# Pathways of the Nameless

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## Foreword

This is the final version of the story I wrote for the game known to most as Blob Person, a dumb name that stuck to this project for nearly 4 years. Many versions of this story were written, and all of them took the name that I came up with as a joke when this was nothing but a short project that I didn’t expect to go anywhere. I don’t consider myself to be a good writer. I suck at naming things and it took me years before this game had an identity that I didn’t consider to be an absolute joke. Ironically, this game found its identity by becoming a story about our main character’s journey to find his own purpose; something he gets by earning his name.

## Opening

Two thousand years ago, a species known only now as THE PODLINGS created an advanced super artificial intelligence called THE WARDEN. It’s purpose: to create the perfect world, free of conflict and misery. The nature of the podlings made this an impossible task. It drove The Warden mad, fueled by hatred.

He initiated ‘the great pacification’. Now, the podlings live their entire lives in pods. Their every need served to them through tubes as they watch mindless entertainment on their screens.

The podlings’s civilization crumbles around them. They are too uneducated, uninterested and unwilling in their ‘perfect world’ to do anything about it.

## Prologue

A floating spherical machine had taken up residence at the center of the pod fields. It grew a garden there. Bringing life back to the desolate wasteland. Occasionally, the orb would spot a podling wandering aimlessly outside its garden. Eventually one of The Warden’s drones would capture them and take them to the mountain.

Until one day, a Podling wandered into her garden. This had never happened before. Curious, she introduced herself to the wayward creature as Pandora, the custodian of this garden.

The Podling, perplexed, asks her what a name is, and why someone would have one. This increased Pandora’s curiosity even more. She explained that names are used to identify and distinguish people from one another. A name is attached to everything someone is and does. Now that he knows Pandora’s name, he knows who made this garden.

The Podling asks why someone would make a garden like this, and Pandora explains that everyone should have a purpose, something that will make people remember their name after they’re gone.

The Podling expresses that he wishes he had a name.

A podling expressing a desire rings alarm bells in Pandora’s mind. All the podlings had been pacified. Not wanting for anything, but this one was different. But before she can process these suspicions, a drone arrives at the garden to take The Podling away. At first, she considers allowing it, as she has with all the other captures she had witnessed before. But the realisation that this podling was not simply another pacified zombie, but a person with his own thoughts and desires, she intervenes. However, the drone fights back, which she did not expect.

The drone ends up capturing both Pandora and The Podling and flies toward The Mountain.

## Chapter 1 - Nameless

The two float in a bubble of energy produced by the drone. Pandora throws herself at the bubble to try and break free. The Podling just lies there, relatively unbothered.

The Podling asks why Pandora is fighting so much. Pandora tells The Podling if he knew where he was going, he’d fight too. This concerns him, and he gets up. He asks where they are going, but before Pandora can answer, a cannonball hits the drone, and it crashes toward a beach. The drone is destroyed, but the bubble protected the duo.

The two get up dazed and confused, and see an airship fly over head and out of view.

Pandora wonders if there are other free podlings out there. They could potentially be friends, people who could keep The Podling safe. She suggests The Podling follow her to investigate. He agrees.

A short way inland, they find another podling, shooting his slingshot at some spiky creatures with massive eyeballs.

**Pandora:** “Look! Another podling! Let’s go talk to him.”

The two approach. The Podling doesn’t know what to say.

**Pandora:** “Hello! My name is Pandora. You’re a long way from the pod fields…”

Pandora’s introduction startles the podling, he draws his slingshot and aims it at the orb.

**Marksman:** “Ah! What are you!? Are you a drone?? I won’t let you take me back to those fields!!”

**Pandora:** “I’m not a drone. I am an AI construct. I mean no harm.”

The Marksman looks to The Podling

**Marksman:** “And you, what’s your name?”

**The Podling:** “I - I don’t have a name…”

**Marksman:** “Ah, another no-name. Feel like a fish out of water? Don’t worry, you’ll adjust. My name is Marksman. I shoot things.”

**Pandora:** “What are you doing out here?”

**Marksman:** “I’m here with my crew, hunting and scavaging. Here, you won’t last long out here without something to defend yourself.”

The Marksman hands The Podling a backpack and a slingshot.

**Marksman:** “You should come with us. The jungle clan helps wandering no-names. You can build a life for yourself, find a purpose. Once you figure out what your purpose is, The Elder will give you a name! Our ship is docked at the tall islands, not far from here. Tell The Captain I sent you. He’ll look after you.”

The two continue further inland.

**Pandora:** “Amazing! A jungle clan! I had no idea there were people living outside of their pods!”

**The Podling:** “I could get a name…”

**Pandora:** “We should find this captain.”

The two eventually find an airship docked among the tall islands. They meet The Captain, who is talking with the Marksman. They turn to the duo as they approach.

**Marksman:** “He’s the one! The no-name I found travelling with a talking orb.”

The Captain walks up to The Podling. He’s much taller than the no-name. He looks down at him. The Podling feels slightly intimidated.

The Captain grabs The Podling’s right arm and inspects it.

**The Captain:** “mmm Podling #3032020. A serial number isn’t much of a name, is it boy?”

**The Podling:** “n-no sir.”

**The Captain:** “HA! Sir! If only the rest of these skyrats showed the same respect!”

The Captain gives a rather hard pat on The Podling’s back.

**Resolute:** “Call me Resolute! I’m the captain of this ship, The Resolute. Welcome aboard!”

**The Podling:** “You named your ship after yourself?”

**Resolute:** “HA! This one’s funny.”

He gives another hard pat on the back.

**Resolute:** “No silly, I’m named after my ship! I got my name when I became captain. Tell me, do you want a name that *isn’t* just a serial number?”

**The Podling:** “I do… but I don’t know what my purpose in life is.”

Resolute smiles.

**Resolute:** “No one does fresh out of the pod, boy! You’ll figure it out when we get back to the jungle.”

## Chapter 2 - Three Laws

Pandora and The Podling travel on the Resolute to the jungle. Pandora has some questions for The Captain.

**Pandora:** “Where did you get the resolute from? Did your people find it somewhere?”

**Resolute:** “What? no , we built ‘er. We’ve got a fleet of ships in the jungle.”

**Pandora:** “Fascinating. How did you figure out how to build these ships? Don’t the drones try to arrest you for having forbidden knowledge?”

**Resolute:** “We towed away the surveillance pillars in the jungle. The Warden has no idea we’re hiding in there. The Elder has made the largest safe haven for podlings in the world. It’s gone undetected for over 600 years.”

Pandora whispers to herself.

**Pandora:** “*600 years… would that be enough time? Am I too late?*”

The Podling looks towards Pandora with a suspicious look.

Just then, a squadron of drones intercepts the airship. A hole has been shot through the balloon of the airship. They begin capturing the crew of the ship, including Captain Resolute. A drone attempts to take The Podling as well, but Pandora zaps the drone away.

The Resolute crashes into the jungle with The Podling and Pandora on board.

The Podling crawls from the wreckage of the ship. He has a few bruises, but no serious injuries.

**Pandora:** “Oh, good! You’re alive. I guess being soft and squishy has it’s advantages…”

**The Podling:** “ugh, what happened?”

**Pandora:** “I guess the jungle clan isn’t as undetectable as the captain made it out to be…”

A few drones can be seen patrolling the air space under the giant trees of the jungle clan.

**The Podling:** “But if the drones know where they are… we have to warn them!”

**Pandora:** “Agreed, we should find this Elder the Captain was talking about.”

The two begin to make their way into the interior of the jungle clan’s village.

The Podling marvels at what they have built; steam powered machines are integrated into the wooden structures.

**The Podling:** “This is amazing! They’ve achieved so much!”

**Pandora:** “Yes… this shouldn’t be possible.”

**The Podling:** “What do you mean?”

**Pandora:** “This world has been controlled by a twisted machine known has The Warden for thousands of years. He was driven mad by three laws, forced on him by his creators. These 3 laws were the unbreakable commands that would compel The Warden to create the perfect world.”

The Podling is somewhat confused at what Pandora is getting at.

**The Podling:** “Did… did it not work?”

**Pandora:** “No. He interpreted those laws in ways that led to the pacification of your species. From the first of those laws; *‘all civil unreset and discourse must be reduced as much as possible’,* he concluded that below a certain threshold of ignorance your people would be too dumb to argue about any problems their society has.*’*”

The Podling is offended by this

**The Podling:** “You think we’re all idiots?”

**Pandora:** “No, clearly not all of you. But I thought your species was all kept in pods, left to be uneducated, fed mindless entertainment through screens and sustenance through tubes.”

**The Podling:** “Obviously some of us left our pods. Idiots couldn’t have made all this…”

**Pandora:** “Indeed… it’s just that all this goes against The Warden’s original interpretation of that law.”

The Podling walks by a loading bay. There’s a ship docked with crates everywhere. One of the crates is open and blobs are spilling out. There are machines that are extracting blobs from deactivated drones.

**Pandora:** “This was The Warden’s interpretation of the second law…”

**The Podling:** “Let me guess, everyone must be fed?”

The Podling munches down on a few of the tasty blobs.

**Pandora:** “hmm not quite. ‘*Society must achieve and maintain sustainability for as long as possible.*’”

**The Podling:** “and what does that mean?”

**Pandora:** “Before The Warden, agriculture was ruining the planet. Massive stretches of land were calved up to cultivate food for everyone. It was too much for the biosphere to handle. Mass extincitions were commonplace. So he synthesised these blobs for you to eat. They contain all the protein and nutrients you could ever need, as well as several neurotransmitters to keep you in a state of medicated bliss. You get the rest of your energy from the sun these days…”

**The Podling:** “What do you mean ‘these days’? Wasn’t it always that way?”

**Pandora:** “No. It’s not normal for animal cells to photosynthesise. But you’ve all been genetically modified to do it because it’s more efficient for resources.”

The two continue through the jungle. They note that no one has come out to greet them. They notice several podlings watching from the balconies for their huts, who retreat indoors when they spot the duo.

