

Genshin Impact Book Collection

A collection of all the Genshin Impact books in one document. For PDF and Epub reading.
Compiled by the [Khaenri'ah Lore Project](#), sourced from [Honey Impact](#).

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Vera's Melancholy

Vol 1

I don't ever think the world is monotonous. It's just that interesting things happen in far away galaxies.

The great adventure of Vera, an ordinary girl always fascinated by distant lands, secretly begins.
—Endless Days in Infinite Worlds—

"There are times when I think to myself... There's nothing to do in this tiny village. What a dull place to live."

This wasn't the first time that Vera had complained about her hometown, the small country village of Delphi. Her frown eased slightly as she lay on the hillside near the village, eyes closed, feeling the breeze of the early summer.

"Then where in this world would you not consider dull?" Her buddy Sachi asked curiously. Vera sat up and leaned forward.

"I believe on the other side of the Starry Sea is a planet inhabited by gods who can answer all prayers and wishes, and everyone bearing a wish is on a journey to get there. I believe, in our universe, there is a world currently in a war against doomsday, where the noble and elegant souls of fourteen Valkyries burn bright, if only for a brief but magnificent moment..."

"You've been reading too many of those weird fantasy novels."

"But... this village really IS dull. When was the last time anything fun happened here?"

"Funny you should say that, a new family did move into our village recently..."

"Novelty and fun aren't the same thing!"

Despite what she had said, Vera decided to pay a visit to the newcomers. Sachi, however, remembered his family's rules, and walked back home for dinner.

...

Vera gave the door to the newcomer's abode a gentle push. Much to her surprise, it wasn't locked.

"Anybody home?"

No sooner had the words left her mouth than the living room cupboard doors flew open and out jumped a black-haired boy wearing glasses. He was followed by a tentacled blue slime.

"Make way! Tal, why did you let a stranger in?"

The black-haired boy gently pushed Vera out of his way and picked up an axe by the door.

"You leave me with no choice. Since you have seen everything, there is only one thing for it..."

Thus began the biggest crisis of Vera's life.

Vol 2

Everything's just boring. Everything, all the time. It's not depression. It's just reaching the age of 14.

So begins Vera's adventure.

—My Backyard is Slightly Bigger than the Entire Universe—

"All I can do now is ask you to help me." The black-haired boy, who called himself Ike, handed Vera a kitchen knife.

He walked back to the cupboard and began slashing at the tentacles frantically.

"Come and help me close this door! If a tentacle starts attacking you, use this kitchen knife to defend yourself!" Ike's glasses were now covered in blue slime. "Hurry! We can't let this evil demon cross into Delphi."

Upon hearing his words, Vera helped Ike close the door. While they were pushing back the tentacles, Vera accidentally stabbed Ike twice in the back. Thankfully, Ike's healing spells were quite potent.

"I shall explain everything to you. I am in fact over a thousand years old, and this door is a gateway to anywhere in the universe. That tentacled monster is an old one from the Large Magellanic Cloud — I went there to get something." Ike was covered in slime from head to foot by this point. He wiped his glasses with Vera's dress as he spoke. "Erm... is there anything else that you'd like to know?"

"Who's Tal?" Vera didn't seem to mind.

"An evil spirit that resided in the man-devouring castle. It has served me as a butler since I subdued it. Strangely, it behaved quite friendly towards you."

Vera's parents always reminded her that people are destined to build families, and that it was futile to entertain dreams of anything beyond the homestead. Her buddy Sachi once told her that if a lively girl like her was to marry someone from a faraway land, the whole village would become unbearably lonely.

(The real reason Sachi said this was that he was something of a weakling, and was sure to be ferociously bullied if he ended up having to play with the boys.)

"The human spirit is still too immature. I need to guide you both through the wonders of your childhood." Ike extended his inviting arms to Vera. "You will sing every step of the way on your long journey to youth."

From the Orion Arm to the Eternal Jahanam, from the Torrents of Time to the depths of the Starry Sea...

"How far is 'beyond'? Any place in this universe is just as boring as my backyard," he said.

"The scale of everything beyond follows the heart," Ike replied. "Thus, my heart is slightly bigger than the entire universe."

Vol 3

The Andromeda Empire stretches across half the galaxy group. Every planet within the Empire has its own demons and deities, dragons and monsters.

"I've come up with a story for every star from your home." "That's not possible. Looking from here, the Andromeda Galaxy is only one fifth the size of your moon."

So continues Vera's adventure.

—The Man Who Stole the Lone Star—

"I am the second rightful heir to the Andromeda Empire, and I have more than two hundred titles to my name. You shall call me the Princess Andro-Basilisks." The charming girl then crossed her arms, savoring the moment of her entrance in her mind and giggling to herself in amusement. Her sole reason for gracing Delphi with her presence was to marry Ike.

"If you, he who conquered a quarter of the universe, marry me, my safety shall be guaranteed after my elder sister takes the throne."

"If I may ask, how big is the Andromeda Empire?" Vera asked.

"I reckon there are more than nine thousand inhabitable planets."

—With so many stars in your possession, why come to steal my brilliance?

"So you aren't here to harm Vera?" Sachi cautiously asked Ike, who was carrying the scrolls and globes of other planets.

"Of course not. I think she would make a great assistant." After putting everything down, he clapped his hands. "You like her?"

"Me? No, not at all, I don't like her at all!" Sachi looked away, worried that the old sage might discern his true feelings.

He reached for a box full of photo frames. He grabbed a few at random, each picture depicting a different beauty.

"Look at them... They all said that they gave me their one and only true love, but did they? In reality, I was just one of their many lovers."

Sachi did not know when or where he had heard the saying, but it blurted out from his mouth in his moment of annoyance:

"With so many stars in your possession, why come to steal my brilliance?"

Vol 4

There is a saying that goes as follows: Not all that glitters is gold, sometimes it is the outpouring of a broken heart.

Either way, the stars in the sky certainly aren't made of gold, and most people's hearts aren't made of glass.

In any case — here is the next chapter of Vera's adventure!

—All that Glitters—

"The people in these photographs are all so pretty," Vera exclaimed as she picked up Ike's box of framed photos.

"Of course they are — otherwise, they wouldn't have had the chance to leave me with a photograph to remember them by."

Ike had no intention of evading. After all, he was a galactic sage who was over a thousand years old. So of course he knew that girls were easily hurt, and that they could become trouble very easily. Ike would thus never cheat a girl — take notes, boys.

"Having seen the starry host, I thus make star-shaped jewels to remember them by," he continued to explain. "But those stars that shine across the universe do not belong to anyone. So it is also impossible to steal them."

Vera did not understand. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying this for the sake of a foolish fellow who isn't present right now. Pay it no mind, humans are just far too young."

"I will serve as a go-between between you and Ike." Sachi said to the Princess of the Andromeda Empire in a loud voice.

"Huh?"

"I love Vera, I don't—"

"Disgusting. Boring. Be silent, worm. You are an offense to my ears. I've already acknowledged Vera as my friend. I will not hand her over to a cowardly person like you..."

"Wh—What..."

Vol 5

You can't have picnics on the sides of a galactic highway! Even the deities will be held fully responsible for road accidents that might occur!

The doorway to a study in a simple village connects to anywhere in space and time! Having tea with the deities, playing hide-and-seek across time... Vera's great adventure continues!

—Roadside Picnic—

When Ike was taking a nap, his servants waged a terrible war against each other.

The great wizard had subdued many gods and demons to serve under him. As the most formidable wizard of his day, Ike was in command of gods and demons more numerous than the entries in a dictionary. But who was the strongest of those under his rule? The gods and demons decided to find out for themselves through battle.

Unfortunately, they seemed to have erroneously regarded as their own three who were neither gods nor demons: the Princess, Sachi, and Vera.

Ike only slept for two hours, but in that time three stars had already been destroyed!

"Why should I protect you?" The Princess pulled her hand away, and the giant demon plummeted to the ground, its eyeballs gone.

The dominant race of the Andromeda Empire may look lovely and sweet, but on their palms grow two special mouths, which they use to devour the eyeballs of their lovers and those they vanquish.

"Are we not friends?" Vera wiped the blood off her face, and appeared to be hurt by the Princess' words.

"Yea – yes," The Princess blushed and looked away. "I already regard you as my only friend for what has happened. I was not referring to you, Vera."

"No!" Sachi yelled as the gnarly jaws of a dragon closed around him.

"Do you surrender to me now?" The giant dragon jeered. "Surrender and concede that you are worthless, lowly rats, and I shall let you live!"

"I surrender! I surrender! Let me go!" Sachi screamed.

"Why, a lizard of your despicable breed should know better than to utter such foolish words! Even the geckos in my palace could crush you." The Princess gave her wrists a twirl.

"No! This has nothing to do with me!" Sachi yelled as the dragon cast him into the sky.

And just like that, the battle between the dominant species of Andromeda and the ancient giant dragon was over.

The moral? You won't get hurt if you just surrender.

Sachi was knocked out of the contest and woke Ike up with the slap of a slipper. Vera also survived thanks to the protection of the Princess.

"Argh! You imbecile! The mere sight of you is revolting. Do not come near me! Don't talk to me, don't look at me, nor breathe the same air as me, you lowly scum!" The Princess could not have a lower opinion of Sachi.

Vol 6

There was once a great scholar who wished to write a book about all the festive days of the empire.

After looking into it more closely, he discovered that every single day had some sort of a festival associated with it... He persevered with this monumental writing task for six months before giving up on it.

But don't worry — as far as this book is concerned, I am the author, and I won't let my readers down!

—For Every Season—

Though those things had indeed happened, they were occurrences on a galactic scale. Now, something more mundane was about to happen. The date of the town festival was drawing near.

"I suppose it's finally my turn to introduce you two to this small town, then?" Vera said as she served the Princess and Ike her very own braised dishes.

After all, those things they had encountered in their galactic escapades had to be explained by the Princess and Ike. If there was any knowledge Vera had to present to them, it was the knowledge of her hometown.

"...Afterward, the great king's first messenger, the brave knight Huffman strode west across two continents, crossing great oceans and rivers. As for the imperial sage, the witch from the east, she passed by her hometown on her road eastward, and then came by the land of the Nether. Thus, they finally met here."

"Huh, is that so. How interesting." Though she was trying hard not to let Vera notice that she did not in fact care for the story at all, the Princess' acting skills required some work.

"So that can only mean that this place is on the polar opposite side of this world from the great king's capital, right?" Ike said, commenting on a seemingly unimportant aspect of the tale.

"Ahahaha, that's true if you think about it." Vera rubbed the back of her head with a crooked smile.

"I've always said that I want to leave this place, but in the end, I discovered that this is the place that I'm most familiar with." Having come to this realization on the eve of the town's anniversary, Vera began crying right in front of Sachi's eyes.

"You numbskull! You made Vera cry!" The Princess made her entry with a flying kick, sending Sachi hurtling away.

Vol 7

In the star clusters at the outer reaches of the universe, habitable planets are few and far between. For this reason, the region is the playground of space captains and pirates alone. With this being the universe, though, there is no port and starboard in the traditional sense — out here, "starboard" means whichever side of your spacecraft is oriented towards the star you are using for navigation...

Lose yourself, and especially your sense of direction, in this next chapter of Vera's starbound voyage!

—Galaxy Wars—

"Re-igniting a sun is not difficult, but I don't think the Andromeda Empire would like to see that happen," Ike said to the panicked Vera.

"Do you mean that the Princess has kidnapped Sachi?" Vera said with some shock in her voice after giving the matter some thought.

"How did you come to that conclusion? I'm saying that only the Andromeda Empire would be capable of kidnapping you and the Princess." Ike then turned to face the innumerable lives that dwelled within the galaxy.

He paused for a moment before declaring thus: "Inhabitants of the galaxy. Though I have come here upon the invitation of the High Saint King Lebannin to re-ignite the flames of the few remaining stars, it seems that the Andromeda Empire does not wish for your longevity, and has thus kidnapped my friend."

"Are you then to put their lives over that of all life?" Saint King Lebannin arose from her seat. "If that is the case, why then do I rule over these stars?"

Finally, the Saint King would charge into peril alone, defeat the assassins from the Andromeda Empire, and rescue both the Princess and Sachi. Afterward, she had a few words with Ike.

"I didn't think you could defeat the dominant species of Andromeda," Ike praised. "They're a strong and hardy race. I suppose it's true, then, that you defeated the holy dragon en route to becoming the Saint King."

"I am, in fact, that same holy dragon. I fused with Lebannin's flesh and blood, and now act according to her wishes."

"Huh..." Ike was a little shocked by this.

"Ah, yes. Is that fellow the person the Second Princess is fond of? When I barged in, they were..."

"What!?" Now that was a much bigger shock for Ike.

Vol 8

Of course boys aren't invited to the girl's slumber party! Girls are sacrosanct, like the gods of the golden age.

Vera, the Princess, Saint King Lebannin, and Ur, alpha female of the Galactic Swarm, shall talk deep into the night!

—The Girls Themselves—

"I said it was a misunderstanding! She was about to eat me." Sachi explained.

"I don't think she was intending to eat you," Ike said, pushing his glasses up. "The dominant race of the Andromeda Empire have organs on the palms of their hands that allow them to capture and consume eyeballs."

"I've seen it before. Looks like some sort of... lamprey?" Sachi shivered a little as he said that last word.

"Let me finish." Ike wanted to touch his eyes, but wound up pressing his fingerprint into his glasses. Taking his glasses off, he touched his left eye. "Their practice of eating eyes has two meanings: submission..."

He touched his right eye. "...and love."

Sachi also began to rub both his eyes, thinking about which it was back then.

"Whatever the case, I don't think the princess really understands the difference. Those who submit to her, those things she conquers, those who love her — they're all the same to her.

People who can't hurt her in an imperial succession battle."

"Huh. No wonder those Andromeda Empire assassins kidnapped her. Two birds with one stone, eh?"

"I'm not getting involved in their succession wars. I can only help you support her better."

"Hey now — we're not like that! I mean, doesn't she hate me the most?"

And what were the girls talking about at this very moment? That may yet be an eternal mystery.

Vol 9

"Vera's so beautiful, like a shining star in the universe, but I..." "Boys at this age are always more petite than girls of a similar age."

Childhood must be let go of to welcome the coming of the adolescent years. It's not too late to think about it now... Real melancholy finally hits Vera.

—Death Awaits in Abyssal Waves—

As Vera and Sachi grew up, the chemistry between the four changed in subtle and inexplicable ways.

"Enough with excuses," Sachi said to Ike. "Vera will not cease pursuing you even if you never reciprocate her feelings."

Ike was a symbol of a faraway land. He stood for the unknown, for that which was waiting to be discovered. A brave bird would never nest there, but would be forever adrift in the winds of admiration.

Ike retorted, "No matter which way you look at it, being a thousand years old makes you an elderly person."

"Then we are well-matched in age." The Princess merrily chipped in on their conversation.

When Sachi finally mustered the courage to declare his love, he met with the most dreadful fate. Remember the ancient sword that Ike and Vera received from the old ones when they first met? It was what Ike needed to propel destiny forward! But now, Vera had her finger slit by its blade, and a malicious ancient virus sapped the life out of her.

"This is all your fault!" Sachi grabbed Ike by the collar. If the tragedy had not happened, Ike would have laughed it off, for he was a gentle soul. But this time, he slapped Sachi's hand away. "Don't you know how to rewind time? Please! Do it to save Vera!" Even the Princess begged.

"You don't understand. Only the future can save the past, not the other way around." Ike bit his lip until blood came flowing down.

"A local myth speaks of a Silver Age when people enjoyed a seemingly endless childhood that could last up to two hundred years. This only made their short maturity a pain to bear." To the others, childhood was long gone, but youth was forever beyond their reach. To be continued in "Vera's Melancholy" without Vera.

Vol 10

"It's enough. Let's go home... The furthest place I've dreamt of, is the Delphi where you are." Though the explanation is delayed, you should know that Delphi is the center of Greek mythology. Vera's Melancholy - the perfect ending... or is it?

—Vera's Melancholy—

To revive Vera, Sachi, Ike and the Princess embarked on a spectacular and thrilling journey that lasted twenty years. From battling Signor Inferno to slaying the Star Devourer, the trio had even rescued two galaxies and the Galaxy Empire, and eliminated four species of ruthless interstellar worms along the way.

When Vera opened her eyes, she found herself in the arms of Sachi, now a hero of cosmic proportions.

To the dominant species of Andromeda, twenty years was nothing more than a few seconds. The Princess looked lovely as always, but her countenance was a curious mix of genuine happiness and loss.

Sachi, having lost an eye in his adventures, was now a tall and strapping young man. His flowing tears soaked into Vera's shoulders — though still prone to tears, he was no longer his feeble-minded self.

The years had been kind to Ike, who after all this time still had that same old smile on his face. "I am but an echo of time," Ike said as he began his preparations. "As I've said, the past cannot change the future, for the predetermined rules of equilibrium are slightly more powerful than me. But the future, with its infinite possibilities, could save the world."

Ike transformed Sachi back into who he was twenty years ago, and time reversed itself to the day of their departure. Everything seemed to remain unchanged between the four, though they realized that the innocence they once shared was one thing that could never return.

"I am sorry for depriving you of your childhood," Ike said to him. "Now go, the youth that you deserve awaits."

"I have witnessed every wonder in the universe for your sake, and this was how my childhood ended." Sachi summoned every last ounce of his courage as he stood before the girl of his destiny. "I will never reach my youth without you by my side."

What will her answer be?

Editor's note: The author of "Vera's Melancholy" is now off living the high life with the royalties from the first nine volumes. If you happen to see him in your corner of the universe, please help us to impress upon him the urgency with which we require the next volume.

The Boar Princess

Vol 1

*A long, long time ago, in the forest kingdom... What legends occurred there?
The Boar Princess, Part 1. A story about friendship, love, and death.*

In the myths of ages past, every living being in this world had its own kingdom. Mondstadt was a forest in that age, a playground of the boars. In the forest was the Boar Kingdom, where everybody lived happily under the reign of the Boar King.

The King had a lovely young daughter, who had the prettiest snout, the whitest tusks, and the smoothest fur in the whole kingdom.

The Boar Princess, beautiful and kind, gave the juiciest and sweetest fruits to her subjects every day.

From sweet and sour berries, to crisp apples, to delicious tree mushrooms, the Boar Princess always shared her delicacies first with her friends.

Every boar in the kingdom adored their King and Princess, and every day they praised them so: "Oink, oink! Bless our King! As long as he reigns over us, we will never starve!"

"Oink, oink! Bless the gentle Anemo Archon for giving our King such a kind and polite Princess!"

(There are some words in the margin written in tiny handwriting: "dada, if I dont eat candy efery night, and i pray eferyday, will i turn into a wild piggy? i want to be a wild piggy because they are so tasty")

Vol 2

*A lifeless ice field, a land even the gentle Anemo Archon has never visited. How is it that it still has its lonely inhabitants?
The Boar Princess, Part 2. The story continues on the glacier.*

North of the boar forest was a frozen tundra.

The playful Barbatos had not reached those lands, so they remained covered by ice and snow. Every creature who ventured there risked freezing their paws and hooves off.

"It's cold, too cold! It's freezing! My claws are going to shatter!"

Even the bravest, strongest Boar King could not withstand the frigid tundra.

"Oink, oink, oink! My frozen snout is turning purple!"

There lived but a single lone wolf pup in that place.

(The childish handwriting at the bottom of the page reads: "dada, why does the little doggy have paws that don't freeze off in the cold?")

Vol 3

"Now and evermore shall you be bereft of hope." What fate awaits the wolf pup who bears such a cruel curse?

The Boar Princess, Part 3.

The pup was a carefree child who had bright blue eyes and slick gray fur. When he got angry, he looked exactly like the wolf head relief atop the Mondstadt Cathedral. But one day, when he was hunting in the forest, he ran into the evil squirrel sorcerer:

Woobakwa!

Of all the beings in the ancient world, none were more evil than Woobakwa — not even demons and dragons. Woobakwa despised everything nice, and swore to transform beauty into ugliness and turn light into dark.

At the sight of the joyful wolf, anger boiled inside him. He cursed:

"Squeak! Squeak! Angry am I! I shall spike his heart with the coldest ice, and he will never again know the meaning of hope!"

With that said, Woobakwa began to curse the pup with his magic.

But the rash pup gobbled him up, just like that, without the slightest warning.

Woobakwa was so furious that he cursed the pup using the most foul and insulting words ever uttered by a squirrel. The pup felt the noise coming from his mouth, and only then did he realize his mistake.

"Aroo, I'm so sorry, mister squirrel, I thought you were edible!"

The pup wished to apologize to the squirrel, but he felt his throat tighten and then loosen. The squirrel slid down to his stomach with a gulp.

(A sheet of paper bearing fine handwriting is taped to this page: "Lily, this is why you should eat cautiously when you're outside.")

Vol 4

The wolf pup grew up in the cold loneliness. The secret past of the lone wolf is now revealed.
The Boar Princess, Part 4.

No-one knew just what chemical reaction occurred in the pup's stomach, but Woobakwa's curse magically came into effect!

Because of the curse, the pup's heart was pierced and frozen by an icicle. The pup became cold and mean forever after, and whenever other animals showed kindness to him, he would repay them with the harshest of words or the most woeful of deeds. In the end, every animal loathed him.

From then on, every wolf in the forest spoke of the pup in this way:

"Woof, what a selfish wolf he is! Such an obnoxious kid."

"Woof, woof, what a heartless wolf he is! Let us stay away from him."

One by one, the pup lost all his friends. The forest welcomed the lonely pup no more, so he had no choice but to head north.

The blizzards that blew in the northern tundra kept most creatures away. But with his heart already frozen solid, the pup was no longer afraid of the cold.

He decided to settle down there, and became the lone wolf that roamed the tundra.

(A young girl has written in the corner of the page: "Dada, but where did Woobakwa go?")

Vol 5

"No-one deserves this fate." The good princess sheds a tear of compassion. For those who persevere as true companions, even the ice shall melt before their determination.

The Boar Princess, Part 5.

One day, the Boar Princess heard about the pup and was deeply saddened by his story. So she asked her people for advice on how to defrost his heart and turn him back to his former sweet self.

She asked and asked, but only the wise fox and the elderly turtle knew the answer:

"Ack-ack-ack! Only sincerity and fire could melt such evil ice. Ack-ack-ack!" The fox replied.

"Friendship demands sacrifice. No friendships come without sacrifices. I apologize for not knowing how to make funny sounds," the trustworthy Grandpa Turtle said.

The clever Boar Princess knew right away what she had to do. She dried her tears and curtsied to the two wise animals:

"Oink oink! Thank you! I would like for you to come and see the pup with me, so that you can be the first to witness our friendship!"

When the fox and the turtle heard the Boar Princess was willing to invite them on a royal trip, their hearts were filled with joy. They set out with the Princess and headed north.

(A handwritten note, seemingly from the young girl's father, is taped to the page: "Turtles can't make noises, no matter how hard they try. The reason Grandpa Turtle apologizes for this is just because he is very polite.")

Vol 6

The Boar Princess and her two wise companions brave an icy wasteland and scale a snowy mountain, where they discover a very mysterious inhabitant indeed...

See how this high-altitude, low-temperature adventure unfolds in volume six of The Boar Princess.

There is some childish handwriting on the title page, which reads: "Daddy, when you get home, you have to read me the one about the snowy mountain too!"

And so, the Princess and her two wise companions arrived in the snowswept hinterland of the far north.

Ice and snow covered the land as far as the eye could see. Neither the biggest, bravest animals nor even the weasel, who is the most skilled digger of them all, could find so much as a single blade of soft grass or a single piece of juicy fruit.

The Princess was shivering from head to tail in the freezing cold, yet she was undaunted. Without even looking back, she pressed on deeper into the frozen wasteland.

The wise fox and the trustworthy turtle could not bear the piercing wind and the freezing snow. They begged of the Princess:

"Ack-ack-ack! If His Majesty the King knew that you were adventuring to such a cold and dangerous place as this, he would be very worried! Let's head back home... Ack-ack-ack," exclaimed the fox.

"Yes, I agree! I fear the snowstorm will get stronger and colder with each passing second... Let us at least rest a while, and continue our journey once the wind has stopped and the sun is out? Once again, I apologize for not knowing how to make funny sounds," reasoned the turtle.

It was to no avail. The persevering Princess did not heed the advice of her wise companions, but insisted that they continue to press on into the bitter cold of the far north.

For what nobler cause could one pursue in this world than rescuing lost kin and rekindling lost friendships?

Onwards they continued through the ice and snow, until their paws and hooves were purple from the cold, until each breath they exhaled turned into ice which became one with the swirling blizzard around them.

Then, at the icy peak of a tall mountain, next to a frozen river which, in spite of everything, still flowed — albeit with icicles rather than water — the Princess met a spirit, swaying to and fro in the freezing wind.

An ancient race of wise spirits lived atop that ice-capped mountain. They had no physical form, but possessed great magical power.

"Oink oink! Are you the master of this place? Please, O Spirit, could you guide us through this snowstorm?"

The Princess politely posed her question as her hooves, now numb from the cold, trembled in the snow.

The wise fox and the trustworthy Grandpa Turtle also looked expectantly at the spirit of the snowstorm. As they gazed, their paws and flippers, respectively, numb from the cold, trembled in the snow.

"Whoosh, whoosh..."

The spirit of the snowstorm spoke softly.

"Of course, but... whoosh, whoosh..."

"In return, I will sap your energy. The further forward you go in the storm, the more tired and hungry you will become — though I assure you, it will not be life threatening... I hope... Whoosh, whoosh..."

"Oink oink! This is, after all, the spirit of the snowstorm," pondered the Princess.

"And I am also in the company of the two wisest, most caring members of my family. Whatever may happen, they will always be able to find a way!"

Without a moment's hesitation, the Princess granted the spirit of the snowstorm her request.

The wise fox and the trustworthy Grandpa Turtle had no time at all to formulate, let alone articulate, any remonstrance.

"Oink oink, I do declare this deal a fair one! Now, lead us to the wolf pup!"

And so, the spirit turned into an ice stream, and carried the persevering Princess over the tall mountain...

Vol 7

All the sacrifices made out in the frozen plains were not in vain. The perfect ending of friendship, love, life and death!

This is the end to the famous and touching story, The Boar Princess.

After venturing through the bitter cold and the swirling storms, the Boar Princess finally saw the pup.

Covered in ice, the poor pup's once bright blue eyes had now grown dim, and he had all but forgotten how to bark.

"Aroo! You have come at the right moment, for I haven't had lunch yet!"

Hearing his words, the kind Boar Princess could not help but shed tears. Her warm tears seemed to melt a little of the ice at the tip of the pup's heart.

"Aroo! Why are you crying?"

"Oink, oink! You are going to starve out here — I have never seen such misery in my kingdom!"

"I will sacrifice everything to feed your hungry belly!"

The pup was stupefied by her words.

"Aroooooo! Miss, you must be mad! No-one has ever dared say such a thing to me!"

But when the pup saw the determination in her eyes, his frozen heart melted some more.

"Nope! That's why..."

"I will sacrifice two of the wisest and most caring members of my family just to feed you! It is for the sake of our friendship!"

The fox knew what horror she meant and attempted to run, but he was pinned to the ground by the pup and the Boar Princess. Grandpa Turtle was so frightened by the sight that he retreated into his shell.

The pup and the Boar Princess enjoyed a delicious appetizer of fox out in the snow. Next, they found a cave, picked a few mushrooms, built a fire with some moss, and treated themselves to a tasty turtle soup.

The pup felt the delight of sharing and making friends for the first time he could remember. His frozen heart melted completely, and he shed tears of joy.

The Princess took the pup by his paw, and the two merrily returned to their home.

(Wedge between the last two pages is a card bearing elegant handwriting: "Honey, I think it would be best if we donated this one to the library...")

The Mondstadt Tower

Vol 1

In the age of depression and tyranny, the outlander girl met the ominous orphan. Does this fateful encounter foretell a tragic ending?

The historic romance novel, The Mondstadt Tower, begins!

In the time of the aristocrats, there stood a high tower in Mondstadt's plaza. It was built to honor Barbatos the Anemo Archon in name, yet in reality it was nothing more than a flamboyant display of wealth and power by the royals to gloat over the commoners. The one time in the year that the commoners living in these dark times could find a little solace was during Ludi Harpastum.

During one Ludi Harpastum, a wandering singer from a distant land arrived in the city. The name of the lass was Inès, and everyone at the festival was enchanted by her stunning beauty. People of all ages and all walks of life vied to catch a glimpse of her throwing the Harpastum and to hear her sing foreign ballads.

"The blessings of Barbatos are for everyone! You are only sinful if you are bitter at such a joyous occasion!"

As she sang these verses, she handed out her earnings during the festival to the poor and orphans in the city.

A frail figure stood among the crowds. He was the Seneschal, and he fell for her at first sight. But his religious piety filled him with a frustration at his inability to suppress the emotions he was experiencing, and her acts of charity, which violated the Church's right to aid to the poor, irked him all the more.

As is known to all, the beliefs of contemporary Mondstaders hold that the Anemo Archon Barbatos encourages people to seek love and pursue freedom, but in the dark ages the Anemo Archon slept, and the city was tormented by the tyranny of the nobles, the poverty of the commoners, and the ravage of the dragon; meanwhile, the self-proclaimed "orthodox" church — a mere figurehead, controlled by the ruling class — advocated abstinence from earthly pleasures to avert divine punishment. Under such circumstances, even the harp which symbolized the wind had been restricted to playing only those songs deemed "holy." However, the notion of "divine punishment" was little more than an excuse fabricated by the nobles to conceal their avarice and restrict the commoners.

"To let her stay in the city is to bewitch all its inhabitants. What wickedness will this witch bring?" The Seneschal pondered.

And so, the Seneschal plotted to hunt down Inès, and to confine her to the Cathedral while awaiting further instructions. As per the traditions of the time, the maiden chosen to throw the Harpastum should serve at the royal court for three days after the celebration, under the protection of the aristocrats. The Seneschal decided to send his adopted son, Octave, to sneak into the royal court and abduct Inès.

Octave was an unwelcome child, abandoned by his superstitious parents at birth and later raised by the Seneschal. As a child, he was persecuted and abused by the citizens, seen as a bad omen of draconic disasters. The only person who protected Octave was the Seneschal, who treated him like his own son and thus won his utmost trust.

"Bring the maiden who threw the Harpastum yesterday to me! Disturb no-one and do not mention my name."

Under orders from the Seneschal, Octave climbed onto the balcony of the court chambers at nightfall. Upon seeing the girl weeping in the moonlight, his pure heart was stirred, for he had never seen such a wondrous sight. He gazed at the girl, leaving his task forgotten. But the silence of the tranquil moment shared by Octave and the girl was interrupted by the servants...

The Pale Princess and the Six Pygmies

Vol 1

A fairytale story that has been told throughout Teyvat for ages. This is part one, which tells the story of the Land of Night and the Moonlight Forest.

In the distant past, the Night Mother ruled over the faraway Land of Night. Here, no light touched the earth, nor did a single tree grow, and there was no life here but the horrendous denizens of the dark.

The Night Mother was the source of all sins, and the Land of Night was the embodiment of her evilness. The cruel Night Mother, who had neither heart nor mouth, was always watching the Land of Night, and her punishments were always unexpected. The only thing she could not bear was the occasional ray of moonlight that made it through the clouds. The light that penetrated the walls of darkness always irritated her.

The Moonlight Forest was the only place free from the rule of the Night Mother. Only there could the people bask in the bright moonlight and enjoy the grace it brought to the living. Everyone in the Kingdom of the Moonlight Forest was born with fair skin, light-colored hair, and bright blue eyes. Perhaps the constant lack of sunlight and the nourishment of the moonlight was the reason for their beauty, giving them an appearance different from the abhorrent creatures lurking at the edge of the forest.

Vol 2

A fairytale story that has been told throughout Teyvat for ages. This installment tells of the meeting of the Pale Princess and the Light Prince.

The monarch of this kingdom was a beautiful princess with skin as white as snow. Just like the moon, she had the brightest skin, the purest eyes, and the kindest soul. People of the kingdom all vowed their loyalty to her and referred to her as The Pale Princess.

The Pale Princess ruled her kingdom with kindness and gentleness. She always knew what was best for her people. Under her rule, the people of the Moonlight Forest never knew the threat of the Night Mother's wrath, and the creatures lurking in the dark never dared to set foot in the forest.

However, the Princess had her own troubles. To her, the silvery moon hanging in the night sky seemed like a tiny hole through which the light could pass, and she felt that by following the light back to its source one could almost see the world on the other side. Just like all other people,

the Pale Princess would often sit on the stone plate in front of the palace, imagining a world beyond the moonlight.

"Will I be able to bring my people there one day?" The Princess thought to herself.

"You will."

She had not expected to hear an answer.

The Princess turned and saw a young prince.

Vol 3

A fairytale story that has been told throughout Teyvat for ages. This installment tells of the Pale Princess and the Light Prince's decision to save the Moonlight Forest.

"I am the Prince of the Kingdom of Light from the other side of the world," the prince said to the shocked Princess.

The Prince shone with an extraordinary light. The people of the Moonlight Forest had never seen such vitality. For as the Prince strolled through the forest, life flourished around him: new leaves sprouted and the Princess and her people grew stronger.

He had come to save them. He would eventually save her from the darkness and take her to a kingdom free from all shadows. Although the Prince didn't say it explicitly, the Pale Princess had sensed the possibility of his arrival through her years of meditation.

So, she asked.

"What's the world like on the other side of the moon?"

The Prince had already told her about the Kingdom of Light hundreds of times before, but at that moment, the Prince realized that she was determined to find out for herself.

So, having sworn to save her people, the Princess and the Prince left the Moonlight Forest and walked hand in hand into the dark forest of the Land of Night.

Vol 4

A fairytale story that has been told throughout Teyvat for ages. Installment four describes the meeting between the Pale Princess, the Light Prince, and the Six Pygmies.

Having slogged across the swamp blazing with dark flames and passed the cave overgrown with poisonous mushrooms, the Prince and the Princess finally arrived at the Kingdom of Pygmies.

"Princess of the Moonlight Forest, please save my five brothers. We will vow our loyalty to you in return for your kindness," begged a deformed pygmy who had just popped up from behind the branches.

The kind Princess, sympathizing with the pygmies, promised to help them.

They climbed up the dark mountains and saved the pygmy on the ridge, who was blind.

"Oh, silly me. I climbed all the way up here to try and get a better view." The blind pygmy apologized profusely.

They dragged another pygmy out of the muddy wetland. This one was a fool.

"Hehehe." The foolish pygmy thanked the Princess.

They walked into the cave where the Nightgaunt resides and saved another pygmy, who was timid, from the top of a stalactite.

"Not... not to brag, but I... I came here to have a fierce fight with the Night Mother's minions!"

The timid pygmy explained.

They set foot on a barren field and found a shrunken pygmy in the quicksand.

"I wanted to see my garden but somehow got lost." Rubbing his withered palms, the shrunken pygmy grinned.

They snuck into the nest of shadows and rescued a carefree pygmy from the clutches of carnivorous mushrooms.

"I was out for a walk and somehow got trapped here." the carefree pygmy sighed.

One by one, the Princess and the Prince saved the deformed pygmy's five brothers. The kind Princess said to them:

"Now that you are all my people, please let me take you to the Kingdom of Light. It's a place that can bring sight to the blind, wisdom to the foolish, courage to the timid, and reinvigoration to the shrunken. As a princess, this is my gesture of gratitude to you."

On hearing this, the pygmies were elated. To show their gratitude, they went along on the journey to serve the Prince and the Princess.

Vol 5

A fairytale story that has been told throughout Teyvat for ages. In this installment, the Six Pygmies' sinister scheme starts to unfold.

On the surface, the six pygmies were true to the Princess and Prince, and followed them everywhere. But they were still heinous creatures from the Land of Night, and corruption flowed in their veins. As the days traveling to the Kingdom of Light grew long and dangerous, the root of evil would again blossom in their hearts.

Fear gave root to malice, and out of malice grew evil scheming. The six pygmies started to devise their nasty plot.

The blind pygmy opened his sightless eyes and enjoyed the sunlight greedily.

"Why not keep the Prince with us forever? Instead of believing in unfathomable promises, securing the sunlight before us is our best bet."

The foolish pygmy gently patted his scabies-ridden head and gulped the light-filled air rapaciously.

"Hehehe, I... I think we should kidnap the Prince and use... use him to make us smarter. That's the smart way!"

The timid pygmy swung his tiny fists in the air and yelled.

"All that rascal did was save our lives and now he acts so condescendingly, treating us like servants. I shall challenge him to a duel!"

The shrunken pygmy squinted in disdain. His complexion wrinkled up like a piece of crumpled paper.

"Brothers, you have been hiding in the shadows for too long. The darkness has clouded your judgment. It is new life that we need in order to survive. I say we use the corpse of the Prince as fertilizer so my garden might flourish again."

The carefree pygmy sighed and looked sullen.

"We'd better get this over with quickly... If it weren't for them, these evil thoughts wouldn't have entered my mind, and I wouldn't have become so somber."

There was one pygmy who did not join the discussion. This is not because he was not evil, but because the guilt of betraying his savior overcame his wicked nature enough to make him keep his mouth shut. He couldn't even say a single word. Nevertheless, the guilt could not completely suppress his corrupt nature and the pygmies all agreed to the scheme. They decided to poison the Prince's water.

Vol 6

A fairytale story that has been told throughout Teyvat for ages. This installment tells of how the Six Pygmies managed to implement their nefarious plot.

At that moment, the Pale Princess was in a deep slumber and had not an inkling of how the pygmies had played her and her lover for fools. Under the cover of the night sky, the six pygmies made their first move.

The poison had sent the Prince into a coma as the Pale Princess slept. The six pygmies' scheme started to unfold.

