawing bone weapons in an overwhelming show of force. Rahzsha stays them with a gesture and then studies Anna and the jay with a knowing grin.

RAHZSHA

You... you can't speak with him, can you? I know it.

ANNA

I can well enough. He says your words are carrion worms.

RAHZSHA

Naturally.

ANNA

Any utterance squirming out of that throat would only creep into a rotten bargain and devour it from the inside-out. We know your tricks, Rahzsha, and we'll bandy no words.

RAHZSHA

No words are necessary.

With a wicked licking of his fingers, he shakes the dream with a shrill whistle. The others shrink in pain but Arek flies into a rage. He squirms and flaps and finally slips away from Kwazhol's grasp, landing on Rahzsha's shoulder.

ANNA

No!

KWAZHOL

Rahzsha!

RAHZSHA

You should have bargained while you had the chance. Adieu.

ARTHUR

Open the doors!

RAHZSHA

No.

Rahzsha gathers his company to leave, but Anna angrily licks her own fingers and then pierces the Dream with her own mystic whistle. Rahzsha stops dead in his tracks as a moment of absolute calm envelops the temple.

The dream quivers and the crystal egg hanging from Rahzsha's neck cracks.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

What?

Our lovely dove flies out of the crystal, shattering it and leaving Rahzsha in a stunned stupor.

KWAZHOL

Is that the one...?

The angelic dove majestically lands on Anna's shoulder and now the daughter of mother nature and the trickster demigod face each other, each with a bird on their respective shoulders.

ANNA

Yes, that's her. Rahzsha, that was you! You interfered at the shrine.

RAHZSHA

How? Lenore?

ANNA

Lenore?

RAHZSHA

My lady, Lenore. A new bargain, a new bargain.

VICTOR

You guys! He's still coming.

As Ammanon's wave collapses into foam, an army of those mythic variety of sharks known to hunt across land on dinosaur-like legs storm up the path towards the temple.

RAHZSHA

Your whistle. I'll make you a deal.

ANNA

There's no deal you can offer.

Rahzsha approaches Anna now in deep humility, speaking to her heart to heart.

RAHZSHA

Grant me that whistle and I'll give your blue jay a voice. It's a fair trade, right?

He looks to his guards for reassurance, but they fidget and gesture with "noes". He continues anyway as the shark squadron nears.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

And I promise you, no tricks.

KWAZHOL

Anna...

RAHZSHA

My mausoleum is a sanctuary from the Dream. We can complete the bargain inside.

Anna studies him. The sincerity seems genuine.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

Do we have a deal?

The shark squadron leaps onto the temple grounds.

ANNA

It's a deal!

Rahzsha signals to the brute ravens who unscrew a moon seal on the temple doors, allowing moonlight to pour through like a wave and wash them away. They spin as if thrown into a washing machine, feathers flying everywhere.

They vanish, and the sharks stamp at the empty stone ground now dripping with wet moonlight.

INT. UNIVERSITY FOYER -- EVENING

Aedon and Member 1 struggle to complete the setup of their gear, which forms a circle around the control hub. Connecting the last of several monitors around the circle, the member smiles with satisfaction and hits the switch below it. A monitor behind him switches on and Aedon shakes his head with a sigh.

MEMBER 1

Um...

Aedon activates the COM on the control hub.

AEDON

Did you find the professor?

MEMBER 1

It's like trying to mate a pigeon with a magpie.

MEMBER 2 (V.O.)

He won't come down.

AEDON

Did you give him the wall painting?

MEMBER 2 (V.O.)

Yes, and he hated it.

Member 1 mumbles to himself as he works on rewiring the equipment.

MEMBER 1

Maybe my painting hates his wall.  
Maybe it hates all of these walls,  
and maybe it hates him too.

Aedon flips off the COM angrily and activates the controls in the center of the hub.

AEDON

The wireless VR module will at least activate, right?

MEMBER 1

We can use it locally, but if you want to use the city's webcam network for emission, we'll need to go through their system.

AEDON

We need to test the hippocampus plugins before the rollout anyway, so...

MEMBER 1

You don't mean the professor?

AEDON

Can you isolate him?

The member enters the commands and Professor Lector appears on a monitor, arguing with Member 2 near a wall painting of Sir Isaac Newton.

MEMBER 1

If it completely wipes his memory there won't be anyone else who can help us.

Lector finally rips the painting down.

MEMBER 1 (CONT'D)

Son of a...

AEDON

We're running out of time. Go.

The member angrily enters the commands.

MEMBER 1

On the canvas of your memory, mister, we'll paint a whole new kind of hall.

The purple pearl, now resting in the center of a large, egg-shaped aquarium with numerous cables connected to its base, flashes once.

Member 1 studies the monitor apprehensively as a purple pulse of light hits Lector, causing him to stop suddenly and drop the painting. Member 2 then ushers him down the hallway, much to the relief of Member 1.

AEDON

Recruit number one. And so it begins.

MEMBER 1

Excuse me.

Member 1 pulls out a heavy black stapler and exits. Aedon notices the purple pearl continues to flicker anxiously.

AEDON

Oh.

He returns to the stone birdbath-like shrine and, with a stir, the image of Aezhos again appears on the surface of the water.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

Why have you been out of communication so long?

AEDON

The equipment here...

AEZHOS (V.O.)

The god of the underworld is wreaking havoc in the Dream, attempting to obtain the mother pearl for himself.

AEDON

Did Anna locate it?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

No, but now she's allied with Rahzsha. He's promised to give that jay a voice in an exchange.

AEDON

An exchange? So we caught a lucky break.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

No, we didn't. The once remarkable beehive of Rahzsha's imagination was overrun with wasps long ago, and I don't think she has any idea what he's capable of or what she's getting into.

AEDON

But if Ammanon is in the Dream, he could at least hide them from him.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

Which brings us to problem number two. Your man inside left my tracer behind in the river.

AEDON

What?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

Your brother has it now and was able to read those tracings like a manuscript. If he actually finds and kills Anna we could lose everything.

AEDON

Where are their bodies?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

The pool below the Triad Temple.

AEDON

The sisters are retrieving the mother shrine as we speak. I'll send them to get the bodies as well. You just keep Anna trapped in the Dream.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

I have a whale prepared for her, but...

A shark shadow flickers behind Aezhos.

AEZHOS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I need to go. If this unravels I'm going to need you.

AEDON

I'll be here.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

No, the other you.

As the image of Aezhos dissolves, Aedon pulls out his trident. His reflection appears over the kraken engraved beneath the spears, and a wink of light chances off one of its eyes.

AEDON

You? You would leap out of the deep into this conscious air like a salmon? The streams above are poisoned, you know.

As Aedon stews, a brainwashed Professor Lector enters and is instantly drawn to the whirring cotton candy machine against the wall. As he helps himself, Aedon spots the candy thief and predatorily leaps towards him.

## AEDON (CONT'D)

No!

EXT. RAHZSHA'S MAUSOLEUM -- DAY

In a mausoleum courtyard filled with ravens, a white moon illuminates rippling clouds that roll by like a river overhead. Spiderwebs serve as holiday streamers to decorate the shrubs and tombstones adjacent to the stone building.

Mist generated by a Dream waterfall, similar to the river they fell into, hems in the scene with an eerie shroud.

KWAZHOL

He built his mausoleum right on the  
Dream river? We're still not safe.

Arthur tentatively stumbles around, and notices the egg sacs in the nearby spiderwebs flash with dream colors.

ARTHUR

Are we out of the Dream?

Rahzsha appears out of the mist.

RAHZSHA

This is a sanctuary within the Dream.  
It's camouflaged very well, isn't  
it?

Rahzsha raises his hand and checks to see if there are any other votes in favor of its camouflage. Arthur pokes an egg sac and it responds with a flash of color and a twitch. Rahzsha leaps to the sac, pushing Arthur away.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

Don't touch it! Nightmares are an  
art form and you... are not an artist.  
You haven't dreamt them! You haven't  
suffered!

VICTOR

They're dreams?

ANNA

Rahzsha, let's do this.

Victor, taking an interest, pokes one as well. A disembodied scream floats overhead as the sac unravels, spilling the colors inside. Rahzsha responds in a rage.

RAHZSHA

No, don't touch them! It's gone!  
You! They're not dreams exactly, or  
at least they're a special variety  
of dream.



KWAZHOL  
Captive nightmares.

Rahzsha raises a reprimanding finger at Kwazhol.

RAHZSHA  
They are exquisite. And you're not  
to touch them.

ANNA  
Rahzsha!

Arthur pokes another, with the effect duplicating Victor's.