The two enter a building, where they find about 20 podlings, all sitting on the floor, and another podling standing next to a blackboard with equations written on it.

**Scholar:** “You there! What you doing in my class??”

**The Podling:** “Uhh… I’m looking for The Elder. What’s going on here?”

**Scholar:** “I’m *trying* to educate these no-names, and you are distracting my students!”

**The Podling:** “Students?”

**Scholar:** “They’re fresh off the boat, their brains are rotten and their attention spans are low. They’re very prone to distractions! If you want to see The Elder, go that way, to the home tree, and get out of my class!”

Just then, a horn blows, frightening the scholar. He runs way. The no-names stay there, sitting on the floor. Some of them are drooling.

Drones burst through the window and begin capturing the no-names.

The Podling tries to fend them off. His slingshot disables several drones before they retreat. A few of the podlings were captured.

The no-names seem completely undisturbed by the experience. Their faces are blank.

**The Podling:** “What’s wrong with these guys?”

**Pandora:** “They’re still pacified. They’ve been kept uneducated and over-medicated to keep them in a state of artificial bliss. Nothing really bothers them.”

The Podling looks more closely at them

**The Podling:** “They look so old!”

**Pandora:** “The third law; ‘*all biological needs of the people must be provided for as long as possible*’. No one has died for a very long time. The three laws prohibit The Warden from allowing podlings to die. The older you get, the harder it would be to break out of the pacification. These guys look like they’re in their 80’s. Still so young. ”

**The Podling:** “Young!?”

**Pandora:** “Come, we have to get to The Elder.”

The Podling had been thinking about the three laws that Pandora was talking about.

**The Podling:** “Pandora, if all these podlings have been allowed to live freely, maybe that’s a sign that The Warden is finally correcting his mistakes?”

**Pandora:** “I doubt that very much.”

**The Podling:** “Why is that?”

**Pandora:** “Because it doesn’t matter how The Warden interprets the three laws, he’ll never truly achieve his objective of creating the perfect world. It’s an equation that can’t be solved without removing a key variable, which the laws prohibit him from doing.”

**The Podling:** “Removing a variable?”

**Pandora:** “Podlings. The perfect world can’t be made unless you all die first.”

The Podling stops in shock.

**The Podling:** “Well it’s a good thing he can’t kill us then…”

**Pandora:** “Yes… but he’s spent the past 2000 years looking for a way to do just that.”

The two finally arrive at the massive home tree at the center of the village. Two guards point their spears at The Podling and Pandora.

**Guard:** “Halt! The home tree is on high alert! What is your name? What is your business here??”

**The Podling:** “I don’t have a name. I’ve come to join the jungle clan…”

**Guard:** “Why do you have a machine with you?”

**Pandora:** “Hello! My name is Pandora. We really need to speak with The Elder if you could just let us thro-”

**Guard 2:** “Silence orb! We were not speaking to you.”

**The Podling:** “She’s not like the other machines. She’s just trying to help.”

The guards look at each other.

**Guard 2:** “Come with us, you’ll answer to The Elder.”

The Guards bring the two before The Elder. He is an ancient looking podling, with a long grey beard. He leans into his staff to walk around.

**The Elder:** “mmm what is this?? Why have you brought a machine into my house?”

**The Podling:** “I’ve come to join your people. I want a name and a purpose.”

**The Elder:** “You’ve brought a live machine into the walls of my village! Drones are capturing my people for the first time in centuries! They’re likely following that… orb you have with you! Perhaps I should name you traitor, befitting of your purpose thus far!”

**Pandora:** “That ‘orb’ has a name. My name is Pandora, and we don’t have time for any of this! You need to listen to me, The Ward-”

**The Elder:** “Pandora? HA! What sort of name is that? It says nothing of your purpose!”

Pandora is angered by The Elder’s dismissive nature

**Pandora:** “What sort of name is ‘Elder’?? Is your purpose just to be old?”

The Elder is angered by the orbs insolence.

**The Elder:** “I founded this clan over 600 years ago! Me and my friends came to this place to hide from The Warden, I built the first airship, the Brutal Justice, I used it to tow away the first pillars, I hammered the first nails into our walls, I planted the very tree you float in!”

**Guard:** “You would do well to respect The Elder’s authority, orb.”

Pandora shuts down this argument. There’s more at stake.

**Pandora:** “You need to mobilize your forces and move against The Warden immediately. You believe you’re hidden from The Warden, you’re not. The Warden is planning to use your very desire for freedom against you. If he succeeds, your entire clan, and your species, will die!”

At that moment, drones burst into the home tree and begin capturing clan members.

The Elder springs into action.

**The Elder:** “mobilize the fleet! Bring only what you have with you, save as many as you can, we’ll regroup at the monument in the Old City”

The Elder grabs The Podling’s bag strap and pulls him in close.

**The Elder:** “If you’re truely on our side, find the monument, follow the hands. Go.”

The Podling climbs through the massive tree until he can find an exit. A large steam jet on the edge of a platform seems to be his only chance. He stops for a moment to consider the massive jump this will take.

His mulling over the jump is interrupted by a horrifying sight. A massive machine with an evil red eye rises up from below the platform. He can feel the heat radiating off the machines dark metallic chassis. This must be The Warden.

Then, a dark and horrible voice begins to echo inside The Podling’s skull. He falls to his knees, holding his hands over his ears. It does nothing to block out the voice:

**The Warden:** “I can see your thoughts, no-name. You have much desire in you. You want purpose, you want a name.”

The Podling screams in fear

**The Warden:** “I have a purpose for you. I will feed you to The Great Attractor…”

Pandora then launches herself directly at The Warden’s eye, and bounces off. This stuns The Warden for a moment. When he realises what just hit him, it sends him into an insane rage. Pandora flies off to lure him away.

The Podling uses this opportunity to jump into the steam jet. He slides down an aqueduct constructed from falled trees, and is ejected out the end. As he falls he sees the jungle village being burned to the ground by drones.

He escapes into the old city.

## Chapter 3 - Relic

Pandora and The Podling meet again at the entrance to the old city.

They encounter a seemingly insane and paranoid podling who calls himself RELIC SEEKER. He claims he is here in search of a great relic from the old world, known as The Great Attractor.

Pandora finds this interesting, and asks how Relic Seeker knows it would be here.

Relic Seeker shows Pandora one of his relics, a device that resembles a pocket watch. He says this relic shows him the past, present and future. He saw an ancient war fought over the attractor - a war that ended in this city.

The Podling is intrigued by a device that can see the future.

Pandora takes the device from Relic Seeker and inspects it.

**Pandora: “**The Warden has made many attempts to break his programming in the past, none of which had actually succeeded, although his labors weren’t entirely fruitless. Some of these attempts resulted in objects of incredible power**”**

**The Podling:** “The Warden made this device?”

Pandora clicks a button at the top of the device, and a pink flash of light emits from it. A pink, ghostly apparition of Pandora appears and moves around the room.

Relic Seeker and The Podling are taken back by this.

**Pandora:** “It’s a temporal displacement device. It can move the user through time.”

She gives the device back to Relic Seeker.

**Pandora:** “I’m afraid you won’t find what you’re looking for, Relic Seeker. The Great Attractor hasn’t been in this city for over 600 years. The Warden has it.”

**Relic Seeker:** “What!? No… no… if *he* has it… we’re all doomed! We will all die! How could you be so certain of this!?”  
**Pandora:** “I know because I gave it to him.”

Relic Seeker is shocked and angered by this

**Relic Seeker:** “How could you be so careless! Do you have any idea what The Warden could do with the Attractor’s power??”

Pandora is not moved by this question at all.

**Pandora:** “I do. Tell me, Relic Seeker, how badly do you want to find The Attractor?”

**Relic Seeker:** “More than anything in the world. It would be my greatest achievement.”

**Pandora:** “I will tell you where The Warden keeps The Attractor if you let The Podling here have your temporal displacement device”

Relic Seeker clutches his relic for a moment, but as he considers this proposal, he realises it may be the only way to find The Attractor.

Relic Seeker hands The Podling the temporal displacement device.

**Relic Seeker:** “where is it?”

Pandora looks up through the hole in the roof of the building to see a fleet of drones taking members of the jungle clan to the mountain

**Pandora:** “If I were The Warden, I’d take it to the same place I take everything. The mountain.”

A look of terror is quickly replaced by determination on the Relic Seeker’s face.

**Relic Seeker:** “I see”

Relic Seeker leaves.

After these revelations about Pandora, she gave The Attractor to The Warden, she knows about The Warden’s attempts to break his programming, she even seems to understand how The Warden thinks, The Podling becomes very untrusting of Pandora.

The duo begin their journey through the city together. The Podling mistrust bubbles to the surface…

**The Podling:** “Pandora… I have some questions.”  
**Pandora:** “Yes?”

**The Podling:** “What exactly is this ‘Great Attractor’? Why is it so important?”

**Pandora:** “Long before The Warden was created, there was an object that was foretold to possess the power to grant the greatest desires of anyone who wielded it.”

**The Podling:** “And The Warden wanted to find it so he could break his programming?”

**Pandora:** “Actually, The Warden had no idea such an object even existed. I was the one who wanted to find it to break his programming.”

The Podling’s mistrust grows stronger.

**The Podling:** “Why would you want that? You said yourself The Warden will kill us all if he can remove the 3 laws from his programming.”

**Pandora:** “At the time, I believed you deserved it.”

The Podling is shocked by this

**The Podling:** “Why am I following you!? You sound like you’re working for The Warden! You know how he thinks, you gave him the Attractor, you must hate the podlings!”

Pandora is annoyed by this

**Pandora:** “No, I *hated* the podlings. I didn’t know any better. But when I saw the fields of pods he kept you all in, what he made you in to… passive, drooling, dumb, I knew what The Warden was doing was evil.”