In her sleep, the Princess had no idea how the Prince was being tortured. In her dream, her lover's body glowed with luminous colors and light scattered gently like satin. The sweet sunlight finally broke through the dark clouds and sprinkled on the living. The orange glow of the setting sun painted a layer of caramel on the blue lake, making the water as sweet as nectar. New colors were painted on the black hills and the ruined city was turned into a candy castle. However, when the Princess called the Prince by name, all she heard in reply were indistinguishable words.

The poor Princess had no idea that the Prince could no longer respond to her calling.

Lightning flashed and thunder echoed in the silent night sky. The six pygmies carried out their scheme successfully. To celebrate, they set up a huge pot and cooked a pot of thick soup with

moss and poisonous mushrooms. But just as the culprits were enjoying their feast, the Prince's broken soul used up all its remaining power to curse the pygmies. For the rest of their lives, they were tormented by a curse that made them feel as if they were being cooked in a huge cooking pot, unable to ever see the light of day again.

However, during the celebration, one of the pygmies wrapped the Prince in the dirty tablecloth, intent on carrying him back to the dark forest to seek help from the Princess, hoping to wake him up. No-one knows if this was out of a lingering sense of loyalty to the Princess, or simply born of his fear of the curse.

The Legend of Vennessa

Vol 1

A popular song since the reconstruction of Mondstadt. It tells the story of Vennessa, the founder of the Knights of Favonius, in her early years as a slave in Mondstadt.

Friends of Mondstadt, let us revel! Drink to your hearts' content!
To freedom! To the Anemo Archon!
To Vennessa, the first Knight to grace this world!
Sons and daughters of Mondstadt, may the gift from the Anemo Archon be engraved in your hearts!
And let it be known that this gift is not freedom, but just defiance!

It transpired in ages past.
Friends, do excuse me for improvising,
For it should be clear as day, that the glory and freedom of Mondstadt
Were born when Barbatos struck the strings dolce.
Poems sing of heroic fame,
Yet to commemorate unnamed freedom should they aim.

Chained by the royals, Mondstadt could barely suspire,
And festivities were but vanity games of the rich,
Beyond the grasp of the ordinary people.
A withering dungeon, Mondstadt was.
In slavery games the royals gaily relished,
Oblivious to their place, the inmates were.

A fiery-headed dame confined to a cell,
From the southern plains she did hail.
Born free but now bound by chains,
Though restrained by a tyrant her flesh remained.
Still her pious soul never ceased to pray,
For her people, for Mondstadt, for illusive freedom if she may.

Vol 2

A popular song since the reconstruction of Mondstadt. It tells the story of Vennessa, the founder of the Knights of Favonius, in her early years when she met Barbatos, the Anemo Archon, as well as how she defeated the drake and overthrew the Aristocrats.

Friends of Mondstadt, let us revel! Drink to your hearts' content!
The day came when Barbatos answered her devotion.
The Anemo Archon sought her fiery hair and descended to her position.
"Every being deserves a name," the spirit grinned.
"To weave your fair name into a song I yearn,"
"I seek nothing but your friendship in return."
The girl happily reciprocated, her fears swiftly dissipated.

And so, to the battlefield she marched to Barbatos's singing voice,
The demonic dragon fled from her might and the people did rejoice.
Corpulent aristocrats crawled under tables at such a valiant sight.
"Mondstadt is freedom," the winds sang for their people in delight.
Lonely forest breezes converged, jointly they overthrew the tyrant's tower from the sky.
Broken free from shackles at last, the young lioness stood firm in the winds with her head held high.

And so, the fiery-headed dame won herself prestigious fame.
Her heart swelled with appreciation to sing by the Anemo Archon's side.
But no words of gratitude should she utter, Barbatos replied:
"You first conducted what now transpires in your song."
"You have entrusted me with your friendship and your name."
"To praise your freedom, my songs came."

Friends, let us drink some more!
For thence flows the freedom of Mondstadt.
When days become nights and faces fill with despair,
Never forget the heroic tales of Vennessa, the dame with the flaming hair!
Never cease to pursue freedom, even when the land is bare!

Diary of Roald the Adventurer

Sal Terrae

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald. The pages are littered with a small amount of shiny but bitter salt crystals.

—Sal Terrae—

My shoes are completely waterlogged after trekking here from the banks of Dihua Marsh. The last time I took them off to pour the water out, a frog jumped out.

From the scale of this ruin, I suspect it is the temple that provided safe refuge for civilians during the Archon War several millennia ago. I've heard that the God of Salt built such a place. Liyue folklore holds that she was the gentlest of the gods. In the brutality and chaos of wartime, human beings were puny and disposable. But the Salt God refused to join the other gods in their senseless battle for dominance, instead choosing to give shelter to those dispossessed by the war. She brought them here to build a new settlement. She showed them kindness and comfort. And even as global upheaval ushered in the end of an epoch, she worked tirelessly to bring about a return to peace between the gods.

It seems that most parts of the ancient city have sunk into the riverbed of Bishui River. It's fortunate that the foundation of the temple is still here after all this time.

She amassed a group of followers who settled in the area now known as Sal Terrae and lived a humble existence. The city stood for several centuries, finally falling with the downfall of the god herself.

The gentlest of the gods fell not in battle at the hand of the other gods. She fell at the hand of one of her own people, the people she had loved so dearly.

He was the first king of the people, and also the last. He had once loved the God of Salt just as the rest did, but as a mere mortal, he ultimately could not fathom the self-sacrificial love the god embodied. He sought after military might, in the hope that the city might be able to hold its own in defense and attack. And so, to demonstrate that gentleness was a virtue unfit for the times, he took a sword and ended the life of the lone, defenseless god. No sooner had she met her demise than the temple itself collapsed, and the people's city crumbled like salt into the earth.

As for the treacherous king's fate, theories abound but none are certain. Some say he continued to reign in solitude from the ruins for centuries, finally turning to dust long after the cries of war had subsided, the ruins had been engulfed by the river, and insects had hollowed out his scepter. Other say that he took his own life after taking that of the god, unable to bear the guilt of deicide that weighed upon his conscience. In any case, the people on whom the Salt God

had once looked so fondly became scattered across Liyue. In the safe haven of Liyue Harbor, under the rule of the Geo Archon, they and their stories survived, and that is why we still hear about them to this day.

Rumors say that the Salt God's body can still be found somewhere in the depths of the ruins. Though her body has turned to salt, it still maintains her posture from the moment she was struck by the king's sword.

It looks like we're in for some heavy rain: dark clouds are gathering as far as the eye can see. I'd better get moving. I'm going to head northwest to Mt. Qingce. Hopefully I can make it there before the rain gets too heavy. And hopefully it's not such a mad dash that I lose my diary en route...

Qingce Village

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald, at a makeshift camp. It stills looks new, and smells like the fragrant herbs of Mt. Qingce.

—Qingce Village—

Leaving Dragonspine, I waded through rivers, walked across shoals carpeted with silver grass, and made my way through sun-dappled bamboo forests, before finally arriving at Mt. Qingce. My shoes and clothes were all soaked from the heavy rain. Luckily, the elders in the village were kind enough to let me hang my clothes in the assembly hall. They even prepared dry clothes and some food for me.

There were many children in Qingce Village. Sweet as they may be, they can become quite clingy. There were also many elders here. People living here seemed happy and carefree. The elders said that most of the young people had gone to work in Liyue Harbor. Many of them already had a family there and they would send money back every month. Having seen the prosperity and convenience of the city, it's hard for these young people to go back to the rural life here. Liyue Harbor has brought peace and prosperity to Qingce Village for the time being, but eventually it will also be the cause of its demise.

Legend has it that the word "Qingce" originated from the name of an ancient monster "Chi." "Chi," of course, is what we call it now in the contemporary language. But in ancient times, the people of Liyue pronounced it as "Qingce."

An elder said that thousands of years ago, Morax defeated the sea serpent and brought peace back to Liyue. After Chi died, its body turned to stone, its blood became water, and its scales are now the terraced fields. The monster's nest became what we now call Mt. Qingce.

But after a quick look, I believe the mountains consist of mostly rocks shattered by impacts from the outside. No traces of a hydro monster can be found in the rocks. Perhaps the corpse of Chi is long gone and this monster-turning-into-a-mountain thing is nothing but an ancient tale?

My next destination is the lake located amongst the stone peaks of Jueyun Karst. It is said that there is a labyrinth where the adepti live. Let's see if I can find them.

Aocang Lake, Jueyun Karst

A diary of the famed adventurer, Roald, left by the lake. It tells of his plans after his adventures on Mt. Aocang.

—Aozang Lake, Jueyun Karst—

I seem to have lost yet another diary... I don't understand, I even made sure to say to myself three times: "Whatever you do, don't lose your diary." But then I got caught up in my adventure, and it went straight out of my head. I waste so much paper every year... I do hope the Dendro Archon won't mind.

I have arrived at a mountain lake located high on Mt. Aocang. To get here, I had to hike up a winding dirt trail, make my way across perilous wooden walkways built by herb gatherers in ancient times, and then scale a steep, wet cliff. I was told by some fishermen that the lake is a thousand furlongs deep, but after taking a dip in the water I can safely say that their statements were pure hyperbole.

The Qingce Village elders were right after all: the mountain lake's water is sweet and warm. This place certainly lives up to its reputation as a celestial paradise! Back when I had just arrived in Jueyun Karst, an old farmer told me that the adepti possess a mysterious magical ability that lets them turn into mist and roam in the sea of clouds. I dismissed it as an old wives' tale at the time, but seeing the way the mist over the lake rises up to the summit and merges together with the sea of clouds, it does make me wonder... The adeptus I've been searching for could be roaming the clouds at the summit right now, for all I know, and I would be completely oblivious to it.

I headed east down Mt. Aocang and ended up thoroughly lost in a thick forest. Finally, I came to a clearing and discovered I was back at the banks of the Bishui River. I have an excellent view of the surrounding area here, so I think this is where I'll camp for the night.

While I was sorting through my things at the camp, I met a young lady who looked like she was out on a treasure hunt. She was called Eduarda, and she explained that she was heading west to look for a "Miraculous Lake" at the foot of Mt. Aocang:

"Legends tell of an adeptus who lives beside a lake at the foot of Mt. Aocang on the northern side. If that's true, then that's sure to be where the adeptus keeps their secret treasure, too... Mwuhahaha, I know exactly what I'll do when I get my hands on that treasure!"

Then she quickly changed her tune, as if suddenly realizing how she sounded: "I... I'd contact the Guild, and report to them if I found it! I am a proud member of the Adventurers' Guild, and I have absolutely no connection to the Treasure Hoarders!"

Indeed, some adventurers are in the business for material wealth alone. I'm reminded of that classic Liyue saying, "To each their unfathomable own"... But whatever her motivations, she is a fellow adventurer nonetheless, and a genuine one at that.

I must say, I was tempted to head west in search of this fabled "Miraculous Lake" myself after hearing Eduardo talk about it. But in the end I decided to stick with my existing plan. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, I will proceed to the Guili Plains to see what sights and treasures are waiting to be discovered there. And hopefully I won't lose my diary again this time — again, barring any unforeseen circumstances. I can't lose another one... May any unforeseen circumstances be well and truly barred.

Luhua Pool

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald, at a makeshift camp. It seems to have been dipped in water, with the watermark of a fox's footprint.

—Luhua Pool—

Traveling southeast along the Bishui River, I came across a pond at the foot of Mt. Tianheng on the north side. The water is clearer than the sky and the water temperature is similar to a human's body temperature. The water has a sweet aftertaste.

A local herb gatherer told me that thousands of years ago, this pond was once a garden. It is said that during the era of the Archon War, two lovers, whose families disapproved of their relationship, made this place their rendezvous. However, the times were merciless, and the man left his lover to follow the Geo Archon. He plunged himself bravely into the conflict as a mortal among gods... and like so many mortals in those dark days, none heard from him again for centuries.

The girl wandered the garden, awaiting the return of her lover. The flowers withered and grass grew in their place. Soaked in a flood, the grass rotted. And when the flood too had subsided, and to dust she had returned, her tears then converged into this pond. Perhaps it was her deep longing that made the water here so clear and gentle.

I spent an afternoon here and nodded off while taking a bath in the pond. When I woke up, the stars were already glittering in the night sky.

I noticed a baby fox slinking around me, but it got scared and ran away when I looked up.

Not until later did I realize that one of my shoes was missing and my bag of provisions had been ransacked.

It took longer than I expected to pack my luggage. My next destination is the delta of the Bishui River in the northeast — Yaoguang Shoal.

Yaoguang Shoal

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald. The pages smell like the sea breeze.

—Yaoguang Shoal—

This is the delta of the Bishui River, where the sand and mud carried by the river has accumulated into an open and flat shoal. When I finally arrived, the shoal was shrouded in a blanket of fog, and my new shoes were soaked again. I heard the sound of some unknown monsters coming from the fog, but couldn't quite tell their exact location.

All that was left to do was set up the tent and wait for this blasted fog to drift away.

When I was staying at the Wangshu Inn, a merchant told me about the legends of Yaoguang Shoal. He started with a poem — "Jade-lustered waves washed into the ocean while a conch lay empty on the white shoal."

The meaning of the poem is that the sunlight, pure as jade, glimmers on the surface of the Bishui River and seems to flow into the sea along with the river water. But the Greenconch Lodge on the Yaoguang Shoal has been unoccupied for some time.

I once ventured into the fog to visit the Seashell Sanctuary, but didn't see the owner.

A legend among fishermen has it that the Greenconch Lodge was the home of an adeptus — the green conch itself, in fact, constituting part of her very being. She provided shelter for travelers who were lost in the fog, took care of the shipwrecked survivors, and bid godspeed to other adepts on crusades against sea monsters.

But older fishermen interpret the legend differently. They say that the Seashell Sanctuary was not the abode of an adeptus, but of a family that had lived in the giant seashell for generations. They devoted themselves to helping the lost and saved many fishermen's lives.

It seems the fog is drifting away and the sun is almost visible now.

Next up, I'll borrow a boat to get to Guyun Stone Forest and visit the ruins where the Geo Archon vanquished the sea monster.

I should arrive in no time at all if the weather is good.

Guyun Stone Forest

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald, by chance. The pages are damp and seem to have been soaked in water.

—Guyun Stone Forest—

We skirted past a few small islands occupied by hilichurls, managing to steer clear of their line of sight, and made it to Guyun Stone Forest successfully. Six giant Stone Pillars kept the sun out of my eyes as I went ashore, and it was remarkably cool in their shade. The crabs on the beach were big and meaty. Maybe it's because the area has been nourished by the remains of a magical beast for millennia? Anyway, they taste great roasted.

The sheer beauty of this place makes it hard to imagine that it was once the site of a bloody battle between the Geo Archon and the sea monster. Suffice to say the blood once shed here has long since vanished into the sea without a trace. I suppose that everything pales into insignificance when faced with the scale of the sea. Whether it's a single drop of an ordinary person's blood or rivers of blood shed collectively by the heroes of the past, the relentless flowing of the winds and waves are destined to wash every last trace of it away. In the end, everything will be just as it has always been, since time immemorial.

Legend has it that the Geo Archon once carved a giant polearm out of the rocky land. He plunged it deep into the ocean, riding it straight through the body of the demon that wrought chaos upon his domain. Over the years, the wind gradually eroded the stone polearm into the form we see today.

Later, I'll return to the mainland to camp out for the night. From where I am, I can see the ships leaving the harbor in the distance. As I write, The Crux is setting sail once more, embarking on its next grand voyage. I wonder what mission the Qixing Commerce Guild has entrusted to the legendary Captain Beidou this time?

I had the most awful night's sleep last night. I dreamt I was somewhere pitch-black and damp. Suddenly, I was a sea monster, and my impaled body was being driven into the ocean floor by the Geo Archon's polearm. I writhed around and clutched at the giant polearm made of rock, trying desperately to free myself, but it was wedged firmly in place. Each movement I made filled me with agony, and with rage...

Note to self: Guyun Stone Forest is not a good place to spend the night! I woke early, so I lit the campfire and I'll move out once the sky's bright. My next stop is Liyue Harbor: I just need to be somewhere that I can get my clothes washed, beard trimmed, that sort of thing. Once I've sorted myself out, I'm making another trip to Jueyun Karst. I didn't make any progress on finding the adepti last time. This time, I think I'll try my luck at Qingyun Peak.

Another note to self: Do not lose my diary again!

Qingyun Peak, Jueyun Karst

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald. The pages have the scent of flowers that grow on cliffs.

—Qingyun Peak, Jueyun Karst—

I shall preface my adventurer's diary with a stern reminder to myself. Recently, I keep discovering that I've misplaced my diary every time I feel like I want to write in it. Oh, Roald, you must learn to be more careful in future!

After climbing for what feels like an eternity, I have finally reached the top of the precipice. I'm surrounded by a sea of clouds. It's impossible to know where in the midst of that sea of clouds I once stood looking up at this celestial place where the adepti dwell.

Apart from the few oddly-shaped trees, there are barely any signs of life here at the top of the precipice. Occasionally, a Lapis Glede will let out a high-pitched cry before diving down into the clouds and disappearing from view. Up the hill from here is the adeptus's dwelling, but there's a few things I need to sort out before I head up. The most pressing issue is repairing my climbing gear, I'll also tend to a few cuts and grazes while I'm at it. A kind farmer gave me some ointment when I first arrived in Jueyun Karst — it stings, but it really does work.

Nights atop the precipice offer little in the way of comfort. The relentless wind above the clouds pierces to the bone. It's difficult to shelter oneself from it, because it finds its way to you through all the tiny gaps in the tent, and there's no way you could keep a campfire alight in this wind. A good night's sleep is therefore out of the question. I wonder if the adeptus who dwells at the summit ever gets lonely and dispirited being surrounded by nothing but the cold, heartless wind?

At the end of a long and sleepless night, I finally watched the moon set into the sea of clouds. I'll make sure my pack is securely fastened, then at daybreak I'll begin my journey to the summit where the adeptus dwells. Hopefully, the altitude is high enough that it won't rain.

Qingxu Pool

Diary of a renowned adventurer, Roald. Spots of shiny green moss can be seen among the pages.

—Qingxu Pool—

To stop me from losing my diary yet again, this time I've put a marker made of moss on the leather case. Now it really stands out in my backpack. It's perfect! Tonight, I'll put it beside my pillow before I go to sleep — there's no way I can lose it then. Honestly, I don't think I can keep calling myself an adventurer if I lose my diary one more time... a misadventurer, perhaps.

I headed westward from the mountain pass at Mt. Tianheng and came to a ruin, known locally as Qingxu Pool. The entrance to the ruin is located right in the center of a giant rocky outcrop rising up from the center of a shallow pool. It is surrounded on all sides by steep cliff faces. There are several stone towers which blend in seamlessly with the natural scenery put here by the Geo Archon. The morning mist is beginning to clear and the first rays of sunlight are starting to illuminate the mountains and ruins. It looks like it'll be good weather today.

Legends say that these ruins predate the Geo Archon's rule over Liyue. The whole of Lisha was covered by water at the time of the Archon War, and back then this rocky outcrop was nothing more than a little islet that rose above the water's surface. After peace was restored, the region of Lisha unfurled once more as the tides withdrew, revealing the ancient buildings erected by the early peoples.

Back when I was at the Wangshu Inn I met a scholar from Sumeru called Soraya. She had done a fair bit of research on the ruins in Lisha. Once she got talking about it she could talk all day. What she told me was that these ruins were left behind by an evil god, whose name has been wiped from the record, and its people. But in the end, the sea gave way to forests and fields, the self-serving god was defeated, and the strongholds and temples of the ancient city the god's people once built were left to crumble. That is how Qingxu Pool came to be. The ruins were submerged until the long Archon War finally came to an end, emerging on the landscape as the tide subsided.

Maybe these crumbling remains have been left as a nostalgic reminder of a bygone era for the adepti and the other deities. In any case, this is a calm and tranquil place that has, for whatever reason, remained entirely unperturbed by the relentless development of Liyue Harbor and untouched by the mining operation based at the Chasm. It has just been left, as-is, right to this day. Perversely, the only disturbances have come since the mining at the Chasm has been halted, as monsters have now occupied the ruins here. Let's just hope they don't destroy anything.

It is a simple theory, but I need to gather more evidence. I should keep heading north and visit the ruins at Lingju Pass and Dunyu.

I ran into Eduarda again just before I set off. She seemed to be traveling with a partner this time. She must have a busy adventurer's schedule — it seemed like I blinked and then she'd disappeared off into the ruins.

Dragonspine

A journal left behind by a renowned adventurer Roald. Some of its pages are damaged and crumpled, and a few shimmering ice crystals are attached to them.

—Dragonspine—

I began my ascent of Dragonspine from its southern side, where the mountain meets the riverbanks and plains of Liyue. The mountain slopes gently here, the wind is soft, and the snow is light. Added to the unfrozen water sources, it makes this place a good choice for setting up a base camp. Once I have prepared my supplies, I will make a camp here before continuing my climb to the summit.

After setting up camp, I took the chance to survey the surrounding ruins. What intrigued me is that the architectural style and artistic patterns are strikingly similar to those seen in ancient buildings elsewhere. This could very well mean that the fabled mountain civilization of old is right beneath my feet.

Unfortunately, I did not find any well-preserved inscriptions within the ruins, so there was no hard proof of the ancient civilization's historicity. Perhaps I will find more information is preserved further up the mountain, buried deep within the biting cold blizzards.

Spending the night here is an unpleasant experience. The cold, damp wind chills to the bone, and the way it shakes the tent sounds like the roar of a rushing river. Guaranteed nightmare material for once you do manage to fall asleep. There's a cave by the water, and it must be spacious in there because I can hear the ghostly groaning of the wind echoing inside. Unfortunately, the entrance is tightly fenced off and there is simply no way to get through from the outside.

I will start advancing further up the mountain a little later on. There are some remnants of the relatively recent past by the path, which if I'm not mistaken can be traced back to the era when Mondstadt was ruled by an aristocracy. I dug up some fragments of clothing and some irreparably damaged weaponry. The dense snow and ice seem to have slowed down the decomposition process, preserving any pieces of the past that they swallow up for a long time to come.

The way that the items are distributed leads me to believe that a chase once took place here on this mountain path — or possibly even a murder.

It seems that even fierce blizzards and sinister mutations pose no obstacle to humans intent on following through on their dark ambitions. In the end, this archon-forsaken snowscape has become stained by mortal transgression.

As I climb further up the path, the wind becomes stronger and the temperature plummets to an unbearably low level. I scouted out a ruin to the northeast, where to my utter astonishment I found water! It was somehow unfrozen, in defiance of its perennially blizzard-beaten

surroundings. From the location, I would estimate that it is linked to the stream I saw further downhill.

However, this area is so cold that I could not afford to explore deeper inside the ruin for the risk of freezing to death or drowning. I left a makeshift sign there to mark the spot — I just hope that it doesn't get buried in the snow.

I suppose that once upon a time this could have been an underground shelter and that over the years the groundwater has seeped in and flooded it. But I have also heard that the tyrants of the distant past were partial to a form of punishment whereby they would jail a prisoner, lock them in a cage, and then slowly pour water in. Just so they could force the prisoner to watch in alarm as the water slowly rose up from their ankles to their mouth, nose, and finally their forehead... Such a cruel and drawn out punishment... And in the sheer cold of this climate, it is all the more impossible to imagine that any managed to survive it.

Further to the east, the road becomes more rugged. I had a stupid accident and very nearly broke my leg because of it. I was lucky to only receive a superficial wound and no major bone injury. But it also tore a great big hole in my windproof clothing, so now I feel the full force of the wind right against my skin. It feels awful, like being stabbed constantly with a sharp knife. I managed to find shelter from the wind before my wound went completely numb. I just about managed to sew my clothing back up, but there's no way I can continue to the summit like this. I made it back to camp, finally, on the verge of freezing to death. As I warmed my feet by the bonfire, I removed my socks to find that three of my toes had turned purple from the cold... But no matter, right now I'm still enjoying the feeling of coming back to life after such a close brush with death.

When the storm died down a little, I looked up and caught a view of the peak, towering there silently against the dark sky, encircled by giant jagged rocks and yet secluded among them in the center. The bards' songs tell of an ancient, evil dragon who lies buried there in the mountain stream — I wonder if it, too, yearns for the celestial heights even as it gazes up with its rotting and blinded eyes?

Many villagers who live at the foot of the mountain liken this monstrous mountain to a blind spot in the eyes of the gods, a place ruled by the inscrutable force of fate. Old Mondstadt fairy tales speak of the mountain as a place of punishment that was abandoned by the Wind of Time and left for the howling winds to sweep in and freeze everything in its moment of destruction. Yet something still stirs here, at the peak of the mountain. I heard its call in my dream. It was like a gentle song, pleasing to the ear, but somehow disturbing to the mind.

This trip was a disaster, but at least I came out of it alive. Farewell for today, Dragonspine. Perhaps I shall return, though I do not know if I will ever make it to your summit... I think I will explore Liyue next. But first things first, my top priority is replenishing my lost supplies. Oh, and while I'm at it, I think I'll swap this soggy old diary for a nice new one.

Ritou

A diary left behind by the famed adventurer, Roald. The pages bear both the refreshing scent of sakura flowers and the bitterness of tobacco leaves.

...

Someone's Diary

Letter for Dongdong

A letter treasured by Dongdong from Qingce Village. It seems to be a letter from his father.

Dear Dongdong,

Time flies, doesn't it? It's been nearly three months since I left. Do you miss me? I do hope you're going to bed on time and not causing any trouble for grandma and grandpa. I'll be back from Inazuma very soon, and I promise when I get back I'll take you to see The Crux's ship down at the harbor. I won't let you down this time!

Dongdong, do you remember the beach at Yaoguang Shoal? Well I went there, and I collected lots and lots of beautiful, golden sand. More than I can carry by myself. When I'm back, we should buy up the local mill and make fresh tofu every single day. Although, I'd rather use all this gold to buy a house in Liyue Harbor. A huge house with a splendid sea view. I'll let you decide how to spend it when I'm back. How does that sound?

Guess what? Just opposite Luhua Pool at the Guili Plains there's an enormous cliff, and what did I find there? A Ruin Guard! He was just sitting there, slumped over, completely still. He didn't flinch even in the thunder and lightning, not even when the rain was pelting down on him. Then I realized, he must be sleeping! So I climbed up on top of him, threw my arms around that big old head of his, and twisted it as hard as I could. There was a clunking noise, followed by a loud boom, and suddenly his head fell off and rolled straight off the cliff! It smashed into a million pieces at the bottom. Shame really, otherwise I would have brought it home as a trophy, and you could have had a proper up-close look at what a Ruin Guard's head looks like. Imagine that!

I also went to Jueyun Karst. I must take you there when you're older. The scenery there is incredible. The billowing clouds look like an ocean, the waterfall is infinitely better than the one in Qingce Village, and you can sometimes catch a glimpse of the realm of the adepti in the mountains. You can't begin to imagine how beautiful it was. And guess what? You're not going to believe this but... I met an actual, real-life adeptus! We sat and drank together, chatting and laughing away... The adeptus gave me a gift, too: a magic wine bottle. All you need to do is blow on it, and an infinite supply of wine will flow from the inside! You absolutely mustn't touch it though, do you understand? You're way too young to drink. When you're older, though, all my treasures will be yours to do with as you please.

My adventures in Liyue are coming to an end. It's time for me to head to the harbor, where I'll hop on The Crux's ship and sail off to somewhere even further away. I'm excited to see what wonderful sights and valuable treasures are waiting for me at the next stop, and I can't wait to share them all with you! Until then, Dongdong, please make sure you go to bed on time every

night. And don't eat too many sweets, they'll rot your teeth. Please also be nice to your grandma and grandpa — seriously, don't do anything to make them mad. And no fighting! I will be home soon.

Lots of love, Daddy x

Yaoguang Shoal

A diary left behind by someone in the wilderness that tells of the owner's unfortunate encounters at Yaoguang Shoal.

—Yaoguang Shoal—

The fog is setting in again... The idea of panning for gold here has turned out to be a complete waste of time. I should have known not to trust this old mining crew, it must have been several decades since the last of them retired! Every last bit of information they gave me is completely out of date... utterly useless. This is turning into a complete farce. I would say I'll be going home empty-handed tonight, but the chances of me finding my way home at all in this fog are looking slim... I hope Dongdong's eaten dinner.

I can hear hilichurls somewhere in the distance. I have no idea where I'm going in this fog, so I suppose I'll just focus on walking away from the hilichurls' voices. Hopefully I'll make it out alive...

I don't know how long I've been walking, and in this fog I don't even know if it's daytime or nighttime. Hang on, are those silhouettes I see up ahead? By the good grace of the Geo Lord, maybe I can join along with them and find a way out of here. Yep, that's what I'm gonna do. Hooray, I'm saved!

On closer inspection, the silhouettes didn't look like friendly characters. I've decided to set up a camp here and wait for them to leave before figuring out my next move. I might have to go back the way I came.

Egads! I can hear hilichurls all around me... I should definitely—

-End of diary content-

Guili Plains

A diary left behind by someone in the wilderness that tells of the owner's unfortunate encounters at Guili Plains.

—Guili Plains—

What a string of bad luck...

I finally made it out of that hilichurl camp alive, only to end up nearly being killed by a Ruin Guard! I'd figured it was probably out of action given the way it was sat there completely motionless in the torrential rain. But then a bolt of lightning struck it right on the head... There was some whirring and grinding, and suddenly it was back to life.

I was powerless to defend myself against it. It lifted me up like a baby bird and tossed me from the top of the cliff. Luckily, amidst my frantic scrambling, I managed to duck into a cave at the foot of the cliff. It was out of his line of sight, so it gave up trying to find me. If not for that cave, it'd have ripped me to shreds, thrown me to the ground, and then stomped me into... I don't even know what you'd call it by that point!

Surely it must be well away from here by now... Even so, I can still hear the droning noise it made, like a swarm of bees buzzing around inside my head. I think I must have broken my arm, because it hurts when I put any pressure on it. I think — I hope — that I will be able to manage, though. In any case, at my age I need to grin and bear it. I mean, what would Dongdong and his mother think of me if I didn't?

Jueyun Karst

A diary left behind by someone in the wilderness that tells of the owner's adventures at Jueyun Karst.

—Jueyun Karst—

Near the foot of the cliff, I ran into a herb gatherer who helped me set the bone. I almost passed out from the pain. But he did say that most passers-by he meets who have survived an encounter with a Ruin Guard tend to be less physically intact than I am... Every cloud has a silver lining, I guess.

From above, Jueyun Karst looks completely untouched by human activity. It's also shrouded in mist, and to add to the mystery it's impossible to know just how deep the mist goes. Strange noises can be heard coming from the stone forest. Whether it's illuminated beasts or celestial beings in there, I don't know. All I know is it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. With any luck I should be able to pick up a quality chunk of amber here, or maybe some highly

prized medicinal herbs. I know that back in the day many of the poorer village folks made their fortunes and built their lives in Liyue by selling herbal medicine, and I see no reason why I couldn't do the same.

It rained heavily in the evening, which meant the cliff face was too slippery to climb up. I also couldn't find my climbing rope or axe anywhere. It's strange, I'm not the type to lose things so easily... I'll bet one of the monsters lurking in the mountains pinched it when I wasn't looking! Maybe it was a fox...

After several days of fruitless searching, I finally found some good medicinal herbs so I'm getting ready to head back. I had wanted to do one final search, but this place is starting to creep me out. As soon as night falls I keep thinking I see shadowy figures following me everywhere... Also, the blood-curdling cries of some unknown species of monster are now coming from all directions — and they're getting closer...

During my descent down the mountain, I came across an old wine bottle. I gave it a rinse with some spring water, and found it's in good condition. I bet Dongdong would like it if I gave it to him as a souvenir. I'll just tell him that it was a treasure given to me by an adeptus.

Liyue Harbor

A diary left behind by someone in Liyue that tells of the owner's adventures there.

—Liyue Harbor—

I sold the herbs at Bubu Pharmacy. Made back everything I've lost, plus a little extra. At this rate, I could buy a house in Liyue within the next few years. Just in time for Dongdong to settle in before he starts school.

If I'd studied harder when I was younger, I wouldn't have ended up getting involved with those scumbag Treasure Hoarders. I also wouldn't have squandered the inheritance my father left me. This makes me think that I must get Dongdong a good teacher who makes him study hard. That's the only way he'll make reliable friends and not end up like his wretched old man. So, for Dongdong's sake, I can't give up now. I have got to find a way to make a good living.

...That said, I couldn't get the idea of making a quick fortune out of my head. So I tried my luck at The Jade Mystery. I hadn't intended to spend any money at a place like that, but the boss, Shitou, was very persuasive... He talked me into putting all my money into it. I didn't do too badly. I cut open the stone I bought and found it to be higher-quality jade. Then again, that one brief foray into the world of gambling on stones meant that I had to pawn the sickle and the medicine box I'd used for foraging for herbs.

I'm penniless now. Sure, I got some good jade pieces from gambling on stones, but jade isn't easy to shift. So it looks like I'm back in survival mode again. I think I'll head overseas and see how it goes. I should try joining The Crux, here's hoping Captain Beidou will take me on.

I'll happily scrub the deck if it comes to it, I haven't eaten in three days.

Jinren Island

A diary left behind by someone in the wilderness that tells of the owner's unfortunate encounters at Jinren Island.

Records of Jueyun

Records of Jueyun: Stone Beasts

A collection of folk stories, myths, and legends from Liyue. It's quite a page-turner. This segment is on the legends of stone beasts.

—Stone Beasts—

Stone statues appear all across the vast land of Liyue. Most were built by locals who prayed to them for favorable weather and peace steadfast as the mountains. But it is claimed that some have a much more ancient history.

One story regarding the animal statues in particular is popular among the fishermen of the Bishui River, the Silvergrass harvesters of Dihua Marsh, and the old mining crowd. They say that in some corners of the land, ancient stone beasts wake at night in the cool of the fall and look around at a world that has slowly become alien to them. Hearing the sounds of frogs and insects greeting them, they respond with deep, soulful cries from their petrified throats. Then they roam around Liyue, inspecting once more the land they used to protect.

To my knowledge, no-one has ever witnessed a stone beast in motion firsthand. However, local residents who know the territory extremely well have long observed and accepted the phenomenon that the animal statues can change location and posture overnight. Meanwhile, light-sleeping campers often report hearing a sound in the middle of the night that is like flowing water, only much deeper in tone.

As for where these stone beasts originally came from, the elders of Qingce Village say they are illuminated beasts who once fought alongside Rex Lapis in the Archon War. After the war ended, the tide subsided and peace was restored. The illuminated beasts were no longer required to serve as defenders of the common people, and one by one they retreated to more secluded parts of the country. There they lived free from concern for mortal affairs.

But some illuminated beasts remembered with fondness the glorious days when they served under Rex Lapis, and they pined for the years they protected Liyue. Though they were not of the mortal realm, nor were they immortal: For them, too, life would one day come to an end. Thus, they beseeched Rex Lapis to turn their ephemeral flesh bodies into everlasting stone. The merciful Geo Archon granted their request and made them as such.

Records of Jueyun: Palace Beneath the Sea

A collection of folk stories, myths, and legends from Liyue. It's quite a page-turner. This segment is on ancient fictional stories.

—Palace Beneath the Sea—

The day had arrived. It was time to collect the bride.

The Sea God looked majestic indeed as he sat center stage in his giant clam, holding in his hands the reins of two sea serpents. They stood as imposing as Mt. Tianheng before the royal carriage as their master accepted the gift of pearls from the village elders and welcomed his new bride aboard the carriage. In return, the village would receive the Sea God's blessing: a year free from tempests and tsunamis.

The bride was whisked away to a place deep beneath the waves, far from home, far from the reveling crowds celebrating the festival, and far from her mother all alone. The Sea God took her along a corridor of great columns, formed from the skeleton of a dead whale, that led to a palatial gate adorned with shining pearls and iridescent shells. Finally, the young bride had arrived at the palace the Sea God had made for her. The palace that was to be her new home. "It was not my plan to meddle in the affairs of common people," came the god's voice rippling through the water. It was a husband's attempt to console his bride.

"This place has served as a new home for many other young women, and it also became the place they spent their final days. Many of them were driven away from the village where they were born. For them, the ocean has provided safe refuge. Somewhere they could sleep peacefully without fear of being disturbed. Somewhere they could call home."

But this young woman did not want a new home decorated with prize pearls and rare shells. The dazzling spectacle of the ocean floor — and the creatures that she knew lurked in the darkness — filled her not with peace, but with dread. Time went by, and the longer she stayed in her bewildering ocean chamber that knew not sunrise nor sunset, the more homesick she grew — and the frailer she became.

Eventually, there came a day when the Sea God sensed what his young bride was feeling.

Though he was saddened by her choice, he allowed her to go through with her decision.

"In the fallen world of the humans, there will come a day in your life when you regret this decision." The Sea God took the shell of a sea snail that adorned his waist and handed it to her as a parting gift.

"There will come a day that you blow into this shell, and it will sound like a horn. On that day, you shall return to this place."

The young woman took the shell and returned to the land. The years went by, and soon she became a mother herself. As she went about her simple, peaceful life, the ocean palace seemed but a childhood dream. The dazzling sights and grotesque creatures would once in a while flood into her mind from the murky depths of her memory, but it was a rare occurrence, and she put them out of her mind. She lived like this year after year. Until one year, when the festival came once again, the village elders came to her home. They had come to take her daughter from her arms. It was then that she finally understood why the Sea God had spoken of her regret, and of her return, all those years ago.

On the eve of the festival, she blew into the shell, and it sounded like a horn.

The Sea God responded to the call, rising up from the billowing waves to greet the village. But his embrace was a tidal wave that engulfed the village, and took the villagers and elders in their

sleep. Drawn by giant sea serpents, a colossal clam carriage came to a halt in front of her, dazzling her with its shimmering pearls.

