

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones

Chapter 1(Complete)

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The sky above is where all life originates. From up high, fell one carrying the gift of life. Into the oceans, they rested for a time before returning to the sky, but behind was left traces of the gift. That thing which animates. From this, life in the sea sprang, and from the sea life crawl onto land afterwards.

This is all we know of the origins of life of our world. Okeanós, the most common name for our planet, was derived from a language spoken in the far north. When thinking about how to begin this tome I had difficulty deciding where to start. My goal is to pass down the knowledge that I have accumulated of Okeanós to all who would willingly receive it. But the well is so deep that I am having trouble finding the bucket, so to speak.

Should I begin with what we know of the sky? After all, all life as we know it came from above. Or should I start with the sea? All of what we know of creation came from documents found upon the frigid Koivu Sea. But, what of the stone foundations of man? None can deny that humans owe their evolution to the stability of the land.

After all my years in the Global Lore Researchers Union, after climbing up through the ranks of Novice, Adept, Erudite, to finally reach Master, I can say with certainty that we will never know everything about Okeanós. Every time I find an answer, two questions appear. It is much like fighting a hydra, but this one cannot be slain.

As I battled with this immortal metaphysical hydra I realized that I was overthinking it. This is just a book. One meant to enlighten and teach, but in a way that will not bore my readers and students. As one who has spent decades in libraries and classrooms, I assure you that I am well



Figure . I used the hydra analogy in one of my lectures and a student submitted this for extra credit. I think she missed the point. Nice painting, though.

acquainted with horribly boring lectures and books. But not here, dear reader. I solemnly promise to teach AND entertain you.

It is at this notion that I came to my decision about how to start this book. As a wee lad from a small island in the South Peleca seas, I hadn't thought about the world outside my island. This changed when an Adept of the GLRU visited Euryph, my hometown. She brought with her the most wondrous tales of far away lands, but always stated that they were not tales alone. They were real things that happened in real places. The very first of these she told me was of an island not too far to the east of Euryph. One that was home to ancient structures and massive trolls who guard them.

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Before I continue, I must name this Adept of the GLRU who came to visit Euryph. Her name was Aquilaria Wood. She was tall and slender, like a tree. Skin and hair coloured like one, as well. Her name was difficult for me to pronounce at the time, so she insisted that I call her Quil, for short.

As Quil told me of this island to the East of Euryph, my eyes must have certainly widened in wonder. All over the grassy fields and thin-wooded forests of this island, named the Isle of Agalloch, rested doorways of various sizes and compositions. By 'doorway', I do not mean ones attached to structures or magical portals. I mean freestanding doors frames with doors included. Around each doorframe was eroded or broken material; depending on what substance it was built from. The smallest, of a size most humans would use, were comprised of wood. Larger ones, usually twice the height of the wooden ones, were made of stone. Finally, the grandest of these doors, were made of a strange, orange metal. Quil called the stuff 'Lodgium'. Their bright forms tower over but a few places across the entire island, though at four times the height of the human-sized human doors, their presence must have been undeniable.

Lodgium, apparently, is a component used in creating seafaring and submersible vehicles. It is lightweight, yet strong and immune to the effects of oxidization.

Each door looked like it had been part of a larger structure. Quil claims to have found a large amount of evidence pointing to a civilization that has since disappeared. She theorizes that this civilization must have been gone for a long while, allowing their buildings and belongings to disintegrate over time. But not the doorframes.

Her curiosity peaked; Quil stated that she approached one of the wooden doors shortly after landing. When she walked up to it, the red door was closed. When within distance to grab the handle, however, it opened slightly. From beyond peered the eyes and upper visage of a being she described as 'trollish' in appearance.

Two large eyes, each with yellow sclera, no iris, and dark pupils, scrutinized her. She froze as it stared, hand still outstretched towards the handle, though still not touching it. Quil did not expect to find something, or someone, beyond the door.

There were no footprints around the area, which was a sandy dune upon the beach. A terrain in which it would be easy to spot tracks, even for a novice in such techniques.



Figure 2. A representation of the wood troll. Painted by the same student of mine who created the image in Figure 1. She, generously, has volunteered to illustrate this book. Henceforth, she shall be known by her name: Elador Loam.