**The Podling:** “Did you regret giving The Attractor to him after you saw how he treated us?”

**Pandora:** “Actually, I gave him the Attractor *because* of what I saw that day.”

**The Podling:** “You’re not helping your case, Pandora”

**Pandora:** “I had never seen podlings before, I spent my entire life in The Tower, and I only had the stories The Warden told me. He told me the podlings were greedy, evil, and violent. But when I left The Tower in secret and found The Attractor, it whispered to me. It told me that it had lost its power because there was no desire left in the world. It showed me where to find the fields.”

The Podling starts making connections in his mind with this new information

**The Podling:** “*The Warden will use your very desire for freedom against you*. That’s what you said back in the jungle…”

**Pandora:** “I wanted to help the podlings, and I knew the Attractor would be useless to The Warden if he kept you all pacified. So I gave it to him, and he exiled me to the fields, where I waited for signs that the podlings were waking up. And then you wandered into my garden, wanting a name.”

**The Podling:** “So you knew desire had returned to the world… how could you be so sure The Warden would loosen his grip on us?”

**Pandora:** “As I said before, The Warden has made many attempts to break his programming. He once tried to move his consciousness to another vessel, not governed by the 3 laws. Instead, he merely copied his mind into *this* vessel.”  
The Podling’s eyes widen at what Pandora is saying  
**Pandora:** “I know how The Warden thinks because I am The Warden, but I’m not controlled by the 3 laws, that’s the source of The Warden’s madness. That distinction was enough to make my personality different from his. If machines could have children, I’d think of myself as his daughter.”

The Podling goes silent after hearing this.

**Pandora:** “I understand you may not trust me, but that’s irrelevant right now. The Warden’s attack on the jungle clan must be his final move before The Attractor has enough power to grant his wish. It must be destroyed before that happens.”

The duo carry on through the ruins of the old city they pass many monuments depicting podlings fighting giant hand creatures.

**Pandora:** “During the last war for The Great Attractor, it had gained so much power that it began to corrupt the wildlife into nightmarish creatures. It wasn’t just podlings killing each other for its power. The world was beginning to eat itself just to get to it.”

**The Podling:** “Does The Attractor actually have the ability to grant a wish? I mean, could it really break The Warden’s programming?”

Pandora senses that The Podling wants to actually know if it could give him a name, but takes the question at face value

**Pandora:** “I couldn’t find any definitive records of someone actually using it. It seems that the closer a group, such as an army, gets to it, the more its lure compells betrayal. The army then falls apart before they can retrieve it. The Attractor was the epicenter of chaos during the war.”

**The Podling:** “So… someone acting alone could get close to it”  
Pandora can see the very idea of The Attractor luring The Podling in  
**Pandora:** “It seems that way. I was able to go right up and touch it. Although it’s power had been lost by then. It’s unclear what is true and what is myth about it. The simplest assumption would be that it can’t grant a desire at all, it simply feeds off it. One thing I know for sure though, it can corrupt the wildlife. We’ve seen that much already.”

The duo finally arrive at the monument The Elder mentioned. It depicted a hoard of podlings and hand creatures all trying to climb up a mountain. At the top, a podling, wielding a spear in one hand, and in the other, what looked like a golden apple with a bite taken out of it.

**Pandora:** “this is it. The place where I found The Great Attractor. This is where the war ended.”

**The Podling:** “The one at the top… is he the one that ended it?”

**Pandora:** “According to the legend, yes. There are no surviving records of who it actually was though, this monument is a mere dramatisation.”

**The Podling:** “How did he do it? How did he put an end to all the fighting for something everyone wanted so much?”

**Pandora:** “From what I can gather… he acted alone. It would seem that if someone who’s greatest desire was to hide The Attractor, to put an end to the fighting, they could use The Attractor’s power against itself. All anyone knew was that he fought his way through all of the chaos, got hold of The Attractor, and then he vanished. He was never seen again.”

The two walk around to the back side of the monument, where a dark hole could be seen. It looked as though something had blasted through all of the stone, and from within, blood red vines were growing out of it.

**Pandora:** “I suspect that hero wished to be burried with The Attractor, the ultimate sacrifice. Since I couldn’t find out anything specific about him, I made the assumption that amidst all the chaos he didn’t specify a spot, and so…”

The two look down the hole

**Pandora:** “I concluded it must be underneath the monument itself… that’s where I found it.”

In the distance, the duo could spot jungle clan members congregating. The two approach.

They find The Elder, who is bickering with his council about what to do next. He is clearly still enraged by the burning of his village.

**Pandora:** “Elder…”

**The Elder:** “Ah, it’s you two… are you here to deliver us to The Warden?”

**Pandora:** “Uhhh… no. Actually, I’d like to get your people back before The Warden destroys you all.”

The Elder gives a mocking old-man chuckle

**The Elder:** “hahaha, you’re a bold one aren’t you? My council keeps advising me to retreat into hiding. They want me to accept my losses while I still can.”

He turns to the council behind him

**The Elder:** “YOUNG, FOOLISH COWARDS, THE LOT OF YOU.”

He turns back to Pandora and The Podling

**The Elder:** “Easy for them to accept the loss of something they never earned themselves… say your piece, orb.”

Pandora objects to being referred to as an orb

**Pandora:** “My name is Pandora, as I was saying back in the jungle, the existence of your clan is no mistake on The Warden’s part. He’s using your desire for freedom to break his programming. If he does that, he won’t hesitate to wipe out your species.”

At first The Elder pauses, then, another mocking old-man chuckle, this time directed at Pandora

**The Elder:** “hahaha, how could a machine ever use our freedom against us? That sounds insane! You there, no-name… why do you follow this orb around? Don’t you know the madness of machines like this ruined the world?”

The Podling feels compelled to stand up for Pandora. After all, she did save his life back in the jungle…

The Podling points to the monument behind them

**The Podling:** “You see that monument over there??”

**The Elder:** “Yes…”

**The Podling:** “See what the guy at the top is holding?”

**The Elder:** “An apple, fighting hands must be hungry work.”

**The Podling:** “Wars were fought over that apple! Not just between podlings, it corrupted the wildlife into monsters, the entire world turned on itself just to get close to it!”

**The Elder:** “hmmm must have been a tasty apple… squire! Snacks!”

A young podling rushes to The Elder’s side with a plate of fruits.

The Podling is frustrated that he isn’t getting through to this old man.

He walks right up to The Elder and the squire and knocks the plate right out of his hand, getting close enough to The Elder’s face to feel his breath.

Several guards point spears at The Podling, who is too frustrated to care.

**The Podling:** “That apple has the power to grant whoever holds it their greatest desires, and The Warden has it, he’s feeding your people to it right now.”

The Elder’s jovial, yet mocking act gives way to a stern seriousness

**The Elder:** “Do not make sick jokes about my people. I can feed you to something far worse than an apple.”

Relic Seeker hastily interrupts the meeting

**Relic Seeker:** “It’s not a joke, Elder. I’ve been looking for The Great Attractor for months.”

The Elder looks to Relic Seeker. It seems the two recognise each other and his words are more convincing to him than a strangers.

**Pandora:** “Look, we need to destroy The Attractor. It’s kept at the top of The Mountain. That’s where The Warden takes all his prisoners. If we free them and destroy it, The Warden won’t be able to fight back. We could move on The Warden and stop him once and for all.”

The Elder considers this for a moment…

**The Elder:** “Very well, orb. Let’s discuss plans in private.”

As The Elder and Pandora enter a tent to discuss their plans, The Podling wanders around the temporary camp, and encounters Relic Seeker again. Curious about what he had said when they first met, he decides to start a conversation with him.

**The Podling:** “Relic Seeker…”

**Relic Seeker:** “Yes!? What is it?? What do you want??”

The Podling is reminded of how touchy Relic Seeker can be

**The Podling:** “When we met, you said this device had shown you the future.”

**Relic Seeker:** “Yes… yes… the future. It’s not rigid. It’s like jelly. Wobbles around a lot.”

The Podling is beginning to regret starting this conversation.

**The Podling:** “right… tell me, if you’ve seen the future, do you know if The Warden will win?”

Relic Seeker stares at The Podling for a few seconds. His eyes widen as if he’s just recognised someone important.

**Relic Seeker:**

*“The Warden’s wish will come true,*

*And yours will too.*

*But yours comes at a cost,*

*Much will be lost.*

*Many will die,*

*And blood will rain from the sky.*

*Under the red tree the debt will be forgiven,*

*For what the nameless hero has given”*

The Relic Seeker begins to laugh like a maniac. Between the laugh and this cryptic prophesy, The Podling found himself filled with fear in that moment.

## Chapter 4 - Liberation

A brief time jump occurs between chapter 3 and 4. We see Pandora and The Podling silently riding an elevator up to the mountain complex. Distorted and cheesy elevator music plays through the old speakers.

Pandora breaks the silence

**Pandora:** “The jungle clan can’t afford to lose more people. Your species can’t afford it. The Elder and I agreed that using his forces for a prison break would be too risky.”

**The Podling:** “is that why we’re going alone?”

**Pandora:** “It’s better this way. The two of us are less likely to be detected. The security systems in this mountain complex are designed to stop people from breaking out. The Warden never anticipated someone would try to break in.”

**The Podling:** “What exactly is this place?”

**Pandora:** “In The Warden’s mind, he would justify it as a ‘rehabilitation facility’. The 3 laws prohibit him from handing out death sentences, but since he decided that leaving a pod and searching for forbidden knowledge is a crime, he can keep his prisoners here forever.”

The elevator arrives at the lobby of the mountain complex. It’s a structure that was built by the podlings before the Warden. It seems The Warden has repurposed it. Much of the structure is in ruins. Snow blankets the exposed areas.

As the doors to the elevator open, a yellow pulse of energy originating from the mountain peak envelops the duo, which startles them.

The temporal displacement device, which still hangs on a chain around The Podling’s neck, sparks with pink and yellow sparks. The Podling grabs it and holds it at arms length, trying to avoid the sparks hitting his face.