The mother took her daughter by the hand and boarded the Sea God's clam. It was just like she remembered from her childhood — only this time, the village she left behind now lay in ruins beneath the ocean waves.

Records of Jueyun: Wuwang

A collection of folk stories, myths, and legends from Liyue. It's quite a page-turner. This segment is on the origin of Wuwang Hill.

—Wuwang—

Hiding between the jagged peaks in the north of Mt. Qingce is a slope known as Wuwang Hill, a palpably ominous place and the setting of many tales of supernatural phenomena.

It is rumored in Liyue that the spirits of the dead lurk within the woods on Wuwang Hill. They roam the perimeter of the decrepit village, wandering among the withering trees and rotting foliage, eternally yearning for things left unresolved in living years. These floating spirits often entice unsuspecting passers-by away from the main path and onto treacherous mountain tracks that lead them tumbling into a river or straight into an ambush of ravenous monsters.

It is this phenomenon from which Wuwang Hill derives its name. Wuwang means "prudence" in the common tongue, and Wuwang Hill is said to be "the hill where the prudent are punished." For even those travelers who do not act rashly or impulsively on their journey are doomed to be ensnared by the malevolence that lingers here like the mist in the mountain air.

Both innocent villagers and ignorant visitors alike are susceptible to the deception of the Wuwang Hill spirits, which draw them deep into dark woods where thick mist blots out the sky and unknown dangers lurk in the shadows. There are many means by which these sinister spirits are able to deceive mortals. Some take the form of bereavement or grief, others of regret, manifesting as voices and visages of the deceased, the love of the departed, or the remorse of another party in an unresolved dispute. The traveler finds themselves compelled to heed the spirit's cry, and follows them into the depths of Wuwang.

But Wuwang Hill was not always this way. Some signs of life remained there up until relatively recently, and in times gone by the village at the foot of the slope enjoyed a peaceful and leisurely existence, the chimneys always smoking and the lanterns always lit. That same village stands abandoned today... The buildings are in ruins and all that remains of the villagers is the indistinct murmuring from a realm beyond.

There is a fable that is oft-repeated among the children of Qingce Village. It holds that the young people of Wuwang Hill, enchanted by the whale-like song of a faraway sea monster, all threw themselves into the gently flowing Bishui River in pursuit of false promises and childlike dreams. Along the river they floated, making their way to the Sea of Clouds, where they became one with the waves and lost all memory of the woods and their village on the hill... Their dreams, meanwhile, became the sea monster's song.

Generation after generation of young people disappeared in this way, until in the end, the sole remaining residents of Wuwang Hill were old and gray. One by one, they left this mortal plane amidst sighs of grief. The bright lights of Liyue Harbor, Rex Lapis's pride and joy, burned ever brighter, while another neglected mountain village turned into a silent ghost town.

But unlike the fleeting and fickle human mind, the ever-flowing ley lines remember all. Surging elemental energy takes on spirit form to recreate all the dreams, both fair and foul, of Wuwang Hill's erstwhile residents. Much like a mother who once lost a child and now searches desperately through their irretrievable past for a way to bring everything back, the ley lines — albeit unconsciously — repeatedly recreate the past and those who inhabited it. The way each looked, the way each child cried, the way the elderly would sigh in their twilight years. Each moment of joy, and each moment of sorrow. And like the hypnotic song of the great creatures of the deep sea, it unintentionally lures toward it any nostalgic soul who would dare trespass here.

Records of Jueyun: Mountain Spirits

A collection of folk stories, myths, and legends from Liyue. It's quite a page-turner. This segment features the stories of Seelie living in the mountains.

—Mountain Spirits—

Many lone seelie are found floating in the mountain forests of Liyue. These glowing spirits are unfailingly found hovering in the mountain mist, in the ruins of ancient cities, or in crumbling, decrepit villages. Should a Vision-bearer draw near, the seelie will guide the way for them, leading them to long-hidden treasure or unfathomably ingenious mechanisms.

The people of Liyue believe these tiny, silent spirits to be auspicious sightings, the souls either of departed adepti or unnamed benevolent gods of old. Others believe they are the echoes of strangers without kin, lingering in the mountains to guide lonely, lost visitors onto the path back home.

Another old legend told in the mountain villages claims that there was once a time, before the adepti had come into being, when the seelie who meander in the mountains knew an altogether different existence, one in which they had beautiful physical forms and possessed great wisdom. That era, when the seelie roamed the mountains and strolled through the grand halls in the cities of old, is said to date back even further than the days when Rex Lapis fought bitterly against countless rival gods.

At a far-flung moment in the distant past, the ancestor of the seelie met a traveler from afar, with whom they swore an oath of union witnessed by the three sisters of the Lunar Palace. Just thirty days later, a sudden disaster struck. The seelie and their lover fled into exile as the world collapsed around them, fleeing until the terrible calamity caught up with and seized them. Their cruel punishment was to be separated from each other for eternity and to have their memories wiped without a trace.

The graceful but heartbroken seelie and the sisters grew more sullen and withdrawn with each passing day, to the point where their wondrous forms withered away, leaving fragments of their

former selves scattered in the mountains and ruins, where they turned into tiny little life forms. They had forgotten so much, lost so much, and been stripped of their voices and wisdom, yet they continued to sing their same songs of grief. Because of this, still harboring a shred of the deep love they once had for their long-lost lover, they will act as guides to travelers who stop in the mountain mist, seeking to retrace their memories of an ancient story in long-abandoned ruins, disused makeup cabinets, and now-undecipherable poetry.

Of course, these are nothing but clumsy, incoherent folk tales, wild and fantastical conjecture about what Liyue may have been like in the distant past before the time of Rex Lapis. Needless to say, such tales have no credibility whatsoever. The true origin of these sorrowful spirits that meander in the mountains is, however, still widely debated, and no consensus has ever been reached on the topic.

Records of Jueyun: Qilin

A collection of folk stories, myths, and legends from Liyue. It's quite a page-turner. This segment is on the shared history of qilins and humans.

—Qilin—

Among the legends that circulate in the mountains of Liyue, the qilin are a type of noble and benevolent illuminated beast. Qilin often roam the mountain forests, but appear only on nights where starlight shines upon clear dew. For sustenance, they drink only spring water and eat only fragrant herbs.

Qilin are gentle illuminated beasts, with grace and elegance flowing through their veins. It is said that qilin will never harm living things, refusing even to step on an insect or break a blade of grass. People believe that a qilin's characteristics, behavior, and their every movement is dictated by an age-old etiquette that has remained unchanged for a thousand years.

Following the barbarous age of the Archon War, many adepti became unable to continue living among the clamorous world of mortals. As a result, and under the direction of Rex Lapis, they withdrew themselves from society to live in seclusion in the bamboo groves and mountains. No longer would they interfere in the human world, content instead to enjoy a realm of mountains and water and pursue their own interests.

Yet some illuminated beasts there were that, over a thousand years of mortal cooperation, had cultivated deep friendships with ordinary humans. They decided to carry out the will of the Lord of Geo in the mortal realm, assisting human society with their adeptal powers and charity. Some hid in mountain hamlets, others walked the bustling city streets. They lived together and mixed with humankind, leaving behind unique bloodlines in Liyue Harbor.

According to one folktale, as early as several thousand years ago, there were already those among the elegant qilin who had begun to grow deeply attached to the savage mortals. The tale tells of how in that barbaric era, the people wore clothes of water lotus and bay leaf.

One night, a herb gatherer was bathing in a mountain pool, when to his surprise, a passing qilin began to eat the clothes that he had left by the water's edge. The illuminated beast was too young to understand human notions of shame and privacy and had yet to learn the conduct of illuminated beasts in the mortal realm.

To make up for her crude behavior and to avoid startling the vulnerable mortal with her otherworldly adeptal appearance, she transformed into one of human bearing. As the pale light of the full moon fell onto the pool, she appeared before the herb gatherer.

The young illuminated beast ultimately did not understand human notions of shame and privacy. She stood in that mountain forest, lit by cold moonlight and the glow of fireflies, clothed only in dewdrops and the lunar gleam. Together with the ignorant mortal she traveled, strolling happily among flowers and bamboo groves, revealing to him the mountain dwelling of the adepti, interpreting for him the language of the birds, sleeping lightly amid the cry of insects, sinking softly into shared and ancient dreams...

As the herb gatherer began to stir at the first light of dawn, he awoke to find that the noble illuminated beast had vanished without a trace.

As for how this tale unfolds, opinions vary widely. Some people say that one night, the qilin placed a bamboo basket outside the front door of the herb gatherer's home, before disappearing into the moonlit mist. When the herb gatherer came to the door, he found a child soundly asleep inside the basket.

Others say that from that moment on the qilin lived together with the mortal, gave birth to children, and grew accustomed to human life.

No matter the truth of the thousand-year-old matter, the elegant illuminated beasts continue to walk among the residents of Liyue, unseen among the sea of people, waiting for the day when Rex Lapis calls them forth once again.

Records of Jueyun: Hidden Jade

A collection of folk stories, myths, and legends from Liyue. It's quite a page-turner. This segment is on the Dunny Ruins.

—Hidden Jade—

In the valley northwest of Liyue Harbor and south of Nantianmen lie many silent, ancient ruins. One of these areas is known as the Dunny Ruins. This area is said to have already existed even before the time of the Archon Wars.

According to old legends passed by word of mouth, "Dunny" means "the land to which beautiful jade flees."

In a past beyond memory, when even Rex Lapis would still have been young, a star fell from the sky into the barren plains west of Liyue. These plains were transformed into a huge and deep chasm in the wake of that star's descent, and jade would emerge from within, beautiful and

limitless, and it would become the foundation for a thousand years of industrial mining in Liyue thereafter.

Legend has it that when that nameless star fell, a fragment of it broke off and crashed into the rocks in northern Lisha.

As most know, wordless stones harbored soul and spirit, and in manners and times not witnessed by mortal eyes they watched and listened to the ley lines' pulses, the echoes of the alpine springs, and the slow but inexorable movements of the mountains.

But unlike the ordinary but enduring stone of the earth, the fragments of the meteorite that fell from heaven had a proud and agitated temper.

Later, when countless gods and rulers fought over the appointed celestial seats, and the very stars and abyss themselves faded, tragedy and evil embarrated the breath of the waters and mountains. The fallen star could bear this no longer, and heedless of the great chasm's persuasions to stay it leaped away, away towards the heavens.

As it returned to the skies, the heavenly jade left behind a deep pit, within which humans would build great cities and mighty fortresses, finding refuge and shutting themselves in with the leftover inheritance of that fallen star.

Over the tumult and storms of the next few thousand years, the redoubts of the Dunyu Valley stood tall and maintained prosperous relations with Liyue Harbor up till 500 years ago.

But with the coming of the black calamity and the rise of the Abyss, the residents of Dunyu sealed the ancient city and departed for other lands. None know why these refugees chose to shut the gates of their home, and even the millennia-old adepti and yaksha are silent on this matter.

And so, the sealed fortresses became giant, silent tombs, with naught left in them but the sound of pond water and the wind whistling through empty halls — and thusly, too, did they come to be called the "Dunyu Ruins" by the people of Liyue.

Hilichurl Cultural Customs

Vol 1

It contains the investigations and observations into the cultural customs of the hilichurls by the "Poet Laureate of Hilichurlian," Jacob Musk, a Mondstadt ecologist. This volume features the social structure and characteristics of the hilichurls.

Hilichurlian Social Structure

The social structure of the hilichurl race is evidently a primitive, tribal one. Small-sized hilichurl tribes are prolific in occurrence throughout the wilderness. It seems that they conceive of the tribe as akin to a large, extended family.

By far the most powerful figure in the hilichurl tribe is the Shaman. Extensive field research confirms that the Shaman is the oldest member of the tribe and plays a role in it analogous to that of the parent in the family: managing major affairs and making policy decisions, based on their wealth of experience. Additionally, Shamans act as protector to their tribe using their elemental abilities. Shamans can be identified by their distinctive appearance from other tribe members: They wear horned, smiling-face masks with eye holes at the mouth, and wield a rudimentary Shaman's staff in their hands. A further identifying feature is that they will be heard chanting to themselves some form of unintelligible hymn or incantation.

Age is not always the deciding factor when it comes to status in the tribe. In some tribes, Shamans are ousted from leadership by physically larger hilichurls with superior combat skills. Under leadership of this kind, such tribes tend to become more aggressive. The chiefs of these tribes can easily be identified from their large stature and ostentatious masks, which also bear horns.

The hilichurls' hostility towards outsiders, coupled with the obvious language barriers, means that conducting specific research on the distribution of resources within tribes has been all but impossible. Nevertheless, Knights of Favonius' patrol reports suggest that resources are typically shared on the basis of "to each according to his needs." All tribe members are both gatherers and soldiers, but some that prize combat above others develop into seasoned heavyweights of the battlefield. If the tribe stays long enough in an unfavorable environment, these heavyweights will become its most respected leaders.

Interestingly, hilichurls seem to have a unique ability to manipulate the elements despite their low intelligence and primitive social structure. This ability is most notably manifested in the Shamans. Typically, humans require a Vision in order to exercise elemental control. The question of how hilichurls are able to do so without a Vision is, therefore, one that requires further investigation and analysis.

Vol 2

It contains the investigations and observations into the cultural customs of the hilichurls by the "Poet Laureate of Hilichurlian," Jacob Musk, a Mondstadt ecologist. This volume features the beliefs and spiritual world of the hilichurls.

Hilichurl Spirituality

Just as the inhabitants of the Seven Nations of Teyvat each have their religious beliefs, so too do the hilichurls. However, they worship not a specific figurehead with a presence in this world — such as one of The Seven — but elemental power itself in a more abstract sense. For instance, some hilichurl tribes in Mondstadt revere Anemo just as their human counterparts do, but they do not recognize the Anemo Archon Barbatos. Instead, they worship the power of Anemo itself. Hilichurls holding different elemental beliefs often live together in the same tribe. An individual hilichurl's elemental affiliation can be deduced from the designs on their masks and the color of their body paint.

Firsthand observations indicate that the Shaman, responsible for organizing offerings and worship ceremonies for the tribe, applies a colored dye to their hair and skin, with the color representing the element they worship. Shamans are dressed and adorned more ornately than ordinary tribe members, but owing to the limited intelligence of the hilichurls it is highly doubtful that any of the fine ornaments worn are crafted by their own hand.

The Shaman is the spiritual leader of his tribe. He leads them in song and dance during worship, singing hymns of praise to the elements. If there is leftover meat from the hunt, the hilichurls place it on the altar, raw, as a sacrifice. Even though they accumulate ample Mora, precious stones, and other items of value through exploring, looting, mugging and other means, it would appear that raw meat alone is considered a sufficient sacrifice.

It would appear that the hilichurls possess no concept of either the past or future, living only in the present. They do not intentionally store up food for survival, nor do they commemorate their deceased forebears. Though crude attempts at something like calligraphy have been widely observed within their camps, closer inspection reveals these markings to be nothing more than botched imitations of what they have seen in ancient ruins, possessing no originality whatsoever. Hilichurls do seem to have an inexplicable affinity for remnants of the past, evidenced by the fact that ruins are one of their preferred locations to camp. But investigations thus far have turned up nothing which might hint at the true nature of their connection with the lost civilizations to which these ruins belong.

Vol 3

It contains the investigations and observations into the cultural customs of the hilichurls by the "Poet Laureate of Hilichurlian," Jacob Musk, a Mondstadt ecologist. This volume features mysterious hilichurls who live apart from the others.

The Mysterious Loners

Among the Hilichurls exists a kind of mysterious, large creature possessing both immense physical strength and the ability to control the elements. They use this elemental ability to further enhance their physical state, such as to protect themselves or increase the brute force of their attacks — a combination making them nearly unstoppable.

These powerful Hilichurls are called "Lawa" by the rest of the tribe, a respectful form of address best translated to mean "king" or "chief". However, Lawa don't actually rule over or lead the tribe at all. Rather, these large loners prefer solitude, avoiding the looks of reverence from the smaller Hilichurls.

Adventurers very rarely encounter these gigantic creatures. Still, even the most seasoned adventurers will think twice before going on expeditions into areas where these dangerous Lawas may be roaming.

Vol 4

It contains the investigations and observations into the cultural customs of the hilichurls by the "Poet Laureate of Hilichurlian," Jacob Musk, a Mondstadt ecologist. This volume explores the diverse cultural customs of the hilichurls in relation to Mondstadt's.

Dadaupa Gorge, Mondstadt: a Case for Cultural Diversity Among the Hilichurls

The Meaty tribe is fond of feasting. They have built a boar-rearing pen in the center of their settlement and assigned a swineherd to watch over it. Over a natural stove made with a Pyro Slime, they cook boar stew in a single, large pot from which each tribe member feeds according to their needs.

The most striking feature of this tribe is its sizable combat arena. Those who set foot in the arena are understood to be accepting an open invitation to engage in combat, and those subsequently ousted from it face being mocked by the entire tribe.

The Sleeper tribe is prone to sleeping at every opportunity. They have built themselves an environment especially conducive to sleep, consisting of simple, wooden huts furnished with soft animal hide for beds. They are the most cunning and devious of the hilichurl tribes, and their above-average mental capacity can perhaps be attributed to the superior sleep quality they enjoy.

The practices of the Eclipse tribe are the most occult of any in Mondstadt. They concern themselves neither with brains nor brawn, but with occult power. Distinct from the elemental powers worshiped by their peers, the object of their worship is a crude symbol that appears to represent an eclipsed sun. Their shamans are more powerful than those of the other tribes. In the center of their settlement, the other tribe members have built a grand throne for the most formidable of shamans who leads them.

Ballads of the Squire

Vol 1

Ballads that have been passed down since the aristocratic period and are said to come from Ragnvindr the Dawn Knight himself. They tell of Ragnvindr's days as a knight's squire.

Down every street in Mondstadt have I strolled.
The air was filled with the stench of misery and the buzz of revelry.
I saw the most arrogant of aristocrats,
And I saw the most pitiful of the impoverished.
At night these streets are a spider's web — some here to feast, others their eternal prey.
I hear a jangling in the night, and know it is the chains that fetter the souls of the oppressed.

I patrol the streets of Mondstadt at nighttime,
Where my peers and superiors would once declare:
"We are the starlit knights, lift thy heads and bear witness!"
"For we, who raise our flag in the splendor of starlight, are the true protectors of Mondstadt!"
But not once have I lifted my head to the stars, or gazed at our flag:
For I cannot shift my focus from the filthy street corners.

Destitute peddlers weep in silence.
Aging soldiers grimace in pain.
In the deathly stillness of night,
A young girl, rejected by the Aristocracy, pleads for Barbatos' mercy.
The sighing of mournful winds rattles the Cathedral gate,
Carrying with them the grief of the oppressed, they assault splendid palatial walls.

Each mother's call,
Each infant's cry,
Enough to dent the hardest of shields.
Enough to shatter the sharpest of swords.

Sounds of sorrow send shivers down my spine.
But in the palace, and in the castle,
Though the wind blows the same over holy ground,
They are but the sighs of ants to the ears of men.

Vol 2

Ballads that have been passed down since the aristocratic period and are said to come from Ragnvindr the Dawn Knight himself. They tell of Ragnvindr's friendship with a sword-dancer.

One day, at the crack of dawn,
A dancer whose sword was her song set foot in Mondstadt.
Though clad in chains with cuffed hands and fettered feet,
In her silence lay a song:
It was the song of freedom. A song of a brighter dawn beyond the walls,
A joyous ballad sung without reservation by a people unrestrained.

She was the dawnlight of the Wanderer's Troupe,
But she spelled eternal midnight for the Aristocracy.
I once asked her, "Why do you come to overthrow our aristocrats?"
"Do you not know that they are the first among us?"

"Wherefore do you place their lives on a pedestal?"
Came her voice, like a fresh breeze,
"If you claim to know the wind as your companion,"
"Then did you not once know freedom, too?"

To her lonesome listeners she told a tale:
A tale of our rulers' better ancestors who held divine power,
A tale of angels, gods and vile dragons,
A tale of the deities and peoples of all the land.
Each myth and legend she turned to song,
And the wind carried the song to all corners of the land.

In the aristocrats' arena, her sword sang once more:
Her final masterpiece, but it stopped short of perfection.
A nameless knight retrieved her sword from the blood-soaked battlefield,
And buried it where the gentle winds meet in communion.

Legend of the Shattered Halberd

Vol 1

In ancient times when Axis Mundi was unobstructed, there were nine realms, each a world of its own. The realm of humans was known as the Zhongzhou, while the gods reside in Shenxiao.

At the end of the last calamity, a war between the gods broke out. The God King fell, setting the nine realms ablaze, obliterating all living things. The realms have now been born anew, life again thrives, but the passageway between the nine realms by Axis Mundi has been sealed off.

An all-new graphic novel on the epic journey in search of the God-King's Halberd begins!

—Pressing Official Business—

"I am the Great and Glorious General Weiyang, emissary of the imperial court on a royal mission! I demand that you step aside at once!"

"General? So the Great and Glorious is a military rank now, huh? I thought it was a civil office." Mir responded with not a moment's hesitation.

Weiyang's face turned bright red. "Oh!? An ignorant borderland heathen seeks to educate me on the matters of the court!?"

Mir was unfazed. "I would be surprised if they'd overhauled the entire government bureaucracy in the space of a few years."

Two broad-sword-wielding Martial Artists in Weiyang's party burst out laughing. "Haha! So ends our grand journey to the capital... The cart finally makes it past a thousand miles of checkpoints, only to get gridlocked like this at some tiny little inn out in the wilderness!"

The waiter, Qin, stared intently at Weiyang's crimson-colored cheeks before suddenly declaring: "You're a woman! A female officer disguised as a man!" The claim was accentuated with a prod of his finger.

"An astute observation," came the response from one of the martial artists. "She is in fact the Secretary of Ceremonies. The two of us are military officers. One from the Imperial Guards, the other from the Imperial Escorts, both versed in polearm and sword. We are serving the office of the Imperial Grand Minister on secondment, and we are here under orders to retrieve the Ominous Swords."

"Although the part about the Great and Glorious Gen... General, haha... Although that's made up, the bit about being here on official court... uh, business is not," the other Martial Artist chimed in to say.

The Ominous Swords were something that Mir had heard of. The story was that an iron meteorite had fallen from the sky five or six years ago, and convention dictated that as nature's treasure it belonged to the imperial family. However, a swordsmith by the name of Feng had taken it for himself and used it to illegally cast nine swords. It was said that the Ominous Swords were cursed by the meteorite and could drain people's intellect. Naturally, they had caused quite the stir in martial artists' circles.

"Good for you," said Mir as he shut the toilet door.

"It'd be even better for me if you got yourself out from that toilet... now!" Her disguise exposed, Weiyang gave up trying to compose herself and spoke in her normal voice. She sounded more charming than one would expect, given the circumstances.

"Officer Weiyang is a cultured lady of the court. Unlike us, she cannot resolve her pressing official business by simply finding a discrete spot in the wild. Please, hurry up!"

Mir washed his hands and exited the toilet, then sat down at the table with the two Martial Artists.

"It is not at every border town that we encounter one so familiar with court affairs." The one that seems to be the Imperial Escort officer sizes up Mir. "Might I inquire as to your personal history?"

"My father, Mi Tingren, was Minister of Imperial Banquets. He was framed for embezzlement of funds intended for the imperial cuisine. He then resigned from his post and returned home." Mir paused to scratch his chin before continuing, "My old man's not been himself ever since it happened. I still intend to go back to the court one day and clear the Mi family name."

Vol 2

Mir, having stumbled onto the journey to retrieve the swords by accident, encountered a huge crisis before the journey had even begun. Imperial Guard and Imperial Escort elites were slain by enemies holding the Ominous Swords. Amidst grave danger, Mir recalled a spell taught by his father. Legend has that, the Celestial Emperor has a young daughter whose name was not

known to the world; she now possessed Weiyang's body and revealed herself. Who would prevail? The wielders of the Ominous Swords who had turned into ferocious demons? Or Mir who could somewhat hold his own in a fight?

—A Matter of Possession—

"Yum. Very nice."

Now that the spirit had possessed her body, Weiyang was of a much sweeter and gentler disposition. She took a tiny bite of one of Mir's stuffed pies, but it was too hot, so in an effort to avoid burning her tongue she stuck it out of her mouth and panted for breath frantically. Truth be told, it was all rather cute.

"That came unexpectedly. I need some time to process." Mir, who had given up one of his eyeballs to appease the spirit, helped himself to a pie and asked, "Can you go over it again?"

"Very well. The 'meteorite' was in fact a Divine Halberd. It was snapped into pieces by a commoner and made into nine cursed swords — the Ominous Swords. This one is the Sword of Mist, adding in that pair I've found three of them to date."

"And what's your place in all of this?"

"I was once the daughter of the Celestial Emperor. But I have long forgotten my name. I was in charge of conducting trials and sentencing at the end — a judge, to use your parlance."

Since the Court of Imperial Entertainments was responsible for sacrifices and offerings, Mir's father had forced him to learn every last detail and word uttered in every known court ritual. And because most rituals involved encounters with bizarre forces and temperamental deities, he also knew a thing or two about how to deal with them. For instance, he knew that deities tended to guard their names closely, for knowledge of a deity's true name allows a human being to exercise absolute control over them. So he wasn't convinced this one had simply forgotten her name.

"So the court wants to retrieve the swords to reconstruct the Divine Halberd?" Mir forced himself to entertain the reasonability of this line of inquiry.

"I don't know. The master of this body knows nothing else. She is just... deeply angry. She wants to prove herself." Weiyang puts her hands on her chest.

"So what's the next step? Do I have to perform some sort of farewell ceremony for you?" Mir stroked the bandaged and sightless eye. "And then do I get my eye back?"

"Give me a name." She raised her head, oblivious to the crumbs at the edges of her mouth.

"Don't be ridiculous. The imperial civil service examinations are overseen in person by the Emperor himself. How will I claim the title of Minister of Imperial Banquets with only one eye?"

"Well, I have things to reclaim too: the remaining pieces of the Divine Halberd," she responded.

"Otherwise, this world and everything in it is going to burn in hellfire."

Mir kept looking at her, but did not respond.

"You do not need to go with me. But with the fate of all living things at stake, please allow me to hold on to your eyeball for the time being."

Vol 3

"Just stay with the name 'Weiyang' for convenience's sake on the road. With the official documents from the government in hand, you should be free to go as you wish throughout the kingdom." Still worried about Weiyang, Mir decided to accompany her on her journey and kill any demons they may encounter.

Though they had already collected five Ominous Swords and all seemed to be well, they knew in their hearts that the way forward would only get more treacherous and perilous.

—A Dark Westward Journey—

"This is all that I can do for you," Mir said as he placed a series of dishes onto the table. He then sat down opposite Weiyang.

Weiyang's right arm, which was broken in the fight to the death that had just taken place, was still wrapped in bandages. She stared intensely at Mir for a long while, but Mir just sat there resting his jaw on his hand and looking downwards. Neither of them spoke.

Finally, Weiyang attempted to use chopsticks with her left hand. But alas, her dexterity was found wanting, and she failed to procure a single meatball from the murky depths of the hot broth.

Mir sighed, took the chopsticks from her hand, and said, "Fine, I'll feed you."

"So there is still more that you can do for me," Weiyang suddenly quipped a few mouthfuls in. Her mood remained unchanged.

"The Court of Imperial Entertainments is dedicated to worshiping and making sacrifices to all of you divine beings up above. Serving you is my family's job."

And in any case, when the gods make their move, what can mere mortals do but look on helplessly and accept their fate?

— At least, that's what Mir thought. But he also thought it was better to keep that part to himself.

"Couldn't you use your powers, though? I thought you said that each time you fight a Ominous Sword owner, you use telekinesis to make your polearm levitate, swing your sword around, and so on. Surely chopsticks can't be any harder?"

"That is a power bestowed upon me by my father. Only I have this power. It is solely for use in sentencing the guilty. I mustn't..." Weiyang's voice changed in tone. "I mustn't use it lightly."

"Before he died, that guy said something really strange about the situation with my father." Mir flicked the candle flame while he spoke to relieve his boredom. "Minister Mi was neither innocent, nor wrongly accused.' What on earth did he mean by that?"

If the court was unwilling to reconstruct the Divine Halberd, then being with the celestial emperor's daughter that had possessed Weiyang's body makes him an enemy of the imperial court.

As if to signal that she had understood what Mir was thinking, Weiyang's face grew dark in the candlelight.

She said, "You don't need to help me any longer. You are a mere mortal, there is nothing to be gained from settling a score with the court."

Mir replied, "Speak no more of this matter. I must get the truth out of my old man first."

Weiyang said, "Oh... We will pay a visit to your esteemed father? Then I must buy some fresh silk garments and makeup first thing tomorrow morning."

Mir replied, "He's just a regular old man. There's no need for all that."

An unusually stern expression appeared on Weiyang's face. "Is this not your sworn duty?"

Vol 4

"Calm down, my son. Listen, Mir. I am not your real father..."

"Noooooo!"

The once Minister of Imperial Banquets was, in truth, Khan the Asura from Jotunheim. Leaving the capital was but an act in collaboration with the Minister of Ceremonies and the Grand Secretary to protect the daughter of the Celestial Emperor.

"The late Celestial Emperor Shenxiao, the now Contra Mundi, was once a dear friend of mine. But now, knowing that you have successfully summoned her, all my wishes have been fulfilled."

—Master Plan—

Even a Buddha or an adeptus would have found themselves powerless to do anything in this situation.

"This is the Sword of Flame, the 'Katakugosha.' It was made from the shard of the Divine Halberd that was the Dharani of the fire realm. Sorry... in language that Your Majesty would understand, it's made with the runes of the fire realm, one of the God King's nine realms." How could this westbound warrior display such mastery of the sword? Most who had been stripped of their intellect by an Ominous Sword lose their fighting instinct and any martial arts they had learned.

Weiyang nursed her broken arm and panted in the scorching hot air. Normally her abilities would enable her to fix broken bones, but the unquenchable flames burnt relentlessly at her wound.

Her sight grew blurry as she lost blood. Mir stepped in front of her, guarding her from the warrior.

"I can see that you have a lot of questions. Fine, I'll tell you everything! I killed your father because he tried to stop the resurrection of the God King. And the reason I can manipulate the fire realm runes rather than the other way round is because..."

The warrior from the east raised the Ominous Sword. "Is because I am a warrior of Hunt From Above made flesh..."

Legend has it that the Celestial Emperor once went to war with the Asura. To prepare for the war, the Celestial Emperor selected soldiers from three realms and made them ascend to become his celestial army after death. Sometimes, they were beset by inclement weather on the marsh, with thundercloud tornadoes surrounding them. The people of Zhongzhou referred to it as the soldiers of the celestial army "hunting from above."

"No... Impossible!" A look of disbelief appeared on the warrior's face as the Ominous Sword broke into pieces, and he, too, was sent flying from his own shoulders towards whatever destiny had in store for him next.

In the chaos, Mir had brought out the sword his father had left him as inheritance. It was intended as more of a gesture of defiance than a genuine attempt to fight back. But unbeknownst to him, this was the greatest cursed sword of all, that had once burned the entire world to cinders: Laevatain. If the fire-realm runes constituted the mystery of the fire realm, Laevatain was its pure, unadulterated, unquenchable reality. The sword had extinguished after the world was burned, but having assimilated the rune of the fire realm, it burned bright once more.

"The whole world... destroyed again..." Weiyang fell unconscious as she spoke.

Vol 5

"There are many among the military officials who wish to unseal Axis Mundi since the world in chaos would greatly elevate the position and importance of the Martial Artists."

"They want to wage another War of the Asuras?"

"He does."

The tug-of-war between the civil and military officials and the schemes of the past gods once again threatens all of the nine realms!

—Legacy of a Goddess—

"Your deeds have saved the people. You are indeed a great warrior." The crown prince, hands clasped behind his back, walked in circles around Mir, who lay prostrate on the ground. But Mir was unmoved by his words.

"Hand over the Divine Halberd and you may have the title of Minister of Imperial Banquets. Grand Secretary will be yours too within a decade, if you want it." The crown prince sat down. "Well? What is your response?"

"A lowly commoner dares not speak till His Majesty permits him to rise."

"Hmm... but now if I granted you permission to speak, it would be because you had instructed me to do so... We can't have that! As future lord of all the land—"

"Pff. What a charade this is," said Mir as he switched to a more relaxed position. "The official etiquette of the ruling dynasty does not require kowtowing for an audience with the crown prince. It should just be the regular thrice greeting. I noticed that you were on track to become Emperor, so I thought I'd come and pay my respects. There's just no need to lord it over me like this."

"You... you..."

"What about me?" Mir snapped as he stood up. "I will give you half of the Divine Halberd. The Dharani of the fire realm, I will offer to father. Mostly to avoid another situation where we have remnants trying to stir up trouble."

"Can't, uh, can't hurt. As long as the portion I get looks the part it'll be fine. This is gonna be known as the new national superweapon! Hahaha..."

Mir sat down impatiently right in front of the crown prince. "I don't understand how you are such a fool when we were both raised on the same mother's milk!"

"How dare you! I have nothing but respect for Lady Mi serving as my wet nurse. And it's only because of the virtues she instilled in me that I am able to put up with you—"

"Give the title of Minister of Imperial Banquets to someone who cares. I'm going home."

The crown prince said nothing.

"How about Weiyang?" Mir chewed his food and acted nonchalant.

"Oh, for the meritorious act of retrieving the swords, she was promoted to Secretary of Ceremonies. She was not implicated in the evil plot by her father, the Imperial Grand Minister. The Minister of Ceremonies and the Grand Secretary both testified. I will see her every need is met."

Something sounded odd about that.

But that was fine.

She was gone, and his eye was restored. But to this day there was still a dull ache, like the phantom pain of a missing limb.

Vol 6

Mir once again chanted the forgotten spell. The maiden was reunited with him again. "So, this is what you truly look like."

"The world is beyond repair. It shall be born anew from the ashes of the last." The mad Celestial Emperor sentenced all living things of the world to a harsh punishment.

"But you, you would understand me, wouldn't you?" The nameless thief who stole the national treasure said to his lord.

"No. No apologies necessary, for you are benevolent."

—Nothingness—

"Oh my daughter, the one in whom all my hopes are placed! Did I not bring you into existence that you might one day pierce me with a halberd?" Awakened at last, the God King floated in the heavens to the claps of thunder and the dancing of the wind, rejoicing at his return.

But she was no longer afraid. This was the moment she had been waiting for her entire life, the moment she had been made for all those eons ago.

No — that was not it. The true source of her courage was the time she had spent with him.

The first Divine Halberd, Irmin, once pierced the Axis Mundi and connected the nine worlds. Now, its replicas had proliferated across the heavens.

Fearing the madness that would ensue following his death, the God King made one final Divine Halberd, and named it the Prinzessin der Verurteilung. In this moment, it — nay, she — could finally unleash her true self.

...

A commentary from the editor appears at the end of the book:

Legend of the Shattered Halberd was a successful first attempt by Inazuma's Yae Publishing House to incorporate elements of Liyue culture in one of their novels. The first five volumes were wildly successful, becoming something of a cultural phenomenon in both Inazuma and Liyue. Commercially, the fact that a sixth volume exists at all speaks to its success.

I trust that the abrupt finale to this epic saga brought by volume six will not be to our readers' displeasure.

I hope.

Though the ending reads like a different story entirely, I must stress that this did not arise from any attempt on our part to pressurize Mr. Nine, the author, into developing material for a new series. The truth is that in his rush to meet the publishing schedule, Mr. Nine ended up diverging somewhat from his usual style. Mr. Nine simply wished to challenge himself as a writer. ♡

Naturally, we are sympathetic to the fans of the original First Five volumes. In this spirit, we would like to announce that a special First Five collector's edition, the Blackwood Box Set, is currently in the making. Those who have grown up reading Legend of the Shattered Halberd in bookstores: this is the time to finally buy it for yourself! Also, expect to hear more tales of the Prinzessin der Verurteilung in future.

Chief Editor, Yae Publishing House

Heart's Desire

Heart's Desire: Moonlight

A collection of fantasy stories centered around a mysterious antique shop. It's widely popular around Teyvat.

—Moonlight—

Legend tells of a corner of the city that has been forgotten by the wind.

To reach that place one must stand before the fountain and close their eyes, then wait for thirty-five heartbeats, then walk seven circles clockwise around the fountain followed by seven further circles anticlockwise. Upon opening one's eyes, one will find they have arrived at a little shop...

"Excuse me, is... is anyone there?"

Veiga asked timidly as she stepped through the door.

As the door closed behind her, the bell that hung from it rang out, its crisp and clear sound filling the room and cutting through the dimly lit drudgery.

The dull glow of twilight seeped gently through the frosted glass of the display case windows. Stacks of curious objects filled every part of the room. Veiga made her way through the store cautiously, for fear of stepping on something and breaking it.

There was no answer.

Veiga now began to examine the objects around her more closely: an obscure mechanical component, an ornate ancient lyre, a broken ceramic tile engraved with incomprehensible markings, a pair of old manacles, dented and scratched from years of use, a forgotten crown that once belonged to an aristocrat...

At some point as she was inspecting these objects of no apparent utility, the shopkeeper appeared beside her. The shopkeeper's eyes were like those of a fox, with long, slender pupils at their center.

"That fang once belonged to a wolf king. Aside from the gods, it is probably the only thing left that remembers that land the way it used to be... every inch of it covered in ice and snow."

She spoke softly,

"Welcome to the store. Do you see anything that takes your fancy?"

"Do you have anything here that can help someone... to forget?"

"Why, certainly."

Veiga clutched her chest as she pursued the question further.

"...To forget anything? Even... someone very important?"

The fox-eyed shopkeeper's expression turned stern, and she nodded as she continued:

"I know that the one you wish to forget is a young man with limpid eyes as clear as moonlight. He disappeared a long time ago, and left a deep hole in your heart. Nothing else can fill that hole... all other blessings, no matter how joyful they may be, feel elusive and out of your reach... just like the moonlight before your eyes."

