

## THE NIGHT FOREST

### THE 3RD TALE

Unlike the first two, much of this chapter includes Antoine Lynton's short stories that he will gradually remember when recovering from trauma.

Antoine carried on walking through the ash and towards the end of the burnt remains of the Magnolia Forest after spending the late evening finishing the fourth chapter in his diary with a partially worn leather cover; a book he dedicated to his long-lost father. Ewan was a courageous Molokai who stood up to fight for the heartbroken king of the Tarantino Kingdom; a land that had fallen into darkness after the war against the Keatonian Army.

*"The Tarantino Kingdom was a small, but a wondrous kingdom, mostly covered by the nature of trees, flower fields, lakes, rivers and vast open fields. Years before the war, George Tarantino, a man full of loyalty and life, became crowned king after his late father who ruled the kingdom for forty-three years. From the time he gave his first speech to many thousands of Tarantinian folks, high officials of the Royal Tarantino Order or RTO conducted border forces with hope to preserve all within the country from raiders of neighbouring kingdoms. It turned out well for all inhabitants who carried on working in small separate groups, each of them allocated to different jobs in constructing new villages in marvellous, dense forests and freshly green, mountainous fields. Unlike many kings, George Tarantino did not prefer to live in superb luxury but live the life of a perfectly normal fellow. Every morning, noon and night, he and his family ate at a public restaurant rather than a private dining room with carved, gold-painted pillars, four butlers, pale-white walls, a patterned carpet on the floor, a long table with crystal stands, and polished cutlery, plates and wine glasses. On frequent, early evenings when his children played in the city garden, he read passages of the early history, followed by writing a diary entry in his old book that he had bought from a local market.*

*A year after George wore the golden crown, decorated with diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires, for the first time, he hosted a festival in the city streets (surrounding the ancient castle) to bring joy and laughter to the hard-working Tarantinians.*

*Between the houses of every narrow street, storekeepers served hot foods and cold drinks to the public who wandered around the city (decorated with paper lanterns, candles in glass jars, and disused tin cans). In the city garden, officials of the RTO organised a selection of games for the children of both the Human and Molokai races who enjoyed themselves. With parental supervision, they, too, could swim in the harbour with the aquatic wildlife, including the Red Tang, an uncommon, indigenous species of fish. Other than foods and games, selected volunteers conducted a firework display to mark the end of the festival. It was brief but became the highlight of the night. Such a firework show revealed the glittering gold and silver flakes that formed the shape of a capital T, the sparkling grey and white particles that formed wild wolves, the flickering blue, red, green and pink colours of butterflies, and the sphere-shaped bursts of rainbow drops. After the firework display, many of the children went on short walks with their parents to catch a glimpse at the vast swarm of fireflies, flickering many bright colours in the deep woods. Glowing, colourful fungi and flowers grew around the damp forest floor. It had been a wonderful evening and night.*

*Not many of the Tarantinian race lived to see their villages burned to ash on the forest floor and their loved ones slaughtered. Neighbouring kingdoms welcomed the last of the Tarantinian race (Human and Molokai), providing them with food, water, shelter and medical treatment, but had left me in the burnt remains of the Magnolia Forest that covered most of the fallen Tarantino Kingdom.”*

Molokai creatures were a grey-skinned wild species that most preferred to live in dense fields of trees and flowers. Although shorter than the average man or between one-hundred-and-twenty and one-hundred-and-fifty centimetres, their mental and physical behaviour was very comparable to us as humans. However, they absorb air, water, and other liquids through their touch-sensitive, smooth skin. They have no mouth, no hair, no nose, or ears. They telepathically communicate between other Molokai creatures and other animals that wander in their settlements and surrounding area. Unlike humans, Molokai creatures did not wear shoes or clothing, but tight, flexible trunks crafted with some of the finest naturally grown plants. Deep in the quiet wilderness with no source of water or food, Antoine had set foot into the Night Forest, an untouched field of tall trees with flat treetops, flowers with glowing petals, and light green leaves and stems. A narrow track, formed by brown, soft clay, and smooth stones, stretched in between the trees, through a field of flowers and beyond into the far distance. High above the treetops, the many hundreds of stars shone in colours of blue, green, red, gold, and white. Light-orange moonlight shone through the tree trunks and then lit up the forest floor.