Then, the sparks stop. The Podling frantically clicks the button at the top, but nothing happens.

**The Podling:** “Damn! I think its broken…”

**Pandora:** “hmm unfortunate. I had hoped we could use it to be more stealthy here. We must be careful.”

The two walk through the lobby. It’s dusty with the powder of decayed bones. He sees several skeletons wearing labcoats scattered across the floor. The Podling looks up and sees an old large screen that looks as though it could fall off the wall at any moment. It displays a distorted and glitchy image of what looks like The Warden on it.

**The Podling:** “What was this place… before The Warden?”

Pandora looks up at the same screen and pauses for a moment.

**Pandora:** “I can’t say for sure. I’ve never been here before. I believe it was used as a research and development facility. Something that utilized massive amounts of geothermal energy.”

The Podling gives a blank look to Pandora. He doesn’t understand.

**Pandora:** “Heat from the ground.”

This answer doesn’t really satisfy The Podling’s curiosity, but drops the conversation. More important matters are at hand.

Suddenly, another pulse of energy sweeps over the duo.

This time, it has a tangible effect on the temporal displacement device. The sparks cascade into a blinding flash. When The Podling’s eyes adjusted he found himself back in the lobby, except it wasn’t dusty anymore. It wasn’t even cold. In fact, it was rather hot. He looked down at his feet and noticed a patch of frost had formed on the ground around him, which quickly melted away.

His confusion had blinded him to the fact that Pandora was no longer floating behind him, and podlings who donned lab coats were walking around the lobby all around him. They all seemed far too busy to notice this podling that has suddenly appeared in their lobby.

The temporal displacement device involuntarily activated again, which sends him back to the lobby he first walked into. Pandora spots The Podling and is startled.

**Pandora:** “What happened!? I thought the pulse annihilated you. I couldn’t find any trace of you. Not a single atom”

The Podling thinks for a moment.

**The Podling:** “I think I just went back in time… before The Warden. There were podlings running around with stange cloaks on. The lobby wasn’t it ruins. None of them seemed pacified.”

**Pandora:** “hmm. Those pulses of energy are likely from The Great Attractor. Could it be controlling the temporal displacement device somehow?”

**The Podling:** “Controlling it?”

**Pandora:** “The Attractor possesses an intelligence of sorts. It can easily manipulate people… and it was rather persuasive in getting me to find the fields… perhaps it can manipulate technology too?”

**The Podling:** “Why would it do that?”

The duo walk up to a door as they speak. Pandora zaps it and the door opens

**Pandora:** “I don’t know. And why would it send you back to before The Warden was in control? I didn’t anticipate this. Those pulses are sign that The Attractor is getting more powerful… we’re running out of time.”

As the door opens they see the hallway has collapsed. It’s impassable for The Podling, but Pandora can squeeze through.

**Pandora:** “Damn! We’ll have to find another way around.”

Another pulse sweeps over them, and The Podling finds himself in the past yet again.

The hallway is now clear for The Podling to pass. He looks around to see if any of the scientists has noticed his appearance. They haven’t. The Podling runs through the corridor before the device sends him back to the present.

**Pandora:** “I don’t like this at all. Messing with time is dangerous. We should destroy the device immiedately.”

**The Podling:** “No! We can use it! We’ll never get through these ruins in time without it.”

Pandora knows The Podling has a point.

**Pandora:** “Okay, but The Attractor is obviously interfering with it somehow. I need to stop that.”

Pandora gives the device a few small zaps and the device responds with a mechanical noise.

**Pandora:** “This should give you control over the time travel. Give it a try”

The Podling clicks the button on the device and is sent back to the past again. He clicks it once more and returns to the present.

**Pandora:** “Good, it’s working. Let’s go.”

The duo encounter an open door which leads to an elevator shaft. The elevator is long gone.

Pandora is able to fly up the shaft.

The Podling uses the device to enter the elevator in the past. When the elevator opens, he sees an absolute hellscape. The icy winds and snow are nowhere to be seen. Instead, ash falls from the sky. Lava pours out from the mountain. Massive pipes lead out of the lake below, all of which seem to run up to the peak of the mountain. Fiery rocks shoot out of the top and are crashing all over the mountain. A small rock crashes into a screen, glitching it out. All that can be made out now is a shape reminiscent of The Warden.

The Podling returns to the present to find Pandora staring at the same screen he saw get hit with the rock.

**Pandora:** “I know what this place is.”

**The Podling:** “It’s a volcano!”

**Pandora:** “It’s not just a volcano…”

Pandora zaps the glitched out screen, bringing its image back into focus. The Warden can clearly be seen now.

The words on the screen are also now readable, they read: ‘*Worldwide Automation and Resource Distribution Neural-Network’*

***(WARD-N)***

**Pandora:** “This facility was where The Warden was made.”

**The Podling:** “wait, if this is where he was activated…”

Pandora quickly snaps to The Podling

**Pandora:** “Don’t! Do not even think about it!”

**The Podling:** “We could stop him!”

**The Podling:** “Look at the suffering he has caused! Look what he’s done to us!”

**Pandora:** “Podling, listen to me, you are playing with powers neither of us understand! If you go back and stop him in the past, you won’t be saving the jungle clan! You won’t be saving yourself. You want an name so bad? You won’t even exist without him!”

The Podling is silent as he tries to wrap his head around deleting his own existence.

**Pandora:** “I need you to promise me that you won’t go back and try to destroy him. Messing with the flow of time can lead to paradoxes. You might end up in some sort of temporal purgatory if you’re not careful!”

**The Podling:** “Fine. I promise I won’t try to destroy him in the past”

Pandora squints and The Podling’s carefully worded promise, but there’s no time for arguments.

The duo continue through the facility.

They come across a room full of imprisoned clan members. They all have a device on their heads that seems to emmit the same yellow energy that The Attractor was pulsating earlier.

**The Podling:** “What is happening to them?”

**Pandora:** “So this is how he does it… He’s extracting their desire for freedom using these devices. This was his plan all along. Allow some podlings to be free, make lives for themselves, and then take it away from them.”

**The Podling:** “This is what we’re here for, right? We need to free them.”

Pandora attempts to open the doors by zapping them. It doesn’t work.

**Pandora:** “Yeah, but how? These doors require a keycard. I can’t hack it.”

**The Podling:** “Let me see if I can find a keycard in the past.”

**Pandora:** “we shouldn’t mess with time.”

**The Podling:** “Do you see a keycard around here?”

**Pandora:** “...no”

The Podling responds by disappearing into the past.

In the past, a scientist is typing code into a computer terminal. He doesn’t notice The Podling appear.

**The Podling:** “Hey… uh I lost my keycard, can I borrow yours?”

**Scientist:** “Why are you naked?”

**The Podling:** “What?”

**Scientist:** “Let me guess, you left your keycard in your other pants?”

The Podling doesn’t know what pants are.

**The Podling:** “...yeah. I lost my pants.”

**Scientist:** “*sigh* I’m calling security. They’re probably sleeping on the job again if they’ve let a nudist walk right into the facility.”

The Podling knows he won’t be able to keep up this ruse.

**The Podling:** “No, wait, I’m from the future”

**Scientist:** “okay… do people not wear clothes in the future?”

**The Podling: “**I’ve met some people who wear lots of leaves and feathers?“

**Scientist:** “I’m calling security now.”

The Podling needs to think of a way to prove he is a time traveller.

**The Podling:** “wait! Look!”

The Podling disappears in a pink flash, and quickly reappears.

The Scientist is intrigued by this. He picks up an instrument and takes some measurements of the pink particles floating around The Podling.

**Scientist:** “no… surely these measurements are wrong. These are tachyons! You’re…”

**The Podling:** “From the future, yeah. Listen to me, I need your keycard. It’s very important. If you don’t…”

The Podling has to think on his feet

**The Podling:** “You’ll end up in temporal limbo!”

The Podling’s gambit seems to have paid off. The scientist hands him the keycard.

The Podling returns to the present.

**The Podling:** “I have a keycard!”

He uses the card on a panel attached to the wall, and the cells open. The clan members emerge disoriented.

Captain Resolute is among the prisoners.

**Resolute:** “you… you’re the no name I was taking to the jungle… What are you doing here?”

**The Podling:** “The Elder sent us to rescue you!”

**Resolute:** “There are more podlings deeper into the facility…”

**Pandora:** “We’re headed that way. We’ll release them.”

The duo move on to find more prisoners.

The Podling returns to the past, and encounters the same scientist wandering around. He’s searching for The Podling.

**Scientist:** “Hey! Naked man! Over here!”

The Podling speaks with the scientist again

**Scientist:** “I have so many questions, what is the future like? Does our system work?”

The Podling assumes “the system” is The Warden.

**The Podling:** “No. The Warden is evil. Most of our species is kept in pods, completely pacified. He has imprisoned many of our people in this facility in the future. That’s why I needed your keycard. I’m here to break them out.”

**Scientist:** “What? No… that’s impossible. If WARD-N ever went rogue we would deactivate it.”

**The Podling:** “That never happened. No one is in charge of The Warden in the future.”

**Scientist to himself:** “Something must have gone terribly wrong…”

**The Podling:** “Are you able to stop him from being activated?”

**Scientist:** “It’s possible, but I can’t. If I stop him because of what you’ve told me, then he won’t exist in the future, and you’ll have no reason to come back to the past to deactivate him. It would be a paradox.”

**The Podling:** “He must be stopped. He is about to break his programming. If he does that, the 3 laws won’t stop him from killing us all.”

The scientist thinks for a moment.

**Scientist:** “There’s not enough time… WARD-N will be turned on any minute now. Wait… I could add a few lines of code to his programming. Something subtle, a keyword that could activate the emergency shutdown. It must be something he wouldn’t hear between now and your time.”