RAHZSHA  
Argh! Ok, everyone, here are all of  
the rules: No touching anything!  
Ok? Maybe we only have one rule,  
but that will make it very easy to  
understand what happened when you  
wake to find your outsides stitched  
to your insides, and agony, like a  
harpist, plucking your protruding  
bones. Got it? Now, to our bargain.

Rahzsha leaps to a little bower in the center of the mausoleum  
courtyard where Anna waits near a dull, black shrine. He  
pulls out a feathered bone whistle, but then stops to fiercely  
look over his shoulder at Arthur. Arthur just throws his  
hands up innocently in response.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)  
Last warning. I tell you, you have  
no idea just how nightmarish a  
nightmare can be.

ANNA  
Rahzsha!

He distractedly hands her the whistle, his head swiveling  
between her and Arthur. Anna clumsily attempts to blow into  
the odd little whistle but can't get it to work.

ANNA (CONT'D)  
Huh?

RAHZSHA  
Argh. Mortals! You just... here.

Rahzsha loops a feather around the lip to form a mouth piece  
and agitatedly returns it with a sharp rebuke.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)  
Now, whistle.

Anna blows into it again to no effect. Rahzsha calms down  
and soberly corrects her.

RAHZSHA (CONT'D)

Whistle for her, whistle for the  
dove. The way you do...

She closes her eyes and whistles with conviction. The light around them bends and the webs quiver as a little egg sac grows at the end of the bone whistle. She opens her eyes again and Rahzsha takes back the whistle with a hoot.

Anna blinks and scratches her throat as Rahzsha plucks the gray sac from the whistle and unwraps it like a candy. A shimmering, snow-white pearl is revealed and Rahzsha clutches it to his heart with manic glee.

KWAZHOL

Anna... I don't know about this.

ARTHUR

What kind of a trick?

VICTOR

What happened? Arek hasn't changed.

Arek hops mindlessly over to a web sac and pecks it. Another disembodied scream floats overhead, but Rahzsha gives it no heed this time. Anna tries to speak but chokes and again scratches her throat.

KWAZHOL

Rahzsha, the bargain.

He returns to the bower and Lenore. Then, unclasping the pearl with a tear in his eye, he swallows it whole. He tenderly, lovingly whistles to her and she responds, alighting on his shoulder with a coo. He gasps with joy.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

Rahzsha! A voice for the blue jay.  
You promised!

Rahzsha unfolds his wings and vanishes with Lenore into the mist with a flash of feathers.

ARTHUR

No!

VICTOR

Happy honeymoon. Sheesh.

KWAZHOL

I knew it.

Anna notices a little gray pearl at the bottom of the shrine basin and picks it up, her voice returning with a rasp.

ANNA

He left it for him.

KWAZHOL  
That wasn't the deal.

ANNA  
Rahzsha ate his. I think Arek just  
needs to eat it.

ARTHUR  
Here.

Arthur catches the bird and with a bit of fumbling...

VICTOR  
You're supposed to have a worm swallow  
it first.

KWAZHOL  
How can a worm swallow it?

ARTHUR  
No, you have something a worm would  
swallow it, like a vegetable.  
Then the worm...

ANNA  
You guys...

They force the pearl down his throat and set him back down.

VICTOR  
Arek? Where is the mother pearl?

ANNA  
Arek?

The bird caws and hops away.

KWAZHOL  
It didn't work.

The bird rears back as if to speak. Everyone hushes. He  
ruffles his feathers with a squawk and then finally vomits  
out a dry spider cricket. The cricket lowly chirps.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)  
That's not... Rahzsha! That's not a  
voice.

ARTHUR  
I had a quiet grandfather on my  
mother's side, but I don't think...

ANNA  
Shhh! What's that? Listen!

They listen closely to another chirp.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Fall... low?

KWAZHOL

That's it. He fell when he stole the pearl, and there's no place lower than the bottom of Ammanon's pool. It's crawling with felmoss salamanders that lay their eggs in the throats of the dead. Is that why you can't talk now, Arek?

Anna just shakes her head at him as the cricket hops away.

ANNA

Come on.

The cricket quickly hops to a nearby crypt covered in webs.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Ugh.

The cricket stops, chirps, and then leaps directly into a web covering the door to the crypt.

VICTOR

Dreams, you guys... they're absurd.

ANNA

Wait...

Anna studies the crypt and finds the word "Pennington" spun into the web by the twitching cricket.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Pennington?

ARTHUR

How? Hey, that's me.

ANNA

What?

ARTHUR

Pennington, that's my family name.

Anna scratches her head as Arthur gapes in awe.

ANNA

A family crypt inside the Dream? That's it. This has to be where he died, or at least the door.

VICTOR

Finally.

ANNA

Arthur, I think you need to take  
Arek inside.

KWAZHOL

Anna, dream crypts are death. Always.  
I sent Tsili to the maidens, we can  
just wait it out.

ANNA

Look, we know he lost the pearl  
somewhere not even the sisters could  
find. There's no place in existence  
more spatially complex than the Dream.  
It must have happened here. If we  
take Arek inside, we may find we  
have access to the place in the Dream  
he lost the pearl.

Arthur hops after the bird.

ARTHUR

Whoa, dad?

ANNA

The pearl is all that matters now.

KWAZHOL

Then let me take him. You have no  
idea how deep or how far that thing  
will go.

ANNA

The clarity of the Dream will be  
completely dependent on the family  
connection inside. Arthur and Arek  
only, and if it is there, I need to  
be the one to claim it.

KWAZHOL

You'll be on your own down there,  
Anna. And Ammanon still hunts us.

ANNA

Arthur! Let's go.

Arthur returns with the bird as Kwazhol acquiesces.

KWAZHOL

Be wary... and hurry. You will find  
death there, always, but we'll keep  
a lookout. The dice willing, it  
won't be you.

Arek squawks in affirmation as the trio disappear into the  
crypt.

VICTOR  
A lookout? What can we do from here?

KWAZHOL  
Come on, we're going to go touch his  
stuff.

EXT. SACRED GARDEN -- EVENING

As the sun sets and a full moon rises, TWO MAIDENS start a little campfire near the mother shrine. A THIRD MAIDEN stables their eagles nearby, and a FOURTH MAIDEN gathers firewood in the surrounding woods.

MAIDEN 1  
That was the third night in a row.

MAIDEN 2  
Three silent nights are an ill omen.

MAIDEN 1  
Hmm, a plague of locusts in the night  
maybe.

Maiden 3 returns and sits with the others.

MAIDEN 3  
What plague?

MAIDEN 2  
The crickets have been silent for  
three straight nights.

MAIDEN 3  
Ah, when the crickets are silent for  
three nights it means we're in for a  
night of very loud dreams.

Maidens 1 and 2 nod to each other in acknowledgment.

MAIDEN 1  
Loud dreams...

Kwazhol's hawk lands near Maiden 2 with the little twig of red berries.

MAIDEN 2  
Tsili?

The hawk screeches and drops the twig.

MAIDEN 1  
Kwazhol? They've been gone a long  
time.

MAIDEN 2  
The mentis berries...

MAIDEN 3

They're from the dream pool. Come on.

They all leap up and dash to their eagles as Maiden 4 returns to the campfire.

MAIDEN 4

Hey!

MAIDEN 3

Guard the shrine! We'll be right back.

Maiden 4 drops her pile of wood with a huff as the others depart. She tosses another log on the fire and circles around the mother shrine.

MAIDEN 4

The silent solitudes of the maiden and the moon. It's just you and me again, goddess.

A long, spindly shadow creeps into the light towards the lone maiden.

INT. DREAM POOL CAVERN -- EVENING

As the maidens land inside the dream pool cavern, uncoiling ropes and preparing to retrieve the bodies, they notice Sisters Famine and Fire undergoing the same preparations on the other side of the pool.

The hustle on both sides turns suddenly into a stunned standoff. Maiden 3 chokes on her startled response.

MAIDEN 3

Um...

INT. DREAM POOL -- EVENING

A small black shark creeps out of the gaping chasm at the bottom of the pool and slowly swims towards the sleeping heroes. A colossal snow-white orca with bloodshot eyes drops into the pool like a goldfish dropped into a bowl.

Above, through the obscuring surface of the pool, flashes of light meet a hail of arrows as eagle, vulture, sister, and maiden wrench the outside world with battle.

EXT. RAHZSHA'S MAUSOLEUM -- EVENING

Victor and Kwazhol stand above the bower shrine, studying the reflection of a shark in the mystic basin water.

KWAZHOL

They're coming already. They must  
have sensed our bodies somehow.  
They couldn't have followed us.

VICTOR

Did it work? Can sharks even see  
nightmares?

Kwazhol prepares to drop another egg sac into the water and  
then pauses with the thought.

KWAZHOL

How should I know?