*“At the dawn of the third century, Tarantinian Molokai creatures of the Lynton Family explored the Night Forest with hope to find a new home where their suffering of family loss would come to an end after a widespread virus that wiped out thousands of the Tarantinian race. At that time, there was no natural medicine to cure the infected until one of the last surviving Native White Horse tribes formulated a thick, purple paste with a strong smell of lavender. Three days after applying it to an infected member of the tribe, his smooth skin turned from a deathly white to a healthy grey.*

*The Lynton Family settled in the Night Forest and raised three children who the parents had named after the twelfth generation who were wiped out by the virus. They lived a life of peace and silence, growing a patch of flowers and building a small well to collect water far below the fresh soil. From midday to sunset, the children laid dead branches along both sides of the narrow track which I walked along, feeling the stones beneath my dry feet. As the moon rose through the orange horizon and into the dark, night sky, hundreds of fireflies flickered in the light mist. Sometimes, they looked for a large or small body of water where the aquatic plantation glowed on the rocky bed. They would enjoy themselves in the cold water until the orange horizon disappeared from their sight, two or three hours after the sunset.”*

Three centuries later, Antoine Lynton, the last surviving member of the Lynton Family, walked along the narrow track and with his ancestors. Though he continued to write entries in the diary every night, given to him by his father, he remained the only Tarantinian Molokai of all the fallen Tarantino Kingdom and lost in the uninhabited wilderness where no Keatonian has ever been before.

*“I, who had learnt a bit of history a short while before the war took place, grew an interest to explore the many places where history settled like where the Blackhawks destroyed the castle of the White Horse Kingdom in A.B. 41. Centuries later, all that remained were the bases of*

*two or three towers. Everywhere else was covered by flat, green fields of tall grass and short trees. On a few occasions, a passing fellow discovered some ancient tools buried in the soil, but nothing else. My curiosity drove me to go out into the wilderness alone without a map or a compass, sometimes for two or three days. Every time I went out, I enjoyed the fresh air and peace. I admired the small, narrow streams flowing across the vast fields of healthy grass and into the trees where the tops completely covered the forest floor from the hot sun. Unlike many places where the ground was rough and covered in sticks, stones, leaves and insects, the grassy plains were soft and relieving for the Molokai creatures with their aching, bare feet. Some of these plains had water holes that deeply stretched for a mile or two. During the night, these water holes glowed a blueish colour like the bioluminescent plankton. Whenever I needed to rest or cool down, I sat on the edge of a water hole and dangled my legs in the cold water."*

As a light fog swallowed much of the Night Forest, Antoine stepped off the track and onto a patch of grass finely cut and covered with drops of rain from early morning. He felt a chilly sensation when a light gust of cold wind blew in between the tree trunks and took off a few glowing petals from the field of flowers beside the wet patch of grass. After a short moment of looking around the opening and before the fog could blind him from surrounding trees and other objects, he recognised the place as the home where the parents raised the thirteenth generation of the Lynton Family.

*"Three years before the war, I, in my early childhood, went on a hiking trip with my friend Keith Wellington. At the time, both of us have gone on various journeys in dense forests and vast fields, sometimes finding valuable treasures like ancient records and small artefacts buried in the earth and left intact from as early as the second century. Three weeks after we met for the first time, Keith hatched an idea of building a cellar (to preserve the artefacts) in a deep part of the woods with its colourful flowers, mossy trees, passive wildlife, and crystals scattered across the forest floor. Night fell when Keith and I sat against the tree and agreed with the plan and began our work in the following morning with the bright sun shining upon the vast land, packed with trees, villages, hills, farmland, and snowy mountains. Over the next three days, Keith and I dug underground, clearing the dirt and soil out from under the roots. We sweated from head to foot, and in the evening, we wrote each other short stories, no longer than a page or five-hundred words. Keith, who spent most of his weekdays on the farm harvesting and planting crops, admired creative writing like me and forever wanted to be a published writer. Days before the beginning of the Keaton-Tarantino War, King George Tarantino was receiving distressing letters from communities living along the border between the Keaton Kingdom and the Tarantino Kingdom the same time his daughter had died of a mysterious illness. He had become heartbroken and unable to respond to the desperate requests for help. Days later, the power-hungry King Keaton declared war on the Tarantino Kingdom and sent his army to take over the land. Within half a year, his well-prepared army raided every village, left thousands of bodies to decompose, burnt their crop fields and forests, and rebuilt settlements under the Keatonian Flag."*

After wandering around the patch for a moment, Antoine found the remains of the small well. A few cobblestone bricks have fallen off the wall over the many decades of abandonment. When sitting against the wall, he stretched his legs, feeling the cold sensation on the skin. A few fireflies flickered in the thick fog. Antoine took his diary out of his leather bag.