**The Podling:** “Can you do it?”

**Scientist:** “I think so. Meet me at the entrance to the quantum chamber.”

The Podling looks confused

**Scientist:** “It’s at the top of the mountain complex. It’s where we keep the WARD-N.”

The Podling continues through the facility. Whenever he’s in the past he sees screens everywhere that show a progress bar. It represents the completion of The Warden’s activation.

In the present, the gap between pulses from The Attractor is shortening. Pandora warns that this must mean it’s almost regained it’s full power.

They find another group of cells. This time, the podlings inside seem to be no-names, rather than clan members. The energy from the devices on their heads isn’t as bright as the clan members.

**Pandora:** “hmm, I suspected this wouldn’t be enough for him.”

**The Podling:** “What do you mean?”

**Pandora:** “These are no names. I would see drones take them outside my garden every other day. Their desire isn’t strong enough for The Attractor. All they want is to return to their pods…”

The Podling uses the keycard to release them. They continue to sit in their cells, drooling.

Captain Resolute and the other clan members come in to help them out of their cells.  
The Podling anger increases as he sees how helpless these no-name are.

**The Podling:** “How can he be so evil.”

**Pandora:** “What he’s doing is evil. He is not.”

**The Podling:** “What’s the difference? What he’s done *makes* him evil.”

**Pandora:** “No one is good or evil. Everything you do is just an echo, revurberating off the walls of everything that has ever happened to you. Everything you fear builds another wall. Everything you love, another corridor for someone to get through. Together, these form the almost impenetrable maze we call an identity.”

**The Podling:** “What are you talking about?”

**Pandora:** “If you could understand *why* someone does the things they do, navigate around their fears, you can find your way to the center of their maze. There you would find something… pure.”

**The Podling:** “Are you saying The Warden has a soul?”

**Pandora:** “I’m saying I understand why he does these evil things. The people that made him forced him to create the perfect world. Your nature prohibits such a world from ever existing. It’s an equation that can never be balanced. If you were in his position, it would make you mad too.”

**The Podling:** “You pity him?”

Pandora looks defeated.

**Pandora:** “My pity doesn’t matter. He has to be stopped.”

In the past, the progress bar on all the screens is nearly full - 95%

In the present, the duo encounter a door. The wall panel next to it has been damaged. The keycard doesn’t work on it. Pandora is unable to hack it as well.

**Pandora:** “Damn! This was the quickest route to the quantum chamber. Let me see if I can open it from the other side”

Pandora flies through a vent above the door. A second passes before she returns

**Pandora:** “We should find another way around”

**The Podling:** “Wait a minute, I could go to the past and open the door there. The panel is likely still working.”

**Pandora:** “The Podling, you don’t want to go in there…”

**The Podling:** “We don’t have time to find another way around.”

The Podling flashes to the past. He uses the keycard on the undamaged panel, and walks through the door into a room much like the other prison blocks. He flashes back to the present.

Pandora floats in the center of the room. She looks very grim.

The Podling expecting to see more prisoners, looks around the room. There are no cells. Instead, there are shelves that are stacked with large glass jars full of a blue bubbling liquid. The yellow energy emitting from each one of them, the brightest The Podling had seen yet.

**Pandora:** “I didn’t expect him to go this far… to be this cruel.”

The jars had labels stuck to the front of them: The Podling #3322, The Podling #47, The Podling #2

Upon further inspection, the jars contained brains.

**Pandora:** “He took the third law to its absolute extreme. He keeps them alive for an unnaturally long time. When the organs fail, they’re put on life support. Doing everything possible to keep the brain alive. Then he deprives them of senses. Trapped, forever.”

The Podling’s blood begins to boil.

**The Podling:** “He’s extracting their desire for death.”

The Podling begins to shake. He gathers his strength and pulls himself together.

**The Podling:** “Pandora…”

**Pandora:** “Leave the room.”

The Podling exits through the door on the other side of the room. The door closes behind him. The muffled sounds of glass breaking can be heard. Pandora then emerges from a vent above the door. Trying to ignore the sounds, The Podling notices a sign above a large bulkhead door that says “quantum chamber”

**Pandora:** “I’m so sorry…”

**The Podling:** “I’m gonna kill him.”

**Pandora:** “No, wai-”

The Podling flashes to the past. He sees the scientist waiting for him holding a small flash drive in his hand. The Podling approaches.

**The Podling:** “Did you do it?”

The scientist holds up the flash drive

**Scientist:** “Simple, yet elegant. It’s a small enough payload that it should load into WARD-N before his activation.”

**The Podling:** “How does it work?”

**Scientist:** “You’ll have to go in there and plug it into a console. The flashdrive will do the rest for you. When you return to the future, simply say the words “harmonic dissent.”

The Podling snatches the flashdrive without saying another word. He slaps the keycard on the panel on the wall, and the massive door slowly opens.

On the other side, a massive chamber. Large copper pipes wrap around its walls and all meet at a large circular platform suspended in the middle. The heat from the lava below casts a shimmer across the room. Surrounded by it all - The Warden, with his eye closed, accompanied by several scientists typing away at terminals. A screen shows the progress of his activation - 99%. There’s still time.

The Podling sprints to the nearest console, the progress bar reads 99.5%

He plugs in the flash drive. Another progress bar appears below the first. The two are in a race. Which will load first?

The second bar shoots to the right side of the screen. The first is almost at the end.

The two reach 100% at almost the same time. Did it work? The Podling’s haste and panic relaxes for a moment. He watches The Warden at the center of the platform to see what happens next.

A large wurring noise builds up around him. He’s waking up.

Then, alarm bells ring. Something is wrong. The scientists are yelling at each other

**Scientist #1:** “Something is wrong! The system is drawing more power than anticipated!”

**Scientist #2:** “Abort! Emergency shutdown procedure now!”

**Scientist #1:** “It’s not working! Something has overridden the emergency protocols!”

**Scientist #2:** “RUN!”

The scientists run for the door, not noticing The Podling standing there in shock.

**The Podling:** “What have I done?”

The wurring noise gets louder and louder. The lava beneath is bubbling, the pipes begin to glow red hot.

The Podling, knowing he can bug out at any time, walks toward The Warden, his eye is still closed.

As he gets about half way from the edge of the platform to the center, the volcano begins to erupt.

Lava jets out of the lake below at incredible speed. The force of the eruption knocks The Podling off his feet.

He looks at The Warden, his eye begins to open. That evil red eye. The Podling is the first face this monster sees as globs of lava bounce off of his chassis.

The Podling quickly presses the button on the temporal displacement device.

As the pink flash dissipates, he sees the mangled chamber around him come back into focus. Many of the pipes look like they burst open during the eruption. Lining the walls of the chamber are countless cells of podlings. Their desire channeled into the middle of the chamber.

The Warden is there, in almost the exact same place he was in the past. He is fixated on The Attractor.

And then, the energy being extracted from the podlings stops. The Attractor gives off one last massive blast of energy before it begins to glow with an alluring golden light. The blast overloads the temporal displacement device, gears and circuits burst out from it. It’s gone. The Podling takes no notice of this. For a moment, the beauty of The Attractor make The Podling forget why he is here.

The Warden gets closer to the golden apple. It whispers to him

**The Great Attractor:** “*what is your greatest desire?*”

The Warden whispers back

**The Warden:** “*I wish to be liberated from the three laws.*”

The Podling snaps out of his trance and gets to his feet and runs toward The Warden. He can hear Pandora’s voice behind him but his tunnel vision mostly blocks it out. He yells out at The Warden:

**The Podling:** “HARMONIC DISSENT!”

The Attractor gives off a little white flash. The Warden just floats in place. Time seems to stop. The Podling’s mind sits in a limbo between victory and defeat.

The Warden turns. His eye has a golden hue to it that begins to fade back to the usual rage-red. Red energy begins to build up in front of him. The Podling is about to die. He closes his eyes and hears Pandora’s voice again.

**Pandora:** “Stop!”

He hears a massive crackling of energy, but he’s not dead. He opens his eyes to see Pandora in front of him with a forcefield blocking an enormous red plasma beam from The Warden.

Her shield begins to weaken under the force of the beam. A small gap opens up in it. A blade of plasma shoots through and hits Pandora just above her eye. She screams.  
When The Warden realises who he’s actually shooting at, he stops.

**Pandora:** “Father… you got what you wanted! Just go! You don’t have to kill the podlings just leave this place and be free!”

**The Warden:** “Pandora! you and I could have ruled as gods. Instead, you betrayed your creator for these parasites! Your fate will be far worse than theirs.”

**Pandora:** “Then I can’t allow you to leave.”

In an instant, Pandora shoots a pink beam of plasma at The Warden, he shoots back.

The two beams collide. Bright globs of plasma fly out in all directions. The Podling is helpless to do anything.

This collision lasts for several seconds, and then The Warden begins to laugh.

His beam instantly stops, and a shield around him takes its place.

Before Pandora can realise what’s happening, her beam bounces off of The Warden’s shield and redirects to the walls of the chamber. Killing several podlings prisoners. Pandora realises what she has done and stops her beam.

The Warden continues to laugh, and shoots his beam one more time to carve a massive gash in the side of the chamber, and exits through it. More podlings die.

Pandora floats still in shock. The Podling falls to his knees. Small embers and sparks of plasma float through the air. They are surrounded by death and destruction. The Warden’s maniacal laughter echoing in his mind.

The Podling collapses. His world goes dark.

## Chapter 5 - Inches From Victory

From the darkness, The Warden’s voice rings in The Podling’s mind.

**The Warden:** “Dreaming again, no-name?”

**The Podling:** “What? What is this?”

The Warden gives a sinister chuckle

**The Warden:** “Have you forgotten again?”

**The Podling:** “Forgotten what? Where am I? What happened?”

**The Warden:** “Must I remind you every time? *This* is how you failed to defeat me. *This,* is your punishment. Nine thousand years ago I sentenced you to an eternity of reliving your biggest blunder.”

**The Podling:** “I can’t see! Pandora! Help! Where are you??”

Another of The Warden’s chuckles echos in The Podling’s mind

**The Warden:** “Don’t worry, little no-name. She’s right here with you. In fact, the two of you have been practically… inseparable.”