INT. ANCESTRAL CRYPT, STAIRWAY, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

Anna and Arthur gasp with exhaustion as they hustle down a  
seemingly endless stone stairway.

ARTHUR

This is crazy. It's not ever going  
to end.

Anna fingers the oceanic engravings on the walls.

ANNA

No, this is good.

ARTHUR

What?

ANNA

The engravings were clouds and birds  
at the beginning.

ARTHUR

So?

ANNA

Now they're waves and whales. Look.

As Arthur looks and struggles to catch his breath, Arek flaps  
away to find a spider on a stair. He chokes it down with a  
ruffle of feathers.

ARTHUR

Which means we're very nearly to the  
bottom of our lives?

ANNA

Which means we're making progress.

ARTHUR

So, just a little further and we'll  
finally be completely and victoriously  
in the grave. What is this?



Anna snatches up the bird.

ANNA

It's your family. Come on.

They continue their sprint down the stairs.

EXT. RAHZSHA'S MAUSOLEUM -- NIGHT

Kwazhol, furiously bent over the reflection in the bower shrine, screams at Victor, who's hustling to gather another nightmare sac.

KWAZHOL

It's working! They've stopped.  
There's... wait.

An enormous ram-horned shark slowly squeezes out of the chasm. The reflection in the shrine shivers and warps with the effort. Victor triumphantly leaps back to the basin with an egg sac in hand.

VICTOR

Another... what? Is that...?

KWAZHOL

Ammanon? To go directly to the pool... he had to have already known where we were. How?

Victor studies the prowling god's dream avatar and panics.

VICTOR

No, no, no. I haven't secured a resurrection. I can't die here.

KWAZHOL

There's no time to warn Anna. They were doomed before they started.

Victor pulls out the dream version of the shell he used with Arthur in the sewer and plunges it into the basin water.

VICTOR

Aezhos! Ammanon is here. Get me out!

KWAZHOL

What are you...?

Kwazhol studies the reflection as Aezhos's face appears.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

You? You were in on this?

Victor coldcocks Kwazhol while he's off guard.

VICTOR  
I need to talk to Aedon.

AEZHOS (V.O.)  
The tracer worked. We're closing in  
on the pearl now.

Kwazhol returns and sends Victor flying with a blow. The reflection shifts to show Aedon and the machine inside the University.

AEDON (V.O.)  
No, no. The hippocampus jack will  
come after we ramp up the delta waves.  
Everyone has to be in Deep Stage 3  
before... oh. Hold on.

Kwazhol sees Aezhos's pearl glowing in the aquarium. Professor Lector scrambles over equipment in the background as Aedon turns to the shrine on his end.

AEDON (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I'm heading to the mother shrine  
now. We'll activate your pearl  
immediately after. Wait... who?

KWAZHOL  
You have Aezhos's pearl.

AEDON (V.O.)  
Who are you?

Kwazhol, stunned at the scene has no reply as Aedon cuts the connection. Kwazhol removes the little shell and the basin water returns to a reflection of the dream pool.

INT. DREAM POOL -- EVENING

The ram-horned shark drifts to the heroes, coming to Victor's sleeping body first. A gruesome, teeth-tiered smile crosses the dark god's face.

EXT. RAHZSHA'S MAUSOLEUM -- EVENING

Victor rubs his jaw and struggles to sit up as Kwazhol inspects the shell.

KWAZHOL  
You did this? You had us traced!

VICTOR  
We're trying to save the world.

KWAZHOL  
With Aezhos and Aedon?

VICTOR

It's dying, and once they have the mother pearl...

KWAZHOL

They can't use the mother pearl!

VICTOR

They found a prophecy. A new god of nature will rise on the night of Anna's death. Together they found a way to become that god. There's a ritual for it...

KWAZHOL

No!

Kwazhol moves to kill him in a rage but a tear across Victor's chest stops him, and a moment later Victor's torso is ripped from his body, vanishing in mist. Kwazhol soberly sits down cross-legged beneath the bower and closes his eyes.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

So it is to be now. My beloved Tira, I come at last.

INT. DREAM POOL CAVERN -- EVENING

Maiden 2 swoops by on her eagle, dodging a lance of fire from a sister and returning fire with a volley of arrows. The thrash of the monster shark now in the pool gets her attention.

MAIDEN 2

Look!

MAIDEN 3

I see it! Drive it off! Maidens! He's killing them!

The maidens begin launching arrows into the pool, agitating but not entirely driving off the colossal shadow in the depths. The sisters regroup behind an outcropping.

SISTER FAMINE

Ammanon's here.

SISTER FIRE

We only need the girl.

Sister Famine removes the skull from her bone necklace, spits into some dirt to make a paste, and then rubs it inside the skull with a quick incantation. She holds up the enchanted skull, and like a lantern that casts an illusory light, Sister Fire appears bat-like in the glow.

## SISTER FIRE (CONT'D)

That will do.

Sister Famine whistles and a bat drops to her obediently. She whistles again, more fiercely, and bats begin to drop throughout the cavern.

INT. ANCESTRAL CRYPT, STAIRWAY, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

Arthur and Anna finally splash into water at the bottom of the stairway. As Anna wades into the water with Arek, Arthur sees the bird's human reflection.

ARTHUR

Anna, my father... Look!

The bird seems to notice as well, and flaps madly back to the first dry stair.

ANNA

A warden after all.

Arek again sputters and vomits out another cricket.

ARTHUR

What?

CRICKET

She's alive.

They both step towards the cricket as it completely absorbs their attention.

ARTHUR

Did you hear?

Arthur picks up the cricket as behind them, a shark shadow drifts out of the depths towards Arek.

CRICKET

She's alive.

ANNA

She's alive.

ARTHUR

Who? It has to be, right? My mother.

As they turn back to the blue jay, a pair of horns surface like a dorsal fin, and then the jay vanishes beneath the water in a flurry of feathers.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

No!

Arthur rushes back to the edge of the water but Anna tackles him before he can reach the shark.

ANNA

No! That's him!

INT. DREAM POOL CAVERN -- EVENING

The maidens swarm over the monstrous shark thrashing in the bottom of the pool.

MAIDEN 3

Drive it off!

Arrow after arrow flies into the shark until it finally retreats in a trail of blood.

MAIDEN 3 (CONT'D)

Anna is still there!

Maiden 3 raises her bow in victory, but the swarm of bats grows cacophonous, causing them to turn their entire attention to fighting them off.

MAIDEN 2

What's happening?

INT. ANCESTRAL CRYPT, STAIRWAY, DREAM REALM -- NIGHT

As Anna pushes Arthur back up the stairs, black blood spills into the water and the shark agonizingly vanishes back into the depths.

ARTHUR

My father.

ANNA

I'm so sorry, Arthur. But something is happening outside. That was Ammanon but I think something drove him off.

ARTHUR

What?

Anna steps to the water and stirs the fading blood curiously. It momentarily darkens her fingers, which she then rinses in a clean spot.

ANNA

The maidens? I don't know. Kwazhol said he sent Tsili.

ARTHUR

If it's the maidens, we're saved, right?

As the realization washes over her, she rises in alarm, grabs Arthur and drags him into the water.

ANNA

Come on! If they pull our bodies  
out, we'll wake up and never find  
this dream again.

She pulls Arthur into the water but he sputters clumsily.

ARTHUR

We still have time to drown I'll  
bet.

ANNA

There's no time to teach you nicely.  
Just remember you can breathe  
underwater in a dream.

She grabs him by the shirt.

ARTHUR

Wait!

EXT. DEEP SEA, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

She pulls him underwater and after a little floundering, she  
puts her hand on his chest.

ANNA

Breathe.

He gasps and finally does so as she drags him further down.  
As they descend, the wall engravings transform into a living  
forest of kelp. They soon clear the forest to find the Dream  
opens up to an expanse of blue sea. Shafts of light pierce  
the forest and intertwine with glowing web strands that all  
point towards the monstrous Spider Queen, who basks in the  
pale, silver light emanating from the central circle of her  
web.

ARTHUR

How is this here?

ANNA

We're very deep. Wachiin warms this  
level of the Dream like a smithy's  
furnace. Anything you can imagine  
can be created here.

Arthur looks at the Spider Queen.

ARTHUR

Or destroyed?

ANNA

Let's hope so.

They swim towards the queen until she unfolds with a hiss in  
warning.

Arthur notices bright oysters dotting the bottom of the forest, and in the surreal blend of images, a whale circles above them, just within the reaches of the light. Anna stares down the queen.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You have something that doesn't belong to you.

Arthur spots numerous bright, pearl-shaped objects glowing amidst the oysters and swims towards them. A large, ram-horned shark, leaking black smoke like a coal fire, drifts unseen through the kelp shadows behind him.