On page fifty-three, he wrote a new short story. Every story written in the diary was imaginative but inspired by old memories.

*“The same week I had watched my father die a brave soldier, Keith bled to his fate in my arm in a cold, rainy night. His dream of becoming a published writer had shattered into bloodied shards of glass. Streams of water flowed into the darkness as I tightly embraced Keith. My eyes filled with tears. The firelight from behind disappeared, and then the smoke faded away.”*

Months later, Antoine continued his passion for writing as much as Keith did. The memories of losing his father and friend still haunted him like a victim starved and forced into hard labour with no hope in getting back his or her freedom. As he lay on the patch of wet grass, he began hearing quiet voices from his loving father and friend. The air became cold. Swallowed by the thick fog, Antoine hears an owl calling to the moon from high above the forest floor. In his sight, the moonlight fades away. Ewan, who had raised Antoine until weeks after his twelfth birthday, had a rough childhood; a time when he and his friends Johnny, Benny and Michael fought to survive in the vast, harsh land during the notorious Montoya-Philipson War. Ewan never spoke about his early years that darkened his heart and soul, but the very few memories where there were light and a sense of happiness. Such times were when the youths (aged between eleven and fourteen) had feasts with the parents, built and sailed rafts made out of barrels and wood, and visited vast waterfalls in the hot, sunny orange, evenings where trees and bushes grew out of the rocky surfaces scattered around the top of the waterfalls and beyond. Antoine had written a short text about his father’s happy, childhood memory somewhere on page fourteen.

*“One late evening when the bright, golden sun touched the tip of the mountainous horizon, a young, adventurous Molokai and his friends explored the natural magnificence of the Maua Falls. A vast, untouched wonder, the sacred land where healthy trees and bushes grew from beneath the rough, rocky formations that created the many hundreds of narrow, freshwater streams. Smooth boulders of different sizes and colours formed the base of the waterfall where the youths carefully took their stepped and watched the streams fall from the top and splatter on the surfaces of the boulders, creating a fast-flowing mist of cold water.”*

Although Antoine had written more about this intriguing memory, he seemed to have forgotten many of the short stories he had written with Keith or alone in his quiet space underneath a tree on top of a small, grassy hill. Yet, the death of his father and his friend had crippled his kind-hearted soul for a long time.

A bright, orange sun rose above the hilly horizon and into a light blue, starry sky. Between both sides of the Magnolia Forest, a smooth, dusty track stretched towards the hills and beyond towards the rising sun, lined with carved rocks partially buried into the wet soil; a heritage trail built by the hands of hard-working Molokai creatures in the fourth century (A.B. 323 to A.B 334).

*“King Abraham Tarantino requested a track leading from the castle to the south of the kingdom where communities were establishing their settlements with access to fresh lake water, natural foods from the plantation surrounding the lake, and crafting materials from the Magnolia Forest growing in between the castle and the settlements. Before the far end of the lake was the borderline with the Keaton Kingdom, home to an army nearly twice the size*

*as the Tarantinian population. In the dawn of A.B. 323, construction began with four-hundred-and-seventy workers. From sunrise to sunset, we dug two inches of soil in open fields, dense forest, hilly terrain, and vast wetlands to form the base of the track stretching for fifty-three miles. In the south, young Molokai creatures formed groups of six and explored the natural wonders of the Magnolia Forest such as waterfalls, caves, flower gardens, and carved trees. The same time, the parents established their first village with forty houses, a church, a hospital, and a flower garden. Until sunset, the children visited caves where glow-worms lit the ceiling. Shallow, cold water, no deeper than two or three inches, flooded the cave floors. In the spring and summer seasons, glowing, blue fungi grew out of the cave walls. Sometimes, the children found and recovered valuable gems such as rubies and sapphires. Diamonds were among the rarest of natural stones discovered far below the fresh air and sunlight since the beginning of mining in the mid-years of the first century. In A.B. 328, the workers began laying the gravel and filling the gaps with a mixture of sand and powder until A.B. 332 when they moved on to the process of evenly placing smooth, carved, heavy rock along both sides of the track, therefore completing construction in A.B. 334. The opening day was a proud moment for all workers and supporters of the project.”*

