The Loop

An alarming splatter broke my slumber as a crystalline blue droplet of water scattered itself across my sleeping brow. I bolted upright in furious confusion, intent on finding the source of my rude awakening. As I wiped moisture from my face and my eyes took in my alien surroundings my confusion only heightened. Above me I could see only a vast canopy of green. Covering my lower body was a thick, moist blanket of verdant moss which I ripped free of after moment’s hesitation. As my lower torso and legs squelched free of the clinging mass, I swung my feet over the banister of my bed and they promptly vanished into ankle deep ooze. A sickeningly sweet scent nearly forced me to void my dinner as noxious fumes percolated up through my toes while my feet sequestered themselves further beneath the vile sludge. The wretched substance coated every inch of ground, broken off abruptly by a massive wall of creeping vines and dense foliage that encased the barren clearing in a vast verdant dome accented by brilliant flames of floral blossoms. My gaze arced across the canopy and was met by a thousand stars staring at me from tangled vines, seemingly blinking in unison as a myriad of small creatures revealed themselves to the light. They watched me with an aching intentness that sent spiders skittering across my skin. I spotted the fleeting forms of birds, lizards and small mammals as they filtered through the lush canopy overhead, forming highways of vibrant color that seemed to flow endlessly across the peak of the dome. Seamlessly, the saturation of life flowed endlessly overhead, a kaleidoscope of eyes boring into me as they passed, creating a sparkling sea of eyes and faces that gyrated along the branching highways in an almost hypnotic fashion. I would have watched the fantastic procession for eternity had I the time.

Abruptly, thousands of eyes broke my gaze and locked onto a point at the edge of the clearing. Despite some latent urge within me screaming to look away I followed their gaze to a squat brown totem. The totem stood alone, ominous by its very existence, exquisitely carved in the features of some great creature. I could make out three sets of eyes, fearsome mandibles and a gaping maw ringed with terraced rows of jagged fangs. A pronounced sense of uneasiness pervaded further into the recesses of my mind as I was drawn towards the totem as a moth to flame. Without warning, my enraptured audience began wailing and cawing from the ceiling of the dome, generating a siren of enormous proportions. As the wail pierced through my skull, I took cover beneath my hands in some feeble attempt to block the mind-splitting wail. As quickly as it had begun the cacophony subsided and I looked to see what had caused the uproar. To my surprise the canopy was empty, devoid of any movement, it seemed even the leaves had steadied their swaying in the absence of their host. While searching the leaves above me my uneasiness blossomed into an unexplainable terror. It is impossible to say what exactly caused it but some unseen force urged me to turn about just in time to see the creature from the totem barreling down on me from behind, mandibles extended and vivid yellow acid dripping from its fangs. Noxious slime and mud rose in a wave before the massive creature as its segmented body plowed through the slick ground. The creature’s head alone was the size of my torso, with multiple segments making up its long arthropod body. I tried futilely to turn and run but the creature was on me before I could take a single step. I could feel the mandibles try to snap shut around my slick torso as the totem creature slammed into my body, but the force of the blow sent me careening into a tree on the opposite end of the clearing before the deadly clamps could slam shut. The tree’s gnarled ebony bark filled my vision before my brief aerial journey was brought to an abrupt end. I shook my head to clear the pixies dancing across my eyes before noticing a small gap in the foliage barrier to my right. I scrambled to my feet and leaped towards the thin outlet but my feet found no purchase in the shifting mire and rank slime filled my nostrils as I plummeted back into the disgusting mixture. Before I could regain my senses, the beast was on me, I felt crushing mandibles lock around my ankle before shearing my foot clean off. Visceral, animalistic panic seeped through every pore of my being as I thrashed against the viscous mud and it poured over my arms and face. I tried breathing only to find sludge in its place, disgusting and wet as it filled my lungs. Before I could drown in the putrid mess the beast pierced my sides with its mandibles and lifted me into the air. Staring at the lush canopy above me I could just barely make out a single cobalt blue bird still watching me from deep within the vines. Some tiny part of my mind that wasn’t overcome by shock scolded the bird for it carelessness before a thousand fangs began boring into my back.

I woke with a violent start, the nightmare just barely beginning to fade from my mind. Without thinking I levered my torso upright and placed a shaking hand onto my pillow behind me, just in time to meet a glistening blue droplet of water.