ARTHUR

It's here. It must be. Look.

ANNA

It's now or never, Arthur.

ARTHUR

There are lots of them.

The whale slowly descends, its colossal size becoming evident.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Anna!

As Anna drifts towards the queen, the dark-purple whale circles closer and twinkles with multicolored flashes, as if its skin were a lightning-infused prism. The wounded shark moves out of the shadows towards Arthur.

ANNA

Go now, or be destroyed.

The Spider Queen flees from the approaching whale, revealing the abandoned mother pearl at the center of the web. The shark stops and its eyes go wide.

ARTHUR

What?

Arthur, stunned at seeing the pearl there, turns over one of the pearl-like objects at his feet and finds it to be the bright bubble of a diving-bell spider, which hisses furiously. The entire clutter of spiders awaken behind him.

Anna glides to the pearl and plucks it free at last, the glow illuminating her triumphant gasp. The smoking shark jets towards her, widening its jaws until it appears like a red-eyed phalanx of swords charging out of the black billows from a heap of exploding tar barrels. The whale also immediately swerves sharply towards the pearl, gaping hungrily for its prey.

## ARTHUR (CONT'D)

No!

The colossal whale snaps its jaws shut around Anna, severing the smaller shark. The tail of the smoking shark drifts back towards the forest floor, pouring black blood into the water like oil from a punctured drum. As Arthur rushes forward, he finds himself tangled in the webs of the awakened spiders and at last pulled down into a chittering darkness.

INT. DREAM POOL CAVERN -- EVENING

An unusually large bat pulls a ripe red apple out of the dream pool and crawls to the shrine.

SISTER FAMINE

Now.

The shrine erupts in water and the bats shriek wildly.

MAIDEN 1

What? The shrine activated.

The bats scatter and a moment of quiet envelops the scene.

MAIDEN 3

The sisters? Where...?

MAIDEN 1

The shrine?

MAIDEN 2

They used it. The sisters used it.

As the shrine calms and the surface of the pool clears, submerged bodies become visible again.

MAIDEN 3

Get them out!

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

Sister Flood's vulture lands near the whale statue with the broken-off mother shrine basin secured to its back. Aedon, tired and wary of the sisters now, takes a step back as she approaches.

AEDON

They're dead?

SISTER FLOOD

Not all. The others fled to aid the warden.

They take the basin and fit it perfectly into the recess at the bottom of the newly-poured cement pool. Aedon retrieves his trident and places it in the hand of his statue self.



Its aqua-colored pearl glows, bringing the whale to spouting life and awakening the moon engraving at the bottom of the basin.

AEDON

The mains are ready.

SISTER FLOOD

My sisters have not yet returned.

AEDON

We cannot wait. Those iron stalks will shoot the flowering seas this night. Open them all.

Standing in the gushing water, Aedon's shoes disintegrate as his scaly feet burst through the seams. He rotates the trident and the glow from the shrine lights up the kraken engraving.

SISTER FLOOD (O.S.)

He's coming.

Aedon starts and looks to Sister Flood, who glides across the ferris wheel on the other side of the park.

INT. DREAM POOL CAVERN -- EVENING

Arthur gasps and struggles to come around as the maidens remove ropes from around his chest.

MAIDEN 1

He's waking up.

ARTHUR

What was that? Anna?

Arthur feels around questioningly.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Is this...?

MAIDEN 1

You're awake. What happened?

Arthur fully comes to his senses and leaps up, rushing to the pool and searching for Anna.

ARTHUR

We were deep in the Dream. Anna found the pearl.

All three maidens stop what they're doing and focus on Arthur.

MAIDEN 1

She found it? In the Dream?

MAIDEN 2

The mother pearl? You're sure?

ARTHUR

She was sure... but then, there was a whale. It swallowed her.

MAIDEN 1

A whale swallowed her in the Dream?

MAIDEN 3

What did the whale look like?

ARTHUR

It wasn't natural. It seemed infused with lightning like this water here. It took her.

The maidens groan.

MAIDEN 1

Aezhos?

MAIDEN 3

That's him.

ARTHUR

Where's her body? We can wake her up, right?

MAIDEN 2

Not if the god of dreams has her.

MAIDEN 3

And the sisters cast an illusion somehow. We believe they took Anna through the shrine.

ARTHUR

The sisters were here?

MAIDEN 1

They arrived at the same time we did.

Arthur turns from the pool and finally notices Kwazhol's torn body lying nearby. He collapses near his friend and grasps the thin cloth lain neatly over him.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry. This is all my fault.

He accidentally touches Ammanon's claw, which he finds spilling half-way out of a jacket pocket and retrieves it. As he rolls it in his palm, Kwazhol appears in spirit.

KWAZHOL

Yes, that's true.

ARTHUR

Kwazhol?

KWAZHOL

I was to spend this night in the arms of my love. But now... well, I had just barely started to like you. The gods sport with my stars like schoolboys at marbles.

ARTHUR

Kwazhol, he took Anna.

MAIDEN 1

Do you hear? Kwazhol?

MAIDEN 2

The whisper? He's unfinished?

The maidens slowly gather around Kwazhol but do not see him.

KWAZHOL

There was nothing more we could do. Victor betrayed us.

ARTHUR

Victor? No, he saved me from Sister Fire.

KWAZHOL

It was an act to get you to follow him into the Dream. He was sent to help Aedon and Aezhos secure the mother pearl. He believed Aedon could become the next god of nature, but he was a fool.

MAIDEN 3

If the god of dreams has the mother pearl, he could potentially have the power to make those dreams real.

KWAZHOL

Neither one can use the mother pearl. Using pearls from any god requires a physical interaction, and the mother pearl requires a female body. He could never...

ARTHUR

Anna. That's why the sisters came, to get Anna.

Maiden 2's eyes go wide and then she claps Arthur on the back.

MAIDEN 2

The goddess sent aid through this one. Good.

MAIDEN 3

Her sleeping body could still serve as a conduit for the power.

ARTHUR

But if Aezhos traps the mother pearl with Anna inside the Dream, it seems like it could only be used there. The waking world would be unaffected, right?

The maidens look up at that and study the dream pool.

MAIDEN 2

Their plan won't work.

KWAZHOL

They have a machine now. Aedon built a machine with Aezhos's pearl capable of inducing the Dream. I believe his plan is to bridge the waking world with the Dream and then combine the power of all three pearls to create a new reality. One he can control.

MAIDEN 1

Oh, yeah, yeah. That would work then, with three pearls. So what do we do?

Arthur ponders as they huddle around Kwazhol.

ARTHUR

I travel back to the city and destroy the machine.

MAIDEN 1

You can't travel back, not physically, anyway. We don't have a catalyst.

MAIDEN 2

And using the shrines to travel bodily through the Dream is extremely dangerous. It sounds now like that's how the mother pearl was lost in the first place.

ARTHUR

Then how do the shrines work exactly?  
Victor brought me through with some  
kind of shell.

MAIDEN 3

Any object imbued with divine power  
could potentially activate a shrine,  
but these days they're almost as  
hard to find as the gods themselves.

Arthur ponders a moment and then rolls the claw in his palm.

ARTHUR

Ammanon is a god, right?

MAIDEN 3

Of the underworld.

Maiden 2 pushes Arthur where she had just clapped him.

MAIDEN 2

Why does the goddess send us the  
worst? This one is punishment.

MAIDEN 1

Forget the nightmares that would  
come from using that thing, however  
you got it. If they use the pearls  
to sink everyone into the Dream,  
you'd be just as hypnotized as the  
rest of them.

ARTHUR

It's for Anna. Kwazhol?

He looks to his friend for support.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

For Anna? Help me do this.

Kwazhol finally sighs.

KWAZHOL

We can use the berries.

ARTHUR

The berries?

He studies the red-berried shrubs surrounding the shrine as  
Maiden 3 finally nods in agreement.

MAIDEN 3

The crickets were silent for three  
straight nights.

MAIDEN 1

Don't you start. You're going to get him killed over crickets?

MAIDEN 2

I will ornament his funeral pyre with three bugling crickets, so they will recognize him as their champion in the afterworld.

The other maidens look at her.

MAIDEN 2 (CONT'D)

I mean... while we're making a plan.

MAIDEN 3

Tonight's the night. We have to try tonight. For Anna.

Maiden 3 retrieves her eagle and wings Arthur to the shrine. Kwazhol glides easily across the water to join them.

KWAZHOL

These berries, Arthur, they'll keep you lucid. Take as many as you can.

Maiden 3 helps him pick the berries from the bushes along the banks of the dream pool, stuffing a good portion into a rugged pack. An occasional bat still harasses them.

ARTHUR

So get in, destroy this machine, and we'll free Anna, right?