Veiga was stunned into silence. All she could do was nod along.

The fox-eyed shopkeeper smiled and, seemingly out of nowhere, presented a bottle of wine.

"This wine will help you forget your pain."

"Long ago in the age when the icy winds blew, our forebears brewed this wine in secret, deep within the frozen earth, to give them the strength to keep surviving. The method they used to brew this kind of wine was forgotten when the people's fate took a turn for the better, and their lives became more joyful."

She tilted the wine bottle back and forth.

"There is not much left. And since it seems you have an affinity with this store, this one is for free. Provided, of course, that this is what you really want..."

Veiga took the goblet of wine from the fox-eyed shopkeeper's hand.

The goblet must once have been adorned with a precious gemstone. But it had since been removed, and now the only clue to its existence was the empty, lonely indentation it had left behind...

When Veiga regained consciousness she was stood in front of the fountain.

"Hmm? What am I doing here?" She wondered to herself. As the moon shone down brightly, she began briskly walking back home. The glow of twilight had all but disappeared now, and if she didn't get back soon...

She had forgotten all about the strange store, from the route that had taken her there to everything that had happened inside.

"She's gone."

The fox-eyed shopkeeper said, after the door had shut and the bell had stopped ringing.

A young man, one with limpid eyes as bright as moonlight, stepped into view from the back of the store.

"Thank you."

"How many times has she visited now?"

"Six... No, seven. Seven times." The young man hesitated for a moment, and then asked, "Does the wine really work? It's not that I don't trust you, it's just—"

The shopkeeper smiled, though the meaning of her smile was ambiguous.

"This wine causes those who drink it to forget their pain. But your shared history is not a painful thing for her. All this wine can do is to help her temporarily forget her longing for you, and the grief of losing you..."

"Whenever she sees the moonlight, she will see you reflected in it, and the memories will start coming back... the time you met at Ludi Harpastum, the afternoon spent beneath the tree at Windrise, the view from Cape Oath, the time you sneaked out of the midsummer celebrations

together, hand in hand, the song and the feathered cape you offered to her at the assembly of the traveling bards... All of these are memories she will be reluctant to part with."

"...I do have another bottle of wine in my shop, one that can make someone truly forget everything. If you wish... I could give her that to drink, instead?"

She smiled slightly as she watched the young man. After a long silence, he let out a sigh.

"Tell me — why do you insist on leaving her?"

"Ah, well... it's this. This is the reason."

The young man reached into his breast pocket and took out a spherical object made of crystal. Unknown symbols could be discerned faintly flickering inside it.

"I am led to believe that people who receive one of these will one day disappear from this world."

"If that is so, then the earlier I leave the better. She is still young... if she forgets me now, then she will still have time."

"Well, well, well..." sneered the shopkeeper. "So. You are one of the chosen."

"It would appear so. But do you... know anything about what happens to the chosen in the end?"

The young man asked eagerly.

She forced a smile, but did not reply.

"I should be leaving. Now I am the owner of this thing, I suppose I should get on with doing the things that are expected of me."

"And if she returns? What would you have me do?"

"I think... I think we should leave her to handle it on her own."

"What a heartless man you are."

Heart's Desire: Crystal Glaze

A collection of fantasy stories centered around a mysterious antique shop. It's widely popular around Teyvat.

—Glaze—

Legend tells of a corner of the harbor that has been forgotten by the mountain rocks and the sound of the crashing waves.

To reach that place one must stand in the sea breeze and close their eyes, walk forty-nine steps away from the clamor of the crowds, then wait till the sound of one's own heartbeat drowns out the voices in the background. Upon opening one's eyes, one will find they have arrived at a little shop...

"Hello? Anyone in?" Yu'an called out.

He tried the door, and let himself in. The bell continued to ring after the door had closed and as he made his way further inside.

The faint sound of crashing waves seeped into the store, like a distant memory. Piles of seemingly random artifacts were stacked all the way through from where he stood to the other end of the long and narrow shop. Yu'an looked apprehensively at the range of items throughout the store, somewhat intimidated by the thought of his silken robes being covered in dust that was potentially even older than he.

Old lanterns made of now-yellowing paper, a giant fang from some unknown monster, brilliant black aerosiderite from the depths of space, a dull gold-colored geometric object built with a mortise and tenon crafted from an unknown material...

As he picked up a small bottle filled with a fine white crystalline powder, he heard a soft voice coming from someone who was now stood next to him.

"That is salt formed from the residue of an ancient archon's tears—"

The voice caught him off guard, breaking the long silence like a stone disrupts the surface of a pool of still water. Startled, he dropped the bottle he held in his hand.

But the sound of smashing glass his ears were anticipating never came. The shopkeeper, who had fox-like eyes with slender lines for pupils, had somehow caught the bottle and returned it to its place on the shelf.

"I'm, er... Huh, I can't remember who it was, but... someone recommended this place to me." She gave a slight nod that acknowledged she had heard him, but was ambiguous as to what she thought about it.

"Welcome to the store. Do you see anything that takes your fancy?"

"I'm looking for a gift for... she's a girl I like."

"I've been thinking of proposing to her, and I'd like to have a gift to go with it."

Yu'an nervously bit his lower lip as he looked up to face the shopkeeper directly. She had mysterious golden eyes that reminded him of Cor Lapis.

They looked at each other for a long time in silence. Finally, she spoke: "Very well."

Her slender figure disappeared back into the depths of the store.

When she returned, she held in her hand an object that gave off a faint iridescent glow. On closer inspection, it was revealed to be an exquisitely cut ten-sided illuminating crystal.

"I trust you will have heard the legend of the crystal heart?"

He hadn't. But he nodded anyway.

"It is made from a variety of crystal called illuminating crystal. Man-made versions exist, but they are pale imitations. True illuminating crystal is capable of revealing the secrets of one's heart, for it is formed from the unfulfilled desire and grief of illuminated beasts of the highest order when they reach the end of their life. Please, take a look..."

She gestured to Yu'an that they should both watch the faintly flashing images emerging from within the crystal.

Tens of thousands of years flashed by before his eyes. Like the continuous shifting of the clouds, stars turned to water and water turned to land. Snow melted and gave way to green pastures. Rivers cut their way through the open country. He watched cities rise like ants' nests and kingdoms topple like toy building blocks...

...The twilight grew dim. Moonlight zigzagged its way across the uneven surface of the ocean. When Yu'an regained consciousness, he found himself walking by the docks.

The crystal he held tightly in his hand had become warm, as if blood pulsed through it.

"This is a wondrous crystal heart indeed," he thought to himself, increasing his pace as he walked on under the moonlight. "All I need to do is give this to her... Once that's done, then I can... I must..."

The bell that hung from the door rang out, crisp and clear.

"Welcome to the store. Do you see anything that takes your fancy?"

"I'd like to exchange this — well, I don't know if it counts as a gemstone, or..."

The finely cut crystal sparkled brightly, scattering rays of light throughout the room.

"It was given to me by a man who's been pursuing me. He said that if we looked into it together, we would see many marvelous things."

"But somehow I just find it makes me feel uncomfortable. It's a beautiful gem, of course, I just... each time I think of him, I get so exasperated. So I wondered if this store would be willing to take it off my hands."

"I understand. But this is a highly prized ten-sided illuminating crystal. For what quantity of Mora would you be willing to part with it?"

"Actually, I do not want for money. But let me see... what's this — it looks like salt? It's about time I went to Sal Terrae to pay my respects again. If it's okay with you, this is all I need in return for the gem."

The fox-eyed shopkeeper sat alone at the back of the shop, turning the geometrically flawless crystal in her hand.

"In you, I have seen unpleasant things. That fellow's true nature, it is unbelievable... it is upsetting."

"That said, when it comes down to it he is but a lowlife opportunist who wishes to marry into a wealthy and prestigious family in the salt industry, and will do whatever is necessary to achieve his wish. Had this not come to light, it is entirely possible that they may still have enjoyed a happy life together, despite it not being born out of genuine mutual affection. After all, happiness is but a state of mind — it is not related to love."

She took a dainty sip of wine, and smiled mockingly at the thought of her own vanity.

"But the fact is, I simply have zero tolerance for people like that."

"On the other hand, it is delightfully straightforward opening up to a complete stranger. I know that once he sets foot outside that door, we never have to meet one another again — so what does it matter if I reveal a little truth to him? Perversely, the closer two people become, the more one seeks to gain, and so you must be on your guard. But how could he have known..."

"I'm sorry, this has all been quite the imposition on you. But it is truly wonderful to have this back." She lowered her gaze and continued, "This is, after all, your heart that you have left

behind. I will be sure to treasure it... But don't you think it's fun? Taking a trip down into the world once in a while, seeing what people are like nowadays?"

Heart's Desire: Sapphire

A collection of fantasy stories centered around a mysterious antique shop. It's widely popular around Teyvat.

—Sapphire—

Legend tells of a corner of the city that has been forgotten by the wind.

To reach that place one must stand in the center of the plaza and close their eyes, walk seven circles clockwise around the plaza followed by seven anticlockwise circles, take forty paces forward and then wait till the cries of the birds can no longer be heard in the wind. Upon opening one's eyes, one will find they have arrived at a little shop...

The shopkeeper, who had fox-like eyes with slender lines for pupils, opened the glass double doors to let in the bright moonlight, which seemed to sweep up the stardust from across the night sky and sprinkle it down upon the counter.

Everything, from the ostentatious flowers, the dust-covered harpastum, and the old books rendered illegible by years of erosion, to the now-stringless old longbow, appeared as the opulent halls of the ruling aristocrats might have done in times of old — covered in a shiny silver coating, though this was a silver that came from the cold light of the night sky.

"Hey. Business any good these days?"

This audacious alternative to the courteous greeting most people would opt for in the circumstances came from somewhere deep in the back of the shop.

The shopkeeper turned around. A familiar customer was sat nonchalantly on her armchair in the part of the shop that the moonlight did not reach.

"Business is fine. But these days, it would appear, I need to watch out for burglars."

The shopkeeper responded with a slight smile.

"That's it? You're going to turn away your oldest customer, just like that?"

The customer let out a sigh, "There's nothing in your shop that's worth me spending money on anyway. I mean, if I really had to pick something..."

"Well? How was the... hunt?"

"What do you mean? You think I'm just here to offload some loot again?"

The "hunter" let out a displeased grunt at the shopkeeper's insinuation. But the shopkeeper continued to smile.

"Why, of course not. When have I ever heard you use the word "loot" before?"

"On the contrary... all the "exchanged goods," "free gifts," "philanthropic donations," "bestowals" and so on that you have so generously given over the years... why, they must make you the most charitably inclined burglar to roam the streets, no?"

"Well, that's not why I'm here this time. This time I am here to ask for something from you... the wine. That special wine you've got that helps you forget about the one you long for."

Though a burglar by trade, this customer was nevertheless valiant at heart. His words lacked courtesy, but the smile on his face was entirely earnest.

"I'm terribly sorry. Somebody has already bought it."

He looked, and somehow, she was now holding in her hand the wine flask that he had discreetly slipped into his breast pocket earlier.

"Each item in this store is spoken for. This particular one has already been bought by a customer who will turn up at some point in the future."

"It seems your sleight of hand is superior to my own. What a disgrace I am..."

The burglar of valor said with a pained smile.

"I discovered recently that the feeling of longing for someone is heavier to carry than gold. In my line of work I am forever leaping between rooftops and running along rafters. I need to cut out whatever... unnecessary weight I can."

"...I wonder if the girl with the sapphire-blue eyes feels the same weight that I feel?"

Suddenly, the shopkeeper was startled by the jingle of the door bell.

The customer who had just arrived was a blue-eyed sorceress with a Pole in her hand and a tall, slender figure to match. The marks on her face bore witness to her persecution by the aristocrats.

Ignoring the piles of random objects strewn around the store, she marched straight to the counter like a sword lunging toward its opponent's heart.

"Welcome to the store. Do you see anything that takes your fancy?"

"I have an item I wish to exchange."

Her tone sounded cold but fragile, like thin ice in the moment that it shatters. As the sorceress spoke, she placed a giant blue crystal onto the counter.

"A burglar pried this from an aristocrat's silver goblet. He gave it to me as a gift, and then I was punished by my master for it."

"But that was many years ago. I had thought that with the passage of time my anger would be quenched and my desire to see him again would fade away..."

"Very well. What sum of Mora do you ask for in return?"

The sorceress gestured toward the tableware cabinet, in which stood an aristocrat's silver goblet with its gemstone missing.

The fox-eyed shopkeeper turned the crystal in her hand, flooding the room with the brilliant blue light that reflected off its surface.

"I see. Well, provided that this is what you really want..."

When a person encounters a setback, the worry that everything shall come to a fruitless conclusion appears. The advent of fear causes cracks to appear in the mind.

Death follows easily in the footsteps of fear, like a damp cold that, to the unprepared, pierces to the bone.

For many, it is only in the moment that death is upon them that it dawns on them that their weakness has now been targeted with fatal consequences — and that at some point, therefore, that weakness must have been exposed.

Lifting the blue crystal up into the moonlight, the shopkeeper gazed at it intently with her fox-like eyes with slender lines for pupils. She watched with delight as the crest of the ruling family came into view, faded out, and came back into view once more.

Legends claim that peering into a pure gemstone at a specific time can reveal the past, the future, and even someone's true nature. Just as legends claim that somewhere in the world, there is a field of dandelions as vast as the sea. Or that once there were three bright moons in the night sky named Aria, Sonnet and Canon, sisters who were parted by death in a great catastrophe. Or that there was once a witch who could see death before it took place, but in the end herself died from a broken heart, as he who had stolen it from her waited in distant lands longing to see her again.

One thing she knew for certain was that even if she were to abandon these objects, the legends attached to them would not disappear, and the way the stories ended could not be undone.

In which case, it seemed to make sense to collect all the legends and stories she could in her shop.

Heart's Desire: Stone Heart

A collection of fantasy stories centered around a mysterious antique shop. It's widely popular around Teyvat.

—Heart of Stone—

Legend tells of a corner of the harbor that has been forgotten by the mountain rocks and the sound of the crashing waves.

To reach that place one must stand in the sea breeze and close their eyes, walk forty-nine steps away from the clamor of the city streets, then wait until complete silence replaces the sound of the voices in the background, the only remaining sound being that of one's own heartbeat. Upon opening one's eyes, one will find they have arrived at a little shop...

"Is anybody in?" The man tapped on the front door as he called out. He was draped in a raincoat.

He peered in through the dusty windows at the objects on display around the store — a bottle of glimmering stardust, a broken blade that gleamed like ice, a painting on a roll of paper that the years had turned yellow, an elixir that gave off a mysterious aurora, a tile thinly coated with a gel-like substance...

He entered the store. The door closed behind him.

He walked over to the counter and began inspecting the weird and wonderful objects in the store. All seemed to be relics from a bygone era. Then, a soft female voice came from beside him.

"Welcome to the store. Do you see anything that takes your fancy?"

Taken by surprise, he turned to face the speaker, a fox-eyed shopkeeper, who let out a faint smile.

"Here's the thing... I'm looking for a certain something that can help me settle an old score."

The man spoke with a voice that was clear and resonant, but that had a hint of apprehensiveness about it — one which did not seem to fit with his physical appearance.

"Oh? Very well then."

The shopkeeper's golden fox-like eyes flickered as she examined this new customer of hers who was draped in a soaking-wet raincoat. She gave a nod.

She leaned down to search in the bottom of the cabinet. When she stood up a moment later, she was holding a large and beautiful piece of Cor Lapis.

The Cor Lapis in the shopkeeper's hand gently glowed a dark shade of gold, much in the same way that her eyes did.

The man took the stone from her hand and studied it closely in the moonlight. In this light, the Cor Lapis seemed to reveal a deep turbulence concealed within its soft golden hue.

His hands were still trembling.

"Cor Lapis is the soul of the rocks. Even the hardest and most resilient of rocks will, over time, eventually produce a pure, limpid soul."

The shopkeeper's voice seemed to be coming from a distant place. The man gave a nod.

"This is precisely what I was looking for."

The man solemnly responded, and placed a heavy sack of Mora upon the counter. Then, he left the store and ventured off into the midnight rain.

"That's what happened."

After the shopkeeper had spoken, she narrowed her fox-like eyes and examined the customer in front of her.

"Did he say nothing else at all?"

Judging by his appearance, the young man was presumably a miner. His eyes betrayed an urgency that he could not contain. But the shopkeeper responded simply by calmly shaking her head.

"He left a sack of Mora with blood stains on the outside."

Like a pool of water, the shopkeeper's voice was calm and still, but also icy cold.

"That is precisely what I was looking for."

The young man let out a long sigh. It seemed he wanted to evade the golden gaze of the fox-eyed shopkeeper.

"In return, I will give you a story."

The shopkeeper nodded her head to indicate that he should continue.

"That man in the raincoat... I used to go mining with him, up in the mountains. I wanted to make a name for myself. He just wanted to support his family..."

"One rainy night we broke open a rock to find that substantial piece of Cor Lapis inside. The pure golden glow that radiated from its surface was a more breathtaking sight to behold than all the marvels of Jueyun Karst put together..."

"We agreed that we would split it fifty-fifty once we got back to Liyue Harbor. But that night, under cover of the deafening roar of the torrential rain... I discreetly made it so that that clifftop would be his final resting place..."

"I did it because I was scared I couldn't trust him... I couldn't trust in a promise that, aside from ourselves, only the adepti could have heard — and they're probably imaginary anyway."

"So... Fear won me over. I could bring myself to accept that the whole sum could be mine if I was willing to get blood on my hands, but I couldn't bring myself to accept the risk of traveling with a stranger..."

"The following morning, I let down my rope and began my descent down the cliff. I had taken maybe four steps, five or six perhaps, and I was adjusting my footing on a rock when suddenly, I felt the rope trembling in the palms of my hands... Instantly that same trembling permeated every fiber of my being..."

"I lifted my head to look at the rope, but it was too late..."

"The last thing I remember seeing was the torn rope fibers at the end of the snapped rope."

"Only a hunting knife could have made a clean cut like that. I am sure of it."

"Then, in the end, you two settled your score."

The fox-eyed shopkeeper smiled so faintly it was all but indiscernible.

"He takes the Cor Lapis, and you take the whole sum of money for it."

The young man did not say much in reply.

Legends claim that Cor Lapis is the soul of the rocks of the earth, and that the stronger the life force of the rock the more power it possesses to reveal a person's true nature.

Some say that even after its owner has left the world, Cor Lapis will bring their unfulfilled desire and regret back into it, waiting for one with the ability to fulfill them.

So the legends claim.

It had now been around four hours since the two strange customers had left the store. The rain continued to pour down.

The shopkeeper stood by the window for a long time, peering out at the dark street engulfed in misty rain.

"But... Is the score truly settled? And are they now truly free? "

She spoke as if posing her question to the curtain of rain, but knowing that the answer would never come.

The Fox in the Dandelion Sea

Vol 1

"Dandelion, Dandelion, ride the wind to a faraway land," the Fox chants.

An unforgettable Mondstadt fairytale about a hunter and a fox. The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, an 11-part story, begins here.

"Dandelion, dandelion, ride the wind to a faraway land."

The little fox chanted.

He blew the dandelion flower and sent the seeds flying. He then spoke in a more serious tone.

"May my teacher's wishes ride the wind and reach the Anemo Archon."

A wind blew past us and swept away the dandelion seeds.

Did they fly to a better place, carrying my hopes and dreams there with them?

When did this happen?

Some time ago, behind the village, there grew a forest of countless lush trees. At the center of this forest was a small lake.

The lake was like the stained glass windows of the Mondstadt Cathedral: crystal clear and shimmering in the sunlight.

The sun shone through the treetops and glistened on the water's surface like fragments of gemstones. It was really something.

The weather was cool that day. I was hunting in the forest when I arrived at the lake's edge. The shimmering water somehow reminded me of a girl I loved a long time ago.

I couldn't remember much about her, but I felt that her eyes must have looked like the lake, glittering as if harboring fragments of gemstones within.

I became lost in thought as I stared at the glistening water. Walking transfixed along the lakeside, I had forgotten entirely that I was out for a hunt.

I came to when I heard the sound of something freezing up. It was a Mist Flower growing by the lake, having just frozen the water around it. Next to it was a white fox, its tail frozen in the ice. Poor critter.

"It must have had its tail in the water by the Mist Flower while it was drinking."

Mist Flowers are dangerous plants and can cause frostbite if handled without care.

Extreme caution must be taken when handling them.

As it saw me approach, the fox struggled in fear, but its still-frozen tail kept it rooted to the spot. The fox whimpered in pain.

"Oh no, this won't do."

I thought to myself.

"Poor critter. It's gonna die anyway if I don't save it, so I might as well end its pain by bringing it home as my game for the day."

I imagined what a delicious fox stew I could cook with the carrots I grew. Just thinking of the hot stew gave me energy and brought a smile to my face.

So I took out my hunting bow and slowly walked toward it.

"Be good and stay put."

Vol 2

"Be good and stay put."

Trapped by a Mist Flower, what does fate have in store by the fox who met a hunter? The story of the Hunter and the Fox continues in Part 2.

"Be good and stay put."

That's what my father's father had taught me. When I went fox hunting, I always chanted his words silently, so that my hands wouldn't shake when pulling the bowstring.

But just as I was about to release the arrow, the fox lifted its head and looked me straight in the eyes. It had eyes like the lake, glistening as if harboring fragments of gemstone within.

My head began spinning, as if a strong wind were blowing inside it. My arrow missed its target and instead smashed the ice, releasing the fox's tail. The fox raised its tail and looked at me once more before running off into the forest.

I came to my senses and began the chase — but who in this world can run faster than a fox?

Gradually, the fox began to shrink into the distance, eventually turning into a white spot.

"Hey! Don't go!"

I shouted, barely catching my breath.

After hearing my words, the spot seemed to slow.

"Is it waiting for me?"

I pondered.

"If running for its life, a fox is able to shake off anyone in no time."

Foxes are strange animals. Even when running on a flat plain like at Windrise, where one can see clearly for miles ahead, they somehow still seem to disappear from view.

It's almost as if they run into another world.

This led me to my conclusion:

"The fox must be waiting for me!"

Convinced of this fact, I chased the glittering white spot for hours on end. Suddenly, a chilling wind began to blow.

I stood there, shivering, and what I saw next astounded me.

"How can this be?"

Suddenly, instead of one, there were now two white spots in view.

More appeared. Three, four, five... They seemed to grow in number as the winds blew. Eventually, I lost track.

Suddenly, with a stinging sensation, one of them flew directly into my eye. Upon inspection, I discovered that the spots were in fact nothing more than dandelion seeds floating in the wind. The fox had disappeared.

I laughed at my own foolishness and went home.

For supper, I had carrot fox stew — though without fox, or any other meat for that matter. The gods know how much I hate boiled carrots without meat! I felt starving, and in time fell asleep.

I awoke in the middle of the night to something stirring outside my door.

Vol 3

The Hunter of fruitless hunts was awoken by a commotion outside.

Who is at the door?

The story of the Hunter and the Fox continues. The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, Part 3.

Having failed to catch the fox, I went to sleep with only tasteless boiled carrots in my stomach. If not for what happened next, I would have forgotten about the fox by now.

I awoke with a start to strange noises coming from outside my door.

"Perhaps boars have come to eat my carrots?"

I hopped out of bed and opened my door. To my surprise, there stood a tiny little white fox. Its fur was so white that it glowed in the dark, not unlike the way the sunlight sparkles on the water after filtering through the treetops.

"It must be that fox from earlier today!"

I thought again of those eyes that looked like gemstones in the water, gazing at me as if from the depths of my heart.

And so I walked over to the fox, unarmed and with tired eyes.

This time it stayed still and waited for me in silence.

The closer I drew, the greater in stature it became.

By the time I stood before it, it had magically transformed into a human.

She was a tall and slender woman, with a swan-like neck and pearly skin. Her eyes sparkled like gemstone fragments in pools of water — in the darkness they seemed to shine like rays of sunlight on water after filtering through the treetops.

"What a beauty. She looks a lot like the girl I fell in love with long ago, though I barely remember her name. Those eyes tell me she must be her."

I thought to myself.

"This can't be. Must be some type of fox magic."

Stranger still, the idea of "fox magic" had only occurred to me in that instant. You'd believe anything after you'd seen those eyes.

For all the magic and transformation I had witnessed, nothing amazed me quite as much as the gemstone lakes of her eyes. For a while, we stood silently in the dead of night.

And at last she spoke. Though not in our common tongue, I could somehow understand her. Some other magic, perhaps.

"I would have died by the lake, if you had not come in my hour of need."

She paused and continued:

"Although to die by that gemstone lake is no bad thing,"

"We foxes are grateful beings, so you must let me return the favor."

She bowed to me, and her long silky black hair flowed down her shoulders like streams.

Vol 4

After a few days apart, a long-awaited reunion takes place on a midsummer's night amidst a veritable blizzard of dandelion seeds.

At the direction of the fox, an ocean of dandelions opens up before the hunter's very eyes...

For the next few days after that night, the fox never came again.

But in those few days, prey in the forest became gradually more abundant.

Everything from small finches, long-legged cranes, and even scurrying boars...

Maybe it was due to the change in season, or maybe it was some sort of reparation from the fox. In any case, real stew had been served on the table these last few days.

But the fox never came again.

As strange as it may seem, it had honestly been easier to sleep hungry. Even with a full, satisfied stomach, I couldn't help but think about the day we met, and the woman that the fox had turned into...

When would I gaze upon her eyes again, glittering... like water in a lake.

Lying half-asleep with a heart full of turmoil, I heard a faint sound outside my door.

I hopped from the bed and swung open the door, eager to see a small white silhouette awaiting me.

But there were no lake-blue eyes, and there was no fluffy white foxtail. Instead, all I could see was dandelion seeds drifting in the white moonlight, floating like snowflakes in the air.

Suddenly, something got caught in my nostrils.

"Ah-Ahchooo!!!"

Immediately, the fluffy white dandelion seeds began to swirl, filling the sky like a snowstorm.

Amidst the flurry of dandelion seeds, a pair of jewel-like eyes were looking at me, staring straight into my heart.

Waving away the dandelions swirling about, I started walking towards the small fox.

The fox raised its ears and its furry tail flitted across the grass as it turned and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

I hurried and followed closely behind.

In amongst the darkness of the trees, soft patches of white could be seen weaving between the shadows.

Their silhouettes tip-toed like moonlight cast among the tree leaves, or like the hesitant strides of a crafty Seelie.

With unfaltering trust, I followed the fox round and about, soon emerging from the dark forest in a seemingly faraway land.

There, in the moonlight, a sea of dandelions lay before me, stretching as far as my eyes could see.

Stunned by the sight, I then noticed a rustling noise coming from just behind me.

It was a light, delicate sound. Like that of a girl walking barefoot across pine needles and leaves on the ground.

The fox approached me from behind. The night air ferried her presence, cool and damp, whisked together with the slightly bitter fragrance of dandelion flowers.

Two hands with long, ice-cold fingers rested upon my shoulders.

Then, she leaned close to my ear and her long hair draped down over my shoulder.

I could feel the pulse of her heartbeat and the soft rhythm her faint breathe. It made me feel calm and at ease.

"Only the foxes know the way to this place. It is the homeland of the dandelions.

It is my desire that you would tarry here, and teach my child human language...

In return, I will teach you the magic of foxes."

There was a tickle in my ear, as if one of the dandelion seeds grazed my ear as it was carried off in the warm night breeze.

Strange. I had clearly never mentioned anything about "fox magic" to her before. How could she have known?

With no reply, she took my hand and led me into the plush depths of the sea of dandelions.

The night breeze from the south, as well as the breeze from the north, both carried the bitter fragrance of dandelion flowers and faded memories...

She led me to gently frolic through the velvety white fields of dandelions, until the moon rose high in the starry sky.

Vol 5

Upon accepting the Fox's conditions, he came to the place where all the prey who disappeared had eventually gone to — an endless field of dandelions.

The story of the Hunter and the Fox in the sea of dandelions. The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, Part 5.

In a boundless sea of dandelions that existed in the middle of nowhere, I watched as the dandelion seeds took off at the softest touch of a breeze. Suddenly, I knew the answer to that question that had been lingering on my mind for years.

"So all the foxes that disappear during the hunt, this is where they hide away."

I thought to myself.

"What a beautiful place."

But when I began teaching the little fox to speak our common tongue, my heart always felt empty, like a wind was blowing inside of me.

When we talked, I would look into her gemstone-lake eyes. In those moments I felt like I was speaking not to the fox, but to a girl I used to love many years ago.

And so, when she was around me, it was as if I were in the presence of the child of someone I had once loved: We had an enjoyable time together, but the experience was somehow tinged with sadness.

But the thought of her promise — if I succeeded in teaching her child to speak the common tongue...

"I shall impart the magic of transformation to you when the time comes."

Remembering the way she made that solemn promise to me... I knew she was serious, and that gave me determination.

Could I transform into a flying bird once I'd mastered the magic? How high would I be able to fly? Maybe I could transform into a fish, and finally have the chance to go to Musk Reef.

"I could even use magic to hunt!" I couldn't contain my excitement. "No more meatless carrot stews for me..."

I lost track of how long I stayed in the dandelion sea, where everything sways gently with the wind.

One reason was that the little one was such a fast learner! I taught him not only our language, but everything I knew in one package, including how to count, how to grow carrots, how to change window panes, and how to sharpen knives.

When it came to rest, we would talk idly.

"Why must you learn human speech?"

He answered swiftly:

"So that when I transform into a human, I can befriend them!"

I continued:

"Why would you want to befriend the humans?"

He dropped his gaze.

Vol 6

"Why do you want to learn the language of humans?" "So I can befriend humans when I become one."

The child-like voice says, in the sea of dandelions. The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, Part 6.

"Why must you learn human speech?"

On one occasion I asked the little fox this question.

He answered cheerfully in the common tongue:

"So that when I transform into a human, I can befriend them!"

"Why would you want to befriend the humans?"

This seemed to make him sad, and he dropped his gaze.

"I saw a boy in the distant forest."

"He was dressed in grey. He looked and had eyes like a wolf," he added.

"I had just mastered my magic, and was running around excitedly on my hind legs. Running on the grass was fun! But sadly, due to the difference in height, a fox can't see or smell the same things that a human can."

"I'm sure you can guess what happened next, teacher! Suddenly, I realized a horrible truth — I was lost."

There was pain in his voice as he relayed the events of that day.

In the end, he had wandered into some faraway wood, and encountered vicious monsters.

Just when he thought he was done for, that grey lupine boy suddenly leaped out of the forest and chased away the monsters. Without a word, he turned around and vanished into the woods.

"If I could transform into a human and speak their language, I could track him down and make friends with him!"

He said gleefully.

I couldn't help but ask when I heard his reply:

"Am I not your friend?"

The little fox answered sincerely in the common tongue:

"Mommy told me that it's difference because you're my teacher — but I'd only hurt you if I tell you that."

He tilted his head in befuddlement. His fluffy tail patted the surrounding dandelions as he pondered over this difficult issue.

"I know!"

He burst out.

"If I know something that you don't, that would make me your teacher."

"If we are both teachers, that would make us equals — then we can be friends!"

Still unfamiliar with the common language, he did his best to get the sentence out quickly.

"Teacher, please allow me to teach you some magic that only I know."

Vol 7

"Dandelion, Dandelion, ride the wind to a faraway land," the Fox chants.

Can the Hunter also learn magic to make his wish come true? The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, Part 7.

"Teacher, please allow me to teach you some magic that only I know."

Still unfamiliar with the common language, he did his best to get the sentence out quickly, eager to befriend me.

He picked a little dandelion.

"Dandelion, dandelion, ride the wind to a faraway land."

The little fox chanted.

He blew the dandelion flower and sent the seeds flying. He then spoke in a more serious tone.

"May my teacher's wishes ride the wind and reach the Anemo Archon."

A wind blew past us and swept away the dandelion seeds.

"See? The Anemo Archon has just answered my wish!"

He exclaimed merrily.

"What wish did you make?"

"To become friends with my teacher."

He lowered his head abruptly.

"It must have been tiring to teach him to speak your language. Our mouths are structured differently from a human's, so I must thank you for your effort."

We had not noticed the mother fox approaching. Her eyes were like bottomless lakes, and the little fox quietly hid himself among the dandelions to escape her gaze.

"When he has mastered human language,"

I thought to myself.

"When he has mastered human language,"

She said softly.

Vol 8

"When he has mastered human language..." The fox's voice is gently carried away by the midnight breeze, drifting further and further away together with the dandelion seeds...

After all, the fox is a different kind of creature from the human, and the two do not share all the same sense of mirth and misery...

"When he has mastered human language..."

Thus she softly said.

I looked at her face, mesmerized.

I couldn't hear what she said after that. The mischievous night breeze was laden with dandelion seeds, which muffled her words.

Or perhaps that was her native language? The language of dandelions?

She began to laugh as she perceived my clumsy, gauche appearance.

She had the most beautiful laugh. The curved pupils in her eyes glistened like two crescent moons shining on ripples in the lake.

"Now, tell me then, why is it you wish to learn fox magic?"

"I want to learn to transform just like foxes do. That way I could turn into a bird and fly to the highest of heights, and behold places that were once too far for my eyes to see."

That was my reply.

"Ahh yes, no longer will I need to lie in wait among the bushes while hunting. Instead, I will be able to freely soar high above like a falcon."

Thus I kept thinking to myself.

As I was thought to myself, the dandelion seed in my hand began to float up towards the moonlight, almost as if it had heard my thoughts.

"I see..."

She lowered her head slightly and her long, black hair flowed down her neck like a waterfall, glistening in the moonlight. Her pale white skin shone brightly, seemingly reflecting the wisps of clouds in the night sky above.

I couldn't take my eyes off her. After a moment, I quickly turned my gaze away as I started blushing again.

Foxes are free animals. They would never cover their beauty because of shame like humans do.

Although this certainly wasn't the first time I beheld her, every time the moonlight shone upon her long hair, I couldn't help but blush and look away.

She turned her face in thought for a moment, and let out a gentle sigh. She seemed rather displeased.

We sat amidst the dandelion sea, not saying a word. A long time passed, long enough that I started thinking that she might be angry with me.

"We foxes are grateful beings. I will teach you the magic of transformation, and so fulfill your wish."

The fox said, turning her face towards me.

Her lake-blue eyes shone in the moonlight, and it made me feel at peace.

Thank goodness, she wasn't mad at me.

For some reason I could not clearly name, I quietly heaved a sigh of relief.

Vol 9

When I have taught all that there is to teach, will it be possible to see this sea of dandelions again...?

In the dandelion sea, the hunter starts to contemplate leaving.

Foxes are clever animals. Clever and cunning.

The little fox learned very quickly, and could sometimes even ask questions that would stump me.

For human speech is complicated and intricate, nothing like the innocence of animal speech.

Sometimes, language is like a yarn ball caught in the paws of a cat. It catches here and there, and there again it catches a student's tongue, sometimes even tripping a teacher up.

But foxes are clever animals, and very quickly they learn the many intricacies of human speech that were handed down over the generations, becoming able to describe the way dandelions float away, or how the moonlight shines over the lake in a rudimentary manner.

Every time the little fox discovered a new term, every time he tried using unfamiliar words to explore a familiar world, to bestow meanings upon the wind, dandelions and the earth, she would be beside him, smiling, watching us.

The little fox learned very quickly, but I did not take much joy from that.

When I had run out of things to teach, would she still keep me here in this dandelion sea?

When that time came, would I still be able to behold those beautiful eyes under the moonlight?

Would she still lead me into the depths of the dandelion sea, smiling slyly as we frolicked and breathed in the bitter fragrance that came from both the north and south winds?

As I thought about such things, I became lost in sullen memory.

Yes, that's right. On that night that I could no longer remember clearly, when I was about to part with the girl I loved, this same moon had hung in the sky as well.

"Thank you for everything up till now."

Before I knew it, the fox had walked in front of me. She bowed, and her hair spilled over her shoulders, flowing like water in the glimmering moonlight.

"Once he has learned human speech, he should be able to make more new friends."

"I am truly thankful to you for all you've done. He has also cheered up significantly since beginning to learn the human language."

She gazed at me, her deep, unfathomable eyes shining like jewels.

"Still, once you have finished teaching us the human language, where will you go then?"

Enraptured by those shining eyes, I forgot to reply.

Was this fox magic, too?

Seeing my wooden expression, the fox laughed and sighed.

Then, she turned and began walking in the direction of the moon, leading me further into the center of the moonlit dandelion sea.

Seeing this, the little fox swished its tail from side to side, and burrowed into the dandelion fields.

Vol 10

The somber parting has finally arrived... The Fox bids farewell to its mother, teacher, and the dandelion sea. It's time to live up to the promise. The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, Part 10.

The little fox kept waving back to us as he walked. His figure grew smaller and smaller until it became a tiny white spot, which blended into the dandelion sea and slowly faded away.

After he had gone, the mother fox turned and walked to me.

The closer she drew, the greater in stature she became.

By the time she stood before me, she had transformed into a human.

She was a tall and slender woman, with a swan-like neck and pearly skin. Her eyes sparkled like gemstone fragments in pools of water — in the darkness they seemed to shine like rays of sunlight on water after filtering through the treetops.

"What a beauty. She looks a lot like the girl I fell in love with long ago, though I barely remember her name. Those eyes tell me she must be her."

I thought to myself.

For all the magic and transformation I had witnessed, still nothing amazed me quite as much as the gemstone lakes of her eyes. For a while, we stood silently in the dandelion sea.

At last, I could no longer contain myself, and opened my mouth:

"Is this the magic you wanted to teach me? The magic of transformation?"

"It is. I am most grateful for all your help over this long period."