Shaking off her surprise, she then said that she attempted to speak to the being beyond the door. When she did so, she lowered her outstretched arm, which seemed to relax the yellow eyed one. As Quil introduced herself and explained that she was on the Isle of Agalloch to study the mysterious structures, the door opened a bit more, slightly revealing the one behind it.

A hairy face with a bulbous nose leered down at her as she spoke. It squinted its huge eyes, lowering a sloping brow and narrowing gray skin eyelids over them, seemingly trying to understand.

After a few minutes had passed, the troll-like being, henceforth to be known as the 'wood troll', still had not responded or reacted in any way, save squinting. When Quil stepped closer the wood troll suddenly slammed the door in her face, the force of which kicked up a small cloud of sand.

The Adept backed off and the troll opened the door again, though only by a sliver this time. Slightly affronted by the troll's rudeness, Quil said that she walked around the doorframe in order to speak more directly to her interviewee. When she did so, however, what she found was not the calm, yet rude, troll she was just questioning. What she found was a raging fiend that was thrashing about with violent intent and a fury not unlike that of hell itself. Repeatedly, in a maddened frenzy, it screamed at the top of its lungs, 'I AM THE WOODEN DOORS'.

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Shocked and terrified by the troll's violent reaction, Quil jumped back, fearing attack. Though, the troll did not pursue her. She, instinctively, put the door between herself and the maddened troll. When she did so, however, she could not see or hear the raging of the beast beyond. Mere moments after putting the red door between herself and the troll, it opened once more. This time by barely a sliver. All that she could see beyond was a single black pupil surrounded by yellow.

Quil said that she took a few moments to catch her breath, being immensely startled by the troll's reaction. Though, it was very curious. From this side of the door, she had not noticed the creature's enraged flailing, but the second she looked around it; she had found the wood troll in an uproar. The difference in volume was also notable. No noise seemed to permeate through, or around, the door. She also remarked that it would have been impossible for the troll to quickly change posture from its slight crouch while peeking through the open sliver, to the madly swinging arms it had displayed previously without notice. At the beast's stature, its flailing limbs should have been visible from around the door, but they were not.

The adept then theorized that there must be some sort of spatial distortion around the doorframe. One that must block visual and audio experiences. She had heard the troll screaming in Okeanese, the same as which is used to write this very book; therefore she knew it was capable of speech and using a language that she also spoke. The creature's odd expression while peering through the door made a bit more sense now. As it squinted, it seemed to understand that she was trying to communicate, but simply could not hear her.

Cautiously, Quil peeked around the door again and was greeted once more by a raging troll. As it screamed, she tried to scream back greetings, apologies, and even threats, to which the troll screamed even louder to drown out. In fear of going deaf, Quil retreated once more, this time taking even more note of the change in volume. She also noticed a subtle, yet undeniable change in the wind. Before the door, while facing the peeking troll, a breeze blew to the east. When peering around the door, at the angered troll, the breeze was blowing west.

After quantifying a few variables, Quil decided to take a risk. She sprinted at full speed past the door to see what would happen, and to her alarm the wood troll began chasing her. Apparently, it did not care much for people, and so it shouted at Quil. "Trespasser! Invader! Who dares intrude beyond a door upon this sacred isle?!"

it shouted while it chased the scholar. “I AM THE WOODEN DOORS! I CANNOT LET YOU PASS THROUGH ME!”

“I’m deeply sorry, but there was no way for me to seek permission for entry!” Quil called back as she continued her run.

“No permission would ever have been given to an outsider! You defile sacred ground, much like the fools who stole this land long ago! We are now rid of them, as we shall soon be rid of you!” It yelled as it began to close the distance between them. Its long legs carried it swiftly, if heavily, through the tall, grassy fields of Agalloch.

As they ran, Quil noticed wooden doors painted in all manner of colours scattered across the open fields. The ones they passed by within a few metres opened by cracks or slivers, revealing curious troll-like eyes peering beyond at the commotion.