The reluctant maidens catch up near the shrine to offer what help they can. Maiden 2 checks the runes and carefully lights nearby candles, making sure everything is aligned properly.

KWAZHOL

Aezhos's pearl is connected to the machine but it, too, is the power of a god. Like a celestial body disappearing below the horizon, removing it will create a sort of lingering twilight. The shadows in that spell may grow very strong.

ARTHUR

So, shut down the machine and run away?

KWAZHOL

I'll meet you there.

Kwazhol shakes his head with a sigh and vanishes.

ARTHUR

Okay, okay. Like this?

Arthur takes a drink of water from the basin but doesn't glow.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

How come I don't get to glow?

MAIDEN 3

It's going to get very loud in there, Arthur. Stay focused. We're counting on you.

A few bats continue to flutter around the cavern, and as Arthur plunges the claw into the shrine, they shriek loudly.

EXT. CITY STREET -- EVENING

The full moon reflects in the flooding city streets as Aedon, grown another couple of feet as he wades in the rising tide, meets Sister Flood near a gushing fire hydrant. Members 1 and 2 slip and splash in the rushing waters as they struggle to catch up.

SISTER FLOOD

Every pipe in the city is open. The sea pours in.

Aedon clicks his COM.

AEDON

Is it ready?

PROFESSOR LECTOR (V.O.)

We have the whole city.

AEDON

Start it up.

INT. UNIVERSITY FOYER -- EVENING

Professor Lector ramps up the dials. Aezhos's pearl, still in the aquarium but now beneath a thick glass dome protecting the control hub, fills the foyer with purple light. He briefly checks a network of cables connected to the hub as the monitors switch over to the city's webcam network.

He takes a deep breath as all goes quiet (except for the low hum of the cotton candy machine nearby) and then hits the big purple button.

EXT. CITY STREET -- EVENING

Webcams positioned to cover the entire city flicker with purple light. A ripple of lightning rolls over the water, and Aedon inhales it as if it were a drug.

Citizens begin pouring from the buildings. Some wade right into the twinkling water while others take up tubes, tubs, inflatables, and anything that floats. Dolphins now splash through the streets as they toss little bubbles between them that burst into rainbow rings around the delighted citizens. Mermaids slip out of the water to spout butterflies from luminous conch shells and whisper into the ears of gleeful bystanders.

A nice start... but as he stares deep into the reflected moon, it wavers and warps as black bubbles begin to leak from it as if from a punctured tube. Squirrels sporting in the still-dead trees take notice and retreat back to their nests.

AEDON

What?

INT. SEWER -- EVENING

Arthur pushes on the manhole cover from the inside but pauses as he hears a whisper.

KWAZHOL (V.O.)

Arthur!

He pulls the claw out and clasps it earnestly in his hand. Kwazhol's spirit appears again to reprimand him.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

The berries, Arthur. You must take the berries to remain lucid. You must remember.

ARTHUR

I'm remembering... now. I remember how the maidens reminded me nicely.

He opens the little pack and bats fly out. Panic sets in, but he's able to fish two small berries from the bottom of the pack.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

What? No, no, no.

KWAZHOL

The sisters are taking Anna to Aedon now.

ARTHUR

There's only two left?

Kwazhol shakes his head in disappointment.

KWAZHOL

Well, I guess you'd better hurry then.



Arthur downs one of the berries, grits his teeth and storms through the manhole cover.

INT. BELLY OF THE WHALE, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

Anna surfaces, wheezing air back into her lungs as she splashes towards a floating carcass drifting nearby. A thick black film covers the surface of the water, making the swim difficult, but she at last grasps a dorsal fin with a gasp of relief.

After taking a moment to catch her breath, she attempts to heave herself onto the corpse but it rolls over, revealing rows of shark teeth and causing Anna to lose her grip and slip beneath the water once more. She resurfaces, coated with a fresh layer of the black film and coughs sickly. She then grits her teeth and leaps onto the back of the shark.

She unclasps her hand, revealing the mother pearl is likewise covered in the sludge and tries to clean it on her dirty clothes to no avail. The insides of the whale begin to turn a sickly green as dark patches, unsightly slicks, and even little black clouds begin to appear. Anna then realizes her little raft is drifting on moving water towards a roar in the distance.

She furiously paddles with her arms towards the side. As the head of her shark raft nears the edge of the waterfall, she leaps from its back to the whale's rib cage and clings to it for dear life.

As she looks around desperately, she sees a sparkle of pumpkin-sized fireflies hovering above an eddy just out of reach. She whistles for them with all her might, but finds she's still mute. One last hoarse attempt causes the flies to glow with activity. She gasps with joy, but then the fireflies rise and fly upwards out of sight just as she loses her grip and tumbles over the edge of the waterfall.

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

Alarmed by the reflection of the green and sickly moon now leaking poisons into the dream water, Aedon rushes back to the moon shrine in the park. Aezhos's pallid whale head appears in the reflection, black bubbles leaking from his spout like they did from the moon.

AEDON

What is happening?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

Ammanon's touch has poisoned Anna.

AEDON

What? How?

AEZHOS (V.O.)

Before I could take her. His hand  
was in her dream.

AEDON

Take the pearl from her. Kill her  
yourself.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

It's too late. That would destroy  
everything.

AEDON

That poison is seeping through  
already. It's becoming a nightmare.

AEZHOS (V.O.)

We must sacrifice Anna and absorb  
her connection to the pearl. But a  
woman will have to perform the ritual.

Hisses and screams behind Aedon interrupt him and he turns to see a naga chase down a panicked citizen trying to swim through the streets. Senator 1, enamored with the sporting dolphins, follows a dorsal fin on a little custom raft but screeches in terror when a hideous shark's head leaps out of the water and drags him under.

Screams rise throughout the darkening city as Aedon notices the sickly moonlight emanating from the dream water has caused tentacles to sprout from his submerged feet. When a mischief of rats scramble across the tree where the squirrels were, he finally turns back to Aezhos.

AEDON

Okay.

Sister Fire shows up carrying Anna's sleeping body. Sister Flood falls in behind her, and Members 1 and 2 fall in well behind her, struggling to catch up once more.

SISTER FLOOD

The daughter has fallen and the  
prophecy is fulfilled. Through this  
seed a new god will rise tonight.

AEDON

She must be sacrificed.

SISTER FIRE

I'll do it.

INT. UNIVERSITY FOYER -- EVENING

Arthur rushes through the University doors. A brainwashed Professor Lector operates the VR machine as he would the University programs.

The open cotton candy machine roars nearby, sending green threads swirling about the foyer as Arthur comes to a halt.

ARTHUR

Professor?

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Welcome to the show. Do you have a ticket, sir?

Aezhos's dream pearl in the center of the hub spins and pulses as it fills the interior of the foyer with light.

ARTHUR

What are you...? Yes, of course, or... well, I'm meeting someone who has them.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Ah-ha, wonderful. And who is that?

Arthur tests him searchingly.

ARTHUR

Professor... Lector.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Hmm, well, keep a sharp eye then, eh? No shows without a ticket. Security is in force and her hounds will knock you off your ride.

Arthur peruses the controls around the hub and the few scattered textbooks laying beside the monitors. He stops at the central hub and inspects the thick glass dome protecting the pearl.

ARTHUR

Quite a production here, professor.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Operator! I'm the operator and keep the ride going round. Ticket?

ARTHUR

Operator, of course. And how exactly does this ride operate? I mean, say, how would one start it up, and then, you know, shut it down?

The professor flies into a rage.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Shut it down? Not possible! We just activated the mnemonic surge.

(MORE)

PROFESSOR LECTOR (CONT'D)

Stopping it now would result in catastrophic memory loss: amnesia for humanity, essentially.

ARTHUR

Amnesia?

PROFESSOR LECTOR

And where would we be? Back where we began... seven million years ago. And why? Operator error? It's not possible, the show must go on. Remember that, young man.

KWAZHOL (V.O.)

Arthur!

ARTHUR

Kwazhol, it will erase their memories. We have to reverse the program somehow.

Arthur frantically searches the menus on the central computer.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Reverse the...? It cannot be reversed. It cannot be stopped. Young man, you do not have a ticket. I must call security.

ARTHUR

Professor Lector, please. I need your help.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Security! Security!

Professor Lector sounds the same alarm he had sounded during Arthur's failed VR professorship test. Arthur reacts by knocking his old professor out with a massive textbook, causing his dream eyes to go rolling under the machine.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry. Wait, was this the one?

He inspects the bat picture on the cover and reads "Seeing with Sound: Keloas Auguries and Echolocation".

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

A book that can open your eyes? Well, with the right swing, anyway.