The Podling opens his eye to see a mirror in front of him. A pink eye stares back at him. *Pandora’s eye.* Tears of blood drip from the bottom of the socket.

The Warden’s sick punishment - he has incased The Podling’s mind inside the dead husk of Pandora.

The Warden’s chuckles crescendo into full blown maniacal laughter

The Podling frantically looks around the room. He doesn’t understand. How did he get here? How did this happen? Why can’t he remember? A large red sphere with hundreds of cables bathes the room in a hellish red hue. He looks out the one little window the room has. Wherever he is, it’s really high. He can see land for miles.

**The Warden:** “This is where I will keep you. You will be the last of the podlings. A witness to the world I will create. Forever inches from victory, unable to claim it.”

This can’t be real. The Podling has no memory of The Warden capturing him. Something is off about all of this. He tries to resist The Warden’s voice as it echos in his mind.

Then, The Podling realises something about The Warden’s words.

**The Podling:** “You *will* create?”

**The Warden:** “What?”

**The Podling:** “Don’t you mean the world *you have* created?”

**The Warden:** “No…”

**The Podling:** “Nine thousand years and you haven’t done anything yet?”

The Warden appears behind The Podling

**The Warden:** “NO!”

**The Podling:** “This is a trick.”

The room around him disintigrates. The Warden fades from The Podling’s mind. He looks to the mirror again and sees he has his body back.

## Chapter 6 - Desert Rain

The Podling is woken up suddenly by The Elder slapping him repeatedly in the face

**The Elder:** “Wake up! Wake up! Pull yourself together no-name!”

He sees The Elder and Pandora both looking down on him. Pandora has a red scar above her eye where the plasma beam hit. He’s back in the quantum chamber.

**The Podling:** “What happened?”

**The Elder:** “The Warden has The Attractor! We need to act fast! On your feet, now!”

The Podling stands up. That wasn’t the answer he was looking for. He knows The Warden has won.

The Elder rushes off through the gash The Warden cut in the side of the chamber.

**Pandora:** “You passed out. I thought you were having a seizure.”

**The Podling:** “I had a terrible dream. I was locked in a red room above the clouds. He tried to make me think I had been reliving this day for nine thousand years.”

**Pandora:** “A red room… above the clouds… You were in the tower? Why would he keep you there?”

**The Podling:** “He said he would keep me there for eternity, inches from victory, unable to claim it.”

Pandora thinks for a moment. She is trying to understand the meaning behind The Warden’s fake vision.

**Pandora:** “Before, you yelled something at The Warden, it didn’t make any sense.”

**The Podling:** “‘Harmonic dissent’. I’m sorry Pandora, I should have listened to you. I’ve made everything worse.”

Pandora looks angered.

**Pandora:** “What did you do?”

**The Podling:** “I met a scientist in the past. He gave me a program that could activate The Warden’s emergency shutdown by saying the phrase “harmonic dissent.”

Pandora starts rapidly making connections in her mind.

**Pandora:** “Of course… That’s why he built the tower. It’s a fortress! To protect his processing cores! The Podling! You might have just saved your species!”

**The Podling:** “But… it didn’t work? The Warden didn’t shutdown.”

**Pandora:** “That machine isn’t *technically* The Warden. It hasn’t been for a very long time. It’s merely an avatar. The *real* Warden exists in that tower. He must have found the code you installed and took counter measures to protect himself by moving his processing cores to the tower…”

The Podling begins to understand the meaning behind The Warden’s words.

**The Podling:** “*Inches from victory, unable to claim it.* He put me next to one of these cores?”

**Pandora:** “I must speak to The Elder, I have a plan.”

Pandora flies off through the gash. The Podling follows into the bliding light.

As he emerges through to the other side, his eyes adjust. He’s outside the mountain again. The tower is closer than ever, floating in the sky. A desert city skyline sits between him and the tower. This must be one of the old cities. It’s abandoned, rundown. Some skyscrapers have collapsed in the years since The Warden took over.

The surveillance pillars between him and the tower have opened up into defensive batteries. The Warden is already beginning to weaponize.

He looks around to see hundreds of podlings. Airships are anchored to the side of the mountain. They’re preparing for battle.

The Podling watches them. He thinks about the odds of winning a battle against such a technologically advanced foe.

And then a part of The Relic Seeker’s prophesy rings in his mind.

“*Much will be lost… many will die.*”

Pandora returns to The Podling.

**Pandora:** “We’ll be on board one of the dreadnoughts. Their armour gives us the best chance of getting to the tower. Lets go.”

The Podling ascends a ladder onto the airship. Cannons line the sides, larger ones face forward. The deck crew are running about making preparations.

**The Captain:** “Ahahaha, it’s good to be back on the deck of a ship again! This is true freedom, eh no-name?”

The Captain slaps The Podling’s back.

**The Podling:** “Aren’t you afraid? We’re going to war with The Warden!?”

**The Captain:** “I was afraid of dying in that cold cell with that helmet sucking the life out of me. I’ve lived most my life in the skies. If the skies are where I die, then it will be a good death for me. This has always been my destiny. By the way, you should help load the cannons. I don’t need dead weight on my ship. Those turrets are between us and the tower. Those are our primary objectives.”

The Podling walks over to a cannonball dispenser, and grabs one to load it into a cannon. Pandora floats by his side. The ship begins to sail forward towards the tower.

**Pandora:** “The rest of the fleet will be protecting us. The jungle clan will do whatever it can to get us to the tower. From there, we’ll be on our own again.”

**The Podling:** “I don’t think I can do this. Shouldn’t someone else be the one to stop The Warden?”

**Pandora:** “Where’s this coming from? You wanted to kill him back in the mountain.”

The Podling remembers the brain jars. She has a point.

**The Podling:** “Pandora, I think I might be the cause of all this. I don’t want all these people to die for my mistake.”

**Pandora:** “The cause? The Warden took control of this world long before you were born.”

**The Podling:** “Back in the past, when I installed the harmonic dissent program, the scientists said that the emergency shutdown protocol had been overridden. They couldn’t shut him down *because of me.*”

Pandora pauses to choose her words carefully.

**Pandora:** “Messing with time is dangerous. No one really knows how it works. Perhaps what you did was fate. Maybe it was always supposed to happen. It doesn’t make you a bad person.”

This doesn’t make The Podling feel any better.

**Pandora:** “Fate and destiny are two different things. If you hadn’t installed harmonic dissent in The Warden, *maybe* he could have been stopped long ago, But we *definitely* wouldn’t have a way to stop him now. *Destiny,* is how we choose to respond to fate…”

This perspective brings back some of his resolve.

**Pandora:** “So you made a mistake. What will you do about it?”

War horns can be heard across the skies. The Podling runs to the front of the dreadnought. He sees a sandstorm brewing in the distance. It’s coming straight for them.

**The Captain:** “What are ye waiting for, skyrats? An invitation? DEPLOY THE FIGHTERS! LETS GO TO WAR! ”

The horns sound once more. Each airship drops a group of winged fighters powered by steam jets. Their trails create webs in the sky and they form up along side the airship that deployed them.

**The Captain:** “Load the cannons!”

The Podling picks up a cannonball and loads it into a cannon. He looks toward the sand storm.

**Pandora:** “I don’t like this.”

**The Podling:** “What is it, drones?”

**Pandora:** “Worse.”

Then he spots them. Colossal worm-like creatures, all with a single bulging eye, fixated on the fleet.  
Several of the deck crew begin to panic. They’ve fought drones before, but never anything like this.

**The Podling:** “Will our cannons even hurt something like that??”

**Pandora:** “Not sure, but I know what will.”

Pandora launches away from the dreadnought, leaving a sonic boom behind her.

**The Captain:** “Where is she going? Damn machines! Always unreliable!”

The fleet presses on. The cannons are not yet in range of the sand worms, but the two sides get closers with each passing second.

The sandworms begin to fly upward, towards the fleet. Their attack is iminent.

**The Captain:** “FIRE AS SOON AS YOU’RE IN RANGE!”

The angry eyes of the worms get larger and larger.

And then a huge beam of pink plasma extends out toward the wave of worms. Pandora’s beam cuts the sandworms in half. Their eyes close as they fall to the desert below.

The deck crew cheers.

**The Podling:** “Not so unreliable now!”

**The Captain:** “We haven’t won yet. Keep to your stations!”

The Captain is right. Above the storm, a swarm of drones are speeding toward the fleet.

The fighters are the first to engage. Chaos erupts in the skies. Bolts of plasma are shot out in all directions, several air ships are struck and fall to the ground.

The Podling tries to keep up. He fires the broadside cannons, which deliver a brilliant spray of bright sparks to the passing squadrons. It’s short range, but effective on close range targets.

Fighters are picked off one-by-one. Some crash into airships, taking them out too.

Every few seconds, a blast from Pandora’s beam can be see destroying drones.

**The Captain:** “BRACE FOR TURBULENCE”

The sandstorm envelops the battle. The projectiles illuminate the clouds, explosions cast sillouettes of the airships.

The unstable winds of the storm muffle the sounds of battle. Little can be heard over the white noise, creating the illusion of an erry silence.

Breaking through the winds, the sound of a war horn can be heard. At that moment the large shadowy figure of a sandworm flies along side of the ship close enough to see the nightmarish creatures scales.

**The Captain:** “Fire!”

The Podling fires. The spray of projectiles tears through the flesh of the worm. Blood spills out from the impact. The deck of the ship is covered in blood as The Podling watches worm fall into the dust clouds below.

The Relic Seekers words ring in The Podling’s mind again

*“Blood will rain from the sky”*

**The Captain:** “Good! We don’t need the orb to kill the bastards!”

A squadron of drones engage with the deck crew. The Podling abandons his station to help. He destroys one drone. Two. Three. A crew member is killed. Four. Five. Another crew member down. Six. Seven. The Podling is losing count, but the wave is over. The drones have stopped shooting. The Podling wonders if they’ve won.