Figure 3. The wooden doors on the Isle of Agalloch were varied in colour and position. Some were bright, some were dark. Some were straight, while others were crooked. All were accompanied by trolls, though.

Quil, beginning to tire, looked ahead at the treeline that approached. The forest looked dense and she hoped that the troll would lose sight of her amongst the vegetation.

Upon entering the shade of the tall trees, she made a hard right turn and hid herself within a bush just beyond a thick stump. Mere moments later, the wood troll crashed through the foliage. It roared angrily as it charged straight ahead, clearly

having lost track of its target. Quil remains motionless within the bush until the sound of the trolls stomping completely faded.

She stood up and looked around nervously, but soon established that the troll was no longer in the vicinity. During her scan of the surroundings, she saw a stone structure a bit further into the woods. She took out a small knife and made an arrow in the stump that she hid behind. It pointed towards the way out of the woods. She was not very deep, but she did not want to risk getting lost. Especially since there was a furious troll searching for her amongst these very trees.

Being sure to mark a clear path, Quil made her way towards the stone structure. When before it, it became clear that it was a huge stone doorway. As she stood before it, examining, it opened by a crack. Beyond, she saw familiar yellow and black eyes, but the features of the face she saw looked different from the troll visages that she had seen before. This one was more rugged; bumpier and wider.

This huge door was flanked by a steep cliff to Quil's left and by thick vegetation to the right. There would be no way around this one, so if she wanted to see what was beyond she would need to somehow get through it. As she stared up, into the eyes of the massive stone troll, she got an idea. One that would permit her entry through this door, and all others on the isle of Agalloch.

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Quil's plan was to get the titanic stone troll to open the door. Instead of trying to speak to them, the scholar feigned as if she was calling out, addressing the stone troll. Like the wood troll, the stone one squinted in an attempt to comprehend Quil from beyond the separation.

Quil continued to mime and act as if she was trying to communicate with the stone troll, until eventually, out of curiosity, it knelt down. It brought its head closer in an effort to hear Quil's words.

More and more she acted and pantomimed until the troll's interest grew so great that it opened the door and stepped out of it, and into a space where the adept could speak to them.

Relieved, Quil told me that she had nearly passed out from the energetic flailing, but managed to communicate with the huge troll. She, attempting to be mannerly, introduced herself as an adept researcher of the Global Lore Researchers Union who had come to the Isle of Agalloch to study the doors. She then asked after their name.

The stone troll, who spoke flawless Okeanese, albeit in a deep, gravelly voice that was apparently difficult to understand, introduced themselves as 'Stone Doors'. Quil noted that this was similar to how the wood troll had identified themselves, though amongst its maddened screaming, Quil had not realized they were mentioning their name.

Quil asked Stone Doors of the origin of their name and of their duties on the island. The big troll responded by saying that like all upon Agalloch, they were named after what they are. They also stated that their duty was to permit or deny entry through this particular area.

The adept only discovered more questions to ask at these answers. Almost salivating at the idea of new and formally unknown knowledge, she then had a great discussion with Stone Doors.

What she learned was that the entire island used to be home to great structures, but whenever she queried about the lifeforms that inhabited these structures, she was always met with a strange and nearly incomprehensible response. Stone Doors stated that, in a manner of speaking, the structures were the inhabitants themselves. She asked if they took the forms of trolls as well, to which Stone Doors did not understand.

Figure 4. A realistic depiction of one of the stone doors of Agalloch. It should be noted that these doors open from the inside.

They had no knowledge of what a troll was, or even goblins, orcs, elves, dwarves, or all manner of races. They didn't even seem to fully understand what a human was, seemingly thinking that Quil was just a particularly talkative and flexible tree. Her dark brown skin and naturally green hair was quite good at making others think of her as arboreal in nature. Even those who knew what humans were.

To Stone Doors, structures were living beings. It is at this that Quil asked of what happened to all the other structures and that why only the doors remain.

The big structure responded in another unusual response. One that Quil said she had a great deal of



difficulty understanding. She told me that it had taken weeks to fully parse the details mentioned, which she had written down during her conversation with the strange being.