He uses the book to smash the alarm and then returns to the console.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Now, to just tip over the elephant.

As he furiously searches the computer again, cotton candy threads stick to his fingers and thicken along the console.

KWAZHOL (V.O.)

Hurry, the machine has you!

He turns around to retrieve his pack, but finds Sister Famine curiously rifling through it. She at last extracts the lone remaining berry.

ARTHUR

What? Who?

SISTER FAMINE

Security.

The dark-purple pearl pulsates madly beneath its dome. The interior of the University warps into nightmare as shadows twist into knots and cotton candy threads thicken into spider webs. Sister Famine lets slip her beetle hounds and Arthur turns and bolts up a nearby spiral staircase.

INT. BELLY OF THE WHALE, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

Anna tumbles down the waterfall until she at last splashes into a dark-blue sea. She slowly sinks into a massive coral reef, passing through branching coral tentacles the size of redwoods like a fluttering leaf. As she falls, she finds multi-colored sparks and colorful balls of smoke drifting upwards and hears hammering coming from somewhere below.

She breaks through the lowest tentacles to find colossal shrimp feeding at volcanic vents among the coral, and spinning the cloudy vapors into fiery orbs they then roll away into the shadows beneath their plated shelters.

A brightly-colored anemone waves in the current like a copse of beech trees shaking in the wind. A monstrous seahorse with webbed legs surprises her from behind, coils her up in a leviathan's tail, but then vanishes into a coral island as a squadron of giant manta rays wing overhead like passing jets. Anna tumbles in their wake, passes through a set of feathery tentacles, and at last lands on a coral outcropping, sending a few of the bioluminescent pea crabs laboring there skittering away.

She hears a blacksmith at work and turns to find what seems the forge of creation fashioned out of the coral bed. A hovel of green coral, decorated with mosses and glowing brightly from within, sits warmly behind AEGROL, a barefoot, white-bearded sea giant. Sparks spew from purple asphalt as the giant hammers it near his black forge. A deep-blue coral shrine sits beneath a canopy of coral tentacles, which is then ringed by a waving forest of green anemones.

As she rises in astonishment and attempts to give her sooty clothes a cleaning, a fiery cannonball of volcanic rock crashes down into a nearby patch of blue coral, turning it to ash. Aegrol ceases his hammering and ponderously turns to the disruption as all goes quiet.

INT. UNIVERSITY FOYER, TOP FLOOR -- EVENING

Arthur flees up the seven-story staircase as he slips further into the Dream. Spiders again return, and as he reaches the top floor, he finds the Spider Queen has made her nest here. As he turns to run from her, Sister Famine's beetle hounds clear the last steps of the staircase.

He grabs the edge of the rails and considers the seven-story drop, but Kwazhol whispers to him again.

KWAZHOL (V.O.)

No, Arthur. The statue.

He spins around to see Isaac Newton buried in webs, but as he dashes towards it the webs slow him down, allowing the beetle hounds to catch up and seize him.

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

Back at the central fountain, Aedon positions a park bench over the moon engraving in the cement shrine. Sister Fire places Anna's body on the bench and begins her sacrificial ritual. A mystic moonbeam shoots through her blazing body, and she raises her fiery dagger for the fatal stroke once the ritual is complete.

Aedon looms over the ritual as he impatiently awaits. His arms have now turned into tentacles and his head has taken on a kraken-like appearance. He notices a surviving mermaid being chased by a little fire spout and rushes to her, cupping the water in his tentacle hands to douse the flame. The resultant splash turns her into a hideous naga and she hisses venomously at him, finally vanishing into the water.

The winds stir and little whirlwinds of fire sweep through the flooded streets, turning anything and anyone they touch to ash. The blaze surrounding Sister Fire grows stronger as her chants rise.

INT. BELLY OF THE WHALE, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

The giant spots Anna as another volcanic rock crashes down nearby.

AEGROL

The eye of the world weeps tears of fire this night. And what drops here to stain the troubled cheek of Dream?

ANNA

A mote... now spilt from the vision  
of life.

AEGROL

Oh, little Anna. Not so little now.  
I wasn't expecting you just yet.

Ashamed of the condition of the pearl, Anna hides it and  
tries to clean herself up.

ANNA

You were expecting me?

AEGROL

Time bends when it enters the Dream,  
the same way light does when it enters  
the sea. And here along the bed,  
entire years seem to wrinkle on the  
surface as the currents rush them  
along.

Aegrol points his hammer at his coral shrine.

AEGROL (CONT'D)

Yet if you have fallen here, then  
you are in grave need. The sisters  
will attempt to raise a new god now,  
eh? That much I have seen clearly.

ANNA

I... don't know their plan, other  
than they are after my mother's pearl.  
You know the sisters?

AEGROL

Yes, I aided your mother at the  
Chezhul Trench, when the sisters  
sought to turn the magma Heart of  
Siti to obsidian glass.

ANNA

My mother? You knew my mother?

AEGROL

Of course! Well, she was my sister  
long before she was your mother.

ANNA

Sister? That would make you my uncle.

AEGROL

And at your birth the eyes of  
constellation Dyneas blazed.

ANNA

You attended my birth? My father?  
Did you know him too?

The giant hefts his hammer, simply pointing up.

AEGROL

He doesn't dwell on this world. But  
I think you should hear about him  
from your mother.

ANNA

You don't know that she's gone? She  
was killed...

AEGROL

Gone? Is she now? The goddess of  
nature gone in a puff? It's not so  
easy to kill a god.

ANNA

What? Then where? Where is she?

AEGROL

She waits. She waits for you to  
bring her the pearl. That is how  
she communed with her mother and  
that is how you must commune with  
her.

Anna rises at the news.

AEGROL (CONT'D)

Sometime soon the pearl will be found  
again.

ANNA

I have it.

He rejoices with a clap and lays his hammer down.

AEGROL

Ah-ha! Tonight, then! Well, let  
the hammerings cease as Saranna's  
silver skirts sweep through the  
terrestrial halls.

Anna slowly reveals the filthy pearl.

AEGROL (CONT'D)

What? Uh-oh, hmm.

ANNA

It's ruined.

She sheds a tear as the giant inspects it.



ANNA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's my fault. I had promised her...

AEGROL

I see then, let's have a look.

She allows him to test it in his gigantic, webbed hand.

AEGROL (CONT'D)

The pearl was placed on Earth to heal and renew it. It comes from the Great Mother and contains great power.

ANNA

Can it be cleaned?

AEGROL

You have goddess DNA. And when you rise to be the next Mother Nature...

ANNA

The next Mother... No.

AEGROL

...which you must, use the pearl in the moon shrine in order to receive the memories of your goddess mother. Then you will know.

Another fiery rock turns more of the coral reef to ash as Anna shakes her head in disbelief.

ANNA

Can you help us?

Aegrol surveys the damage done, sighs, and then places the mother pearl in the basin of his massive coral shrine.

AEGROL

I do not have power over the god of dreams. But the sisters... well, I can buy you some time.

He stirs the basin until the dirty pearl dully glows with moonlight.

AEGROL (CONT'D)

There they are.

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

As Sister Fire continues her ritual, the shrine water ripples and the bench shakes. The reflection in the basin shimmers and glimpses of the Dream foundation appear in the water.

SISTER FIRE

Sister! Help!

Sister Flood leaps to the shrine, places her hands on the shoulders of her sister and begins chanting. The water calms and the reflection disappears.

As Sister Fire completes the ritual, the reflection in the mother shrine basin reappears with a vengeance, becoming the full depths of the Dream's coral foundation, with the moon engraving becoming the mother pearl in Aegrol's shrine. His face appears like the back of a giant sea turtle slowly rising towards the surface.

AEDON

Now!

As Sister Fire rears back to slam her dagger through Anna's heart, a colossal hammer breaches in the basin like a whale, knocking the sisters completely off of the hill.

AEDON (CONT'D)

No!

The god of the sea rushes to the shrine as the giant's image disappears. Standing over Anna in the sickly shrine water, and with the full moon nearing the horizon, he completes his transformation into the kraken. Member 1 taps Member 2's shoulder and signals it's time to leave.

INT. UNIVERSITY TOP FLOOR -- EVENING

A web cocoon quivers as Kwazhol taps it.

KWAZHOL

You did quite well, all things considered. You almost had them, and you really didn't get a chance to stretch...

ARTHUR

I'm dead.

KWAZHOL

I'm fairly certain I would know. And I'm afraid the possession of that supernatural claw along with this new dream reality has kept you from officially passing on... thankfully.

The cocoon quivers in response.

ARTHUR

I can't get out.

KWAZHOL

Oh, I guess we tried then didn't we.  
Don't take too long dying. A too  
slow a passing contracts the diaphragm  
and can give you the hiccups in the  
afterworld. I should probably say a  
few words.