As a mild gust of cold air rushed in between the trees, touching the sharp tips of the finely cut grass, and creating a light, moving cloud of dust, forty archers rode their horses along the track, kicking up dust. They were all armed with bows and quivers and carrying shields. Their leader, a war veteran in his late forties with a silver beard and tanned skin, wearing his polished leather armour and armed with a white, valuable longbow and white quiver carrying thirty arrows. He looked around the vast scenery, his eyesight more sensitive than the average human and more comparable to Molokai creatures that could see in the darkness. Their night vision helped them navigate through dark tunnels and corals reefs far below the surface of the sea in the night. After a short moment, he, Commander Jordan Wise, pauses before a trail of footprints leading to a deep part of the Magnolia Forest.

‘Why have we stopped?’ one of the archers called to Jordan who then stepped off the saddle and inspected the trail.

Every footprint shaped like a man’s slipper with no tread, the heel and toe were perfectly arched and small; no more than twenty centimetres in length and eight centimetres in width. They were Antoine’s footprints.

Many miles away from Commander Jordan and his men, Antoine woke up on the patch of icy cold grass, listening to the call from a flock of red sparrows flying over the ancient remains of the partially collapsed water well. He got up and brushed some grass off his arms and back. A few butterflies hovered above the flower petals. The bright, orange sun shone through the trees, lightening the frosty forest floor. Winter will come soon, in four or five days.

As Antoine re-equipped himself with his bag, bow and quiver, the hot sun melted the frost off the freshly green patch,

turning it into a carpet of soft and dry grass.

Beyond the flower field, a narrow stream of clean water drifted through the floor covered in green, healthy grass. Antoine stepped back onto the forest track where he noticed a red sparrow wagging its tail and jumping on the wet clay. That same moment, a swarm of monarch butterflies flew into a flower field. In the sunlight, particles of pollen drifted in the

cold air, wandering like Antoine walking along the forest track with nowhere to go, but the end of the trail leading him to the unknown. The red sparrow flew away. When entering the small flower field, he looked around the scenery, reminding him of the evening his mother died in her bed as Antoine sat on a chair, tightly holding her hand until the end.

“Earlier that day, I had brought a vase of her favourite flowers (white roses) and placed them on her bedroom table. The same cloud of pollen drifted in the sunlight entering the room through a small round window. The next moment, my father joined me and laid his hand on my shoulder, comforting me as my eyes filled with tears.”

In the flower field, Antoine sat on a log beside a patch of flowers. The bright sun shone upon him as he clenches his hands together, struggling to overcome his emotion. For a short moment, he looked directly into the sunlight with a tear drifting down his face. The red sparrow lands on the other side of the oak log and a flock of scarlet robins flew over the flower field and around the trees to the old well sitting in the distance.

Far away from the flower field and as the golden, afternoon sunlight through the treetops, Commander Jordan and his men rode their horses along the narrow track, following Antoine’s trail. They trot in a single line, led by Jordan, then his first officer Luke Barrack. A black and brown fawn watched them from behind a white rose bush with no thorns. Leaves continued falling off the branches high above the forest floor.

Meanwhile, far, far ahead, Antoine follows the narrow stream with its bed covered in smooth stones of numerous colours like blue, red, brown, black, white, green, pink, orange and grey. He heard the soft blades of grass get crushed beneath his aching feet after walking along a rough track made of clay and stones. A green caterpillar crawled up the stem of a blue flower before taking a bite from a fresh, green leaf with a droplet of water.

Commander Jordan and his men rode past the ancient well on their left, slowly shortening the distance between them and Antoine.