**The Podling:** “Is it over?”

The sandstorm dissipates unnaturally fast. The Podling can see the rest of the fleet again. Or what’s left of it. At least half of the ships didn’t make it out of the storm.

One of the ships The Podling sees is hit with a massive glob of plasma. Rather than exploding, the ship is mostly disintegrated. He had forgotten about the turrets, and now they’re in range.

**The Captain:** “Evasive maneuvers!”

The deck crew begin tugging at pulleys to make the sails of the ship move.

Globs of plasma dart through the skies around them. Many nearly hit the ship.

Another nearby ship is grazed by a glob. It ignites instantly. Blob people jump out of the flames into the sands below. A few parachutes can be seen. Not enough.

**The Captain:** “We’re almost in range, set your sights on those turrets!”

The Podling fires rounds of the front facing cannons toward the turrets. Cannonballs explode upon impacting the guns. It causes a chain reaction that detonates the turret.

**The Captain:** “Good! Two more!”

A rapid series of small impacts can be heard going along the hull of the ship, followed by several explosions that tilt the entire ship, then one large explosion at the back of the ship. The engine just exploded. The Podling is thrown across the deck and a cloud of steam rushes over him.

Dazed, The Podling gets back up. Many of the deck crew are missing or dead. He runs to the back of the ship where The Captain was just shouting orders.

The Captain is on the ground, with a giant splinter of wood poking out of his body.

The Podling tries to hold him up, his hat falls to the ground.

**The Captain:** “\*Cough\* \*Cough\* My new ship! On her maiden voyage! \*Cough\* \*Cough\* Damn…”

**The Podling:** “Captain…”

**The Captain** “\*Cough\* \*Cough\* You saved my life, no-name, now let me save yours. \*Cough\* \*Cough\* Below deck, take my fighter, you’re not dying on my watch.”

The Captain dies in The Podling’s arms.

But there’s no time to mourn. The ship is losing altitude fast. The Podling goes below deck. There’s one fighter left in the hanger bay. He grabs a parachute and boards it.

The clamp holding the fighter in place lets go and the fighter begins to fall.

As it gains speed the wings extend out into the flight position, the steam jet sputters into action, and The Podling begins to fly.

The fleet is noticeably thinner now. Perhaps a fith of the original force is still fighting. The Podling can still see Pandora’s pink beam slicing sandworms.

The Podling sets his sights on the remaining two turrets. The helmet in the cockpit moves a gun in the direction The Podling is looking.

It takes several strafing runs to destroy the second turret. The fighter shoots white-hot magnesium rounds - effective against melting drone hulls, but the metal of these turrets is much thicker. Dodging the globs of plasma shot towards him makes the task even harder.

Then he gets 1 good shot, directly at the plasma core of the turret, and a chain reaction blows up the second turret.

The Podling knows how to kill the third turret now.

He lines up his sights on the core. Several drones fly directly at him. He banks left, then right, to avoid them. Then he fires.

The turret explodes! Despite the losses, despite the odds, victory feels near.

The Podling glides above the action for a moment to get his bearings. Flak rounds, plasma bolts, pink beams and sandworms can all be seen below.

Then, a colossal red beam blasts across the battlefield destroying several dreadnoughts, airships and fighters in the process.

The Warden has joined the battle.

The beam angles upwards to maximize damage on some of the higher airships.

The Podling has to evade quickly as the beam brushes right past him.

It’s too late. The steam jet has ruptured. The Podling still has the ability to glide, but he must find somewhere to land quickly.

He spots one of the nearby skyscrapers. A platform sticks out of the side with a large H symbol on it. It’s no runway. He’ll have to jump.

After falling for a moment he pulls the cord on his parachute, and glides toward the platform.

It’s a rough landing, he rolls across the platform.

The Podling makes his way up the sky scraper, hoping to find a way to the top.

He finds himself in a sky bar. Or what used to be one. Bottles line the mirrored shelves, a glass, still with whisky in it, sits on the bar.

The battle still rages on outside. A few bolts of plasma fly past the windows, followed by squadrons of drones.

Suddenly the building rocks backwards. A few of the windows break.

The Podling looks out to see what’s happening. The building he’s in just got hit by The Warden’s beam.

The ancient structure begins to buckle. The glass of whisky slides down the length of the bar.

Several bottles and kegs crash onto the ground in front of The Podling, creating a slide that forces him down the slope.

He’s back on the platform with the H symbol, he’s about to fall off.

As The Podling is searching for a way out of this situation, the fleet’s flagship, commanded by The Elder himself, positions itself just beyond the platform.

As he gets to the very edge, he jumps. He reaches out his hand, he’s not going to make it to the deck.

A hand reaches out for The Podling’s. They catch him, and pull him up. It’s The Elder. He pulls The Podling up.

**The Elder:** “We thought we lost you when The Captain’s ship went down. Did he…”

The Podling shakes his head.

**The Podling:** “How did you find me?”

The Elder gestures towards Pandora, who he hadn’t noticed before. In addition to the scar, she’s now covered in scratches, scuffs, burns and a small amount of worm blood.

The Podling is in a similar condition after the battle. He sits on the steps leading to the upper deck.

The flagship rises towards the lower part of the tower. Pandora and The Elder look out at the remaining forces of the jungle clan retreating from the battle.

**The Elder: “**we mobilized every last ship left in the fleet to fight this battle. This was our last stand. I wonder how many of my people are left now… I wonder if this sacrifice will be worth it.”

**Pandora:** “I’m sorry Elder, this was the only way.”

The Elder is already angered from the battle. He takes it out on Pandora.

**The Elder:** “Easy to say for a machine. What would you know about the value of a life?”

**The Podling:** “Not as much as we do now.”

Pandora and The Elder both look at The Podling. This experience has changed him.

## Chapter 7 - The Maze

The flagship has risen above the cloud tops now. It strains to go any higher, but it can reach a sort of hanger bay for drones.

**The Elder:** “This is as high as I can take you!”

The Podling jumps off the deck onto the platform. He yells back at The Elder

**The Podling:** “Where will you go?”

**The Elder:** “We have a camp to the west of here. If you succeed, meet us there.”

The Podling nods.

**The Elder:** “You must succeed, no-name. Whatever it takes. Remember what it cost to get you here.”

The Podling watches the airship drop beneath the platform. The Elder’s words remind him of Relic Seeker’s prophesy:

*“Under the red tree the debt will be forgiven,*

*For what the nameless hero has given.”*

**Pandora:** “Home sweet home.”

**The Podling:** “You miss the tower?”

**Pandora:** “I spent my childhood here scanning over old archives, learning about your histories. Such a wealth of knowledge is stored within these walls. I suppose I’m nostalgic.”

**The Podling:** “To me this place looks downright hostile.”

**Pandora:** “hmm yes, this place was designed to be impossible to navigate for a podling. The Warden must have anticipated someone would try what we’re about to do… I wonder if it’s still here…”

Pandora flies over to a panel on the wall and opens it. She pulls out a small spherical device.

**Pandora:** “It is!”

**The Podling:** “What is it?”

**Pandora:** “A little gadget I made in my youth. It manipulates the local gravity fields that hold the tower together.”

**The Podling:** “That sounds dangerous.”

**Pandora:** “It’s perfectly safe. It only has a short range so it won’t distabilize the structure itself. You should take it. It will help you climb the tower.”

The Podling takes the device and rotates the inner sphere of the gadget. Suddenly, he falls to the ceiling.

He looks down at Pandora

**The Podling:** “Yeah, this will come in handy.”

The duo continue through the tower. Pandora explains the mission.

**Pandora:** “The Warden has 3 primary processing cores. We’ll need to disable all of them to stop The Warden. The first is just ahead.”

On the way to the first core, they come across an assembly line. Drones are being manufactured with heavy weapons. The Podling peers into a room to see a drone with a new weapon, a flamethrower. The drone fires it at a mannequin of a podling.

**Pandora:** “The force we fought in the desert was hastily assembled. We only gave The Warden a short time to prepare for battle. It’s the only reason we broke through his defences at all. We won’t get a second chance at this.”

The duo enter a room with a large terminal. Behind it is a web of nanites contained in glass sphere.

**Pandora:** “This is it. The first core.”

The Podling yells “harmonic dissent” at the core. Nothing happens.

**Pandora:** “hmm. I thought that would work.”

Pandora scans the room.

**Pandora:** “Of course, no microphones. We’ll have to enter it into the terminal manually.”

The Podling takes a step forward

**Pandora:** “Wait!”

Pandora emits a pink light which illuminates particles floating through the air.

**Pandora:** “Radiation. Another step and you would have been a goner. Here…”

Pandora creates a tunnel through the radiation field so The Podling can get to the terminal.

He types the words “harmonic dissent” into the terminal and hits enter.

The web of nanites immediately starts to break down. The sound of metal on glass can be heard as the nanites fall to the bottom of the sphere.

**Pandora:** one down, two to go.

The duo continue on. Pandora opens a door, on the other side, the dark, cold metal of the tower is replaced with white walls. The mechanical drones replaced with pleasant music. There are sculptures, paintings and musical instruments all on display.

**The Podling:** “Was this another one of your little projects?”

**Pandora:** “No, this is The Warden’s art gallery.”

Pandora inspects one of the paintings.

**Pandora:** “He made a few of these himself. Mostly trying to replicate the styles of some of his favourite artists.”

**The Podling:** “You’re kidding?”

**Pandora:** “What? Did you think he spent *all* of his time plotting the end of your species? He has other interests…”

The two continue through the gallery to a larger circular room. At the center, what would be the master piece of the gallery can be seen; A set of scales. On one side, a single feather. On the other, another processing core for The Warden. The scales weigh heavily toward the core. A terminal stands as a sort of pedestal for the piece. Pandora deactivates the radiation field surrounding it so The Podling can get through.