What Stone Doors told her was that Time and Chaos ate their people. The wind and rain were like vultures, pecking away at their kin, while Time and Chaos drew the heights of great cyclopean buildings down into the stone over the course of millennia. But the way Stone Doors phrased it made the process seem more predatory than natural erosion.

They also stated that the reason only the doors remain is because of their thresholds. The meetings of two separately defined areas on Agalloch were all marked with doorways. These doorways not only once lead in and out of structures, but also acted to contain, identify, and catalogue the various rifts found upon the island. The smallest rifts were set with wooden doors; the moderately sized ones with stone doors, and the greatest were fashioned with Lodgium doors of colossal size. These rifts, which the doors were magically bound to, entwined the structure's material with that of different states of being.

From the perspective of the structures, this lent them great and undeniable strength and resilience, but from the perspective of a human such as Quil, resulted in a ponderous thought. One more to the ever-growing list of such thoughts, might I add.

"Why?" Quil asked. To everything. Why were the structures built? Why were the rifts there to begin with? Also, who built them?

Before Stone Doors could respond, however, the actual stone door behind them began to slowly swing close. Panicking, the troll-like being stood up quickly and retreated back to the doorframe. Not wanting to miss the chance to pass through it, Quil swiftly followed, being careful not to get crushed by the huge being's feet. Before the door could close, Quil made it through.

The door shut with a grating and a slam, although the loudness was due to the structures size more than the force in which it closed. Quil and Stone Doors were both on the same side, the one opposite from which Quil had discovered big doorway. She was beyond, and further more, the huge troll did not seem to notice. It was facing the door. It opened the door by a crack and peeked outside, seemingly looking for Quil, but shrugged as it saw no one and closed the door once more.

Strangely, though, it did not do anything else. It just stood there, facing the closed door. It was so motionless that as Quil stared, she pondered if the strange being was truly alive in the same way she was. She was tempted to engage the troll in conversation once more, but remembered the rage of the wood troll and decided to leave the huge creature alone. She had acquired many great answers, but the hydra of curiosity was now flourishing within Quil's very essence.

She proceeded inward, towards the centre of the island, searching for even more answers, but also a particular find. She was now on a quest to meet a lodgium

door troll. One that may give her insight into the deepest, and most ancient, secrets of Agalloch.

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Quil, being a very thorough researcher, mapped all the areas that she had explored so far (See Figure 5). As she travelled more inland, she estimated that she was about halfway to the centre of the island. Agalloch was not a huge isle, but its dense forests soon gave way to hillocks, which themselves gave way to a few mountains and short, yet deep, canyons. It was in one of these canyons that Quil found her objective.



Figure 5. Quil made her landing on the south-west beach and proceeded north-eastward, towards the centre of the island.

Looking over the edge of the cliff above the canyon, she spied below her a door that could more appropriately be called a massive gate. Shining with a metallic orange, this gate was undoubtedly made from lodgium, Quil had told me. She recounted seeing the stuff in devices and contraptions of all kinds, yet admitted that she had never seen so much in once place. And in the form of a titanic, ornate gate as well. Lodgium was a metal known for its strength, but also its ability to transfer energy.

As I remembered her regaling me with this tale of Agalloch, I also remembered my innate fascination with Quil's descriptions of organic materials, including flora and

fauna. Every member of the GLRU, from novice to Loremaster, must chose a duality to focus their work upon. Many outside the Global Lore Researcher's Union have trouble understanding the concept of dualities, therefore, if this tome finds its way to those outside the union, I shall elaborate.

A duality, by definition, pertains to subjects of contrasting nature that coincide, or otherwise exist together in some capacity. Every member who enters the GLRU must chose two different subjects to study, with the aim of becoming a master of both in equal measure.

Quil's duality was to focus upon natural science and engineering. She inspired me to take up natural science as half of my duality, but in place of engineering I focused upon visual artistry.

Being an adept researcher of some renown on her native isle of Gainsborough, in the western waters of the South Peleca Sea, Quil had come to Agalloch with sufficient knowledge to attempt a visual dissection of this strange lodgium door. Even at a distance, she saw that the design of this door lent itself to being opened vertically, rather than horizontally like the wood and stone doors.