She bowed to me, her long silky black hair flowing down her shoulders like streams.

Although saying farewell to the little fox left emptiness in my heart, I soon became exhilarated at the thought of the transformation magic that I was about to learn.

Could I transform into a flying bird once I'd mastered the magic? How high would I be able to fly? Maybe I could transform into a fish, and finally have the chance to go to Musk Reef.

"I could even use magic to hunt!" I couldn't contain my excitement. "No more meatless carrot stews for me..."

"Then I shall ask you to stand still."

She walked circles around me, her body growing in size with each pass.

No, not just her. The dandelions were also growing in size! They had only been at my ankles when she started, but now stretched to over my waist, growing as if turning into towering trees.

It was only when I started to feel strange that I realized that the fox had become a giant.

Vol 11

"Dandelion, Dandelion, ride the wind to a faraway land," the Fox chants.

An unforgettable Mondstadt fairytale about a hunter and a fox.

The Fox in the Dandelion Sea, the final installment.

I started to feel strange, and then I noticed — I had turned into a dandelion!

Even if I wanted to protest, the dandelion had no mouth nor tongue for me to make a sound. All I could do was watch helplessly as the giant gently picked the dandelion plant from the ground and held it between her thumb and index finger.

"Dandelion, dandelion, ride the wind to a faraway land."

The fox chanted.

And then with a puff, the dandelion seeds began to dance in the air. I was caught in a storm and whisked away to a distant sky.

The swirling made my head dizzy. Those eyes that glistened like gemstones in the lake had left me, along with my consciousness and the promise she had made.

"Oh, Anemo Archon, I beg you to turn us into humans! For only then can we be safe from their hunting bows and knives."

...

When I awoke, I found myself in the woods behind my village.

The woods were full of lush trees, and at the center of the woods was a small lake.

The lake was like the stained glass windows of the Mondstadt Cathedral: crystal clear and shimmering in the sunlight.

The sun shone through the treetops and glistened on the water's surface like fragments of gemstone. It was really something.

The weather was cool that day. I was hunting in the forest when I arrived at the lake's edge. The shimmering water somehow reminded me of a girl I loved a long time ago.

I couldn't remember much about her, but I felt that her eyes must have looked like the lake, glittering as if harboring fragments of gemstone within.

Hmm. I must have lost myself in thought that day, drifting off into sleep as I watched the sparkling lake.

Hilichurl Ballad Selection

Vol 1

The masterpiece of the Poet Laureate of Hilichurlian! Scholar Jacob Musk will show you the mysterious spiritual world of the hilichurls through this poetry collection!

A collection of hilichurl poetry compiled by the Mondstadt ecologist Jacob Musk. During the writing of this book, Musk traveled across the continent to visit every hilichurl tribe, even going so far as to venture deep into hilichurl settlements and become intimately acquainted with their lives. Musk was praised as the "Poet Laureate of Hilichurlian" for this book, but it is evident that neither the scholar himself nor the hilichurls were particularly fond of this honor. Jacob Musk, though enthusiastic about hilichurl studies, loathed to be associated with them even in his late years.

The first song:

Mi muhe ye
Mi biat ye
Biat ye dada
Muhe dada

Quite possibly a battle song sung by the hilichurls before combat. I have observed that when two or more hilichurls are present, they engage in frenzied brawling after singing this vulgar song.

The second poem:

Eleka mimi-a-Domu
Mita domu-a-dada
La-la-la
La-la-la
Mimi mosi ye mita

The song is sung by hilichurls as they dance around totem poles. In my estimation it is some form of tribal hymn. It has an upbeat tone and is usually heard during festivals.

The third poem:

Mi muhe mita nye
Mi muhe mita nye
Muhe nye
Muhe nye
Gusha
Biat, gusha

A melancholic hilichurl song I heard during an exchange with an elderly samachurl. Although I do not yet understand the literal meaning of the poem, the overwhelming sense of grief that comes through in the song is enough to captivate the best poets in my birthplace (despite such praise, I must admit the acrid smells coming from the elderly hilichurls were just as melancholic, and just as overwhelming).

Vol 2

Are wine and poetry a part of the hilichurl lifestyle? Do they have pure and devout desires? Expert on the hilichurls, Jacob Musk, is here to answer!

The fourth poem:

Celi upa celi
Sada shato lata
Kuzi unu ya zido
Unu dada

A song sung by samachurls. Judging by the reaction of the chief, the song seems to bear a special philosophical meaning for the hilichurls. It may appear ridiculous in mainstream academic circles, and I have no intention of casting doubt upon well-established views, but I feel obliged to say that the question of whether philosophical discourse truly exists among the hilichurls is one that still fascinates me to this day, and may be deserving of further study.

The fifth song:

Nini movo muhe yoyo
Nini movo mimi tomo
Lata movo mosi yoyo
Celi movo celi yoyo

Much like the people of Mondstadt, the wind-worshipping hilichurl tribes often drink to excess and sing endless songs of praise to the Anemo Archon. This is a hilichurl ode that is often heard when they are inebriated.

The sixth song:

Unu, unu
Yaya ika kundala!
Unu, unu
Mita dada ya dala?
Unu, unu
Kuzi mita dada ye
Mita dada-a-mimi

A pious ode that is only sung by hilichurls during sacrifices. When performing this ode, the hilichurls often add percussion by beating the backsides of the weakest tribe members with planks, creating rhythmic ringing sounds. It must be quite painful.

The seventh song:

Mimi movo

Mimi sada

Mimi domu

Domu upa

Gusha dada

It appears that many hilichurl tribes share a tradition of exchanging songs around bonfires in the moonlight. This song is one such bonfire ballad sung by the chief at the end of the night. At the end of the song, the chief shouts "nunu" three times, which presumably carries the meaning of "sleep."

Traveler's Notes

A clue found in the northern Guili Plains ruins: "To unite in ambition is to be steadfast and immovable for all time."

A clue found in the eastern Guili Plains ruins: "Wisdom is like water, it nourishes all those who receive it and in it is a reflection of the truth."

A clue found in the southern Guili Plains ruins: "Fortify the bones, that movement be supple when the time comes."

A clue found in the western Guili Plains ruins: "Virtue grows tall like a tree, though there be shade it will flourish forever."

Heart of Clear Springs

Vol 1

A legendary tale passed down by Springvale hunters that portrays an encounter between an unknown young boy and a spring fairy.

Under the cascading moonlight, a tearful boy made his wish at the spring. A fairy from afar, who had taken up residence in the unoccupied spring, listened in silence to his wordless wish.

Spring fairies know nothing of distant memories or deep dreams. They are born of water's essence, faceless descendants of the angels. Thus, when the curious fairy emerged from the water and heard the cry of that boy's heart, she became interested in this life, younger and more fragile than her own. The silent fairy reached out her formless fingers, cold as the midnight dew and soft as fortune forgone, and gently caressed the boy's forehead and cheeks.

Startled by this stranger's touch, the young boy lifted his head and met the fairy's gaze. "Can you make my wish come true?" The boy asked. The fairy of the spring was surprised and confused by this presumptuous question. But she could not speak, and so simply nodded her head. Satisfied, the boy left.

He did not know that the spring fairy was alone, without friends or family, and that she had lost a great deal of her wisdom. Only when the spring water flowed from cracks in the stone into her pool, and when she gazed upon the fractured image of the moon in the rippling water, did she slowly regain the ability to think, and to mimic fragments of speech. Like a curious child, the fairy observed the world around her in innocence, wonder, and love. She rejoiced with the fox and squirrel who stole berries, and grieved at the dark clouds that covered the horizon.

And for that young boy, a feeling complex yet immature welled forth from within her heart. All alone in this world, she had neither the power nor wisdom with which to grant his wish. But she could share it, and she drew life from sharing his burdens.

Vol 2

A legendary tale passed down by Springvale hunters that recounts the acquaintance of a spring fairy and a young boy.

As he gazed at the fractured image of the moon carried by the water's ripples, the boy poured his heart out to the spring.

From within his words, she learned much of him.

And from her silence, he strengthened his belief in himself.

Dimly, the spring fairy understood that there was good in the world beyond moonlight and fruits, and more to darkness than mere clouds.

The boy spoke to her of forests and trees, cities and walls, and shared with her his joys, his sorrows and his fears.

As she listened to him, she became enamored of this imperfect world into which she had been born.

When the boy grew frustrated at his powerlessness, the spring fairy would gently and quietly wipe away his tears. From them, she grew to understand the world outside the spring a little more.

Those tears flowed into the water, and the fairy purified them, turning them into a sweet nectar that brought him sweet dreams. The boy forgot the pain of his waking hours, and met the silent fairy by her spring in his sleep.

Every time that happened, the fairy too would smile, asleep in the pool drenched in moonlight. The fresh dew nourished the boy's dreams, and the boy's dreams rejuvenated the lonely fairy's soul.

In those dreams, the spring fairy told the boy tales of the faraway realm of Hydro. She spoke of her sapphire-blue homeland, she sang of the homesickness of exile, and she sighed for separation and belonging. In these dreams, the boy became the one who silently listened, who wept for her troubles, and who rejoiced in her happiness.

Over time, the spring fairy gained the power of speech from the boy's memories and dreams. Over time, they became friends who shared all.

Vol 3

A legendary tale passed down by Springvale hunters that recounts a promise made between a spring fairy and a young boy.

When the wind ceased to blow, the moon's fractured reflection in the pool was made whole, and the boy heard the fairy's voice for the first time.

Fairies are tender, sensitive beings beyond the ken of humans, and the boy was deeply taken by her gentle, elegiac voice.

But fairies being tender and sensitive beyond human ken, through his eyes she saw his naked yearning, and the promise that was about to leave his lips.

And suddenly, the fairy was afraid.

Mortal lives are strong but fleeting, and the boy must grow, and grow old. Once youth and innocence had faded, how would he treat his elemental descendants? In the twilight of his life, would he blame himself for throwing his life away for a childish promise?

The spring fairy was pure and kind, but she did not understand human love. She had never seen the miracle of humanity, and had merely sat idle through millennia of change. And so, she greatly feared parting.

What humans see as the miracle of devotion, elemental fairies can only perceive as fleeting pleasure.

And even the power of fairies cannot reverse the aging of a loved one.

The tender fairy could not bear to see that unavoidable day come, and with a kiss she stopped the boy from uttering the words.

But the boy, in his innocence, mistook her rejection as her approval of his promise.

From that moment, the fairy vowed that she would someday bear to leave him.

And the boy vowed that he would remain by her spring forever.

Vol 4

A legendary tale passed down by Springvale hunters that recounts a bitter ending finally faced by a boy who was no longer young and a spring fairy who had not grown old.

By and by, the young boy grew up, made new friends, and had new experiences.

And the spring fairy, as she had in his youth, sang him her quiet elegies each one.

Till the day came at last, when she left, and gazed no more upon the boy.

Never again did words flow forth from the trickling sound of the spring. Never again would the fractured moon become whole.

The spring fairy suddenly realized that though she had found a place to belong, and though she had experienced fleeting happiness, she was still alone.

The boy, now no longer a boy, could not perceive her flight, and blamed himself for his own solitude.

"Perhaps she was merely a childish fantasy."

He would think this to himself as he listened to the gurgling of the spring.

But that cool kiss was real, as was the wind that once played with her hair.

Suddenly, he realized that though he had met and parted with countless new friends, and though he had adventured and returned more times than he could remember, he was still alone in the end.

So, as they had done many years ago, the boy's tears fell into the pure pond, soaking into the fractured moon.

But this time, the spring fairy did not come as promised.

Stubbornly she turned her back, willing to be the object of an innocent childhood dream, to be a fleeting guest wandering from a foreign land, but unwilling to allow her near-eternal life to break her lover's promise.

Legend has it that whenever the rain pours down, the raindrops that fall into the pond mix with the tears of the spring fairy.

To his dying day, the boy believed wholeheartedly in this groundless superstition.

But sadly, the spring fairy who fled from her true feelings could never believe it herself.

Draft Hilichurl Ballads

Recital Draft

A Hilichurlian poem created by Ella Musk. According to her, this Recital of Friendship is the work of many hands. Still, you can't help but feel that something sounds a bit off when you read it...

Olah! Olah!
Yoyo mosi mita!
Nye, nye mosi mita,
Yeye mosi gusha!
Mosi gusha, mosi tiga,
Yeye kucha kucha!

Narrative Draft

A Hilichurlian poem created by Ella Musk. According to her, this Stirring Narrative is the work of many hands. Still, you can't help but feel that something sounds a bit off when you read it...

Biadam! Ye dada nesina,
Ye dada nesina nunu,
Nunu shato!
Shato celi, shato lata,
Ye dada nesina,
Nini zido!
Nini zido!

Lyrical Draft

A Hilichurlian poem created by Ella Musk. According to her, this Elegant Lyric Poem is the work of many hands. Still, you can't help but feel that something sounds a bit off when you read it...

Gusha, gusha,
Gusha muhe kucha.
Kucha mita pupu,
Pupu si kucha mita.
Mi mosi mita,

Ye mosi gusha,
Kucha.

Tales From the Waves

Rising Tide

The legendary tale of an anonymous seafarer set in a time when Liyue was plagued by sea monsters.

—Rising Tide—

As the moon hung bright among the sea of stars above, hums of a sea shanty slowly began to rise over the waters below.

There once was a mighty ship that would lay anchor in Liyue Harbor. Its captain was a man who tracked and hunted terrible monsters of the deep, known as the "Skipper."

The ship's hull was adorned with skeletons of monsters from the sea, an unmistakable signal of their the Skipper's fearless will. However, the shanties of the crew seldom made any mention of hunting creatures of the deep. It's not that the sailors didn't revel in their reputation and brag of their achievements, but ages of navigating the merciless seas had taught them that ballads of blood and water were the most unlucky of all.

With his sword in hand, the Skipper sailed across the watery expanse, coasting along rocky reefs and cruising with surging undercurrents. He fearlessly guided his ship to face the roar of squalls and sea monsters alike. The dark worlds that laid beneath murky waters were like boundless hunting grounds. Any monster that would dare stir the tranquil waters often became the next trophy hanging from the side of the ship.

But the Skipper only knew wind and waves, and never seemed to grasp the bittersweet lives of ordinary people. For he occupied all his days with searching and hunting, accompanied solely by the salty sea breeze and the muffled calls of whales in the deep. The crew feared him more than they adored him, ever cautious of his character, relentless as if trying to break free from tangles of seaweed. The Skipper's clipper silently sailed forward, unyielding to the perilous stretches of sea.

Only the young maiden who always sat atop the towering bow could ever reveal a glimmer of softness to the Skipper's eyes. She was his navigator, charmed by the tidal song and humming with the whales, guiding the ship through the wind and waves to waters infested by beasts.

A young maiden at the helm offered her songs to the sea, paying due respect to its every billow and breeze...

"Hark the calls of creatures deep, and echoes of waves tossed in the gale.

When the sea and winds flow in our favor, towards the horizon shall we sail."

"May the deities that have passed, and me ol' captain too,

Steer our bow through the boundless sea, and point our compass true.
May we guide every sailor's soul, to the port they call home."

The chorus of the shanty gave way to the bellowing orders of the Skipper, promptly calling all hands to set sail. The mighty vessel slowly left the port and came underway, sinking into the horizon under the first glimmer of dawn.

This is how the story of every voyage would begin, just as they had each day before.

Wild Storm

To the never-ending tune of the ocean, the seafarer fought against the phenomenal foe of fate, fighting to the bitter end...

—Wild Storm—

"Come with me into the watery abyss, listening to murmurs of the deep.
When the wind and waves are right, we sail towards maelstroms of the sea.
I hear the jabber of me ol' lady, wishing well to her heirs to come:
May they navigate blasting winds and o'er dancing waves,
Pierced by heroes' harpoons, may the monster's lair meet the last of its days."

Even in the most violent of squalls, her constant shanties never ceased. The voice of the maiden harmonized with the raging waves, guiding the Skipper over deathly currents, sailing boldly towards the eye of the storm where the sea monster lay lurking.

Skimming across the vortex, ushered by lightning and waterspouts, the ship inched further into the monster's treacherous waters. Flashes of lightning revealed the Skipper's silhouette, fearlessly grasping his sword.

Following the Skipper's fixed gaze, the crew could only make out an alpine shape shadowed by tenebrous clouds. The massive figure that lay skulking in the distance was the body of the beast. The once fearsome skeletons that hung from the ship now seemed like mere cubs compared with the terrifying silhouette that lay sprawling before them like a mountain range in the center of the maelstrom.

At the Skipper's bellowing command, the crew fired broadside after broadside of giant crossbows, unleashing their mortal fears and delusions on the massive body that lay like a towering wall before them. The barrages of cannonballs and barbed iron harpoons left gruesome wounds on the body of the beast.

The sea monster hissed violently in pain, plunging beneath the huge crimson waves before slamming the ship's hull with all its might. The ship nearly capsized against the might of the blow, and crimson waves came crashing across the decks. The sailors were drenched in the foul torrents as they cursed the gods of the elements and continued to rake the body of the beast with stones and sharpened spears.

The ruthless Skipper never flinched at the opponents dealt to him by fate. The thundering roars of the terrible beast were answered by songs of the young maiden atop the bow. The ship maneuvered round the monster, cruising upon the spinning torrents, and answering sharp fangs and swiping stingers with catapults, harpoons, slings, and even mortal bodies to vent their dread and fury.

Once the monster's body was riddled with wounds and nearly all its tentacles and claws had been severed, the Skipper's ship too had been reduced to a floating hulk. Half of the ship's masts had fallen, half of its guns were out of action, and half the crew had been taken as dinner for the monster — even the Skipper's prized sword had been cleaved in two. This was an unwinnable bout, much like a mere child challenging a full-grown adult.

The injured monster knew very well that its opponent no longer posed any threat. Craving to devour the ship that now lay dead in the water, it rose to the surface and exposed its gaping mouth.

Receding Torrent

Finally, when the tempest eased and the ocean surface was tranquil once more, the soft wind played a poignant homecoming tune...

—Receding Torrent—

Although the moon was veiled by dark clouds, her shanty did not cease.

As the surface grew eerily calm amidst the storm, the splintered ship drifted slowly towards the abyss.

The monster's massive spiraling mouth lay open wide, and a rumbling growl came from deep within it. The monster was content with its prey and opened its eyelids, crusted in reef and coral, to witness the final moments of yet another opponent who had underestimated it. The monster's massive eyes revealed their fragile gaze to the dying Skipper.

The monster reveled in the moment and through his pair of eyes beheld a heart that was darker than the abyss.

A final bolt of lightning flashed in the sky above, illuminating the ship as it split into two among the monster's swirling fangs, fading beneath a mist of splinters. Even the screams from the keel were drowned beneath the waves.

And then it was dark again... until the furious roar of the monster broke out over the black waters once more.

The Skipper plunged his severed sword into the eye of the beast again and again, until he was immersed beneath the filthy tide, when finally his broken sword became lodged in the monster's soft eyeball.

As the Skipper drew closer to his treacherous fate, clutched by countless claws and pincers, he continued fighting tooth and nail until the monster's sharp claws were torn into pieces...

A familiar tune then filled the salty breeze as the monster's movements began to cease.

"Sing with me, farewell to the sea, a shanty I hold so dear,
When the sea and winds flow in our favor, I know my end is near.
O' captain is calling me name, back to whence I came,
So forget not the captain and I, and hum this melody again.
There will come a day when at last you find me, slumbering in the abyssal deep...
Or perhaps you too then, will be swallowed by the whirlpool in the sea."

The monster's gigantic tentacles burst forth from the water, snaking upwards like towering columns, but the young maiden simply lay there floating on her back, singing amidst the turmoil. Even as the tentacles coiled tightly around her arms, even as the sharp claws pierced her skin, and even as they shredded her clothing to pieces, leaving it floating in tatters on the sea, still she continued to sing her farewell shanty toward the Skipper.

Then, the maiden was gently pulled into the black sea by the monster.

In an age where the sea was ruled by unpredictable disasters, the people of the waves died each passing day.

The Skipper awoke to find himself on the deck of some unknown merchant ship. Having lost his ship and entire crew, all he had left was a body covered in wounds and an old dream echoing an ethereal sea shanty.

"When the sea and winds are right, I will go forth to sea and avenge her, O maiden charmed by the tidal song..."

Hex & Hound

Vol 1

Sometimes, feelings are like the summer rain, coming out of nowhere and catching you unprepared. A nostalgic summer story set in the age of aristocrats begins right here.

As is known to all, the Lawrence Clan is a noble family of considerable notoriety. The nobles idle away their time, extorting the common folk to furnish their lavish lifestyles. They lead licentious lives. Under their cruel governance, countless unspeakable crimes are committed against the people. Although the common folk unanimously resent the nobles' greed, they are powerless to speak a single word against them.

Young Dietrich was a highborn noble. He hadn't yet committed any deplorable crimes at his tender age. In fact, his swordsmanship was reputedly exceptional among the noble circles. If you wished to find something to cavil about, it would have been his short temper and chronic delusion that the whole universe revolved around him. Such traits, of course, are not uncommon among the sons of nobility, so it wasn't of any major concern. However, given that he was born into the Lawrence family name, it was only a matter of time before he would get drafted into the ranks of the other scoundrels.

It was at this time that the young scoundrel decided upon the first reckless act of his life. A short while earlier, Dietrich had made up his mind to skip the Grand Mage's discourse on the elements in favor of a bit of fun outside the confines of the city. As he pressed his way through the streets crowded with commoners, his gaze fell upon a young lass with blonde hair and blue eyes.

Dietrich was at a loss for words for the emotions that bubbled in his heart at that moment. The only thing he was certain of was that his heart had never thumped so loudly, or so uncontrollably, within his chest.

"So this must be how dear Mother feels when she sees her kitty."

As Dietrich kept thinking in his heart, he suddenly found himself moving towards where she was standing.

Much to his dismay, the young commoner girl didn't so much as bat an eyelid at him. After making his identity known to her, she didn't display even the slightest sign of any interest. Convinced that this commoner didn't understand what was good for her, he decided that he would carry her off under the cover of night.

"Once I take her, I'll lock her away in a cage, just like dear Mother would when her kitty is being naughty."

Vol 2

Money doesn't solve all your problems, but it can certainly solve a lot of them! A young woman's summer vacation in Mondstadt opens to the melodic tune of a symphonic sum of Mora.

The plebeian lass arrived in the city on one fine sunny day. Her long golden hair shone like the spring sunshine, and her blue eyes sparkled like the gleaming waves in the afternoon sun. It's hard to imagine how such a girl could travel alone from the monster infested outskirts all the way to the city.

"To call her suspect would only be an insult to her beauty!"

Thus shouted the drunken gate sentry among the clamor of the crowded tavern. His earnings from guarding the gate that day were especially bountiful, enough to keep his cup brimming until dawn at least.

"We all know you were just dumbstruck by her beauty!"

The man next to him pulled no punches.

"Hah, what do you know! Do I look like one to go frolicking after ladies? I'll show you what I really have my eye on!"

The soldier promptly pulled out his money purse and shook it in his hand.

"Good heavens! Today, drinks are on you!"

"You heard the man, drinks all around! I'm just worried that one more will be one too many for ya!"

...

So this traveling scholar who went by the name of Nottie settled into her newfound life in the city.

Nottie spoke in a quiet, gentle manner. A rumor eventually began floating around the streets claiming that if you exchanged a few words with Nottie during the day, you would have sweet dreams the following night.

Apart from this, the new girl didn't disturb the lives of those in the city in any manner. After all, the people not only had their daily lives to deal with, but also the constant oppression from the nobility.

"Oh, I thought life in the city would be simple. I never imagined it would be like this..."

As rays of sunset filled her room, she tilted her head and rested it on her hands. Sitting beside the table, her fingers seemed to be circling around something. Her words flowed like a magical chant with the power to persuade people into believing almost anything.

Vol 3

*Even when you live in a safe city, you should watch out for the wolves that lurk in the night...
Something more impossible to master than mass hypnosis is revealed within these pages.*

Night came.

The faint howl of a wild beast could be heard echoing in the distance. It seemed to be the cry of a wolf.

Nottie sat on her bed and lifted her long sleeves to reveal a bone-white armband carved in the fashion of a coiling snake.

The serpent's head was strikingly lifelike with its mouth stretched open to reveal its fangs. Its neck was reared back as if ready to pounce on its prey the very next moment.

The snake's slithering body was wrapped around her arm, emitting a dangerous aura under the rays of the magical lamps that lit the room.

"Goodnight, my dear sister."

Nottie gently petted the armband, rubbing her pinkie playfully along the snake's tail.

Shortly after, the magic lamps went out and the entire room was draped in darkness.

The darkness of night brought Nottie boundless power.

So Nottie was already wise to the unknown presence the moment it entered the room.

Sitting on the bed, Nottie could clearly see Dietrich as he quietly gathered her clothes and felt his way around in the dark.

It became harder and harder for Nottie to hold back her laughter, until Dietrich was just in front of her.

Dietrich met the same dazzling eyes that occupied his mind all day.

But her eyes were somehow different now. They were no longer blue like water as Dietrich had seen that day. At this moment, they were filled with the night, devoid of waves, tranquil like the depths of the sea.

"Here, drink the water in this cup."

That was the last thing Dietrich heard before his consciousness faded away.

Vol 4

Even a dog can learn basic things like upper-class etiquette — or so insists a certain non-nonsense teacher from afar.

The cup fell from his languid hand as Dietrich collapsed to the floor. Nottie crouched beside Dietrich and relieved him of the saber sheathed upon his waist. She stroked the hilt of the blade for a moment before pulling back her hand, and a black gemstone that had been inlaid in the hilt fell into her palm.

"How convenient... You have brought the Eye of Eternal Night right to me. Thank you." Removing the snake armband as she spoke, she placed the black gemstone in the mouth of the snake.

Scales and flesh began to quickly ripple from the snake's head down its body. A small black snake uncoiled in Nottie's hands, slithering off her palm and falling to the floor. The snake began to enlarge, forming into a massive python with red eyes and black scales, its twisting body almost filled the whole room.

Nottie extended her hand and as the magical lamps illuminated the room, the python began to shrink down again and coiled back around her arm.

"Hmm? Are you hiding?"

Nottie turned her gaze to beneath the bed.

Under which she found...

A dog.

It was trembling uncontrollably, probably frightened by the python a moment before.

"Oh, what a pity. I wanted to turn you into a wolf, but it seems you turned into a dog instead!" Although Nottie's words seemed to be apologizing, her voice lacked any hint of remorse.

Dietrich still hadn't realized what had happened yet. It was only by pure instinct that he had scurried under the bed.

Only then did he begin to come to his senses. He tried to say something after hearing Nottie's words, but no matter how hard he tried, only "woof woof woof" would come out.

After hearing himself, Dietrich panicked and dashed out from under the bed.

No matter how many times Dietrich leaped in front of the mirror, or how many times he howled in disbelief, the reflection of a striking young noble never appeared again.

Dietrich then turned with a snarl and leaped towards Nottie. Without even being the least bit startled, she simply glanced at him with folded arms. Suddenly Dietrich could no longer move toward her, no matter how hard he tried.

"That's not the proper etiquette for addressing a lady. Hmm... It seems you need to be trained!"

Vol 5

"Be a good dog! Yes, there's no reward for getting it right, but there's still a punishment for getting it wrong!" The witch in black makeup smirked.

"Allow me introduce myself again. I am Nottfriga, but perhaps you're more familiar with my nickname. People call me the Enchantress of the Night."

As she spoke, her long golden hair began to gradually darken, eventually turning black as the night sky outside the window. Her once sky-blue eyes were now pitch-black, ushering in the darkness of night.

"I am your master now. Of course, I will need to train you well."

Nottfriga knelt down and placed a necklace that seemingly appeared out of nowhere on the still struggling Dietrich. The necklace shrank in size until it fit perfectly around his furry neck. No matter how he thrashed his head about or clawed at it, the necklace would not budge.

"Tsk, we've already wasted so much time. Come, we're leaving."

With that, Nottfriga set off towards the city. Dietrich whimpered along the way with all the strength he could muster, wishing he could simply run back to his villa. But he couldn't, no matter how hard he tried. The necklace Nottfriga had placed on him seemed to somehow control him, so he had no choice but to follow behind her.

Nottfriga glanced back at the reluctant Dietrich dawdling behind her, and curled a strand of her hair around her finger.

"Although it is certainly amusing to watch you struggle in your current state, you are much too noisy. So unless you'd like a taste of my new Silence of the Night spell, you'd better keep your yapping mouth shut."

The whole world seemed to fall into silence at that moment. Intuition told Dietrich that it'd be best not to become the latest test subject for Nottfriga's new spell.

Vol 6

"Message From the Editor: Thank you for your support, everyone! We've managed to snag our erstwhile author from the bowels of The Cat's Tail! Although they look drunker than a sodden

dandelion, continued serialization should pose no problem! We hope for your continued support from here on out as well!"

Dietrich witnessed the fall of the house of Lawrence.

Who knew where Mother's kitty had gone. His father, driven to distraction, and his mother, hysterical, were so close by, and yet no matter how he shouted, they did not pay him any heed.

"Arf..."

Dietrich lowered his head, but before he could speak again, the ground opened up beneath him. A pair of old crone's hands stretched out from the ground, seizing him by the neck.

Then he fell, and his fall seemed not to end, till at last he crashed to earth at the feet of the old witch.

Strangely, it hurt not at all.

Something hooked onto Dietrich's necklace, and he found himself hoisted up bodily.

All before him was darkness, and he could only see one thing — that which was below him. It was a steaming pot, filled with some unknown black substance that gurgled and belched. There were some solids in there, too, and when he looked, he could espy spiderwebs and the bones of venomous vipers...

Into his ear crept Nottfriga's voice: "Ah, I have you now, my last ingredient. Once I've put you in, my stew of life eternal shall be complete. Hahaha!"

"Woof! Woof! Woof!" Let me go, you dastardly witch!

Dietrich struggled with all his might, not thinking for a moment that the bond of the hitherto inescapable necklace would suddenly be so easily slipped—

"Ar—"

And so he fell...

He heard nothing more, naught else but the howling wind and Nottfriga's crazed laughter whipping about his ears.

Vol 7

"A good person, one who smiles as she gives out dog biscuits..." What is the true identity of the strange young woman in the familiar forest?

"Wake up—"

Dietrich felt his body being rocked gently.

"Are you alright?"

A hand reached over as if to check his breathing.

It was a familiar voice...

Gentle as the April breeze, and genial as the March sun.

Dietrich forced his eyes open, and before them—
Was the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl.
"Ah, wonderful, you're finally awake," she said with a smile.

"This place... Is this... Celestia?" Dietrich wondered.
"No, I'm afraid it's just an ordinary forest," the girl replied.
Then Dietrich's senses returned to him, and he knew then that the young lady before him was the source of all his troubles — the wicked old witch, Nottfriga! In a flash, he had recovered, and leaping a distance away from her he maintained a guarded stance.

"Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you. Ah, I must've forgotten to introduce myself. My name is Magdalene. I'm, well, Nottfriga's younger sister." So saying, Magdalene gave the finger behind her back a twirl — a calming spell of light magic, and she approached Dietrich. "Come now, it's alright."

At this did Dietrich indeed calm down. He desired to ask the girl before him how she could understand him — but he could still do naught but bark.
"Oh, this? It is but a small spell. My sister knows it too."
"Woof, woof woof!?" So that crone did hear what I said, and simply pretended not to so she might string me along!?
"Well... Still, Nottfriga is actually a gentle person." And speaking of her sister, Magdalene smiled gorgeously once more.
"..."

Vol 8

"Heavens, I spoke ill of a witch to her face!" "Oh, what a bad boy. Still, discipline is a master's duty, so there's nothing for it~" The curtains rise on the witch's cruel secret—

"Do witches trade their brains for mighty magic? I can't get through to her at all.." Dietrich thought to himself as he followed the golden-haired maiden, who rambled on about something or another.
"Ah, don't say that! If my sister heard you, she would be most angry." Magdalene said this in a quiet voice as she looked at Dietrich.
"Woof woof woof, woof?" Well, you needn't tell her, do you... Wait, how did you know what I was thinking?
"Ah... But. It. Is. Too. Late. Now."

Dietrich lifted his head in alarm at the rising pressure above him—
Her expression had not changed at all...

But even so...

He knew that the girl before him was now changed.

"It seems that your nightmare has been of some use — for your memory, at least. But as I see it, you are still far from adequate." That proud, cold voice from on high — yes, surely this was Nottfriga.

"Well then, I suppose I shall leave the Essence of the Inmost Heart inside you."

What on earth was the "Essence of the Inmost Heart"...

Wait, no. Magdalene had mentioned just such a thing.

"Don't worry! The nightmare from before was a falsehood. My sister placed the Essence of the Inmost Heart into you, and it can see your fears. That is why you dreamed of the things you fear most."

"But I think that my sister must've done it for your good. She is, after all, a most gentle soul."

...

Dietrich's fur stood on end, and he trembled as he peeked at Nottfriga, banishing any other thoughts from his mind.

"Hah, it seems that my teachings have been quite useful indeed. Well then, let us be on our way." Dietrich's frightened appearance pleased his master, the witch.

Vol 9

"What does the death of a warm spring day feel like?" So the young maiden said one morning, in defiance of all common logic. "I suppose it must feel... furry?"

This was a forest without end. A fine mist shrouded the area and the golden rays of dawn shone through the canopy, scattering themselves upon the emerald earth below.

At this moment, Magdalene was clutching a dog — indeed, this was Dietrich — as she kept up a leisurely pace. The golden-haired maiden traipsed upon the gnarled roots of massive trees like an elegant swan, lithely making her way through the woods.

"How fortunate that she is currently Magdalene. If it were that hag Nottfriga, she would certainly make me walk or use some sort of magic to force me to run. This path is not made for dogs — no, not even humans could traverse it. There isn't even a road, only trees... Ah, it would be nice if Magdalene could keep carrying me like this..." Dietrich's thoughts meandered as he turned to look at Magdalene.

The morning light danced upon her face. She possessed a beauty that could not be considered lesser than any noblewoman's. Her light complexion and gentle expression made her seem delicate, like the short-lived morning dew born upon on flower petals.

"Magdalene's skin is so fair... I daresay none of the nobles I've met can compare to her," Dietrich thought as he gazed upon the girl.

"Let me tell you a story. That is, I'm already dead," Magdalene suddenly spoke.

Vol 10

After all, none can live and still obtain release.

A long time ago, there was a witch who gave birth to twin daughters. However, witches are unable to keep two offspring from the same generation. That is the price they pay, the cost of their enormous power. But this witch had already reached the apex of mastery in dark magic. She offered her own life force to preserve the life of her twins.

Still, this solution could not last forever, and as the last of the witch's life force faded, the day of their fated farewell arrived at last.

In death, the witch was finally freed from the world. The surviving elder sister, Nottfriga, inherited everything, and felt entirely responsible for the passing of her younger sister, Magdalene. Luckily for Nottfriga, she inherited the witch's talent for dark magic. Using herself as a vessel, she summoned Magdalene's soul using complicated magical symbols and obscure incantations. Then, she read all of the leather-bound books in the tower, and combining what she learned with dark magic and alchemy, created a new vessel. However, the ability to place her sister's soul inside the vessel and bring her back to life was not only a forbidden art in light magic, it was also exceptionally difficult — especially for Nottfriga, who knew no light magic whatsoever. Nevertheless, Nottfriga's insistence on bringing Magdalene back spurred her on, and eventually she found a solution. She transformed the vessel into a serpent bracelet that she wore on her wrist, and set out on an adventure.

"My beloved sister, when this is all over, we will never be apart again..."

Vol 11

"I should just stuff that noisy puppy yapper of yours..." "Woof, woof!" That day, the young maiden gave her loyal dog something precious...

The last ray of light was fading, and darkness was about to engulf the forest.

"It's time to switch, my dear elder sister."

Suddenly, Magdalene put down Dietrich, whom she had been holding in her arms.

"One last thing, elder sister — I have a present for you. I hope you like it."

With this, light slowly began to shine from her fingers, gradually forming a dazzling ball of light.

This was Magdalene's light magic.

"Alright, from now on, you have to be well behaved. Shh, don't say anything."

"What? Why are you being so mysterious... Ugh." Before Dietrich could react, he had quietly muttered something, but his speech was interrupted when he suddenly found a slender hand tightly covering his mouth.

A moment later, the girl — now transformed — hastily stuffed something into his mouth.

"What's this..."

It was the hilt of Dietrich's sword.

The sword that once proudly hung from his belt.

"!?"

Dietrich opened his mouth instinctively to say something.

"Bite down on it if you want to live." Nottfriga raised one hand into the air, and Dietrich felt unable to breathe as the collar around his neck grew tighter and tighter. Powerless to resist, it was all he could do to bite down as instructed.

"Listen carefully. In a moment, you will need to defend yourself with this sword. Even though you're an ignorant and useless spoiled brat, it would still be a lot of trouble for me if you died here." Nottfriga raised Dietrich's head and spoke in a low voice. "After all, I haven't finished teaching you a lesson yet. It would ruin my fun if you died too easily."

The witch of the night finished speaking, and retracted her hand to adjust her garments.

The collar loosened again, returning to normal tightness. At once, air rushed passed his teeth and in through his nostrils, filling up his lungs again. Dietrich still did not dare relax his jaw's grip on the sword, however, so he had to make do with somewhat impaired breathing.

Before long, the sound of commotion was heard in the distance...

Moonlit Bamboo Forest

Vol 1

When a small-town boy looking to leave his sleepy hometown behind gets lost in a bamboo forest at sundown, what long-forgotten dreams will he encounter?

Between the rustling emerald curtains of foliage, in a spot where the croaks of frogs and shrills of cicadas meet, lies a corner of the forest that is withered and dry, just near the wetlands beneath the mountain crags.

The bamboo forest of Mt. Qingce is the verdant home to many fables.