Night fell when Antoine came near to the end of the Night Forest, where a blue, thick mist formed above the forest floor. Again, at night, the fireflies flicker in the darkness below the night sky, dotted with hundreds of colourful stars. High above the treetops, a light, a smooth cloud covered the sky and stretched for dozens or hundreds of miles. The grass turned frosty in the chilly air and lit by the partially faded moonlight. Far behind, Commander Jordan and his men have made camp for the night, setting up a few campfires and twenty tents in a large opening surrounded by many hundreds of tall trees and flowers. As the temperature dropped, a few men searched their bags for their winter clothing. Smoke and flakes of ash rise from the two campfires lit to give warmth to many of the Keatonian archers. Some rub themselves with both of their hands, struggling to stay warm. Jordan stays in his tent, writing a new diary entry on old, worn paper dating back ten years. Meanwhile, Antoine shivers in the chilly air and discovers a small underground shelter. A light breeze forced the last few leaves of a fruit tree to shake off, one of them landing on a wooden trapdoor partly covered in soil and swallowed by the blue mist.

As Antoine walked around the small hill, he stepped on the trapdoor. He bangs his foot against the planks a few times, hearing the sound echo inside. He kneels and brushes the dirt off, feeling the mossy wood beneath the skin of his hand. The moonlight fades a little more.

When opening the trapdoor, he noticed a copper tag nailed to the underside of the centre plank.

*Ronald B. Russell*

*(A.B. 239 – A.B. 253)*

*“Ronald B. Russell was once the underboss of the Tarantino Crime Family, one of ten that formed the Blackhawk Crime Syndicate that promoted crime and power to numerous communities in the Era of Kingdom Flourishment (A.D. 41 to A.D. 379). King Antonio Murdoch, who ruled the Blackhawk Kingdom until the mid-third century, refused to act for the people terrorised by the crime syndicate and instead ordered them to carry on building new settlements. I did not know much about Ronald B. Russell or the early history of the Blackhawks. Keith and I met for the first time at the riverside where we enjoyed swimming in the hot summer and collected delicate seashells from the shoreline of the Papua Morrison Sea, famed for its glowing coral reefs and rare aquatic species. One evening, Keith and I built a small raft out of poles of wood we had collected from dead, grey trees and rope we recovered from old, abandoned sheds, tied together to form a floating platform. As the bright, golden sun began to set, we paddled downstream, under the tree branches that stretched across the shallow river, towards the Papua Morrison Sea; a body of water surrounded by smooth, white shorelines and a vast, orange horizon. The cold night fell when Keith and I made it to the glowing coral reefs; one of the most wondrous, natural sites that I had ever seen. Hundreds of different species of coral brightly glowed in a range of different colours like blue, white, purple, green, gold, red, yellow, pink, and orange. For an hour or two, Keith and I swam deep below the sea surface, exploring the reef’s natural beauty. The surrounding waters reflected the colourful stars like a mirror. Everything was silent. It was a happy memory from five years ago, but it remained deep inside my mind.”*

That night, Antoine rested inside the shelter on a worn blanket that belonged to Mr Russell a few years before his death in A.B. 253.

After Commander Jordan had blown out the flame of his candle, first officer Luke Barrack paused outside his tent and peeked through the gap.

‘Commander Jordan, my friend, may I come in?’ Luke asked as Jordan placed his diary underneath his soft, thick cushion.

‘Yes, you may,’ Jordan replied before having a yawn, covering his mouth as it happens.

Luke entered the tent and out of the chilly air where the others gather around their two campfires. A few men return to their tents for bedtime.

‘I am getting nervous that neighbouring kingdoms might be preparing for war, Commander Jordan. Earlier this evening, a young fellow ran into me and badly bleeding from his forehead. He was in shock and tears when he told me that our rivals attacked his border village with the Mornington Kingdom.’

Luke scratches his nose, seemingly anxious. Commander Jordan walked out of his tent to take a few breaths of fresh air.

‘There is no need to get worried, Officer Luke. We have a strong army of tough and clever men. If we obey orders from King Carl Keaton, we will prevail. He made us proud before; he will make us proud again. I promise that no other kingdom will force us into darkness.’

Luke covered his mouth, breathing out warm air onto his cold hands.

‘Yes, I understand you, Commander.’

Jordan took one more breath and returned to his tent.

‘Remember, Officer, keep your chin up like everyone else.’

Jordan closed his tent. All became silent.