Quil leaned over the edge a bit more, trying to get a better view, when the boulder that she was leaning on suddenly gave way, rolling off the side of the cliff. She jumped back, away from the edge, but the sudden shift of the boulder had caused the stones beneath her feet to separate, leaving her with nowhere to stand.

Among many stones, Quil fell downwards, into the depths of the canyon. Rushing up to meet her, along with the canyon floor, was the shining orange gate. Near the top of the gate, though, she spied the exposed roots of some long-buried tree. In desperation, she reached out and grabbed them. As the roots took her weight, they were ripped from the earthy pocket in the cliff, but did a great deal to slow Quil's downward momentum. Luckily, she was only about a meter from the top of the lodgium gate. As the roots were torn free from the cliff, she fell onto the gate with a thud.

Quil told me that it was one of the scariest moments in her entire life. She said that she would never forget the sensation of plummeting towards her doom. Briefly, I remembered her going off on a tangent about the species of plant that the heroic roots had belonged to, but it was quite dull and I shall spare you an in-depth botanical lecture...for now.

As the researcher stood upon the top of the gate, she said that it felt warm. She also heard a humming, as if there was an energetic current nearby. As she examined the top of the huge door, she peered cautiously over the side and noted that she was still quite high up. Though, from this height, the fall would more likely result in injury than death, but that was still a fate that she said she wanted desperately to avoid.

She then peered over the other side, the 'inside' of the gate, so to speak. On this side she spied a most curious sight. One that she had expected, in a colossal troll-like being, but accompanied by such a strange companion that she claimed that she could barely wrap her mind around what she had witnessed. After spotting such a queer sight, she claimed that it gave her nightmares for years to come. Ones plagued by a primordial hunger the likes of which man, troll, or otherwise would likely never fully fathom.

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Quil stared down at the hungry presence plaguing the colossal, orange furred troll. Its integument was as lustrous as the metal of the lodgium gate. Though, a dark fog surrounded its body in places, seemingly stuck to them. The troll, who probably identified itself as a lodgium door, was groaning in fear, agony, or both.

It was swaying back and forth, in a daze. For the dark fog was doing something. Though, as Quil inspected it more, she realized that this was no cloud of fog, but a tremendous amount of filaments of various thicknesses. These monochromatic gray filaments were reaching in from the inside of the lodgium gate, though nothing was entering it from the other side. The door was not even open.

Near her, on top of the gate, she noticed patches of bluish rust upon the metal surface. Quil remarked on how strange she found that, as lodgium was widely known to be virtually immune to oxidization. She poked and prodded at one of the blue rust spots briefly, but was shocked to find that they reacted to her harassment. When touched, each spot would change shape. Either becoming longer, thinner, wider, or any measure of transformation, though they stayed relatively the same size. They also gave off small puffs of violet smoke that burst into many tiny monochromatic gray filaments that dissipated into the wind almost instantly.

While making observations, she realized that she was possibly in danger. Academic curiosity often blinded her to threats, she had admitted to me on multiple occasions. She said that she thought then of getting the huge being's attention, but realized that it would likely not amount to much, considering how distracted they seemed to be. Instead, Quil resolved to try and assist the huge troll.

She dug into her pack and pulled out a small knife. She prodded a blue spot of rust, forcing it to eject a cloud of smoke. As the small cloud puffed out of existence, and produced the filaments, Quil slashed with her knife. Her minute, yet sharp, steel blade cut through the wispy filaments with ease before they disappeared of their own accord, as before.

She looked over the edge at the troll being assailed by the greater filaments and pondered if they had the same properties as the smaller ones. She assumed the blue rust spots and greater filaments were connected, as they both displayed similar qualities, though she could not rule out that they could be unrelated.