After a spell of rain, a cadence of drips and drops could be heard bouncing from the bamboo leaves and hollow bamboo stalks. Along a winding path between the bamboo spires came a young boy. He swiftly made his way along the trail, climbing up damp crags and running down its paved mossy course. The leaves of tangled foliage and vines strewn across his path brushed against his skin. The boy finally decided to stop for a rest at a dried and withering spot among the creaking bamboo of Mt. Qingce, tucked away below the mountain rock.

The boy clearly remembered the village elder once saying that the rainy season was the proper time for the fox to take its wife. Only the eyes of a child could ever see the fox bride's crimson sedan chair and its procession dancing through the forest accompanied by strains of music and thumping drums.

The village elder also warned that kids mustn't approach any such procession.

"If you wander too close, the fox will snatch your soul away!"

That's what the village elder always said.

"What happens if your soul gets snatched?" asked one of the kids.

"Once the fox has your soul, your fate will be forever sealed... Perhaps they will use you for music in their processions, smashing you like a cymbal and beating you like a drum, horns blaring all around... There will be no rest for your soul."

The elder would never forget to pose as if she were beating a drum while she spoke, scaring the little ones all the more.

As the boy grew older, he stopped believing the elder's silly fables. Following the Seelie's wispy trails, he passed through the green labyrinth, accompanied by the faint calls of foxes coming from the thickets along the way. Those crafty creatures hiding deep in the forest will seldom reveal themselves or their boisterous bridal processions to careless treading travelers.

The boy was in rather low spirits, kicking pebbles off the road and stomping up the naturally occurring stone steps along the way, wandering further into the heart of the bamboo forest.

The village elder once said that this very forest was once an ancient kingdom conquered by the Geo Archon. But what did the Geo Archon look like? Did it have arms and legs, or eyes like us? Or, was he more like the stone beasts found along the water banks?

The herb gatherers that periodically set up shop in the city to sell their herbal ingredients would always bring tales of that year's Rite of Descension. Listening to their stories, one could only imagine the amazing scene of the Geo Archon descending to the world. But of course, the curious kids could only hope to someday see the great Archon that had been revered for generations with their very own eyes.

Was the immovable Mt. Qingce a gift from the benevolent Geo Archon? And were the decades of peace and the long lives that had been enjoyed by generations of people here preordained by the Archon?

The answers to these questions lay outside the village, within the aging forest on the mountain.

Bubbling with questions and expectation, the determined boy made his way forward beneath the scattered shadows of bamboo leaves.

Vol 2

As the moon slowly rises in the night sky, small-town boy meets bamboo-forest girl — but is he voyaging into the realm of the adepti, or setting foot in some monstrous trap?

Lost among the green bamboo canopy, the young lad soon met an unexpected companion.

"What's the matter? Are you lost?"

The lad heard a gentle voice among the rustling bamboo stalks, speaking with a hint of sarcastic playfulness.

The lad turned to see a slender woman garbed in white. She stood beside a clear babbling brook, with beads of water glistening on her woven rush raincoat, her golden eyes melding with the rays cast through the forest by the setting sun.

The village elder had said that there were once white horses that would leap from clear springs to become adepti to assist the campaigns of the Lord of Geo. But no one had ever specified which spring, or the honorable name of the illuminated beast that sprang from it.

Besides, the woman that stood before him now didn't appear to be an adeptus, apart from the piercing gaze of her golden eyes.

Furthermore, he had never heard of any adepti that needed to wear raincoats.

"Well if it isn't another fool."

The lady garbed in white began to chuckle, squinting her eyes with a smile.

"Who are you calling a fool?"

Replied the young lad in a fluster.

This was certainly no adeptus. Who had ever heard of an adeptus that would speak in such a deplorable manner?

"I wish to embark on an adventure. I want to sail across the seas and witness the stone spears of the Lord of Geo for myself!"

"You've only just embarked on your journey and yet you've already fallen astray among the bamboo forest..."

The woman's reply was calm and even, a subtle smirk playing over her eyes. Already, the lad found her particularly annoying.

"I don't need your..."

"There's no shame in being lost. Come, follow me. I will lead out of here."

The woman snickered and extended her slender hand toward the boy. Her white skin glimmered under the rays of the sunset that shone between the bamboo leaves.

"Uh, thank you..."

The young lad took her outstretched hand. Her skin was cold and damp to the touch, much like fresh rain upon a mountain or dewdrops upon a bamboo shoot.

The setting sun gradually disappeared behind the mountain ridge, and the afterglow in the clear sky above gradually grew dim.

The village elder always used to say that once the warm glow of the setting sun fades, the cold and murky atmosphere of the mountain woods becomes a perfect breeding ground for monsters.

These monsters are born from a past that has long gone, their spirits forming from the resentment and unwillingness of the dead. Any bamboo they ensnare will dry up and die, and any person they ensnare will similarly grow weary and fade from existence.

"Sometimes, they will even call upon passers-by to assist them with matters that they could not accomplish on their own, before leading them into a trap from which they would never return..."

"Other times, they would act as a guide for innocent travelers, leading them to a den of demons."

"So you see, little ones, you must stay vigilant, and never let your guard down when you journey far from familiar soil."

Thus would say the village elder, patting the kids on their heads as she finished the story.

Come to think of it, could this woman in white be a monster of the mountain woods?

The lad grew nervous in his heart and couldn't help but slow his pace.

"What's the matter?"

The woman turned around, her golden eyes shining through the moonlight draping over her silhouette.

Vol 3

Deep in the bamboo forest, reality has coincided with a story from the distant past. But the crossover ends as the bright moon reaches its peak in the night sky, and small-town boy disappears into an indescribable dream.

Nightfall seemed to always hasten its approach over the bamboo forest of Mt. Qingce.

Gazing upward, the silvery moonlight was scattered amidst the shadows of the bamboo forest's leaves. In a spot illuminated under the moonlight, far from the croaking frogs and chirping cicadas, new bamboo culms had just sprouted from the ground.

The bamboo forest of Mt. Qingce is the verdant home to many fables.

As night fell, the woman garbed in white began to recount many stories to the young lad, ancient tales that the lad had never heard before.

"Long ago, three bright moons once hung high in the night sky. These three moons were sisters, their years numbering more than those of the Geo Archon and their year of birth predating the very bedrock upon which Liyue Harbor now rests.

The moons were daughters of prose and song, sovereign over the night sky. They navigated the heavens above in their silver carriage, alternating with one another thrice a month. If the reign was not promptly passed from one sister to the next, a terrible disaster would occur that very day.

These three luminous moons shared but one love, the stars of daybreak. Only at the fleeting moments when day and night converged could one of the three sisters pass the fading stars and gaze upon the chambers of the morning stars. Moments later, as the new dawn would break over the horizon, the carriage would quickly ferry the night's sister away.

The three sisters shared an equal affection for their one and only love, much like the affection they shared for one another. But this was all before the world was smashed against the tides of great calamity.

With time, disasters overturned the sovereign carriage and laid ruin to the halls of the stars. The three sisters of the night turned against one another, leading to their eternal parting by death. Only one of their pale corpses now remains, ever shedding its cold light..."

The woman raised her head and gazed at the moon through the sea of bamboo. Her long, slender neck was covered in the silver light and her eyes shone gold.

"The wolf packs are children of the moons, they remember the calamities and the tragedies that ensued. Hence, they lament the fate of their mother with each new moon... It is also why those who live among the wolves call the morning stars, the surviving love of the moon, the grievous stars."

"I see..."

The young lad remained silent for some time.

This was a story that the village elders had never told before. Perhaps it was a legend that even the eldest of elders had never heard before. It was a grander tale than those about foxes taking brides and monsters ensnaring people, but a less riveting one than those about the Lord of Geo driving away evil spirits. The woman's tales were almost like a dream of the imagination.

"These are stories that have never been told, legends that have already been long forgotten by people."

The woman garbed in white gently stroked the lad's hair and lowered her eyelids. The golden color of her eyes grew a little darker.

"Before the ancient immortals established the universe, there were gods that wandered across the lands. It was at this time that many of the adepti came into being. But what about before then?"

"Only broken memories and fragments of the past were turned into stories, and stories turned into legends, passed down among the people..."

"Even deities and adepti would feel sentimental upon hearing such ancient memories that surpass the mortal world."

The woman let out a long sigh and turned to find the young lad fast asleep.

"Tsk! Unbelievable..."

With a weary smile, she took off her raincoat and placed it over the young lad.

That night, the lad dreamt of three moons in the sky, and a silver carriage stopped before the gates of the stars.

Vol 4

As dawn gently approaches, the fate of the two youngsters diverges, and they go their separate ways. But the echoes of that ancient story still resound within the forest, waiting for the day that they may welcome small-town boy back into their midst once more.

As day slowly dawned, the young boy was gently awakened.

Daybreak's light silhouetted the white mist that shrouded the bamboo forest of which tales of ghostly foxes were told. The vapor seemed like a horsetail, as it billowed this way and that.

The woman held his hand, and together they walked toward the place where the sun pierced through the woods. They turned left, then right, passing through undergrowth teeming with insects, clambering over slippery moss-covered stones, scaling down a gorge hidden by the shadows of the bamboo trees. All the way she led him, till they arrived at the exit of the bamboo forest.

"I still don't know who you are, or where you're from."

Said the boy, for the previous night's story had yet to leave his mind.

"..."

The woman turned, and with her back to the morning light, her eyes shone gold. But she merely smiled, and said nothing.

Many years later, the boy, who was a boy no longer, would remember that moment, and he would understand: the gap between them was as a yawning chasm. His fate was to leave his home and go to Liyue Harbor, to seek the riches the Geo Archon had bestowed upon him. Hers, then, was to hide herself away, away from the majestic, kindly gaze of that great Lord of Geo, and protect those ancient tales that even she was beginning to forget.

So, the boy and the white-clad, golden-eyed woman were parted.

He would pack his things and head for that thriving port city, while she stood silently at the boundaries of the bamboo forest. For in her bewitching eyes, she seemed to have already foreseen the young man's fate — that someday, when he was old, tired of the sea and the waves of life, he would slowly return to this mountain village, and there he would live out the rest of his days.

In the dawn's glow, the boy heard a whinnying cry that then grew distant.

He turned and looked, and there was nothing behind him, but a single strand of hair that had come to rest on his shoulder.

A Drunkard's Tale

Vol 1

One of many popular tales told of Mondstadt's drinkers. This one is the story of a drunkard who stumbled into wolver territory and the lone, starving wolf he encountered there.

In the land where the dandelion wine flows like a river, tall tales have a way of spreading far and wide, following closely in the wake of the whiff of wine.

Far-fetched fables are always sure to spread when boasted between burps by inebriated bar patrons. For these stories share something in common with the slurred speech and sea-sickness-inducing swaying that so often accompanies them, which is that despite being clumsy and awkward, they are also highly entertaining.

Legend has it that there was once a famous drunkard in Mondstadt. It was said that he could hold his alcohol as well as any hunter from Springvale in the off season. And yet, still he would drink till he was drunk. Every time that he drank, he would not budge so much as an inch back from the bar at the tavern until not a single Mora was left in his coin pouch, and not a single drop of wine remained in his glass.

One night, this drunkard was doing his best to stumble home after a particularly satisfying session of especially heavy drinking. A combination of his spinning head, blurred vision, and zigzagging stride served to navigate him towards a forest populated by wolves.

Today, of course, Wolvendom is presided over by the Great Wolf King of the North, and the ominous atmosphere that emanates from inside the forest is sufficient to deter most sober-headed visitors from approaching the area. According to the elderly hunters, the Wolf King gathered the spirits of the wolves there to prevent outsiders from trespassing into territory where they are not welcome.

But this was an age long before the Wolf King and the north wind had descended upon that forest, bringing order and peace to the wolver race. At that time, the forest was a perilous place where wild wolves fought for survival. A fierce blood feud between wolves played out deep inside the dense foliage, concealed from view and unbeknownst to any human.

Least of all to the drunkard, who had by this point managed to transport his drunken self quite some distance inside the forest.

He stumbled forward in the darkness with that dogged determination that only drunkards possess, deterred neither by the tree roots that would trip him up every few steps, nor by the stray branches that would slyly slap him in the face from time to time.

Before long, a pair of green eyes began darting through the forest, their gaze fixed on him, tracking his every move.

Those eyes belonged to a lone wolf, who silently pursued the drunkard from behind, all the while musing to itself:

"This is the most peculiar sight I have ever seen in all my life."

No one had dared set foot in the wolves' forest in hundreds of years, be they a knight clad top to toe in shining steel armor or a desperate fugitive dressed in rags. Even the callous nobles refused to exile their slaves there, for fear of inciting the wrath of the wild wolves and bringing unwanted trouble to their own territory.

"And yet, this odd fellow dares to stroll in here all by himself. How very strange indeed!"

The lone wolf pondered this strange phenomenon as it followed the drunken intruder through the forest, doing its best to ignore the stench of alcohol that was wafting its way.

Vol 2

One of many Mondstadt tales told of popular drinkers. This story is the one of the time a lone, starving wolf met a drunken Mondstadt man.

It is a well-known fact that wolves have a far keener sense of smell than humans. Another way of putting this is that their noses are much more sensitive.

Little wonder, then, that the stench of alcohol emanating from the wolf's now historically intoxicated prey was quite stifling, and caused tears to well up in its eyes.

"Awoo..." the wolf thought to itself.

Having been born in the wilderness and grown up in the forest, the wolf had never had any contact with human civilization before this night, and though it had once caught the faint scent of wine wafting across Cider Lake, it did not know the scent's origin, less still understand the significance of that substance to humankind.

"Perhaps this peculiar fellow is a relative of the skunk, for it seems that he discovered my presence quite some time ago, and now means to poison me in an effort to secure his escape!" The wolf pondered this possibility as it braced itself against the onslaught of alcoholic fumes, picked up its pace, and discreetly maneuvered its way into the drunkard's shadow — the perfect vantage point from which to inspect its prey.

The wolf is a creature of caution and calculation. The drunkard, meanwhile, is a different sort of creature entirely.

And yet, though wine tends to dizzy the mind and dull the senses, it sometimes affords its consumers the curious capacity to detect the subtlest of changes in the direction of the wind.

Perhaps this could explain how a bumbling drunkard, fumbling through the forest, was suddenly able to discover the presence of a wolf that had been stealthily following him the entire time. Or perhaps the alcoholic fumes given off by the drunkard were sufficiently potent to diminish the wolf's mental acuity, to the point that the wolf became less mindful of the terrain beneath its paws, the resulting sound of snapping twigs thus alerting the prey to the predator's presence.

"Who's that? Don't s'pose you know which way the toilet is, by any chance...?"

The bumbling drunkard rubbed his bleary eyes.

"Foul-smelling human," snarled the wolf, "Who are you, and whence proceeds your stench?"

The wolf flared its nostrils, bared its fangs, and growled.

Not only was the drunkard unafraid when he heard the wolf's gruffly voiced threat, but he even became quite animated.

"My friend!" the drunkard replied, "Clearly I've offended you, somehow... sorry 'bout that... but anyway, Mondstadt tradition says you're not allowed to be drunk and bored at the same time... So! Here we are, out in the woods on this glorious moonlit night... How abouts I tell you a story?"

His proposal was promptly punctuated by an almighty belch.

Before this point, the wolf had had no intention of listening to the belching buffoon's drunken ramblings. In fact, it was poised to deliver a fatal blow to its prey by lunging for the neck, sinking its fangs in, and tearing his throat clean out.

But the drunkard's belch blasted a further bout of fumes in the wolf's direction, assailing its nostrils with such force that it ruined the wolf's appetite entirely. Grudgingly, the wolf agreed.

"Grr... Perhaps I'm not so hungry after all... Let's see what nonsense tale you have to tell."

The drunkard stretched out his arms and let out a loud yawn, disturbing a few dandelions in the process.

And with that, the drunkard began to tell his tale.

Vol 3

One of the popular, many tales told by the drinkers of Mondstadt. This drunkard is the one who told the lone wolf of an ancient story.

Legend tells of a lone wolf that roamed a barren wasteland far, far away.

Once, he had been king of his pack, leading them in the hunt, in battle, and in the search for a home... Now, the sole remaining legacy of those days were the scars that covered his body.

He had led the way as they ran across open plains, navigated through abandoned ruins, and passed through the domains of monsters and the Seelie.

The wasteland was a cruel place. The wolf-king grew older with each passing day, and the other wolves gradually dispersed. As time went by, the wolf pack's history faded into distant memory, until finally only the aged wolf-king remained, the sole survivor of its pack.

This wasteland is said to be a land beyond the dominion of deities, inhabited only by the grotesque ghostly remains of fallen gods, where the former palaces of the Seelie now stand empty. So when the solitary old wolf passed by a gray palace and heard the sound of music coming from within, it caught its attention.

"Never before have I heard a sound so pleasing to the ears, whether it be a song of bird or insect, that it stays the pangs of hunger in my starved stomach as this tune does."
Intrigued, the wolf stepped inside the gray hall, trod across the overgrown weeds, and passed by a broken sarcophagus, on which a portrait of the deceased ruler was still clearly visible.

Finally, he came to an inner room, where he saw a fair maiden strumming at her instrument. Her skin was ashen white and her head was bowed down, her slender fingers gently stroking the fragile strings of the lute as she played a long-forgotten and mournful melody.

The wolf sat down in front of the pale young maiden and forgot all about the pain of hunger, thirst, and loneliness for a short while, as it listened in silence to her song.

"The chirping of insects on a long-gone autumn night is the chorus of exiles, singing mankind's most ancient song as they live out their plight..."

"Stripped of all that the body once held close and the soul once held dear, songs and memories are all that now remain of yesteryear."

"The last singers, the first Seelie, they played their final tune in the hall of angels."

The tiny Seelie playing in the forest were also drawn to the young maiden's tune, and flocked to her to pay their respects.

"What is this song that you play?"

The wolf asked, puzzled, for it understood every line, every word, every syllable she spoke — and yet, hers was a language that it had never heard before, quite unlike that of any other living being.

"A song of the Seelie,"

Replied the pale young maiden in a soft voice.

"Long, long ago, we wrote this song for the human savages. Yet now, we sing it to mourn our own fate."

The wolf began to sing along, albeit clumsily, to the maiden's tune.
The wolf's voice was husky and broken, filled with a lifetime of sorrow.

"What are you singing?"
The maiden asked of the wolf.

"This is our song,"
Responded the wolf.

"It sounds ghastly."
The maiden made no attempt to soften her criticism as she continued to caress the lute strings.
"But, you are welcome to sing along with me all the same."

And so, a shared chorus sung by fair young maiden and weary old wolf filled the chambers of the long-abandoned palace. It is said that to this day, adventurers who pass by this place still hear a strange yet harmonious melody sounding from within.

"And then? ...The story ends here?"
The wolf licked its lips, somewhat ruefully, and then said:
"I suppose I shall tell you a story now."

And with that, the wolf cleared its throat and began to tell its tale.

Vol 4

One of many drinking tales popularly told in Mondstadt. This wolf told a tale of wine and wolf to a drunken man of Mondstadt.

Legend has it that the first wine of Mondstadt was brewed in the age when the north wind howled.

In the age when the Kings of Ice and Frost fought for dominion, Mondstadt's forbears brewed rudimentary wine from wild fruits, even as they shivered in the biting cold. They did so to ease the pain of their frostbitten fingers and to give them the courage to face the harsh and unforgiving ice. For at that time, the land of Mondstadt was engulfed by ice and snow, and the dandelions had not yet reared their heads.

It is said that the first person in Mondstadt to discover the craft of wine brewing was a grossly negligent guard.

In a tribe beset by blizzards on all sides, it was the unenviable job of the hardy hunter-gatherers to stock the storage pits with food, and it was the guard's task to guard against intruders.

The sight of a human intruder was a rare one indeed in that harsh environment — but there were other creatures who could better withstand the cold, and they would burrow underground to reach the food stocks. The rules of the tribe were that one person should inspect the storage pits at all times, filling in any mouse holes discovered — or better still, catching them red-handed in the act of pilfering — to keep the tribe's food supplies at plentiful levels.

At that time, the damp, dark caves needed constant care and attention to prevent the food they held from going bad and rotting. On top of this, the mischievous little creatures that hid away out of sight would sometimes play pranks on the guards.

One day, a wily wind spirit noticed that the grossly negligent guard was once again being grossly negligent. So, the spirit took the form of a fox and crept into a pile of wild apples. There, it caused yeast to grow, ripening the apples and causing them to ferment.

The grossly negligent guard was ravenous when he returned, and elected to partake of one of the apples. The mellow taste of fermented fruit delighted both his body and his mind. Immediately, he took animal hide and squeezed the juice from the apples, creating wine.

The grossly negligent guard who first invented brewing in the age of ice and snow also became Mondstadt's first drunkard. It is said that he was the first person ever to fall into a drunken dream.

In his first drunken dream, he drunkenly entered the dreams of a lone wolf. Somewhere in the long-lost past or possibly the far-flung future, he fought fang and claw with rival wolf packs, battled with humans for food in the midst of a raging snowstorm, and met the first Seelie.

The tribe-dwelling human and the pack-dwelling wolf could not bear to live in solitude. This newly brewed wine served to bring man and wolf together in their dreams.

But their attitudes towards these dreams were poles apart.

The human who knew only the wind and snow yearned for the wasteland where the lone wolf runs freely, but the lone wolf was fearful of the human's desire. It could not understand why this human was captivated by dangerous illusions and sought hope from within them.

What concerned the wolf even more was that when in a drunken human dream, it could no longer distinguish whether it was a wolf or a human with a wolver spirit.

So the wolf swore an oath never to touch the humans' poison again, to resist the allure of wine. Wolves are not the children of the wind, and the land of wine and song is not their home. So the wolves left the humans' domain and settled far off in the wilderness and deep in the mountain forests, places where the scent of wine could not reach them.

"What you humans call wine, we wolves call the abyss,"

The wolf haughtily concluded.

But as the wolf turned towards the drunkard to say this line, it discovered that the drunkard was now lying fast asleep on a bed of pine branches.

The wolf was most displeased, and violently expelled a puff of air from its nostrils before leaving the still-pungent pile of sleeping human to his business, and going on its way.

Legend of the Geo Archon

God of the Stove

Stories about the Geo Archon as the God of the Stove.

—God of the Stove—

It is said that in the early days after Liyue was founded, the first settlers built stoves with rocks and struck stones to make fire inside. Thus sheltered from the wind, the fire could persist. People at last knew the comfort of a warm fire, and learned the art of cooking. On this foundation Liyue Harbor was born. The settlers believed the rocks to be a blessing from the Lord of Rock, and as the city grew, restaurants and taverns throughout Liyue began worshipping him as "God of the Stove." Their hope was that the fire in their stoves would burn eternal, and their business might forever flourish.

The Groundbreaker

Stories about the Geo Archon and his divine duties as The Groundbreaker.

—The Groundbreaker—

The intrepid adventurers of Liyue Harbor have another name for the Lord of Geo. They call him "The Groundbreaker."

The reason is that it was a combination of their forebears' spirit of breaking new ground and the Lord of Rock's steadfast protection that brought Liyue Harbor into being.

Adventurers from Liyue Harbor share their forebears' desire to forge ahead and break new ground, with determination as unshakable as the mountains.

God of Wealth

Stories about the Geo Archon and his divine duties as the God of Wealth.

—God of Wealth—

Liyue Harbor has been a haven for treasures from all corners of the world since ancient times. It is a place where merchants and the wealthy flourish. It is also where Mora, the coins accepted as currency throughout Teyvat, are minted. The word "Mora" is derived from "Morax," which is another name for the Lord of Rock. Many people therefore worship the Lord of Geo as the God of Wealth and Commerce.

Business people will burn incense and make offerings of fine food to the Lord of Geo in the hope of receiving his blessing. After all, he's the richest guy in the world! ...The richest god, I mean.

God of History

Stories about the Geo Archon and his divine duties as the God of History.

—God of History—

Liyue's historians refer to the Lord of Geo, who single-handedly founded Liyue Harbor, as the God of History. A preoccupation with history can also be observed in the local restaurants and taverns, many of which proudly bear banners touting their centuries-long existence. Those who take the idea even more seriously advertise stories of the time that the Lord of Geo visited their establishment and reviewed the food, always making sure to include a precise date for his visit. But whenever a child asks in earnest exactly how long the Lord of Rock has been in this world for, the adults' answer is always the same:

"A very long time indeed, kid. A very long time indeed."

Rex Incognito

Vol 1

A Liyue fantasy novel that tells the tales of Rex Lapis' incognito excursions in the mortal realm. Set in an age when the treasures of the world flocked forth, fact merges with fiction and both blend with old dreams in this charming tale set in the commercial port of Liyue.

Liyue is a land where all kinds of rare and exotic treasures congregate, and where there are precious treasures, one is sure to also find those with a discerning eye.

The very first owner of Xigu Antiques — the unconventional collector, Min'gui — was just such an individual.

Xigu Antiques of Feiyun Slope was frequented by well-to-do customers. Closed during daylight hours, it only opened to customers once the moon began to rise in the night sky. The shop's customers were anything but ordinary: they were the wealthy and leisurely, people with outstanding taste.

A meticulously crafted timepiece from Fontaine, incense from Sumeru, a wine goblet once owned by an aristocrat of old Mondstadt, a wooden stool whose surface was once graced by the buttocks of an adeptus for all of one hour, a delicate jade teacup from which the Lord of Geo once sipped a sip of tea, a priceless celadon vase that Liyue's neighbor deity, the Anemo Archon, once accidentally knocked to the ground, shattering it to pieces... All these and more were laid out for the customers to peruse at their leisure, each item just waiting for that one person with whom it shared a certain affinity.

One night, a wealthy young man who was walking by happened to pause in front of the shop, and began carefully examining the items on the shelves.

The owner was struck by his long, black robes, dark and solemn as the looming mountain peaks, and by his eyes, which were the color of amber.

This was no ordinary young man. This Min'gui could tell with one look.

"Welcome to Xigu Antiques," she said. "Please peruse at your leisure, and let me know if you find something you like."

Her soft voice broke the dead silence of the night.

"Ah...? Oh, I'm sorry."

The young man smirked, and spoke in a subtly coy manner.

"I'm just rather taken with this exquisite counterfeit."

The item that had caught his eye was a damaged jade plaque.

The face exposed to the night sky was the one on which the pattern was slightly more intact, and as the moonlight shone down, it seeped into the intricate blemishes in the jade, revealing them, and cascaded down into the ravines produced by the crisscrossing texture on the plaque's surface. The severe wear and tear on the front and the disintegration around the perimeter made it impossible to discern the words and images that had once been written on it. By all accounts, it seemed to have lived a turbulent life.

"Counterfeit, you say? What makes you so sure?"

Min'gui was quite used to customers making such provocative claims. But this young man spoke so bluntly and biting that she could not help but feel aggravated by his accusation.

Added to this was the fact that this particular item had been snagged by an adventurer from an abandoned palace deep in the heart of the abyss, who had then barely made it back out of that place alive. She recalled how she had haggled relentlessly with the adventurer to acquire the piece, and how in the end it had still cost her the better part of her fortune. If this truly was nothing more than a counterfeit, not only would it imply that she had lost an immense portion of her wealth, but it would also mean irrevocable damage to the reputation of Xigu Antiques as connoisseurs of quality.

Min'gui knew what she had to do: Not only must she somehow get rid of this calamitous customer who threatened to ruin her entire business, but she must also find a way to sell this jade plaque to him in the process.

"Please, continue," she said. "I would hope that you can give a detailed appraisal."

"As we all know, Teyvat was plunged into chaos two and a half millennia ago when the gods declared war on each other, the ensuing conflict spreading to all people in all corners of the land. Teyvat may not have been divided into the same seven nations we know today back in that age, but then, just as now, the people had their own settlements, cities and civilizations..."

"Gods whose names have now long since been forgotten were once venerated, worshiped, even adored by their people. Our forebears took pearls and shells from the sea, jade from the mountains, rocks from the plains, and salt crystals from the earth, each to build idols in the form of their gods."

"Jade plaques of this kind are relics of that era. They belonged to an ancient tribe who worshiped Rex Lapis... though, of course, the Geo Lord probably did not yet go by the name Rex Lapis at that time."

"This was an age when the people watched their gods clash in bitter battles before their very eyes. Rex Lapis would not establish the currency of the seven nations and cast the first Mora

coins for quite some time. So the tribes traded using pieces of ore they would chance across from time to time, with idols made in the likeness of the Geo Lord to ensure price stability."

"As you can see... mortal wisdom is quite a fascinating thing. They were making their own way in the world even before Rex Lapis had made provisions for them to do so."

The young man paused as if to further contemplate the observation he had just made. He stood there, cloaked in a veil of silver moonlight, which somehow served to make him ever so slightly more diminutive in stature.

"This type of jade plaque is a rare find in this day and age. Most of them are buried in riverbeds up in the mountains. And since each one is hand carved, they are all unique... That is why they typically sell for astronomical prices. To claim that they are priceless would not be an exaggeration."

"So, it is quite a shame indeed that the one you display on your shelf is a recent counterfeit. By recent, I mean that it was probably made in your father's generation at the earliest."

"There is an industry saying: 'The jade without blemish is no jade at all.' This jade, for instance, has remarkably few imperfections, and the translucency is too good to be true... All of which points to the fact that it is unlikely to be a product of our forebears' making."

"As a side point, I would also add that the image carved onto this jade is that of a woman. This is a highly unusual thing to see among similar relics from the era in question."

The young man held the plaque up to the moonlight to inspect it in more detail.

"Although there are plenty of rumors to this effect, the claim that Rex Lapis once took the form of a woman is not attested to by any of the historical records, and there is no physical evidence of it ever occurring..."

Though young, the man had the air of an old and infuriating pedant about him.

"Ah, well this is where you're wrong..."

Min'gui smiled faintly, much as a fox does when toying with an inexperienced hunter.

"Perhaps you'd be willing to listen to my story before making your final verdict?"

The shop owner narrowed her eyes and began the process of reeling out her story...

Vol 2

A Liyue fantasy novel that tells the tales of Rex Lapis' incognito excursions in the mortal realm. Between lofty mountain peaks where bounteous jade lies beneath, substantial ideas and empty lies are suddenly shown up side by side.

Back in the age when the gods still walked upon the earth, the deity whom we now worship as Rex Lapis was but one among many.

In those days, the rumor among the common folk was that the Lord of Geo was a cold and unfeeling god. His conduct was just in all things, and his judgments were rational and dispassionate, but he lacked normal human sentiment. Like the rocks, he was without warmth or softness.

Despite this, people revered and placed their faith in him all the same. This was because his laws served to guarantee that trade was fair and that life was safe and orderly. The Geo Archon grew in strength and stature because of the people's belief in him.

But even gods are powerless to control the beliefs and doubts of their mortal followers. And even a god who is the guardian of justice has no means of instilling the words of his rules and regulations into the heart of every individual.

In Mingyun Village, there was an incorrigibly irreverent jade craftsman who loved to jest. Whatever job he took on, he would complete it in the most unorthodox means imaginable, and would always finish the job on the very last day before it was due.

If a customer ordered a statue of a hunter dominating a ferocious beast, they would receive a miniature statue of a distressed boar running for its life.

And when the customer demanded an explanation, he would tell them:

"When a formidable hunter closes in on a fierce beast, he may not show his face, but his imposing presence is enough to frighten the beast to its core."

If a customer ordered a carving in the likeness of a powerful and mighty ruler, they would probably receive a statue of a majestic throne.

And when asked about it, he would reply:

"No ruler takes the throne for more than one hundred years. The throne has more longevity than he."

The craftsman quickly developed a reputation as an eccentric in Mingyun Village. But the wealthy merchants in the prosperous commercial port of Liyue Harbor were most amused and were only too willing to place orders with him — if only to experience for themselves what it was like to be on the receiving end of this mischievous man's antics.

One night, a woman came to his workshop.

She was dressed in a long, slender black gown and her eyes shone a brilliant amber in the light of the crescent moon hanging in Liyue's sky that night.

The craftsman had never met her before, but he quickly found himself deep in conversation with her. Strangely, she seemed acquainted with every vein of ore and deposit of jade in the village. She talked about the wonders of the world like they were her sisters, and spoke of jade and precious metals with a fondness one would normally reserve for their beloved daughter...

The only topics she brushed over were culture, customs, and social interactions. Perhaps she was not wise to the ways of the world, or perhaps she did not wish to discuss them. Regardless, there was certainly something out of the ordinary about this woman. At least, the craftsman thought so.

"I would like for you to make me a jade plaque bearing the likeness of the Lord of Geo on its surface."

The woman finally stated her request once their broad-reaching and lengthy conversation had reached its end, and she was all but ready to leave.

"But I have one condition: You may not conjure up our Lord's likeness from your imagination. You must carve the true likeness of our Lord relying on what you have seen with your own two eyes."

"Otherwise," she said, "I'm not paying a single Mora."

And so a deal was struck between the two, with an agreed turnaround of three days.

On the first day, the craftsman dined and drank with his good friends. He did not take a single new job on that day.

On the second day, the craftsman climbed a mountain to view the jade there, not seeing a single customer or acquaintance for the entire day.

Only on the third day did the craftsman close the doors of his workshop and begin carving away at the uncut jade, working from dawn till dusk, until finally it was complete.

When the crescent moon once again began to rise in the Liyue night sky, the amber-eyed woman returned and approached his doorstep.

The craftsman proudly handed over the fruits of his labor:

A jade plaque bearing the likeness of their god, in female form.

The woman was puzzled. She frowned, and demanded an explanation.

And this was the explanation that he gave:

"On the first day, I sought counsel from every wise and learned person that I know, and learned the principles of our Lord and how they work. But this was just the skeleton."

"On the second day, I visited the mountains and spent a whole day observing the mountain rocks, listening to the ebb and flow of the elements, and pondering all that our Lord had created. But this was just the flesh."

"On the third day, I covered both my eyes and began to carve from the heart, starting when it felt like the time to start, stopping when it felt like the time to stop. At last, this was the spirit."

The craftsman smiled awkwardly, then added:

"But even I'm not sure why it came out like this."

The woman tilted the item back and forth in her hand, as if contemplating something.

"Interesting," she finally responded. "Incidentally, this reminds me of another story..."

She looked up at him with her amber-colored eyes and began the process of reeling out her story...

Vol 3

A Liyue fantasy novel that tells the tales of Rex Lapis' incognito excursions in the mortal realm. Iron-clad concepts of rules or equity fade into nothingness in this fantastical tale.

Liyue is a land where all kinds of rare and exotic treasures congregate, and where there are precious treasures, one is sure to also find those with a discerning eye. At the height of Liyue Harbor's prosperity, a myriad goods and treasures flowed endlessly in and out of the land like the rising and falling tides.

That age belonged, as does the current one, to the wealthy merchants and ship owners. It was an age in which the ones who reigned supreme were those who dared wrestle with the tumultuous tides of the market and the wrathful beasts of the ocean.

Likewise, then as now, the port was constantly abuzz with sailors and laborers.

Legend has it that Rex Lapis, when appearing in mortal form, does not always take the form of a distinguished gentleman fraternizing with the well-to-do of Yujing Terrace. Sometimes, it is said, he takes the form of a commoner and mingles with the miners, the fishermen, the sailors, and the peddlers.

Back in that day, there was a certain fishing vessel owner who was notoriously harsh and critical in his temperament. He was always rude towards those who worked for him, and whenever something wasn't to his satisfaction, he would jump to conclusions and start scolding them, even docking their wages, without giving them the opportunity to explain their side of the story.

One day, the fishing vessel owner met a young man.

He had just been hired by the fishing vessel owner, and his attire was indistinguishable from that of any other seafarer of the day: a loose-fitting brown shirt and trousers, and a bandana around his forehead. But from his tanned skin and the rugged, karst-like contours of his facial features, it was clear that he was a commoner from Qingce Village who had come down from the mountains into the city in an attempt to reverse his fortunes.

Like most mountain-dwellers of his day, he was a simple-minded and unsophisticated fellow. But what dismayed his new boss more than this was his reluctance to go anywhere near the catches of the slimy and tentacled variety.

"You don't make money by being choosy! Who do you think you are, lord of the manor?" This was the only justification the ship owner gave for docking the newly hired mountain man's pay.

The youngster simply smiled bashfully and continued with his work. This set the tone for many of the interactions between the two.

But one day, the youngster responded instead with a question:

"Everyone has likes and dislikes, so why should we do the things we hate the most?"

The fishing vessel owner was taken completely by surprise by this random question. Incensed, he slapped his simpleton apprentice on the head and barked back at him:

"Them's the rules of the world, you moron! Listen good: You'll get yourself nowhere in this world if you won't do a job you don't like!"

"But maybe that wasn't what Rex Lapis meant when he made the rules..."

"Shut up, you idiot!"

"Hmm, maybe you'll understand better if I tell you a story."

The young man's eyes shone like amber from the mountain mines in the light of the setting sun.

"Oh? So you're a storyteller now, are you?"

At the thought of this simpleton from a sleepy mountain village telling him a story, the fishing vessel owner found himself suddenly quite curious.

"Go on then... But I expect you to work and talk at the same time!"

A mischievous smile flickered across the youngster's face, and a twinkle flashed in his eye.

"Well then, let me tell you a story about a certain jade plaque..."

And so, the young man proceeded to tell his tale. His boss listened so intently that he never noticed the anonymous pair of hands that were sneaking into his pocket — hands which subsequently pilfered the money he had made from all the wages he had docked before and which then distributed the money back out to the laborers.

Vol 4

A Liyue fantasy novel that tells the tales of Rex Lapis' incognito excursions in the mortal realm. In an age when scrutiny was laid upon the treasures of the world, one humble witticism was all it took to expose all lies.

It was a time when countless exotic curios and items would flow into Liyue Harbor. This night, Min'gui, mistress of Xigu Antiques, was researching relics and narrating ancient stories with an unnamed son of nobility. The focal point of their debate was a jade plaque.