Kwazhol searches around as if looking for a book of scripture,  
but the tip of the claw protrudes from within the cocoon and  
slowly cuts the web.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

Ah. Well, then. A dream cocoon may  
be just what's called for, actually.  
A symbolic rebirth into the man --  
the warden even -- your nativity  
foretold. A new life awaits...

A ghoul in tattered clothes drops out of the cocoon in horror.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

Hmm, something may have gone wrong.

ARTHUR

I *am* dead!

Arthur leaps up as Kwazhol takes a curious step back.

KWAZHOL

You're not dead. But I think we  
should make a note somewhere not to  
take that claw inside a cocoon.

ARTHUR

I'm Sir Edmond... but worse.

KWAZHOL

Well, it is a new life, of a sort.  
Listen, why don't you use this fresh  
start to help Anna instead of  
complaining?

ARTHUR

Anna? Where is she?

KWAZHOL

She's still trapped, Arthur, and  
she's running out of time. Use the  
statue before the sister returns.

Arthur hacks his way through the webs to the statue, which  
unfortunately signals the queen. As her shadow rises over  
him from behind, Arthur turns and faces her manfully. Her  
yellow eyes blaze as he threatens her with the claw, but  
she lunges and knocks the claw out of his hand, and then  
sinks her fangs between his bones.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, Kwaz. Tell Anna I'm sorry.

KWAZHOL

You're very nearly dead, and certainly deserve a point for keen observation. However...

Arthur struggles to life once more and reaches for the dropped claw. As his fingers finally touch it, the queen spins around to reveal a smoking, red-tipped stinger on her abdomen.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

No! Move, Arthur!

As the stinger rises to pierce Arthur, Kwazhol flies to the queen, shifting into a screeching hawk that seems to fill the space between her and Arthur. The queen shrinks for a dread moment, and then Arthur leaps through the hawk illusion, driving the claw deep into the queen's neck. She slowly shrinks like a melting witch, limping away and vanishing into the webs with a hideous wail.

Arthur rushes to the statue and heaves and heaves to no avail.

ARTHUR

I can't.

As he collapses, regains his footing and heaves once again, the statue moves. A blindfolded Professor Lector gasps with the effort as the two of them shove Newton over the balcony's edge and down onto the glass dome protecting the VR hub, shattering it and the aquarium.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Well then, here's to heavy men, eh?  
He does seem to fit there, doesn't he?

Professor Lector peers over the edge of the balcony as if seeing through his blindfold, and they inspect the damage done together.

ARTHUR

Thank you.

KWAZHOL

It's not over yet.

Lector straightens his ruffled clothes as Arthur leaves him.

PROFESSOR LECTOR

Thank the whisperer. And the core value of our operation, of course, that beauty is weight, and weight beauty and... oh, hmm, now, where is my ticket?

INT. UNIVERSITY FOYER -- EVENING

Arthur rushes back down the staircase and to Aezhos's exposed pearl. He finds Newton's broken-off telescope lying in the heap and, giving it a brief inspection, sets it aside. He raises the Claw of Ammanon, but Kwazhol interrupts him.

KWAZHOL

You'll lose your memory too.

ARTHUR

What?

KWAZHOL

The last berry? Where is it?

Arthur scrambles to find the last mentis berry. He at last finds an unimaginably hairy, shrunken version of the vengeful Spider Queen, smacking her red-stained lips in triumph.

As the plump, round queen turns to Arthur with a wicked grin, he plucks her up, takes a deep breath, and then tosses her in his mouth, grudgingly chewing her into something he can swallow.

The webs dissolve into candy threads, the wicked shadows warp back into their natural shapes, and the image of himself as a ghoul fades as he manages to work her down his throat.

KWAZHOL (CONT'D)

Now.

Free of the dream machine and back in his natural body, he stabs Aezhos's pearl with the claw.

EXT. DEEP SEA, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

The dream whale's eyes go wide with shock as thick air bubbles jet from its spout.

INT. BELLY OF THE WHALE, DREAM REALM -- EVENING

Aegrol's coral shrine erupts in bubbles, instantly sweeping Anna towards the surface as the entire seafloor seems to join in the eruption. The giant raises his hammer in parting.

AEGROL

Tell your mother thanks for the beanie.

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

Anna gasps awake on the park bench in the moon shrine pool as it geysers around her. The mother pearl splashes down in the bubbles, and Anna leaps towards it as it slides down the hill and vanishes in the surrounding water.

ANNA

No.

She finally finds it and lifts it out of the water, but it drips oily ooze. As she spins back around towards the shrine, she's blind-sided by the kraken, which clearly cracks the pearl as it drops again, and sends an enormous wall of water down a side street.

EXT. CITY STREET -- EVENING

Arthur struggles through a flooded street as the wall of water rushes around a corner. Members 1 and 2 howl as they crash into him, sweeping him up in the wave before he can react. As he tumbles back down the street, he raises Newton's telescope, which now bears Aezhos's pearl fit neatly into the lens, and a purple pulse of light winks beneath the wave.

Arthur rises out of the water on the back of a black dolphin as it eagerly escorts him to the central park. Amnestic citizens flee the area as Sister Famine terrorizes them with a squadron of naga.

He reins the dolphin in like a stallion as Sister Famine spots him and attacks. He holds up the pearl and as it winks its purple glow, an eclipse of moths swarm to his defense and wrap her in a moth cocoon. He then maneuvers to the edge of the park to see Anna and the kraken locked in mortal combat on the surface of the water.

ARTHUR

Anna!

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

A squadron of naga attack Anna, but as they rush through the roiling waters, a purple pulse of light hits them and they stop, suddenly hearing the alluring calls and giggles from mermaids splashing nearby. As they straighten their fins and saunter towards them, Anna looks to the edge of the park to see Arthur holding the telescope up like a beacon.

ANNA

Arthur?

As Arthur smiles back, a lance of water sends him flailing into the water. Anna spins around just as the kraken attacks again, sending her flying back towards the statue.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Enough of this.

Anna gets purely physical now as she leaps at the kraken in a rage, pounding him with liver and kidney shots and finishing the combo with a wicked uppercut. He splashes down in the filthy water, sending waves rolling through the park.

He leaps up and retaliates with heavy tree-trunk swings, splashing in the waves until the entire park is a swirling cauldron of foam.

Anna takes a few blows, but dodges and counterpunches nimbly until she lands a roundhouse kick to his chest, sending him flying into his own statue and knocking it off its perch. Aedon roars and rushes to it, retrieving his trident from beneath the waves.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Oh, boy.

As he holds the trident up, the pearl glows and hordes of shark fins approach the park from both ends. Arthur, caught off guard by the sharks, stumbles and falls in the water, but finally holds the telescope up with another purple wink.

Two pods of intrepid dolphins rush through the water to flank the sharks on both ends and drive them off. He then attempts to rejoin Anna, but Aedon swings his trident towards him, blasting him with a spear of water.

Aedon vaults to Arthur and smashes him into a nearby building, shattering the telescope and sending the pearl sailing into the water. As he stalks towards Arthur and raises his trident, Sister Famine finally breaks out of the nearby cocoon. She's beautiful, and her horrified shriek gives Aedon pause.

Anna rejoices as Sister Famine flees the park, but Sisters Fire and Flood angrily appear in her stead.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Arthur!

Arthur recovers and splashes in the chest-deep water searching for the dream pearl, but the sisters glide directly towards Anna. Sister Flood attacks first, raising her staff and sending a colossal wave crashing over Anna from behind. She tumbles like a sock in the dryer as Sister Fire slams her staff into the ground. The waters hiss as the prairie dog burrows around the park rise to the surface of the water like volcanic cones and begin puffing with purple steam.

Anna recovers, but empty-handed, raises her fists warily as she backs up towards the shrine-topped hill and the sisters approach.

ARTHUR

Anna!

The kraken then slams his trident into the water. His aqua pearl mixes with the purple twilight and sends a ripple of color over the park. Anna braces for a fight as the volcanic cones tremble.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

What?

Those mythic sharks known to hunt on dinosaur-like legs begin to scramble out of the steaming cones like prairie dogs from their burrows. They immediately charge Anna, and as she lands an uppercut on the first, another wave strikes her from behind. As it rolls away, four of the mythic sharks drag her out of the wave and back to the shrine.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

No!

Arthur recovers the shattered end of the telescope and struggles to extract the pearl from the jagged piece as Sister Fire strides towards the pinned Anna. As she reveals her fiery dagger once more, Arthur's eyes turn yellow with rage (matching the devoured Spider Queen's eyes), and he clasps the pearl in his palm and whistles.