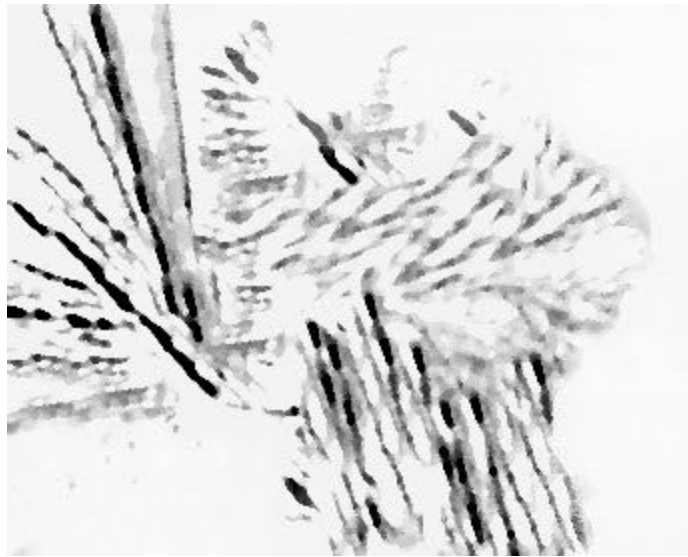


Figure 6. An artistic impression of the entropic filaments.

But, she told me that she had to try. The troll was growing more and more frantic, groaning louder and louder. From her pack, she pulled out a package containing sharp, rigid leaves. These were leaves from the ghost blade plant, Quil told me. She explained that they grew in abundance on her home island of Gainsborough and that they were used as utensils for various crafts, but were versatile enough to warrant carrying a package of them at all times.

Quil then proceeded to tell me of how she used the leaves of the ghost blade plant as kunai and/or shuriken stand-ins while fully re-enacting the scene before myself and a crowd of other children listening to her tale. We were all quite excited to see her jumping about, throwing twigs as various individuals' light heartedly. But, in looking back upon it now, I realized she told this part of her story in this manner in order to obscure the abject horror of the situation she encountered upon the isle of Agalloch that day.

For when she threw the slicing leaves at the greater filaments harassing the troll, they were severed quickly and cleanly, but immediately reacted violently and entropically. A few great strands being severed was enough to force all of them to release the orange troll, but instead of retreating back into the rift that it was undoubtedly coming through, it exploded.

Chaotically, it erupted with such a great deal of force that its individual filaments became missiles, which also disintegrated violently upon impacting any surface. Luckily, Quil was atop the frame of the door, which completely blocked the eruption's directness to her. Though, the surroundings were not so fortunate.

The stone of the canyon walls cracked and pieces fell away. The filaments and explosions eviscerated the troll. Its entire body was dissected in a manner not unlike what would occur if a block of cheese were pressed through a loom of razor sharp

wires. After being eviscerated, the explosions pummeled the viscera into dust and scorched it to ash, leaving very near to no trace of the troll, save a few bloody stains among the rubble of the canyon.

The sides of the gate were equally destroyed, which left the top as a free-floating bar. Though, there was no opportunity for it to drop from the lack of support, as the chaotic explosion from beneath propelled it upwards. Upwards with great velocity, as well, Quil was sure to stress. It rocketed her up into the sky, the force pressing her body against the orange metal, until she was literally among the clouds.

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Quil pressed her body against the metal bar while reaching into her backpack. From it, she pulled out a rolled up leaf. This leaf was from a sub-species of palm tree known as tropius trees.

At this part in Quil's telling of the tale to the village youths, she went into great detail about the nature and evolutionary path of the tropius trees. I shall spare you the majority of the specific facts in favour of a general overview.

Tropius trees are a sub-species of palm found only on Quil's home island of Gainsborough, in the far west waters of Okeanós. They were renowned for being able to grow incredibly tall. Able to reach the stature of large hills and small mountains while remaining relatively thin. Their height allowed them to stretch past all other trees competing for sunlight, which granted them a massive advantage, but oftentimes nature does not know when to say when. This thrust the tropius trees into the sky, where their leaves were subjected to the harshest of winds. Though, these trees had also evolved a thicker, waxy coating upon their leaves. Usually, this waxy coating, called cuticles, were meant to allow plants to retain water in their leaves, but in overabundance they also acted as structural reinforcement.