As many knew, creating a counterfeit jade item was not a matter that cost much capital in Liyue. Creating a beautiful fake might be a shade more expensive, but it was a cost that most merchant houses could absorb. The real trick lay in weaving an intricate but spurious tale.

Like a jade smith wandering deep into the mountains, or the youth of the fisherfolk whose habits are strange, those considered deviant often in fact strike closer to the heart of things. Rex Lapis laid down rules and contracts, but never forced the ordinary folk by his authority to live by them as a perfect template, for he knew that laws and stipulations were a means, not the end. The timeless balance lay, in truth, in a person's awareness and their ability to make choices for themselves.

The harsh boss of the fishing vessel did not understand this principle, and so earned the fear and mockery of his hired help.

As humans are, so too are antiques. Artistry, quality, rarity and perfection are limiting factors, yes, but the true worth of a relic lies in its backstory.

The picky young noble seemed not to wholly perceive this idea, and so had no qualms about calling the jade plaque a fake, denigrating its value.

But if all of Xigu Antiques' treasures were to be scrutinized with such a piercing and empirical eye, their worth would have been ground into dust.

Like the tears of a maiden for her captain, which became eternal pearls, or a mortal king who himself carved a portrait of his deceased queen, before sealing his own soul into it...

These stories, these legends that should have faded with time were preserved, and thus teemed with life under the outer husk of those relics.

"A fine story. I'll take this fake, then."

The noble son nodded, his golden eyes smiling.

"After all that, you still think this is a fake?"

Min'gui sighed lightly.

"Of course,"

The young noble could not help but smile and indeed had never seemed happier since entering her shop.

"After all, the story you told about jade plaques being ancient currency — it's nonsense.

Nonsense that I made up."

Legend of the Lone Sword

Vol 1

A popular martial arts novel in Liyue Harbor. In a world without elemental energy or alchemy, a tale unfolds of love and hate between friends and foes. This volume tells of the origins of Jin the Seventy-Second's revenge.

A single sword's light pierced the night air, unchallenged by any star or moon. The autumn wind in the mountains wept aloud, following the whirling dance of the lonesome blade.

Driving wind and falling rain accompanied a single traveler on his journey home.

This person's hair was wild, and his face fierce, and he seemed most fey indeed. His clothes were thin, and he swayed this way and that in the center of the homeward path like one sick or hurt to the quick, seeming more like some ghoul than a living man.

He had been on the path three days. Three days he had gone hungry, and without any sleep.

Three days ago, he had a name and a famed sword, and his fallen martial arts school. But now, he only wore sorrow and worry on his brow, which rolled off him, carried by the sudden rain, and onto the mud below, eroding the soil.

Three days ago, that nameless swordsman had started a feud with him, a feud that saw his master and junior buried in the merciless mountain snow as the screaming snow was stained red.

Today, he had a new name — Jin the Seventy-Second. For he was the last of the 72 members of their school.

—

He did not know how long he had walked before he heard the sound of carts behind him.

Jin the Seventy-Second shuffled to the side of the road and stopped, asking: "Is your cart headed for Tupi Village?"

The cart driver saluted him and replied: "Few of the carts on this road do not do so."

Jin the Seventy-Second then asked: "Then pray will your cart bear another man?"

The cart driver said: "It could, but you did not ask if I would."

Jin the Seventy-Second did not understand. "If you travel to Tupi Village, why would you not take me?"

"For you are not I, nor I, you," the driver replied.

"What a waste of words."

And no sooner had that been said than the blade left its sheath. The cart driver felt but a single chilling cold, and fell from his cart to the floor without a struggle, never to speak again.

Jin the Seventy-Second was just such a person. Though he had lost everything, even his heart, and his bold brashness had ebbed, he had always hated pointlessly talkative people most of all.

Riding the bloodstained cart, Jin the Seventy-Second departed for Tupi Village.

Vol 2

A popular martial arts novel in Liyue Harbor. In a world without elemental energy or alchemy, a tale unfolds of love and hate between friends and foes. This volume tells of Jin the Seventy-Second's arrival in Tupi Village.

They say that in that faraway land, "Tupi" meant to burn away vanity's dross to attain the gem of truth.

Tupi Village lay at the foot of a barren mountain, passable to the outside world only by a single ancient path — the very same that lay beneath Jin the Seventy-Second's feet.

The skies were darkening, and the wind and rain howled.

Jin the Seventy-Second had never had anything to do with Tupi Village but for his vengeance, and so he now sought out its village chief.

By the time the oxcart had finally trudged its way through the muddy old road to the mountain's base, night fell upon the land, and gloomy clouds cast a boundless shadow as they covered the moon's eyes. Jin the Seventy-Second hid in that shade, drinking the night in, body and soul.

In that deep night, the pure white light of the moon shone upon the head of the village chief. Tupi Village had never been large, but the chief was no ordinary character. No one knew his name or his past, and no one dared ask.

They only knew that his shoulders bore a great blood debt, from a past as crimson as his eyes.

For red they were, and sharp, like a blade, piercing the hearts of all he gazed upon as he pleased.

His character was much the same, like a sharp knife that might pierce another person's heart at any time without forewarning.

"It's time."

The chief shook his head as he talked to himself, the cold moonlight dancing over his shaven crown.

Outside, a ravenous demon wielded a blood-letting long sword, massacring his followers one after the other.

Though Tupi Village was full of evil people, schools and sects had their rules, and so none would dare come knocking with rash provocations and talk of revenge.

But Jin the Seventy-Second had no school or sect, and was thus unbound by any such rules. He was but a single starving ghost with a lone sharp blade, yearning to taste the blood of his enemies.

The wind and rain accompanied the din of battle, and the downpour washed away the crimson that stained the swordsman, only for another layer to be painted on immediately...

The crimson swordsman strode forward amid a crimson mist. Many were his wounds, but none could stay his hand.

When that mist had at last cleared in the endless deluge, the swordsman crossed the turbid red beneath his feet, and stalked towards the chief's mansion.

—

The din beyond the gates quieted, and only now did the chief raise a cup of wine, and scatter the alcohol into the air with a flick.

Perhaps to toast the fated meeting to come, or as a ritual for his sullied soul.

The doors opened. It was Jin the Seventy-Second, his reddened outline juxtaposed against the blinding gray elements outside.

"I have questions for you, village chief."

"You've taken quite a few of my men's lives."

"Exactly three hundred and sixty-two. No more, no less..."

The chief spoke naught, and his face remained still, but the pulsing vein in his temple betrayed the fire within.

"...Ah yes, and one dog."

So saying, the crimson silhouette tossed a certain object forward. It clattered atop the wine case...

...And it was the bone of the dog that guarded the door. It had been stewed for a time and was picked clean almost to the marrow.

For in this half an hour, not only had Jin the Seventy-Second snuffed out the lives of three hundred and sixty-two able men, but he had even turned the dog keeping the gate into dog meat stew.

What cruelty.
What ruthlessness!

The village chief let out a terrible scream, and standing, he drew his sword—

Vol 3

A popular martial arts novel in Liyue Harbor. In a world without elemental energy or alchemy, a tale unfolds of love and hate between friends and foes. This volume tells of Jin the Seventy-Second's duel with the chief of Tupi Village.

The rain had ceased, but light had yet to recoup the skies.

Jin the Seventy-Second had obtained news of his nemesis from the mouth of the village chief. Now, not a thing was left in Tupi Village but masterless rooms and masterless spirits.

And not even that remained, for this was a world without spirits.

This world possessed no elemental power.

And so, the memories of the dead could not remain in the mortal realm via elemental resonance.

The village chief was a formidable foe. His blade was swift as could be, and he had left many wounds on Jin the Seventy-Second, each deep enough to cut bone.

But alas, his "heart" was far too slow.

For this was a world without elements.

And thus swordsmanship could not be imbued with them.

Swordsmanship was thus a question of pure physical skill and not elemental control.

The sword is an extension of one's body, and one uses it as an arm would command the fingers, or as one's heart directs the eyes.

Though he was skilled indeed in the art of the swift blade, the village chief never understood the value of the "heart," and so he fell to a single stroke.

Jin the Seventy-Second strode towards the fallen chief, discarding the broken incense burner in his left hand.

For the chief had focused too narrowly on pouring savage strokes upon the swordsman's body, thinking him too harried to fight back, and had no eyes for his enemy's left hand, which should have been empty—

—And in a flash, the incense burner had struck the chief of Tupi Village on the forehead, sending him tumbling into a wall where he then collapsed, immobile.

"Underhanded villain..."

But only the wind answered him — the villain gripping the bloodied censer said not a word.

"...The person you're looking for is in the barren mountains beyond this village... Go seek your death there..."

But the villain had departed, and all that remained to answer him was the rustling of the wind...

And the crackling of wild flames.

Vol 4

A popular martial arts novel in Liyue Harbor. In a world without elemental energy or alchemy, a tale unfolds of love and hate between friends and foes. This volume tells of Jin the Seventy-Second's treacherous trek into the mountains.

Jin the Seventy-Second waited till the rainbow had dispersed before setting off once from Tupi Village toward the barren mountains.

Ancient legend held that these barren mountains had been brought into being by slices from the Celestial Emperor's blade, and thus were incredibly hard to scale.

Folk tales also held that they were called barren, for they had soaked up the tears of the Earth Mother, and thus had become bitterly salty lands where nothing grew.

The barren mountains had once been mined for gold and gems, but the mines had all been ruined in an earthquake, their workers buried within. No one tried ever again to create the facilities to mine the mountain's bounty, and its caverns were infested with wicked beasts and bandits.

And among these evils hidden in the mountains was Jin the Seventy-Second's nemesis. The swordsman's shoulders shivered, and his gait hesitant, for the wounds he had been given in the battle against the chief of Tupi Village hindered him still.

He knew that many pairs of eyes stared out at him from between the wither rocks, and the breath of beasts who had caught the scent of his blood was all around. Long years of bloodshed had honed Jin the Seventy-Second's senses to their limit.

He sensed that the lifeless mountains were in fact a giant death trap. Bandits and villains lay in wait for him to enter some narrow grotto, or squeeze into a tiny gorge, or pass by a collapsed mine shaft. Then, they would set upon him in the darkness with knives, and finish him.

But from the looks of things now, the steep mountains now looked like they might be enough to kill Jin the Seventy-Second.

The swordsman limped with every step he took, and the road was small and treacherous. Every so often, gravel would slip loose beneath his feet.

At the same time, upon a cliff twisted about with sinuous, dead trees, two figures squinted as they observed the tiny wanderer.

"He has been worse for wear since he departed from the mountain's base. If we but leave him to the treacherous trek, he will surely fall into the abyss below."
So said a bone-thin old crone.

She glanced to her side, icy death in her jade-blue eyes, sharp as a viper hidden in a rocky cleft.

"Not so!"

She turned to face the booming voice of a corpulent old man.

"He slew three hundred and sixty-two at Tupi Village, and even cooked the dog at the gate for stew."

"Though he may have been badly wounded by the village chief to the point where he can barely move, we should still beware of him."

"Hmph..."

The old woman vanished into the withered forest with a displeased noise.

"..."

The old man watched a while longer as the lame swordsman stopped for a moment more, before patting his large belly and slowly departing.

Not a single withered tree or blade of dying grass was touched as he did.

Then suddenly the sky turned dark with gathering stormclouds, and mordant rain again began to fall lightly.

In the mountain rain, the wounded Jin the Seventy-Second leaned on his sword like a crutch, and struggled forward.

But the chilling cold and the loss of blood was too much for him to bear, and he fell upon the gravel and barren stone.

Just as the darkness took him, he caught a glimpse of the billowing hem of azure-blue skirts... He could've sworn he'd seen that sight before.

Customs of Liyue

Flower Ball

A book on the cultures and customs of Liyue originally compiled by Fadhlan, a scholar from Sumeru residing in Liyue. It was then edited by many local scholars and published. It is one of the bestsellers in Liyue.

—Flower Ball—

It is customary at weddings in Liyue for the bride to cast a flower ball towards the oncoming crowd of guests. It is said that the one fortunate enough to catch it will enjoy a year of good luck: business owners will see their wealth increase, the poor will see their fortunes turn around, the single will encounter their fated partners, and the married will see their shared life blossom with mutual love and appreciation, never again to descend into petty squabbles over life's daily vexations.

While some brides use a real flower ball, many alternatives exist depending on the family's wealth. The rich tend to use woven balls with silk from the Silk Flower, while the poor fashion theirs from colored paper or cloth. But the custom itself is observed in the same fashion at all of Liyue's weddings, even though the fortunes of individual families may differ.

Some say the Liyue custom was originally adopted from the Ludi Harpastum festival celebrated in the neighboring Wind Kingdom of Mondstadt. Others say it dates back to before the Archon War when the Salt God roamed free in Liyue. She once stood shoulder to shoulder with the many gods of Liyue, but her extraordinarily gentle nature saw her quickly ousted in the hubris of the Archon War, before being ruthlessly murdered by one of her own followers.

Her remains are likely to be found somewhere in the ruins of the area known as "Sal Terrae." According to a legend that time has unfortunately stripped of all useful detail, she once handed out bunches of flowers to her people as a blessing to them. Or at least, if not a blessing, then a small gesture of comfort to stave off the bitterness of wartime existence. In any case, following her return to the elements, it is conceivable that her followers spread across Liyue, took this custom with them, and taught it to the locals. The people of Liyue being a competitive and fun-loving folk, they may then have adapted it and embellished upon it to suit their own preferences.

Despite being a benign and joyful celebration at heart, security logs from the Millelith indicate that the throwing of flower balls is responsible for a significant number of injuries every year. In fact, the number of cases is more or less the same as those caused by monster attacks.

Receiving God

A book on the cultures and customs of Liyue originally compiled by Fadhlán, a scholar from Sumeru residing in Liyue. It was then edited by many local scholars and published. It is one of the bestsellers in Liyue.

—Receiving God—

Of all the celebrations, ceremonies, and customs of Liyue, none is more iconic than that held in reception of their god: the "Rite of Descension."

It is during this rite that the Geo Archon, Liyue's deity and watchful guardian over the ages, descends in person upon the mortal realm to issue his divine proclamations and exhort the people to be guided by the wisdom they contain, so that all things may transpire in accordance with established rules instead of tending towards chaos.

In the earliest and humblest days of Liyue's history, Liyue's farmer-forebears would elect community representatives to greet the Geo Archon on arrival and give him an appropriate send-off on departure.

After making lavish offerings and reciting solemn blessings, they would listen in reverence to their god's divine predictions before announcing to the people the vision for their labor in the year ahead. In this way, mortals were guided along the path towards prosperity and to triumph over the obstacles that lay in their way, and thus did the domain of the Geo Archon remain strong and steadfast.

When peace returned once more after the Archon War, the city of Liyue Harbor began to flourish under the government of the Qixing, who represented every trade in Liyue, and who also acted as intermediaries between mortals and their god, taking responsibility for communicating with the Geo Archon, explaining his divine predictions to the people in clear and simple terms, and issuing the official policy for the forthcoming year.

Naturally, the illustrious individual tasked with hosting the Rite of Descension can only be chosen from among the Qixing, and no one other than that person is permitted to intervene in the proceedings.

In the minds of the many merchants of Liyue Harbor, the divine predictions of Rex Lapis are more precious than the metals and minerals of the mountain mines.

Thus, no matter how far from home they may have strayed by the day that Rex Lapis descends, all will seek to make the journey back in person, or at least send someone in their place, so that they may receive the guidance of the Geo Archon and safeguard their financial fortunes for the year ahead.

The raving-mad sages of the nation of rainforests drive themselves to hysterics as they abandon all that is worldly in their pursuit of elusive and esoteric wisdom, but the people of the land of karst cliffs are accustomed to welcoming the generous guidance of their deity as a means towards a worldly end — namely, their continued prosperity.

It would seem that, while The Seven stand shoulder-to-shoulder in their roles as Archons of the mortal realm, there are moments where their paths diverge and even run directly counter to one another.

Silk Flowers

A book on the cultures and customs of Liyue originally compiled by Fadhlán, a scholar from Sumeru residing in Liyue. It was then edited by many local scholars and published. It is one of the bestsellers in Liyue.

—Silk Flowers—

For the well-to-do citizens of Liyue, the Silk Flower has a ubiquitous presence in their lives: It has a beautiful color and its soft petals can be processed to make silk. It also has a most delightful scent that can survive multiple rounds of processing, and even the weaving process itself. For this reason, Liyue's botanists have cultivated a special strain for exclusive use in perfume making — with the most luxurious perfumes being offered first and foremost, of course, to Rex Lapis for his approval.

For the women of Liyue, highly prized Silk Flower perfumes are seen as holding different symbolic meanings based on the fragrance profile and composition. The unwritten rule in Liyue is that it is impolite to broach the topic of perfume with a woman in normal social interaction, but also that if an admirer is able to correctly guess the type of perfume one is wearing, as well as correctly deduce its unique properties and characteristics, all whilst conveying this in an articulate and tactful manner, the admirer is more likely to stand a chance of winning one's affection.

A popular belief in the rural regions of Liyue is that the method for decocting Silk Flower perfume was originally taught to mortals by an adeptus living as a hermit on Mt. Aocang. In the age where divine beings coexisted alongside lowly mortals, the adeptus guided humans to learn the ways of courting and romancing from the birds, beasts, and plants. To a young woman bathing in a spring, it once took the form of a graceful illuminated bird, teaching her the exotic techniques of decocting and applying fragrant oils.

Who was this young woman capable of stirring the heart of an adeptus living in deliberate seclusion from the world? With countless legends offering different versions of the story, the truth is impossible to know. But the art of decocting perfume from Silk Flowers was indeed passed on, for it survives to this very day. It is claimed that the subtle undertones of the perfume's scent and the gentle-but-nimble hand techniques used in the decoction process have remained unchanged throughout history on account of having proved themselves supremely fit for purpose time and time again.

As they grow, Silk Flowers will exhibit different properties based on how their environmental conditions differ from their ancestral habitat. Liyue's merchants have coined plenty of tasteless terms for Silk Flowers of all types and uses. They tend to attribute them to Rex Lapis, claiming

they once had the fortune to encounter him during one of his excursions in the mortal realm or pass them off as a merciful gift from an adeptus, such details always featuring as part of a wondrous, fantastical narrative. Sales tactics like these always manage to garner the interest of a shopper or two on their way through Liyue Harbor.

High demand has pushed Liyue's merchants towards the mass cultivation of Silk Flowers and the ongoing breeding of new strains. This means that the striking sight of beautiful Silk Flowers is a common one in all highly populated areas, including the city and the towns. Sadly, geographical changes over Liyue's long history and ever-expanding mining activity have conspired to destroy the natural habitat of wild Silk Flowers, meaning that the flower is all but extinct in rural areas. The handful that can still be found in the wild are carefully looked after by adepti living in seclusion there. These Silk Flowers feature daintier, more elegant blossoms, which puts them in stark contrast to those cultivated by horticulturalists in urban centers. Interestingly, the people of Liyue see the pretty and sweet-smelling Silk Flower as one of the many symbols of Rex Lapis. Which begs the question: Has this mighty and imposing god, who typically takes a decidedly masculine form on his excursions to the mortal realm, ever taken the form of a woman and accepted a ritual offering in the form of a bunch of flowers? The sparse historical records on the one hand and the plethora of rumors of obscure origin on the other means that, while this claim is more or less impossible to verify, it also cannot be simply dismissed as baseless speculation.

On a personal note — the writer has, on one occasion, personally witnessed a Statue of The Seven accept a carefully prepared and distinctly feminine gift that was presented to it in worship. As for the Geo Archon's innermost feelings upon receiving offerings from their subjects, however, this is not something that I, as an outsider in Liyue, consider myself qualified to comment on.

Glaze Lilies

A book on the cultures and customs of Liyue originally compiled by Fadhlán, a scholar from Sumeru residing in Liyue. It was then edited by many local scholars and published. It is one of the bestsellers in Liyue.

...

String of Pearls

Vol 1

Zixin is a poor fisherwoman whose family struggles to make ends meet. One day, she is selling fish on the street when she carelessly loses the string of pearls she usually wears. Though what she does not know is that this lost string of pearls will change her fate for good...

—Act I: Of Fish And Water—

Male Role: Fan Jie

Female Role: Zixin

Comic Role: Grandma Zhang

Scene I

(Enter Zixin wearing blue clothes)

(Aloud)

Zixin: "The tide reflects the mountains low, a light breeze nurtures reefs below."

(Aside)

Zixin: "I am a fisherman's daughter, I grew up by the dock. This year I am sixteen years old."

Zixin: "My parents are old now. What choice do I have but to take up the oar myself? It would seem I am fated for a life on the ocean."

(Dongtang, lento, innig)

Zixin: "With sail rope in hand, I cast the net among the free-swimming fish. It is with their trade that I shall sustain my family."

(Zixin casts out the net and brings it back in)

(Dongtang, appassionato)

Zixin: "It is hard every day under the sun, moon, and stars. The rich live fitfully whilst the poor must struggle. This is the way of things."

Zixin: "I too am envious of the wealthy women's splendor, though I have never pitied myself, even with but a single string of pearls on my wrist."

Zixin: "I have nothing to show for myself but bare walls. All I have is what I make with my own hands."

(Zixin ties her boat to the wharf and jumps to the shore)

(Dongtang, senza misura)

Zixin: "It's time to go on the streets and sell fish."

(Exit Zixin)

Scene II

(Enter Zixin carrying a hand-basket)

(Dongtang, straziante)

Zixin: "Fresh fish, fresh fish! Buy it here, buy it now!"

(Enter Grandma Zhang carrying a flower basket)

(Sprechstimme)

Grandma Zhang: "Look at those fish (fish wag their tails, spraying Grandma Zhang with water), so fierce! They will make a tasty soup!"

Grandma Zhang: "All soaked like that, from head to hips, don't I look like a young lady with pink cheeks and vermilion lips?"

(Aside)

Zixin: "What do they call you, granny?"

Grandma Zhang: "You can call me Grandma Zhang. I sell flowers on this street."

Grandma Zhang: "Deary, such a soft-spoken girl like you won't sell a fish before the sky turns dark."

Grandma Zhang: "You might be beautiful, but if you're too shy to raise your voice, you won't be able to fill your stomach."

(Zixin lowers her head)

(Aside)

Zixin: "You're so funny, granny."

Zixin: "Oh no... Where..."

Grandma Zhang: "What happened?"

Zixin: "My string of pearls, I never take it off my wrist. But it's gone. How could that be?"

(Enter Fan Jie, dressed in colorful stage clothing and holding the string of pearls)

(Dongtang, andante calmo)

Fan Jie: "Like a golden crow that utters the truth beyond the waves blue, I went for a stroll and a string of pearls appeared in my view."

(Aside)

Fan Jie: "My name's Fan Jie, at your service. I make a living doing odd jobs in the docks. My brothers here selected me as their leader."

Fan Jie: "The string of pearls I picked up today must belong to that lady."

Fan Jie: "I intend to return it to its rightful owner, though I don't want to be falsely accused of any indecent act."

Fan Jie: "Perhaps I shall see if there are any marks of wearing the pearls on her wrist."

(Dongtang, 12-bar prelude, irato)

Fan Jie: "In scorching sun and steaming breeze, does selling fish come with ease?"

Zixin: "My fish are fresh, that I guarantee. Boil them or fry, the choice belongs to thee."

Fan Jie: "Those fish are as fierce as a tiger, they won't stop moving even for a second."

Fan Jie: "Would you step forward and introduce yourself?"

(Zixin steps forward)

Fan Jie: "It's only fitting that these beautiful pearls belong to a fair lady of equal beauty."

(Dongtang, appassionato)

Zixin: "My heart is telling me that this man might be a mack, taking pleasure in playing with me, but he won't fool me with his nonsense."

Zixin: "I turn around with my apricot eyes wide open and scold him."

Zixin: "Such a scoundrel like you must have no dignity!"

(Aside)

Fan Jie: "No need to get so angry, milady. I just wanted to check if there are marks of wearing the pearls on your wrist."

Fan Jie: "It looks like, indeed, you are the rightful owner, milady. Now that the string of pearls is returned to you, you need not worry anymore."

Fan Jie: "My name's Fan..."

(Fan Jie pauses, covers his mouth, and turns to leave. Exit Fan Jie.)

Fan Jie: "It's time for me to go, ha."

(Aside)

Zixin: "Oh hero, please wait..."

(Dongtang, lento, innig)

Zixin: "Led by my timid heart, I wronged a righteous man."

Zixin: "I can't even remember the name of that hero of mine. What should I do to thank him?"

(Aside)

Zixin: "How shameful..."

Grandma Zhang: "But my deary, what is it if not destiny? A fair lady has finally met her noble hero."

Vol 2

The young man who had returned Zixin's string of pearls left without revealing his name. Grandma Zhang comes up with a plan that will allow Zixin to find him...

—Act II: The Search for the Gentleman—

Male Role: Fan Jie

Female Role: Zixin

Comic Role: Grandma Zhang

Comic Roles: Zhang San, Li Si, Wang Er'ma

Scene I

(Enter Zixin and Grandma Zhang)

(Aside)

Zixin: "I have been depressed of late, and in no wise have I been at peace."

Zixin: "For I spoke in error 'gainst a hero seeking to do good."

Zixin: "He sought to return my string of pearls, and I did him no thanks nor ask him his name, but instead upbraided him most grievously."

Zixin: "Shamed I am, and do wish to find my benefactor, but amidst this vast harbor, how shall I find him?"

Grandma Zhang: "As I see it, deary, you need not be sorrowful, nor should you be troubled."

Zixin: "Oh, granny, why do you say so?"

Grandma Zhang: "You need only put up a notice, offering Mora up to the one who returns the string of pearls. Will he not then come forth?"

(Danqing, andante calmo)

Zixin: "Thus is it said—"

Zixin: "As wine turns red peoples' faces, so do riches move many places."

(Zixin lowers her head and paces)

Zixin: "I am of a mind to find him with this device, yet I wonder if he should come forthwith."

(Aside)

Grandma Zhang: "Come now, do not hesitate. Let us take action."

Grandma Zhang: "You shall lose little who rely on me."

(Exeunt Zixin and Grandma Zhang)

Scene II

(Enter Zhang San, Li Si, Wang Er'ma)

(Sprechstimme)

Zhang San: "I am Zhang San."

Li Si: "I, Li Si."

Wang Er'ma: "And Wang Er'ma I."

Zhang San: "Hark at that notice! Let me go up, and earn the bounty."

Li Si: "Shall the officer ask, 'think to do good, do you?'"

Wang Er'ma: "Hah! A fool is he who would speak true."

(Aside)

Zhang San: "Ho, brothers. Are you all bound for that lass Zixin's place, her reward to claim?"

Li Si: "Indeed."

Wang Er'ma: "So it is."

Li Si: "Picked up her headdress also, did you?"

Wang Er'ma: "No, I'd have sworn it was her earrings."

Li Si: "Falsehood - t'was the flower upon her head."

Zhang San: "Fools. Perfume it was!"

Wang Er'ma: "Ah, however it may be, sure am I that we all know well the score."

Zhang San: "Ahahah."

Li Si: "Haha!"

(Zhang San, Li Si, and Wang Er'ma turn to Zixin)

Zhang San: "Ah, Zixin, have you my bounty ready? For I, Zhang San, have found your lost perfume!"

Li Si: "Stand aside, friend, for I have come to return your headdress. The prize is mine, therefore."

Wang Er'ma: "No, no, no, Wang Er'ma it is who returns your earrings. Mine is the reward."

Zixin: "You... you lot dizzy me."

Zixin: "For we have never met, and if I lost my earrings, scents, or headwear, would I not know it?"

Zhang San: "Why, you must have forgotten it in your hurry at the fish-store. Just give the reward here, do not worry!"

Li Si: "The Mora, then, and be quick about it!"

Wang Er'ma: "Or I shall ruin your stall, and your good name."

Zixin: "Ah... How I have attracted the eye of these worthless scoundrels!"

Zixin: "Granny, see what trouble your plan has wrought!"

Grandma Zhang: "Worry not, lass. I shall devise a way to see them off."

Grandma Zhang: "Hah!"

(Zhang San, Li Si, Wang Er'ma fall to the ground)

Grandma Zhang: "I had this lass put up a false bounty to catch such thieves as you!"

Grandma Zhang: "The items you bring are false — now hand them over."

Grandma Zhang: "Or else..."

Zhang San: "Or else what?"

Grandma Zhang: "Then the headdress made of prize Glaze Lilies, the earrings of fine Noctilucous Jade, and the scents shipped in from a faraway land..."

Grandma Zhang: "You shall have to pay for them all! Now then, where is the Mora? Give it here!"

(Grandma Zhang pursues Zhang San, Li Si, Wang Er'ma, broom in hand)

Zhang San: "Ow, ow!"

Li Si: "Stop hitting us, please! We don't want your Mora anymore!"

Wang Er'ma: "Now to find that fellow who truly picked her things up to come and own up — sooner rather than late!"

Scene III

(Zhang San brings Fan Jie in)

(Aside)

Zhang San: "Why, I have it now. You must be the thief who took the lady's things. My brothers and I took a beating on your account!"

Fan Jie: "I, Fan Jie, have ever been upright, and such things as stealing are beneath me. Do not think to accuse me falsely."

Zhang San: "Well, aren't you a stubborn one? Dare you go up with me to meet the owner of the lost goods?"

Fan Jie: "I fear you not. Let us go! Indeed, I should like to see who it is who maligns me."

(Zhang San and Fan Jie turn to Zixin)

Zhang San: "Is the proprietor not Zixin? I shall see how you get out of this one!"

Fan Jie: "Ah! So it is you, then!"

(Dongtang, appassionato)

Fan Jie: "This was the lady who was wrath, and no more words came from her mouth."

(Dongtang, allegro)

Fan Jie: "Cease deceiving the young woman, for I am Fan Jie, a dock worker."

Fan Jie: "I have lived frugally and humbly. Whereupon would I steal a lady's makeup?"

Fan Jie: "You met my honesty with accusations, though I returned the item swiftly as I could."

(Aside)

Zixin: "Ah, so this hero is named Fan Jie."

Zixin: "It is my fault, then, that he should have been tangled up in this business."

Zixin: "I shall beg his forgiveness shortly — and should he not accept, twice or thrice more shall not be too few."

(Zixin walks up to apologize to Fan Jie)

Zixin: "O, hero, indeed we had a misunderstanding before, but..."

(Fan Jie turns)

Fan Jie: "Hmph."

(Zixin smiles and steps forward)

Zixin: "...I did have some other motive in doing this."

Zixin: "For you did not leave your name behind when you left, and I wished to repay you but found you not."

Zixin: "So I decided on this device. It is my fault that such trouble came to you."

Zixin: "Please, allow me to apologize."

Fan Jie: "Oh?"

(Dongtang, lento, innig)

Fan Jie: "Though I was at first resentful to be maligned, when I calm down to think, I realize it was but a misunderstanding."

Fan Jie: "Calm must rule me, lest I speak in error."

(Aside)

Fan Jie: "If I may ask you..."

Fan Jie: "You said earlier that the business from before was a misunderstanding."

Fan Jie: "You were of a mind to seek the person who returned your string of pearls, and put out that notice, which by chance snared me wrongly, is that true?"

Zixin: "It is, and again, I apologize."

(Fan Jie catches Zixin)

Fan Jie: "Nay, you need not be so polite. You do me too much honor."

Fan Jie: "I, too, acted rashly, and put you upon the spot. I, too, must apologize."

Zixin: "Oh, no, please..."

(Fan Jie salutes her)

Zhang San: "What!? What are you doing? So is the Mora to be paid or not?"

Grandma Zhang: "Oh, shush you. This is their tale — what business is it of yours?"

Grandma Zhang: "See, all the ladies and gentlemen in the audience are here to see a show by Yunjin, and they have no time for your nonsense."

Grandma Zhang: "Open your eyes and see, and stand aside there."

(Exeunt, Grandma Zhang dragging Zhang San)

Zixin: "Come to think of it, I sell fish here every day. How is it, then, that I have never seen you?"

Fan Jie: "I pass this way each day to work."

Fan Jie: "Perhaps I was lost amid the throng. But perchance we may meet tomorrow..."

Zixin: "So it is... May we meet then."

Vol 3

Our heroine meets the young man again. They fall in love and are ready to live together happily ever after. But a despot who covets Zixin's beauty and virtue is putting the skids under their plans..

—Act III: The Pearls, Lost Again—

Male Role: Fan Jie

Female Role: Zixin

Comic Role: Grandma Zhang

Villain: Wu Wang

Comic Roles: Wu Yi, Wu Er

Scene I

(Enter Zixin and Fanjie from either side)

(Aloud)

Fan Jie: "The dogs do bark excitedly at dawn."

Zixin: "The sun shines, and the frost on the eaves thin."

(Aside)

Fan Jie: "Is that Ms. Zixin I see?"

Zixin: "Indeed, it is! Is that you, Fan Jie?"

(Dongtang, senza misura)

Fan Jie: "I dreamt of you fair last night."

Zixin: "I regretted our parting, though we meet again soon."

Both: "That my heart's desire should come true."

(Aside, unison)

Zixin: "O Hero..."

Fan Jie: "O Maiden..."

(Aside)

Fan Jie: The sun speeds westwards and high, and work begins at the docks. I must go and begin my day."

Fan Jie: "Ms. Zixin, I take my leave."

(Zixin salutes and watches him depart. Fan Jie turns back as he grows further away. Zixin lowers and raises her head again as Fan Jie exits. Zixin wrings her hands.)

(Dongtang, lento, innig)

Zixin: "Ah, to have turned cowardly at the last moment!"

(Exit Zixin)

Scene II

(Enter the playboy Wu Wang, open-collared and dressed in green, with his companions Wu Yi and Wu Er)

(Aloud)

Wu Wang: "I am the great Wu Wang, master of these streets."

Wu Wang: "Today I am bored and idle, and thus stroll about looking for sport."

(Aside)

Wu Wang: "Wu Yi, Wu Er!"

(Same Aside)

Both: "Yes, sir?"

(Aside)

Wu Wang: "I have a mind to eat something new today. Have you any ideas?"

Wu Yi: "What about some Golden Shrimp Balls?"

Wu Wang: "I tire of fine meat and fatty fish. Golden Shrimp Balls seem alright."

Wu Wang: "Wu Er, go hence and find a store that sells a serving of those shrimp balls."

Wu Er: "I will."

Wu Wang: "Wait. It must be fried to a pure golden sheen, with not a speck of char-black to be found."

Wu Er: "Without a speck of char-black to be found, yes."

Wu Wang: "Hold. And they must be of size most equal. Not one shall be larger or smaller than the next."

Wu Er: "And they shall all be the same size, yes. Do you wish to go over the instructions again?"

Wu Wang: "No need."

Wu Er: "Do you have any other requests, sir? Just say the word."

Wu Er: "And if the store fails to meet your expectations, then let's do as we always do—"

Wu Yi: "What do we always do?"

Wu Er: "Not give them any Mora, of course."

Wu Wang: "No, no, come, look at the fish store yonder. Now there's a beauty more filling than a fine meal."

(Dongtang, lento, innig)

Wu Wang: "Let us go up and seek some details as we may... All the better to seize her with."

(Wu Wang turns to Zixin)

(Aside)

Zixin: "Would you like to buy fish, sir?"

Wu Wang: "Why, of course, of course. Which family do you hail from, miss, and where fare your parents?"

Zixin: "I grew up at the docks. My parents have grown old, and I run the store alone, selling fish to make ends meet."

Zixin: "Why do you ask, sir?"

(Turns, sotto voce)

Wu Wang: "Wonderful, wonderful. Her parents are not at hand. A fine chance to strike, indeed."

(Turns back, facing Zixin)

Wu Wang: "Then, miss, are you yet engaged, or pledged to be wedded?"

Zixin: "I have not, sir, for I have busied myself working all this time."

Zixin: "But sir, what has the matter of my marriage have to do with your business buying fish?"

(Turns, sotto voce)

Wu Wang: "Better still, excellent! She has plighted no troth. If trouble should come of this, no one will save her."

(Turns back, facing Zixin)

Wu Wang: "Then, miss, have you one you are enamored with?"

(Zixin lowers her head and says nothing)

(Dongtang, senza misura)

Wu Wang: "See, see how she casts down her eyes without speaking. So, then, there is no such person. Evil enters and masters my thoughts—"

Wu Wang: "Come, friends, take her hence — let us not waste precious time or beauty."

(Exeunt Wu Wang, Wu Yi, and Wu Er, taking Zixin with them)

Scene III

(Enter Grandma Zhang)

(Aside)

Grandma Zhang: "Now then, ladies and gentlemen, if you have listened oft to Yunjin's plays and become wise to the ways of theater, then you have likely guessed what shall come next."

Grandma Zhang: "Shall we not now accelerate towards a fight most fierce?"

Grandma Zhang: "But afore the hero steps forth, he must by fortune be inspired."

Grandma Zhang: "When evil beasts run amok, disturbing the lives of the people, or when times and tides are turbulent, that is when heroes arise."

Grandma Zhang: "If you should pluck up your courage, your deeds shall be remembered. But if you prove craven..."

Grandma Zhang: "Who then will remember if you were named Zhang Jie, Wang Jie, or Fan Jie?"

Grandma Zhang: "And what's more, we ordinary folk must show our mettle, and yet leave a tale of rescuing our fair lady."

Grandma Zhang: "Let us see how Fan Jie shall act."

(Enter Fan Jie)

(Aside)

Grandma Zhang: "Alas, why have you only arrived now?"

Grandma Zhang: "Miss Zixin here was just taken by the notorious hooligan, Wu Wang!"

(Dongtang, allegro)

Fan Jie: "Ah, alas!"

Fan Jie: "When I heard her words I was a-fright, but I never thought that catastrophe was so near to me."