The next sunrise revealed an orange and dark blue sky. The stars remained visible in the naked eye. The blue mist had cleared overnight, and the fresh grass had turned frosty white. A couple of grey fantails flew onto the leafless fruit tree and chirp to the early morning sun. From below the roots, Antoine pushed the trapdoor open and climbed up the ladder, stepping into a new world. Piles of leaves surround the grey, mossy trees; some of them higher than him (over one-hundred-and-forty centimetres). Such leaves have colours like brown, orange, dark green and dark white. Antoine sat on the grass and pulled his diary out of the bag. He turned over the rough, worn sheets of writing until he reached page fifty-five. There, he writes a new entry of yesterday’s sunny morning to the blue, misty night. His ink bottle began to run out of black, blood-like ink. The air remained silent and cold.

*“Four years earlier, I began writing stories when Keith and I sat under the shade of an ancient, oak tree with orange and yellow leaves, writing poetry in the dusty dirt and listening to a flock of pink robins call to the sun. For centuries, Molokai creatures wrote letters to their human friends, whom many of them were fascinated by the rich history of the Molokai race. From records dating back to the mid-first century, humans and wild Molokai creatures worked together, establishing the one-hundred-and-sixty-three kingdoms that forever longed to expand their kingdoms. Over the years, the humans and Molokai creatures grew fonder of each other, leading to the Act of Racial Equality (A.B. 143), announced by King Marlon Murdoch (the leader of all leaders) of the Blackhawks; the largest kingdom in all of Aurora. On frequent occasions, children of the Human and Molokai races sat around campfires, telling each other stories of harmony and peace. During the Era of Kingdom Flourishment, countries fought for land until A.B. 172 when the old King Marlon Murdoch ordered all other kings to sign a peace treaty, therefore ending all conflicts until King Carl Keaton broke the agreement and took over the Tarantino Kingdom.”*

Neighbouring kingdoms of both countries responded to the war and agreed to join forces against the Keatonian Army. Months later, they remained unprepared for such a feat.

Commander Jordan, carrying a tin mug of tea, sat on a log and watched the smoke rise from the burnt wood and ash. After a short moment of listening to the wind blow a cloud of dead leaves from the vast piles, he sips his tea. High above the branchy treetops, the stars disappear from the sky (turning a lighter blue). The grass remained frosty white. Earlier in the week, King Carl Keaton had assigned Commander Jordan (one of twelve) and his men to



deliver a trading agreement to newly built settlements in the south. He expects them to return to the castle this evening. The night before, King Carl was cutting the thorns off a red rose stem when he received a letter from King Melvyn Murdoch II of the Blackhawks. His temper shattered after finding out that the neighbouring countries of the Keaton and fallen Tarantino Kingdoms joined forces and were organising an invasion against his people. As the sun rose above the orange horizon, a young, pale-white archer, wearing his brown, leather armour, and carrying his standard longbow and quiver, stepped out of his tent and took a breath of the fresh, cold air. Last night, he had shared the tent with two others, older and more experienced in archery. Being eighteen, he was the youngest archer and the humblest. He sat on a log, opposite to Commander Jordan.

‘Mel Morris at your service, Commander Jordan.’

‘Good morning.’

He placed his tin mug of tea on the mossy log. Some of the wood was frosty white.

‘I remember that we are due to return to the castle this evening, and I want to make sure that no Tarantinian stands within the borders of our land. Take everything with you and follow the trail of footprints. If or when you find him or her, I expect you to ask who the Molokai is. If not a Keatonian, finish it.’

Jordan picked up his tin mug and returned to his tent, gulping the last mouth-full of tea.

Antoine had set off, walking across the frosty grass patches, and rubbing his chilly arms. A light, thin mist formed above the forest floor, and many of the tree trunks turned white like a thin layer of ice crystals. A northern white-faced owl sat on her nest, watching Antoine. A short moment passes before the first few snowflakes began falling to the forest floor. A gentle, cool breeze blew a thin cloud of frost into Antoine’s face as he walked nearer to the end of the Night Forest. The sky turned into a snowy white cloud, covering thousands of square miles. More snowflakes began to fall. The sound of his footsteps in icy grass patches remind him of a misty, winter evening; a time when he and his old friend Keith visited the frozen Magnolia River.