The surface of the water cracks like glass. Jagged white streaks lace the suddenly stilled water and the park begins to seethe with bubbles. Soon diving bell-like spiders begin skittering along the crack-like webs towards the sisters.

SISTER FLOOD

Just kill her!

Sister Fire rushes towards Anna with her dagger raised. A monstrous Spider Queen leaps out of the water on the other side of the hill, however, and knocks her back into the water, where a second Spider Queen catches her and then drags her down one of the smoking burrows with a belch of fire.

Three of the mythic sharks pinning Anna to the shrine attack the first queen, dragging it back into the water but leaving only one shark to hold Anna. It's not enough and an angry fireman's throw sends it sailing over Sister Flood's head. A small diving bell spider creeps onto the hill and begins hopping excitedly.

SISTER FLOOD (CONT'D)

Sister!

Sister Flood races to the burrow where Sister Fire disappeared. One of the diving bell spiders leaps onto her neck and gives her a little bite. Dark-blue water spills from the wound as if from a punctured bladder.

Sister Flood whirls on the spider, but receives a similar bite from another spider. She whirls on spider after spider as she receives bite after bite until dark blue water pools beneath her, and her body dries into leafy flakes and blows away.

Anna picks up the excited diving bell spider hopping at her feet and it flips over in her palm, revealing the recovered



pearl clasped within a bubble beneath its legs. She pops the bubble and holds the pearl up as the last sliver of moonlight begins to fade.

AEDON

No!

Aedon and the remaining sharks then rush the shrine, destroying the spiders with razor teeth and shredding the webs in a rage. Hopelessly outnumbered, Anna turns to the shrine just as the stampede threatens to overwhelm her.

She plunges the pearl into the moon engraving at the bottom of the basin, scattering the onslaught with a splash of watery light and activating the shrine. A greatly augmented beam of moonlight shoots through her.

EXT. COSMIC NAVAL -- ETERNITY (FLASHBACK)

OALAI, the Great Mother, strides to the base of the cosmic oyster and places her hands on its shell. The oyster exhales a brilliant nebula that stretches away into seeming eternity, blending with the stars in the deep reaches of the galaxy. She inhales deeply and clears her mind.

An 8-year-old Saranna chases butterfly-like coral insects in the surrounding coral garden. She trips and takes a cut on the chin.

OALAI

The Earth is nearly ready, but it appears you are not.

Saranna stifles a cry as her mother opens her arms. Oalai takes her in a deep hug, kisses her, and then wipes the blood away from the healed chin.

OALAI (CONT'D)

Come, Saranna, today's lesson.

Saranna scoots off her mother's lap to land plump on a small oyster. She collects the shimmering creature, finally holding it up for inspection.

OALAI (CONT'D)

For your new world.

SARANNA

An oyster?

OALAI

And a type of its creation.

As Saranna fumbles with the oyster, Oalai takes it from her and gently blows across its shell. The oyster opens to reveal a luminescent pearl within.

SARANNA

It's beautiful.

OALAI

Saranna, you must understand this:  
All my creations will have an inner  
and an outer vessel -- a pearl within  
a shell, so to speak. A rind shell  
will cover the fruit, a bark rind  
will cover the tree that bore the  
fruit, and an atmosphere will shell  
the world that bore the tree.

Saranna takes the opened oyster back and touches the pearl.

OALAI (CONT'D)

And the entire natural world will  
intertwine to form one living body.

SARANNA

A body?

OALAI

But it's only the covering, it's the  
outer shell. It must have a pearl  
within to make it complete, to make  
it whole.

Saranna rubs her chin and closes the oyster.

SARANNA

And what is this pearl? This inner  
vessel of the Earth?

Oalai looks deep into her daughter's eyes.

OALAI

You.

EXT. CITY PARK -- EVENING

Moonlight washes over Anna like a wave of water as she  
completes the ritual. It leaves her clothes dripping, and  
when she opens her hand, it drains between her fingers as  
the mother pearl glows with pure light once more. Then,  
like the moon illusion her mother had used against the  
sisters, she glowingly rises to twice her normal size just  
as the moon disappears beneath the horizon.

She clasps the pearl in one hand and the restored whistle of  
her youth brings a tattered, smoking moth to her outstretched  
palm. A single tear streaks her cheek before she turns to  
the kraken.

ANNA

No.

The beast attacks again, but she masterfully dodges and gives him a kiss on the top of the head. Clouds immediately gather overhead as the kraken lurches back, stunned.

Again the kraken lunges and again it receives the kiss. Lightning flashes in the clouds and the kraken struggles to catch its breath. One last lunge brings a tender final kiss and the heavens open. Rain pours over the darkened city. Aedon stumbles blindly into the ferris wheel, crushing it, and then collapses on the ground and weeps.

Anna walks to him and picks up his fallen trident. Screams echo down the streets as the ferris wheel bobs in a broken heap near a blackened wall. With a sad view of the damage done, she cracks the trident over her knee.

The waters groan in anguish as waves roll away from her like a receding tide. Sharks and naga disappear beneath the surface of the ebbing water as lightning rages above and the pure rains flood the streets, sweeping the nightmares away.

Anna shrinks back to normal size as she joins Arthur under the copse of dead trees near the fallen whale statue. She brushes a few lingering spider webs from his shoulder.

ANNA (CONT'D)

There is just something so wrong  
with you.

ARTHUR

Ouch. The Dream is gone and  
everything counts again, you know.

She smiles, pulls him towards her and kisses him. As they embrace, their pearls glow and the trees heal. Kwazhol appears in spirit, pleased they've come together but a little forlorn himself.

LON

Father?

LON, a strapping young hunter, appears at the edge of the park in spirit like his father. His beautiful mother, TIRA, stands just behind him. Kwazhol turns to see them and his heart breaks.

KWAZHOL

Lon? Tira?

He runs to them and hugs them both. A gate of light opens behind them, and a pure white sunrise reveals an enormous moose bounding across the Ever Fields and into the ringing woods.

Kwazhol turns around to wave goodbye to Arthur and Anna, who smile warmly.

As he departs for the Great Beyond, THESSA, the white-robed goddess of the unborn, glides into the park and smiles unseen as the gates close behind him.

The physical incarnation of Aezhos inspects the collapsing dream.

AEZHOS

You know, of course, that you will  
in time again dream, which will be  
the last time you see my pearl. Use  
it well for a night.

Arthur inspects the twinkling pearl.

ARTHUR

I doubt I'll lose any sleep over it.

ANNA

I have received the memories of my  
mother, along with her power to heal  
the world.

AEZHOS

You'll have your work cut out for  
you. This citizen hive awakening  
now has completely lost its memory  
and will fall into the first pheromone  
trail it finds.

ANNA

Go, Aezhos, the Earth will be in my  
care.

As he departs, he discovers Sister Flood's lost blindfold and, wringing it out, points to a kraken footprint.

AEZHOS

The god of the deep will not sleep  
long, and... he's changed.

As he departs, the citizens stumble around the park to laugh, hug and rejoice in the downpour. Thessa finally approaches the heroes.

THESSA

Your mother will have much more to  
show you.

ANNA

We'll restore the mother shrine to  
the garden and revive the rituals  
there.

THESSA

I think you'll do just fine. And  
your daughter...

ANNA

Daughter?

THESSA

She sleeps now, my little one.

The park pixelates briefly.

ANNA

What? Oh, how?

THESSA

And you have a visitor.

A disembodied raven's caw startles Arthur.

ARTHUR

Oh. Lexii: End sim.

The park pixelates and stutters.

INT. MARA'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Anna tucks the sleeping Mara in as Arthur fumbles with Lexii, finally turning the ball off and causing the remnants of the VR sim to slowly disappear from the walls.

ANNA

You really stretched that one, didn't you?

ARTHUR

You didn't like it?

ANNA

That's not how I remember our first kiss.

ARTHUR

Yeah, you were kind of all over me right from the start.

She looks at him angrily.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

But, you know, the sim is for posterity. And an accurate depiction of your... more amorous practices I reserve for myself alone.

She softens and acknowledges it's for the best. They kiss as he sits down next to her on the bed.

ANNA

Mara dreamt it again.

ARTHUR

That same one?

ANNA

A woman's arm reaching out of an island of rocks in the middle of a lake of golden fire.

A raven caws outside the window and Arthur leaps back up.

ARTHUR

Oh, Thessa was right.

He opens the window and an unnaturally large raven leaps onto the sill. It caws and Anna puts a finger over her lips. The raven quietly caws once more.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I still can't understand him outside of the Dream.

ANNA

He says... she's alive. And...

Arthur's eyes go wide as he pulls out his mother's necklace.

ARTHUR

I knew it.

The raven caws again.

ANNA

He found her.

FADE OUT

THE END