Fan Jie: "This villain burns, steals, and kills as he wills. If I were to go forth..."

Fan Jie: "I shall, in all likelihood, not return."

(Grandma Zhang tosses the string of pearls to Fan Jie)

Grandma Zhang: "S—sir Fan, wh—whatever shall we do?"

(Dongtang, allegro)

Fan Jie: "As I see these pearls, my resolve hardens—"

Fan Jie: "How could I surrender a maiden to this villain?"

Fan Jie: "Pearl-string in hand, I draw my sword in fury — to make contrite that Wu Wang, and have him sue for mercy."

(Exeunt Fan Jie and Grandma Zhang)

Vol 4

To rescue the one he loves, the young man charges heedlessly into danger, entering the lair of the enemy with his sword drawn: and on the other side, his beloved hangs on desperately...

—Act IV: Trial By Candlelight—

Male Role: Fan Jie

Female Role: Zixin

Comic Villain: Wu Wang

Scene I

(Fan Jie with a robe, stage upper left, Zixin sits alone, stage right)

(Dongtang, appassionato)

Fan Jie: "O cursed villain, to steal a maiden in broad daylight! My beloved suffers and I grieve."

Fan Jie: "So it falls to my sword to bring judgment on those who so forsake the law."

Fan Jie: "Let us away."

(Fan Jie spurs his horse and heads for Wu Wang's stronghold)

(Aside)

Fan Jie: "Swiftly did I ride here, pursuing the sounds of merriment from afar."

Fan Jie: "This, then, must be the wolf's den."

Fan Jie: "If I am to rescue Zixin, I must scout their lair out with care."

Fan Jie: "A good plan. We go!"

(Fan Jie leaps over the rear wall, exeunt.)

(Common time)

Zixin: "Within a lone lamp and half-burnt candles — and without lurk the wolves and tigers."

Zixin: "Who could have expected such disaster? And how shall I flee this hive of villainy?"

Scene II

(Wu Wang enters from right through a door, drunk)

(Aloud)

Wu Wang: "I come and go wherever I am pleased, and even gods fall if I am not appeased."

(Aside)

Wu Wang: "Haha, got one in the day, didn't I? Hehe."

Wu Wang: "That lovely, lovely lady."

Wu Wang: "Now that we have made merry, as is our wont. It is time — we meet the fair maiden!"

(Dongtang, andante calmo)

Zixin: "Here that impetuous drunken rascal comes. Still! The weeping candlelight is in my hand."

(Aside)

Zixin: "You shall not have me!"

(Wu Wang chases Zixin. Zixin strikes Wu Wang with the candlestick. He falls down. She slumps in relief.)

(Dongtang, andante calmo)

Zixin: "In the confusion, a stroke of fortune! On shaking feet I flee."

(Aside)

Zixin: "Not a light to be seen outside. How is this so dark?"

Zixin: "Perhaps I should relight this candle—"

Zixin: "No. Would I not be imperiled if recaptured?"

Zixin: "Better then to carry this unlit light, and grope our way out through the night."

Zixin: "Yes, so shall it be done."

Vol 5

The bandit lair in the dead of night is pitch-dark. The tyrant, the youth, and the lady grope in the dark in search of one another, and there, a perilous misunderstanding is about to play out...

—Act V: Twin Pearls Returned—

Male Role: Fan Jie

Female Role: Zixin

Comic Villain: Wu Wang

Scene I

(Fan Jie at stage upper left, Zixin at stage upper right. Wu Wang lies on the ground, his eyes closed)

(The two people grope in the darkness of Wu Wang's lair)

(Their hands make contact in the dark, but not knowing who the other is, they draw away in alarm)

(Wu Wang awakens)

(Aside)

Wu Wang: "Why, that girl is as willful as I, to dare to strike me so."

Wu Wang: "No one is about. Perhaps they have fled further within."

Wu Wang: "Hmph. The night is come, the gate is closed."

Wu Wang: "Unless they jumped the wall, how should that maiden escape? Surely not by the gate!"

(Wu Wang enters the hall)

(Aside)

Wu Wang: "Hah. These louts are drunk out of their gourds. Not one light they lit!"

Wu Wang: "Well, let me get myself one, and let us begin our search."

(Wu Wang steps on Fan Jie's foot in the dark, and they both draw back)

Wu Wang: "Haha, so there you are!"

(Wu Wang stretches his arms out to lunge at Fan Jie, who ducks. They stumble about in the dark as Zixin shrinks into a corner)

(Wu Wang finally grabs Fan Jie)

Wu Wang: "I have you!"

(Aside)

Wu Wang: "Hmm? Have you grown so wide about the waist since last we met?"

Fan Jie: "I put on more clothes, all the better to keep warm with."

Wu Wang: "Indeed, one must wear more in cold weather."

Wu Wang: "Then why have you grown so tall?"

Fan Jie: "I have worn high shoes, all the better to put on a show with."

Wu Wang: "Oh, surely that must be difficult."

Wu Wang: "And why have your hands grown so rough?"

Fan Jie: "Well... Lean closer and I shall tell you."

Wu Wang: "Of course, of course."

(Fan Jie stabs Wu Wang with his sword)

Fan Jie: "To bear a sword, All the better to take your life with."

(Wu Wang falls)

Scene II

(Aside)

Fan Jie: "Foul villain. But a stroke, and you are slain."

Zixin: "Are you Fan Jie?"

Fan Jie: "This voice — you must be Miss Zixin!"

(Fan Jie and Zixin reach out and touch each other)

Zixin: "Fan Jie!"

Fan Jie: "You must have suffered."

Fan Jie: "I have slain that devil. His minions are all that remains."

Fan Jie: "His death shall scatter them like monkeys when their great tree falls."

Fan Jie: "Do not fear, I shall break the gate."

(Fan Jie breaks the gate)

Zixin: "Ah! My life would have been forfeit had you not arrived."

(Dongtang, lento, innig)

Zixin: "A heart of pearls in your house shall nest."

Fan Jie: "In the skies with the wind shall we find rest."

Fan Jie: The white moon shines o'er the catalpas glade.

Zixin: And with lowered head, the promise is made.

—End—

Records of the Gallant

The Hermit

A compilation of stories and legends of various knights-errant in Liyue. Some of them have been told for a long time but are still popular among the people.

—The Hermit—

The stone forest of Jueyun Karst is a mysterious place engulfed in mist all year round. Myths and legends abound among the herb gatherers, telling of adepts and evil spirits.

Once, there was a herb seller named Qiangu who went to Jueyun Karst to investigate the distribution of medicinal herbs there. Unbeknownst to him, a group of brigands had followed him into the mountains. They waited for cover of night, and when he let his guard down they struck. He was knocked unconscious. The brigands grabbed his possessions, bound him from head to foot, and left him alone in the valley.

Deep in the night, the herb seller finally awoke. He struggled against the ropes that bound him, and cried out for help. But the vast mountains did not respond. The only sounds to be heard in the thick mountain forest, save for the echoes of his own pitiful wails, were the faint cries of the birds disturbed by them.

Qiangu sank into despair and sighed with sorrow. Just when he thought all hope was lost, a deep voice came rumbling through the mountains, cutting through the cries of nocturnal birds and the whistling of the wind.

"Arise!"

"I am unable to!" The herb seller protested amidst floods of tears. His cry frightened off a fox that was prowling in the night. But as he tensed his body once more against the ropes that bound him, he discovered they had completely loosened.

The herb seller stood up. No sooner had he arisen than the disembodied voice, without pausing to hear the expression of gratitude that would be customary in such situations, spoke to him once more:

"Ascend!"

As instructed, Qiangu ascended the mountain, following the winding dirt track to the summit as the horizon began to glow in the east. From the summit he saw a twisted and withered pine growing on a cliff, its branches sprawling outwards as if trying to escape into the air. The gentle creaking of the branches drew his attention to the ropes that hung from them — at the other end of which hung the brigands from the night before, bound in like fashion from head to foot. Then he saw the old man whose voice he had heard, his hair and beard as white as snow, sat atop a curiously shaped rock as if it were his throne. The old man took one look at Qiangu's

disheveled appearance and grinned mischievously before returning his possessions to him intact.

Qiangū inquired as to the old man's origins, but he replied that he belonged to the mountains, his home being wherever he roamed and his bed being wherever he laid his head. Qiangū sought to thank the old man with all manner of courtesies and compensations, but he dismissed them all. After much deliberation, he took just a single Mora to one day give as a wedding gift to Qiangū's beloved daughter, in order that he might attend the wedding feast. Out of disaster seemed to spring forth good fortune, for following this incident Qiangū's store grew ever more popular, while word of the wealthy herb seller himself spread far and wide. Some say that after making his fortune, he returned to Jueyun Karst in search of the old man, but found nothing save for a few abandoned tents and empty wine bottles. Some claim to have spotted the old man at Yaoguang Shoal, disguised as a miner and darting around like the wind between the precipices. Others insist he is a fisherman who spends his time saving those who become stranded at sea. The stories are too many to count, and yet no-one knows the old man's name.

Lamentably, age and ill health have now ushered in the twilight years of Qiangū's life while his beloved daughter remains unmarried. Perhaps the day will still come that the old man from the mountain attends the wedding feast, but that day seems impossibly far in the future for Qiangū.

Dust

A compilation of stories and legends of various knights-errant in Liyue. Some of them have been told for a long time but are still popular among the people.

The land of Liyue was not always ruled by Rex Lapis. Many gods walked the land in that distant epoch.

The area known as the Guili Plains was once an area lush with Glaze Lilies. But it was beset by troubles on every side, forcing its residents of old to flee, while the prosperity of Liyue Harbor would attract many of those who took their place. But even so, many tales of gallantry continue to circulate in these wilds.

In the tales of traveling merchants and porters, there was once a mysterious figure that would surface in the dead of night upon the plains: it was a maiden in a long indigo robe, striding along the shallows of the Bishui River, the moon wrapping her face with silver light as the night wind carried her words up to the shimmering, sleepless stars.

According to guests at Wangshu Inn, only those who get lost amid the firefly-lights on summer nights might see her, and only those who can discern the scent of Glaze Lilies amid the dancing lights and Seelie floating in the dark could find her tracks. Some guessed that she might be a lost illuminated beast, or a sole servant of some long-dead god, gently mourning her master only at night. And some also believed her to simply be a gallant hero, like those who spurn civilization, hiding their real names.

No one knows how her story began, but it ended with the tale of a certain hunter. But unlike the stories of those merchants, the hunter encountered her brandishing a sword against several perilous shadows under the merciless moonlight. After an elegant and sharp dance, the maiden was nowhere to be seen, with naught left but a pile of bloodied dust.

The next day, some inquisitive citizens would discover the corpses of Millelith and land surveyors by the river.

After this, no matter how many search parties the Ministry of Civil Affairs would send, no one saw that riverside maiden ever again.

Perhaps that deadly dance was the fruit of some vendetta, or perhaps that woman had herself been some great brigand. Or perhaps that matter does not require any rhyme or reason at all. Heroes are heroes, after all, drawing their blades for reasons beyond common comprehension.

But as the lights of Liyue Harbor consumed the deserted countryside villages day by day, this legend too would slowly disappear.

Still, the legends hold that the riverbank that maiden had used to roam remains filled with blooming Glaze Lilies to this day.

Black Racoons

A compilation of stories and legends of various knights-errant in Liyue. Some of them have been told for a long time but are still popular among the people.

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Breeze Amidst the Forest

Ballad Selection Excerpt

A collection of Mondstadt ballads, recorded, compiled and arranged by scholars centuries ago.

"Breeze Amidst the Forest" and "Breeze Upon the Lake" constitute a two-volume collection of narrative poems. The compilation is the result of the tireless work of scholars who have recorded and arranged countless songs sung by Mondstadt bards.

Bards often elaborate upon or fabricate history to draw in an audience and earn a few extra Mora. Hence, most of their works have extremely low credibility. What has allowed the songs to remain popular to this day, and to stand the test of the thousand winds of time, is the threads of spectacular imagination and ingenious rhetoric that have been woven into them.

"What is to be sung hails from ancient times."

"The gods walked among us in their prime."

The poet, who had finished recounting the tales of the ruins and Vennessa, began to tell the story of the Wind Dragon. He began to sing, "The story to be told hails from ancient times, when the gods walked among us in their prime." The dragon graced by Anemo was born* in the high heavens in that age of wonders. He slowly descended, and inspected everything with curious eyes.

He landed in a village, but the terrified villagers threw rocks at him. The dragon could not understand why they cried out in fear.

He landed in a cemetery, and only heard the lament of grieving people. The dragon could not understand what they murmured in their sorrow.

He landed in an orchard, but was cursed by the furious farmers who lost their trees. The dragon could not understand why they screamed in anger.

The world was too complicated for a young dragon. The dragon was bewildered, yet he did not give up.

One day, the dragon heard music pouring out from the Holy Lyre der Himmel. This was the name of the lyre belonging to the Anemo Archon. Enchanted by the poetry, the Wind Dragon landed beside the best singer under the skies.

People panicked, for the mighty elemental dragons and the great archons that reigned over the earth had never seen eye to eye.

"Behold his beauty and benignity!" The Windborne Bard sang.

"But we do not know him," the people replied.

What mysterious magic lies behind music and poetry that has the power to mesmerize both dragons and humans alike? I, for one, cannot fathom it. The dragon decided to stay with the bard, for he too wished to be understood by all souls. He learned human speech and the Windborne Bard's singing techniques.

...omitted...

Later generations regarded him as one of the Four Winds that watched over and protected Mondstadt.

"An atrous sun befell its kingdom and a luminous pearl lost its glow."

"Niveous silk grew dim and wheaten gold burned brilliantly no more."

So begins another tale that occurred in the lost Khaenri'ah Kingdom.

The Eclipse Dynasty had fallen, and disaster spread across the land. The alchemist known as Gold was corrupted by their own greed and ambition, and created an army of shadowy monsters with their uncanny powers. Durin, a black serpentine dragon, rose from the sea to cast its shadow over Mondstadt. But it was at this very moment that there was no one to inherit the title of Lionfang Knight, thus, the Knights of Favonius could not fly their falcon flag. The persistent yet despondent prayers called upon the archon of Mondstadt, the Windborne Bard. The strings of the lyre were strummed once more, and the Wind Dragon was summoned forth.

As Mondstadt's last line of defense, the Wind Dragon battled the wicked dragon to the death in the raging storms.

The Wind Dragon prevailed. He tore open the throat of the wicked dragon, at the cost of ingesting its poisonous blood. The blood of the wicked dragon was distorted gold, with the powers to crumble mountains and poison the earth.

The Wind Dragon protected Mondstadt with his life, and his only wish was to be understood by humans. And so, he drifted off into a deep slumber.

The Holy Lyre played a sorrowful tune.

The Holy Lyre sang: should you awaken, spread your wings and live your life freely! A dragon is born to soar the skies, and mortals shall surely grasp your beauty...

(*Typically, when life arises from the elements, it either descends and becomes a slime, or ascends and becomes a crystalfly. Rarely does this process give rise to dangerous elemental monsters. Elemental dragons are rarely seen and have the powers to match the gods of old.)

The Dragon Tome

A supplement to the "Breeze Amidst the Forest" ballad selection with excerpts from various sources. It tells the story of the Dragon of Mondstadt.

—The Dragon—

An excerpt from "An Investigation into the Cultural Customs of the Wind Kingdom," more commonly known as "Records of Customs and Culture," by Jacob Musk.

...

The "Wolf" of the Knight of Boreas, the "Lion" of the Lionfang Knight (or "Dandelion Knight"), the "Falcon" of the Knights of Favonius, and the "Wind Dragon" Dvalin have been long regarded as the Four Winds that watch over Mondstadt.

After the Lionfang Knight liberated Mondstadt, the Knights of Favonius was established, and the Knight of Boreas joined them. The tradition of worshiping the Four Winds was gradually formed in Mondstadt. However, Dvalin, the ancient Wind Dragon, predated them all.

Approximately one hundred years ago, the land was in chaos. Darkness spread, contaminating everything it touched. Barbarians and foul creatures roamed the lands, forcing people to dwell within the city walls.

It was an especially difficult time for Mondstadt. The Lionfang Knight was without a suitable heir, and the Knights of Favonius had lost many of its brave men and women during the bitter wars. During the most difficult of times, Durin, the corrupted dragon of immeasurable power, began attacking Mondstadt.

The prayers of Mondstadt's people awoke the Anemo Archon, and his will summoned forth the Wind Dragon Dvalin. As the last defender of Mondstadt, Dvalin battled Durin with all his might. The result was clear — Durin's remains still lie atop the snowy peaks to the south of Mondstadt — but the story of how the battle ended was lost in time. It is said that Dvalin ripped out Durin's throat, and together they fell from the sky. Durin's body sunk into the snow while Dvalin was summoned by the Anemo Archon and fell into a slumber.

...

People used to believe that Dvalin would awaken whenever Mondstadt faces a new threat. But in these times of peace, the belief of the Four Winds has gradually eroded and their temples lie all but completely deserted.

(Citation of unknown origin: By the time the Knights finally discovered that the foreign monstrosity named Stormterror, with which they had clashed countless times, was in fact Dvalin of the Four Winds, the enmity that had grown between them and driven them to conflict could not be undone. One can scarcely imagine the betrayal Dvalin must have felt when he awoke after a hundred years of slumber only to find that the people of Mondstadt, whom he had protected with his life, had forsaken him...)

Teyvat Travel Guide

Mondstadt Chapter

Teyvat Geographic Special Edition — Alice's Mondstadt Diaries

A magazine by the Adventurers' Guild. Each issue introduces great sceneries across Teyvat. This issue includes a short traveling diary of Alice the Traveler on her experiences in Mondstadt.

Dadaupa Gorge

The three hilichurl tribes located in this valley are all densely populated. What if we built a huge spinning, ball-shaped cell in the center of the valley and threw all of the hilichurls into it? That way we might be able to generate enough energy to power all the mills in Mondstadt for at least five years. If we took it one step further by grinding the hilichurls that are too old or too weak into food and feeding them to the strong ones, we might just build ourselves a perpetual motion machine that can support a huge factory like in Snezhnaya!

It seems totally feasible to me.

But when I told Miss Lisa about this idea, she just looked at me and pondered in silence for a long time, then changed the subject gracefully.

Starsnatch Cliff

The Anemo Archon is a bit too undisciplined for me. If I were a god, I would not have allowed my realm to look so unorganized and ragged. With enough bombs placed in proper positions, even huge cliffs like Starsnatch would crumble into dust in a second. With flatter terrain, Mondstadt would surely look much nicer.

But that unctuous Cavalry Captain rejected my proposal instantly. He even asked me to stay away from Starsnatch Cliff.

Windrise

At the center there is a huge oak tree. It is said that Vennessa ascended there. I searched around the tree for a long time but did not find any launching device.

I grabbed some hilichurls nearby to put my theory to the test. Sadly, the longest flying distance was from here to the hunters' huts around Springvale. How disappointing.

Falcon Coast

My unsuccessful experiment caused quite a stir in Springvale, so Miss Jean from the Knights of Favonius arranged someone to keep tabs on me. All I could do all day was wander around at Falcon Coast. This is such a boring place. Those stupid eagles hovering in the sky and puffed-up Anemo Slimes all bored me to death! The worst of all was that I had nothing to do! On the other hand, the Outrider girl who was sent to monitor me had quite a lot of fun with the kids.

Whispering Woods

Yet another forest in Mondstadt. This Outrider named Amber seemed to know her way around this place. The explosive toy she carried around caught my attention. With some tweaks, I could turn it into something that could blow this forest and even the nearby mountains into smithereens easily.

My proposal seemed to scare her. But an explosive stuffed toy is indeed a brilliant idea. I must try it out next time.

Brightcrown Canyon

I finally got rid of that stalker from the Knights of Favonius. This valley I found at the northeast coast of Cider Lake is still guarded by ancient mechanisms, but the soldiers responsible for holding the pass for the King of Gales were nowhere to be found now. All the winds of time had left behind were the unintelligent hilichurls and silent mechanical guards.

My attempt to control Ruin Guards with hilichurls failed as well. The guard split into pieces, and as for the fate of the hilichurl strapped onto it... I will spare you the gory details. Half of the ruins were also destroyed in the process.

Stormterror's Lair

Brightcrown Canyon leads to this huge ruin of an ancient city which was built by the cruel King of Gales, Decarabian. The city was built in a ring shape. It seems that every resident of the city had been arranged their own spot between the inner and outer rings. Right in the center of the city was the tall tower where the King of Gales resided.

The ruins of the domain of this cruel king, who once tried to control his people's lives, are now utterly deserted.

I blew up a few arcades so people can climb up the tower more easily. Looks quite good to me. The ruin feels more ancient now.

Liyue Chapter

Teyvat Geographic Special Edition - Alice's Travels in Liyue

A magazine by the Adventurers' Guild. Each issue introduces great sceneries across Teyvat. This issue includes a short traveling diary of Alice the Traveler in Liyue.

Dihua Marsh

The northern stretch of the Bishui River turns into a wetland. If you look south beyond the Stone Gate you will see a Silvergrass marsh as far as the eye can see. At the southernmost point of the marsh is an inn perched atop a giant rock. That is the Wangshu Inn, the highest point on the entire marsh. Look south from there and you will see the Guili Plains. You can also make out the Guyun Stone Forest across the sea. Also — there's a weirdo staying at the inn on the top floor. I don't think I've ever heard him say a single word.

Lunch is a true feast at the Wangshu Inn. The kitchen is equipped with every utensil you could imagine — perfect for getting some practical alchemy experience.

On the topic of alchemy practice, I've got a few new things to test out in my search for an explosion catalyst. If everything goes smoothly, I'll spend a few more days here then head to the Guili Plains.

Guili Plains

In the end, I came to the Guili Plains a few days earlier than I'd originally planned.

Records suggest that prior to the Archon War, this area was a thriving marketplace.

The foxes and wild finches are stunning here, with fur and feathers that have a certain glow about them. But I hear that they can be pests, too. Liyue locals complain that they keep eating their fruit offerings to the Geo Archon. I wonder if that gives them a fruity aroma when roasted? Maybe I should go hunting.

They run a strict operation at the checkpoint on the main road, but the guards who work there are friendly people. I made a potion from some local herbs and gave it to one of them for his stutter — it cured him, but it did have some minor side effects. He now can't help but constantly imitate everyone he comes across. Not just what they say, but the way they say it. It's uncanny how spot-on his impressions are.

Jueyun Karst

I'm told that somewhere amidst the misty peaks of Jueyun Karst lives an adeptus, the exact location hidden somewhere in the ocean of cloud. All the Liyue herb gatherers claim to have seen the realm of the adepti in all its glory revealed before their very eyes in the clouds. Based on personal experience, I can say that over-indulging on certain types of mushrooms can induce visions of a similar nature.

The terrain here fascinates me. So many of these Stone Pillars look like they belong deep underground, not here on top of a mountain. There is supposed to be an underground reservoir here. Part of me wonders if all the water was drawn out, perhaps Jueyun Karst would find itself back on the ocean floor where it belongs.

My travel companion Zhongli is the sternest person I know, but he seems most entertained by this theory. He won't stop laughing.

What an odd fellow.

Yaoguang Shoal

I've heard that the fog often rolls in off the sea onto Yaoguang Shoal, and when it's at its thickest you can barely see your hand at the end of your outstretched arm. Unfortunately, I didn't make it here in time to see a foggy episode. It's a bit of a shame.

There are so many lovely shells on the beach. I wonder how many of them have been there since the Archon War? I strung some of them together to make a necklace, but unfortunately that fisherman from the inn sat on it and broke it... Every last shell, brutally crushed beneath his merciless buttocks. None were spared.

Not only that, but because he injured himself on the shards of broken shell, I had to pay his medical bills.

A giant conch shell stands on the beach where the Bishui River enters the sea. A kind old lady lives inside. Her family is said to have sailed here on the giant shell, and she spends her time rescuing shipwrecked people who end up drifting near the shore. I think that repurposing the giant shell as a self-propelled boat would make it much easier for her to rescue people from the sea.

But after I lost control of my third prototype seashell-boat and it blew up, the kind old lady decided she was not going to rescue me from the sea anymore.

Guyun Stone Forest

This is the site where the Geo Archon defeated the sea monster. Some of the great stone spears that pierce the ocean floor still tower above the surface of the sea, though many snapped long ago. The hexagonal Stone Pillars, formed from a conglomeration of Geo energy, are quite intriguing to look at. Viewed from above, one gets the impression that they were deliberately arranged in their current form to make a specific shape on the ocean surface.

Maybe that was the real reason the Geo Archon rained down destruction on the ocean floor with his stone spears? Maybe it was all just a big joke, albeit in extremely poor taste?

Zhongli from Liyue Harbor seems extremely knowledgeable on Liyue folklore, but I've never actually seen him come here. I can see the Wangshu Inn in the distance. I'll bet that weirdo I met there last time is still staring this way now.

The flow of the ley lines around here is unique in all of Liyue. Much more dynamic, somewhat unstable... It's as if a great, relentless power stirs somewhere in the depths of the ocean.

Perhaps it is the defeated sea monster, still writhing on the ocean floor.

Inazuma Chapter

A magazine by the Adventurers' Guild. Each issue introduces great sceneries across Teyvat. This issue includes a short traveling diary of Alice the Traveler in Inazuma.

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Toki Alley Tales

Prologue

They say that in the past, when the fragile and short-lived mortals had yet to cross over the sea unto these lands, Inazuma was once a land that belonged to the tanuki. They say, too, that human history began as drunken tanuki nonsense... Welcome to Toki Alley, a place where history and wild tales intertwine.

Prologue: The Tanuki's Oral History of Inazuma

They say that in the past, before the fragile and short-lived mortals had crossed over the sea to these lands, Inazuma was once a land that belonged to the tanuki.

Lazy and fickle by nature, the tanuki never worried about tomorrow, nor did they carry today's troubles with them through the night. During that period, the land of Inazuma was a cozy paradise for the tanuki and every day was a fun-filled festival.

At least, that's what the tanuki elders say.

Later on, the kitsune arrived by sea, forcing the tanuki into a great war that lasted first for 800 years and then for another 800 years, with both sides suffering heavy casualties, until eventually the only option was to hold peace talks. The tanuki are a stubborn bunch and to this day still don't admit defeat, but the fact remains that they ceded the giant Thunder Sakura to the kitsune.

But the kitsune are a crafty and cunning bunch too, and equally skilled in the art of shape-shifting. It is said that in that great war, as a consequence of the constant switcheroo trickery, many poor souls became completely disoriented and could not for the life of them keep track of who was who — eventually forgetting even who they were, what they were, and which side they were supposed to be on.

Thus were the hapless mortals born. The product of bewildered yokai.

This tale and many others were told to me by the tengu who likes to boast.

Vol 1

The great tengu are naught but brutal braggarts, and especially when drunk! — Tanuki Historical Commentary

Yoichi's Tale

The tengu's name is Yoichi, and she lives in Hanamizaka on a small side street called Toki Alley. She rents a shop there that sells alcohol, and lives a leisurely existence.

I say "leisurely." That's putting it nicely. "Completely and utterly chaotic" would be a more accurate description.

In theory, someone who enjoys alcohol enough to start a business selling it should know a thing or two about it. This applies as much to yokai as to humans.

But to be absolutely blunt, Yoichi has terrible taste in alcohol and has no business sense at all. Worst of all, in all her days in the human realm, she has never ridden herself of her awful tengu habits. Sometimes she will get drunk and stir up trouble among other yokai or kidnap human children and parade around all night at the festival, causing total chaos. Other times, she will barge into a theater, with no regard for the atmosphere, then casually strut on stage and start beating up the lead actor... the list goes on.

If it weren't for her senior status among the yokai and her extensive connections in human society, I suspect Yoichi might have been dealt with by some hero or other at the foot of a mountain long ago.

But the yokai and human folk of Toki Alley see her quite differently. Even the Great Gongen has never given her serious punishment, because she has never caused any major trouble.

Though haughty and slovenly by nature, as a "great yokai, set apart from the common folk" (her own words), Yoichi isn't greatly attached to worldly possessions. Any money she comes into is spent swiftly on alcohol — or else on novels from Yae Publishing House, which she skims through halfway before promptly defenestrating them. As a result, her home is not what you would call "domesticated" — quite the opposite, in fact.

Simply put, she doesn't have any worldly possessions of sentimental value... the sole exception being the golden paper fan she wears on her waist.

The Great Tengu are a race of yokai that travels to many different worlds, and it's not at all uncommon for them to adorn themselves with battle trophies that have an interesting backstory. Such is the case for this paper fan.

On a moonlit night, a drunken Yoichi, her shirt collar wide open, began bragging to me about its story...

She said that in one of the many worlds she had traversed, she took the form of a haughty young male archer, serving under an equally haughty shogun. Under that shogun's command, she, — or rather, "he" — had proudly shot down countless opponents, including big-bellied mortal samurai and crafty tanuki ninjas. Even the jikininki, despite their bulky figures, were no match against a single shot from Yoichi's bow.

"Hahahahaha! You are truly a great soldier! Your vision is keen like lightning, just like the Great Tengu!"

At that age, the conceited shogun tended to laugh in a loud and obnoxious manner, which was most unseemly.

After that, Yoichi made numerous contributions for the shogun, executing many monsters and unfortunate mortals. It goes without saying that she probably made some of the stories up. But what she truly became renowned for was the final battle of that world, a world in which she spent a hundred years.

In that naval battle, the shogun and rebels braved storms to wage bloody warfare between the straits. The monsters numbered at least eight million, maybe eight million more than that, while the mortal samurai must have numbered in the tens of millions. In terms of casualties, the headcount cannot be known, but what is known is that 800 thousand ships sank in the course of the battle. Yoichi reached this staggering tally with my assistance as she was vomiting up a bellyfull of wine by the window.

As is typical of so many stories about bitterly fought wars stuck in stalemate, brave heroes from both sides mowed down their enemies like blades of grass, painting the sea blood-red, while the rival generals stubbornly refused to back down, preferring to stay locked in intransigence than to withdraw their troops and head home to get a good night's sleep.

Finally, on one cold moonlit night, a small boat slowly floated out from enemy lines. A lone figure stood on the boat, swaying like a reflection in the water. Beside the figure was a shimmering flagpole with a paper fan at the top. It gave off a golden glow in the moonlight.

"Argh, ARGH... I am furious, furious! This blatant provocation cannot be tolerated!"

The shogun squinted his eyes, saw the golden fan in the distance, and instantly flew into a rage.

Yoichi couldn't understand why the shogun's self-esteem was so fragile, but was too lazy to empathize with the petty mortal sense of dignity. At that moment, she... no, "he," fixed his keen tengu gaze on the floating figure in the boat.

What he saw was a woman, and an altogether different one than Yoichi.

Moments later, a single arrow flew across the moon and tore apart the night sky.

"Haha, great!"

Soon, the shogun's shouting was drowned out by the cheers of the army.

"If those two old-timers find out what they have lost, they'd probably be so angry they'd rupture their spleens!"

Yoichi let out a conceited and mischievous laugh. She was drunk. The Great Tengu had a certain twinkle in her eye, of the rather repulsive variety, that she made no attempt to cover up.

What had happened was that as the arrow flew through the air, Yoichi had already spread out her giant wings and flown across the strait, snatching the golden paper fan and the bewildered beauty holding onto it as she passed over the boat. She then took the opportunity to push over the insufferably loud-mouthed shogun, and flew away from the battle.

A perfect tengu snatch and grab.

It was just a shame that...

"Well, you know what happened, she was a neko. She scratched me to pieces..."

Yoichi stuck out her tongue and sighed with exasperation.

"Oh right, it's snapper season! You should take some back with you."

"Hmm? The stingy Great Tengu has a heart?"

"I meant for that woman!"

Seeing the threatening gaze from the greatly tipsy Great Tengu, I hastily gathered the remaining snapper in my arms and left.

Vol 2

Mother once warned that a beautiful face can hide deceptive intentions. If she looks as lovely as the moonlight, she must either be a fox spirit, or some old bake-neko hag of significant power — Tanuki Historical Commentary

Osen's Tale

I left Yoichi's house and followed the winding alley for a while, then turned into a narrow street to arrive at that old lady's home.

When the night is pitch black and the moon has climbed to its peak, the neko awaken from their slumber.

It is said that neko who have lived up for hundreds or even thousand of years can easily take on the form of a young woman, tempting people into doing funny and foolish things or chasing innocent travelers out of some sense of spiteful vengeance. But that's just the stuff of mortal imagination.

In fact, the bake-neko only take on the form of young women when they're especially angry. Most of the time, they prefer to take on the form of an older woman, partly because it matches their crafty and cantankerous nature, but also because they can use old age as a disguise, portraying themselves as gentle souls to poor, unsuspecting passers-by.

"Hey, that's not free!"

At the sound of the voice, I raised my head to see a young woman sitting on the eaves, as if she'd been waiting there for a while. Her face was obscured in the shadows, and all I could

make out was something resembling a smile on her face and the golden-green light reflected by her eyes. Moonlight flowed from her semi-exposed shoulders down her dress, trickling through the gaps in the hem of her skirt and outlining her long, slender legs with a porcelain-white luster. She was absent-mindedly playing with a kendama in her hand.

Yep, the old lady was definitely furious...

"Tut-tut, you're late again tonight."

"Of course, s—sorry."

Mosquitoes kept bumping into the paper lamp, causing it to flicker lethargically in response. As the moon shone down, a humid wind arose. Before long, it had brought the cicadas' cries to a stop.

With her hair flowing down, the lady turned the spinning wheel with a perverse smile on her face. It was quite terrifying.

Now, despite my being a tanuki on friendly-enough terms with the tengu to sit and drink with them, even I have to be on my very best behavior around the bake-neko. So, I promptly prostrated myself and apologized profusely for my transgression.

"Never mind, never mind. Since the snapper is still fresh, you can get up."

With great difficulty on account of my rotund tanuki form, I resumed a normal seated position. The young woman slowly transformed back into an old woman, who had a kindly but strange smile on her face.

"Thank you, Auntie Sen."

Call me Osen!

I was relieved.

But something still felt off.

"Hahahaha, anyway, how's that fool doing these days?"

With a slurp, Osen swallowed one of the fish whole, including the tail.

As for the story of how her fate became intertwined with that of the Great Tengu, the facts can only be described as farcical. We have already heard the ridiculous tale from Yoichi's perspective, but the bake-neko tells a completely different story.

Osen wasn't born in our world, but in one where mortals were much more savage.

One night, in a bamboo forest, the young Osen was captured by a wandering monk. After passing through many hands, she was eventually sold to the shogun and became some sort of "Obake-Neko."

She has few memories of those days beyond wondering why the high-ranking officials of the mortal world enjoyed annoying her and playing with her. Every day, she was driven to scratch her enemies to pieces, or forced to play boring games which only they seemed to enjoy. This went on for such a long time that any normal person would have been driven to madness. But yokai live such long lives that they have far more patience than mortals.

Later, when her shogun and the rebels' shogun started fighting, Osen transformed into a ninja.

"This is where the story gets even more boring..."

Osen squinted her eyes as she said this, letting out a huge yawn that stretched from ear to ear.

On the night of that naval battle, the shogun thought of an ingenious scheme...

The shogun ordered Osen to transform into a beautiful young woman and stand on a small boat with a golden fan to humiliate the rebels so that they dare not approach. Even if they did, the bake-neko would teach them a brutal lesson.

But of course, Yoichi was standing amidst the ranks of the rebels...

"But of course, that fool suddenly stood up and starting ranting and raving about shooting down the fan with a single arrow."

Then, the Great Tengu...

"...Slipped and fell, landing in the ocean with a great big splash."

The old woman's feline face failed to stifle a smile, and erupted into jeering laughter.

"She was so drunk that night that she thought the seas were the stormiest she'd ever seen. In fact, the moon shone calmly and coolly, and there was not a trace of wind."

"But, it'd been a few hundred years since I'd seen someone so entertaining. So, to save her the humiliation, I stifled my laughter and took the paper fan down myself... Then, a roar of cheers came from their fleet. Just thinking about it amuses me to this day..."

Next, the Great Tengu unfurled her gigantic wings and leaped into the air, like a cloud covering the moon, and swooped down towards the beautiful woman...

"A flurry of arrows later, and she fell into the sea looking like a hedgehog. I couldn't keep a straight face any longer and started laughing uncontrollably."

Laughing raucously, Osen dragged the ill-fated tengu from the sea, put her in a headlock, and flew over the fleets from both sides, laughing manically and causing both generals to lose their tempers.

People say she flew over eight ships in an row, then disappeared into the night. The feline yokai's laughter could be heard for more than three days after the battle had finished.

"I couldn't stop laughing, so I scratched her as hard as I could... But the sorry state she was in made me laugh even harder, and the harder I scratched, the harder I laughed, hahahahaha..."
The neko transformed into an old lady and laughed uncontrollably.

"Afterwards, she brought me to this world and treated me like I was some kind of trophy!"
The old woman pursed her lips as her face transformed into that of a sulky young woman. But this looked quite comical, because her cheeks were still flushed bright red from having laughed so hard she could barely breathe.

"I am NOT a trophy!"

"Hmm, now I think about it, that's probably the whole reason why she doesn't dare to visit me herself."

The elderly female with feline features and the face of a young woman sighed gently, then smiled a cunning smile once more.

"You should go. Leave the door open, and come back on the next full moon."

"Also, don't forget to take this raincoat over to our old friend."

Vol 3

They say that those who make the ameonna cry will bring inescapable sorrow upon themselves.
— *Tanuki Historical Commentary*

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Vol 4

The tragedy of mortals is to lack self-knowledge, and that of the yokai is the lack of any such tragic troubles. — *Tanuki Historical Commentary*

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Vol 5

The tragedy of mortals is to lack self-knowledge, and that of the yokai is the lack of any such tragic troubles. — *Tanuki Historical Commentary*

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