*“There lived an old fisherman with grey hair, who wore a brown leather coat and scarf and used a walking stick to get through the thick snow. He was the guardian of a young boy who enjoyed playing in the snow like other children and had a passion for fishing in the hot summer. When Keith and I met him on the river’s edge, he had just turned nine. Inside their hut, the fisherman watched us slide across the smooth, frozen river surface as he washed his copper plate and mug in the dish tub (full of chilly water from the river). The edges of the glass pane had frozen. Apart from a bunk bed, a chest of drawers, a table, a cabinet for the cutlery and plates, and a few candles for light, they had nothing else in their small, one-room hut. They were poor and often isolated. It was a special day for the young boy who never had a friend or even spoke to anyone, but his old, slowly dying caretaker. When the evening sun began to set, they rolled snowballs to build snowmen guarding a little castle made from wooden crates, old sticks from a pile of firewood and a handkerchief to use as a flag. From then on, they enjoyed having a few snowball fights until darkness fell; a time when a swarm of fireflies flickered like a lighting show at a party or festival. In the end, the young boy had never felt more happiness in his heart. The next morning, Keith and I reunited in the snow during a densely orange, scenic sunrise. The shadows of trees stretched for nearly twice their*

*heights, and the snow reflected the orange sunlight. After Keith had returned home last night, he lied on his single bed and began writing a new novella. His bookshelf full of dusty diaries and a couple of tall ship scale models that he had built out of twigs and leaves the year before. The twigs for the hull and masts, and the leaves for the sails. That night, he wrote a couple of pages about a time when we explored an abandoned flour mill beneath the bright stars of the night sky, not too far from their homes. Inside the little workspace, leafy vines grew on the cobblestone walls, became tangled in the crown wheel and lantern pinion, and grew around the spindle. All other parts left intact. The air was chilly and smelled of old flour and grain. Keith pulled a few, old cobwebs from a copper plate, pinned to the wall and noticed the name of the mill and the date of establishment. ”*

### *Terry Token Flour Mill*

*A.D. 382*

*“Like me, he was a young, curious Molokai child who had an interest in tracing history back to where such events took place. Although the mill was not known to many people, it had a fascinating timeline that took Keith’s attention for quite some time, maybe until the end of the year. After writing the two pages, he gave the chapter a name, “Through the Eyes of Terry Token”. He had to write more about exploring the mill and the journey back home when we found ourselves in the wetland where Blackhawk colonists in the first century discovered a mysterious, Molokai-like creature with dark grey, glowing blue-spotted skin as smooth as leather. His blue eyes lit in the darkness, and he carried a long, carved, magical cane that enhanced all forms of his mind power. Over the centuries, many folks have either forgotten about this story or whispered into each other’s ears, saying that it was a fictional, children’s tale. However, others spent their lifetime finding answers to the many questions that hundreds of other colonists asked about this strange coincidence. According to records written by such enthusiasts, only five of this mysterious species existed in the dawn of the second century. They described them as unique warlocks who journeyed for thousands of miles, searching for silence and permanent isolation. Such creatures were afraid of being interrupted or even seen by the Human and Molokai races. Even centuries later, historians believe that the species still lives today, but the last sighting took place nearly half a century ago.”*

Antoine and Keith have been fascinated by the existence of this merely discovered creature. At one point in time, just a few days later, they both thought about going on a quest to find it, but after a short while, they skipped the plan for their enthusiasm in storytelling. Though they dreamt of seeing lands beyond the Tarantino Kingdom, they felt safer at home, safer with their families and friends.

*“Until the dusk of spring, Keith and I worked on the farmlands as selected volunteers, harvesting crops and watering the dry soil. In the final two weeks of the crop-growing season, temperatures rose beyond bearable conditions. In the evenings, Keith and I spent more time cooling down in the water holes than before, sometimes until nightfall. After working on the fields, we spent most of our time indoors or under the shade where we watched the mother birds feed their new-born, try to catch a fish with their bare hands in a*

*small pond or stream, or watched the butterflies hover around the colourful flower beds. Some days, we joined groups of other Molokai children playing hide and seek or swimming through narrow, rainbow-coloured tunnels to another water hole (only eight or ten metres away).”*

After the time had changed from morning to noon, Antoine crossed a narrow, chilly river and stepped into a different world of trees, bushes, and other species of wildlife, marking the end of his journey through the Night Forest.