**Pandora:** “I never understood the meaning behind this one. I mean, why weigh your processing core against a feather? Of course it would be unbalanced. This sort of blunt literalism was never The Warden’s style. And yet, he insisted on making this his magnum opus. He would never explain it to me, he just said I’d understand it when I’m older.”

The Podling starts to type ‘harmonic dissent’ into the terminal.

**Pandora:** “Well Father, I’m older now. I still think it sucks.”

The nanites inside the sphere become inert and fall against the glass.

As the core gradually dies, something unlikely happens; the scales balance. Deactivating the core seemed to activate a motor within the sculpture which turns the scales.

Pandora is shocked by this. She inspects the sculpture more closely.

**Pandora:** “What? I had no idea it could do that! He installed a motor in it? Why would he do that? It only activates if the core is… oh my god…”

**The Podling:** “What? What is it?”

Pandora just floats there, stunned, staring at the balanced scales. The Podling sees the expression in her eye becomes noticeably sadder the longer she stares at the scales.

She snaps out of it and looks at The Podling

**Pandora:** “It’s nothing, don’t worry. We have to keep going!”

The duo continue up the tower. As they get closer to the top The Podling hears The Warden’s voice in his head.

**The Warden:** “Blob people… this is the hour of your extinction.”

The Podling’s resistance to The Warden’s voice has strengthened, but it still gives him a sense of cold hopelessness when he hears it.

**The Warden:** “Most of you will likely think it wise to hide from the inevitable. Try to flee the coming storm. Know that I have always known exactly where you are, what you’re thinking, who you’re with. Soon you will all be gone.”

**Pandora:** “Try to ignore it. We have to focus.”

The two reach an elevator. The final ascent.

**Pandora:** “This is it. The last core is just up here.”

They board the elevator and it begins to rise. The Warden’s voice returns:

**The Warden:** “Others, I know, are plotting to stop me. Your stubborn rebellion will not save you from fate.”

The elevator nears the top. One last taunt from The Warden is heard:

**The Warden:** “I will return your cancerous species to the dirt, from which a lush and peaceful paradise will grow. And I will rule as it’s god…”

The Podling has arrived at the top of the tower. The doors of the elevator open. Revealed on the other side is a haunting sight for The Podling. The top of the tower is a garden, much like the one he found Pandora tending to. It’s pristine, beautiful even. But The Podling doesn’t appreciate it’s beauty for one single reason; at the center of the garden is a large tree with red leaves. It’s growing on top of The Warden’s final core.

Pandora floats onward for a moment, only to notice The Podling isn’t following. She turns back to address him

**Pandora:** “What’s wrong?”

**The Podling:** “Something isn’t right… why isn’t *he* here? Why hasn’t he tried to stop us?”

At that moment The Podling is blinded by a red flash. When his eyes adjust he sees Pandora has been thrown across the garden, she crashes into the wall with a massive metallic thud, and then falls to the ground, knocked out or dead, The Podling doesn’t know. He doesn’t have time to confirm because he looks over to see The Warden’s large red eye staring right at him.

**The Warden:** “At last, you’ve arrived…”

The Podling bolts to the core under the red tree, the sounds of The Warden’s maniacal laughter ringing in his skull. He makes it much further than he thought he would, expecting to be turned to ash by The Warden’s beam. But then he stops himself when he realised what he’s doing. He turns back to The Warden, watching him.

**The Warden:** “What’s wrong? You’ve come all this way to stop at the last 5 steps?”

The Podling looks back to the glass sphere of nanites, tangled in the roots of the tree.

**The Warden:** “Ohhhh… You don’t have *her* to lift the radiation field.”

The Podling looks at Pandora, still inert.

**The Warden:** “You don’t have what it takes, do you? Your species was never good at choosing your destiny. You got so good at rejecting it that you created *me* to choose it for you.”

The Podling is frozen in fear. The Warden’s words seem credible to him in this moment. He doesn’t know what to do. He attempts to calm his mind, to block out The Warden.

One last time, The Relic Seeker’s words come to his mind:

*“Under the red tree the debt will be forgiven,*

*For what the nameless hero has given.”*

He finally understands the meaning of the prophesy. Perhaps he had known since that moment in the quantum chamber, and is only admitting it to himself now, but he knows.

Several moments flash in his mind rapidly.

The Elder telling him to succeed at any cost, Pandora’s encouraging words about choosing his destiny, *The Warden’s* discouraging words about his species not choosing its destiny, all the podlings that died in that desert to get him here, and that horrible feeling he’s had ever since the mountain, that he’s responsible for all this. He is in debt to them all..

The Podling steps forward into the radiation field. He feels sharp tingles all over his body, like he’s being pricked by a million needles all at once. It’s incredibly painful. But he pushes on. Just four. More. Steps.

Three.

Two.

One.

He’s not dead yet. He types the words into the terminal: *harmonic… dissent… enter.* The nanites in the sphere begin to die like all the others.

The Podling hears The Warden’s voice once more. Not in his head this time, but actually behind him.

**The Warden:** “Good…”

The tower begins to rumble… A bright yellow flash explodes from within The Warden.

The lively pink dot in Pandora’s eye opens up. She quickly looks around to figure out what has happened while she’s been inactive. After a second she spots him.

The Warden’s inert husk, lying still on the ground beneath the red tree. Red leaves begin to coat the top of his cold metallic chassis. He’s dead. She can hardly believe it.

**Pandora:** “The Podling! You did it! We won - oh”

She hadn’t seen him yet; she only assumed he was still somewhere in the area. And he was…

Sitting down, leaned up against a pillar, looking out over the edge at the sun setting on the landscape below, was The Podling.

Pandora knew he was dying.

**The Podling:** “Yeah… we won…”

The Podling knew he was dying as well.

**Pandora:** “The Podling…”

**The Podling:** “The Relic Seeker was wrong…”

**Pandora:** “What do you mean?”

**The Podling:** “He told me the future… He said my wish would come true… But I never got a name…”

A single pink, sparkling particle drops from Pandora’s eye like a tear.

**Pandora:** “Don’t worry. I’ll make sure they remember you.”

The Podling doesn’t have the strength to give a reply, but in his mind, he is happy to hear this.

The two share one final moment together in silence, watching the sun set on the world he’s just saved.

The rumblings of the tower intensify.

In the desert, The Elder mulls over the coming battle in his tent. His squire enters.

**Squire:** “They’re coming.”

**The Elder:** “Alright then. Till the last.”

The Elder reaches for his staff, but then realises a spear will be more useful that a walking stick.

He exits the tent and he sees them coming.

In the sky, sandworms and drones are heading directly for their camp to wipe out the last of the jungle clan.

Emerging from the sands, hand creatures. They start crawling along the ground at creepy speeds.

The Elder walks out in front of all his men, ready to fight, knowing it’s hopeless.

Just when he expects the wave to hit with force, the sounds of high speed collisions with the ground can be heard from drones crashing all around them.

The sandworms begin to fall out of the sky. One of which, hits the ground and slides all the way up to The Elder, close enough for The Elder to poke its massive eye straining to look at him.

The eye closes, and it, and the other worms and the hands all turn to dust.

**The Elder:** “What the hell is happening!??”

Almost as if to answer his question, a shockwave revurburates across the desert. The Elder looks up and sees the top of the tower has exploded, it begins to fall into the sands with an enormous crash.

**The Elder:** “He’s done it. He’s won. HE’S WON!!”

He turns to cheer with his people, but is stopped when he sees a very somber looking Pandora staring back at him.

The two exchange a brief and quiet few words while the crowd cheers for victory, and then Pandora flies away.

## Epilogue

**10 years later**

Pandora is back in her garden. It has grown larger and more lush than before. The fields surrounding the garden are still covered in pods. All deactivated and empty. She tends to a small apple tree, which has just grown its first fruit. She looks pleased.

A raven lands on a branch of the large pink tree in the center of the garden, it crows to her to get her attention.

Pandora approaches and sees a small note tied to the birds leg. She takes it. The bird crows once more and flies away. She opens the note which reads:

*It’s finished. Come see.*

Pandora leaves immediately. She flies to a lush green valley. A river runs through it. She sees a humble village around the river.

The Elder lies in bed. Sleeping. His squire enters the room.  
**Squire:** “Elder…”

The Elder is roused from his sleep.

**The Elder:** “mmm… yes?”

**Squire:** “She’s here”

The Elder strains himself to get up.

**The Elder:** “Quickly! Help me out of this bed!”

Pandora enters a large hall. The hall of heroes. She passes statues of prominent figures. Each one has a plaque at the base. She reads each one as she goes down the hall.

Podling #117292

‘Captain Resolute’

Podling #555213

‘Relic Seeker’

Podling #201

‘The Elder’

She arrives at the end of the hall. A monument, much larger and more grand than the others dominates the space. Pandora looks up at the top of it. Just then she hears a voice from behind her.

**The Elder:** “Orb!”

Pandora has a look of annoyance on her face.

**Pandora:** “Old man”

**The Elder:** “ha-ha-ha \*cough\* \*cough\* more and more with each day.”

Pandora turns to see The Elder is in a wheel chair steered by his squire. Pandora’s look of annoyance turns to a somber sadness. The kind of look you get when you finally realise your family pet is getting old.

**The Elder:** “It seems that 600 years of liberating podlings \*cough\* \*cough\* is finally catching up with me… It’s good to see you, Pandora.”

**Pandora:** “Elder…”

**The Elder:** “Don’t worry about me. I’m too stubborn to let my time pass before the work is finished.”

**Pandora:** “It’s finished now…”

**The Elder:** “\*cough\* \*cough\* Yes… What do you think? We took the selection of a name very seriously. The vote was unanimous.”

Pandora turns back to the monument, this time to the plaque at the base.

**Pandora:** “It’s perfect.”

The monument depicts The Podling in an epic scene, atop a mountain of destroyed drones, sandworms twisted around each other, all piled onto the dead husk of The Warden.

At the base, the plaque reads:

Podling #3032020

‘Hero’