So, Quil took the rolled up tropius leaf out of her pack and, after a deep breath, released the lodgium bar. She was thrown into the sky violently, but managed to retain her wits. When she was sufficiently clear of her former vehicle, she unfurled the tropius leaf, which caught the wind magnificently and caused the adept to start gliding instead of falling. She surveyed her surroundings and then realized just how far she had been sent. Behind her, she spied the canyon that once held the lodgium gate. But below her she saw only blue waves. She had been rocketed off the island of Agalloch, but luckily in a promising direction. Ahead of her, she saw the ship which had brought her to the island, still resting just offshore of the southwestern beach.

She was headed towards her way off the island, but she was gliding quite slowly, she recounted to me. While doing so, she said that she had ample time to

contemplate her experiences upon the island of Agalloch. These thoughts, I shall relay to you, but with my own findings that took place years after Quil's adventures upon this strange isle. For I once had an opportunity to examine a specimen from that odd isle in my own adeptness, many years ago.

As a merchant ship was passing by Agalloch, a gull carrying a strange bone fragment soared above the vessel at sea. Though, for some reason, the gull careened into the mast, causing it to fall hard onto the deck, which killed the poor bird. In its talons was a chunk of bone, likely something that it was planning to add as a structural component to its nest, though the sailors who witnessed the gull's accident claimed that it was like no other bone that they had ever seen. The captain, stirred by the commotion, examined the bone himself and decided to keep it, in case it was valuable for some esoteric reason.

And, as it turned out, it was. Upon docking at their destination, the captain had struck up a conversation with an erudite of the GLRU, who immediately wished to study it, for they were one who made the study of animals one of their key focuses as a researcher.

When he brought the specimen to his local GLRU chapter for study, myself and a few others were present. The normal method of identifying the nature of a biological specimen was to see what particle traces were left upon it.

Particle traces are a topic that one could lecture upon for days on end. I have unfortunately been an attendee at various seminars and lectures about this subject that stretched on far too long to be worth staying put for. Therefore, I shall inform you of the basics, if you are not already familiar with this concept. If you are an expert in such matters, you may skip the next paragraph. Here, you'll see the GLRU crest depicting a coat of arms and the words (from left to right) "Sky", "Stone", and "Sea" in ancient Koivan, the language of our oldest histories.



Figure 7. Our lovely crest

There are three sources for all known matter and energy upon Okeanós. The Sky, which gives aethereal particles. The Sea which gives oceanic particles. And the Stones that give geological particles. By rubbing a specific combination of chemicals upon any biological specimen, it will give off one of three shades of blue. For aetherial particles, cyan; for oceanic particles, cerulean; and for geological particles, a deep navy.

But, when this queer bone shard was swabbed, it gave off no such particles. Putting the pieces of the puzzle together in my mind, I theorized that this old fragment was from one of the trolls of Agalloch that Quil had told me about in my youth, but one warped and twisted by an unknown force.

Nothing had ever failed the particle test so conclusively. Nothing we did could help us identify the nature of this bone. We had, apparently, discovered a new source. Or possibly something that removes the source particles from others. With great care, we tucked the specimen away, for a time when we knew more of this strange phenomenon.

Though, with resolve, I set out to learn more. Quil's time on Agalloch ended as she glided down to her transport and sailed off back into the west, and her experience with that hungry, eroding force assailing the trolls ceased as well. Her interests pertained to the many structures and flora of the world, therefore she never returned to Agalloch to examine the destructive force. I initially intended to head there after examining the odd fragment, but as I was sorting out a few matters before leaving, I heard a whisper of another strange occurrence. One of such rarity, that a trip to Agalloch must surely wait.

I heard of one of the rarely glimpsed cities of the sky, home to the rarest of all source originated life, aetherial particles, had descended below the clouds and was now hovering near to a mountain in the far northwestern reaches of the planet. So, instead of heading to Agalloch, I travelled in the opposite direction, towards a fabled city of the sky. This I shall tell you of in the coming chapter, which will be one dedicated to The Sky and the various wonders it holds.

For The Sky was the first of the sources, and the origin of all life, if our oldest known theories are correct. Maybe those who dwell in a world above our own know more by observing us from up high, like a scholar peering at a fungus with a magnifying glass. For the clouds obscure many secrets. Not just flying cities and foreign cultures, but magnificent winged beasts, the most powerful of winds, and a sublime light undeniable to all who witness it.