As you can see, there is a hut in the middle of the forest. It looks like a permanent camp ground toilet room with a chimney and front door awning attached, with some branches weaved on the roof to make it look homier. There is one window in the hut, and through it you can see a guy sitting on the john reading a newspaper. That’s Ted. And no, he is not using it at the moment. It’s the only seat in the hut, so of course he’d be sitting on it. You can’t see too very much more at the moment by looking through the window, so you’ll have to go around to the front and knock on the door.

The window is accompanied on both sides by similar looking shrubs, both boasting a bunch of bizarre berries. Walking around the bushes, you duck under a low hanging maple branch and tiptoe through the high weeds to the front door. In front of and above the door is a convenient awning that looks like half of an EZ-UP tent. You can still see small puddles on the edges from when it had rained a few hours ago.

You try the door. It’s locked. That’s why I told you to knock. The indicator on the outside of the door reads “IN USE” in white letters over a red background. You knock. You hear nothing but the birds chirping happily and the wind sweeping through the singing reeds in the swamp-pond outback. Then you hear the folding of a newspaper that is loud but trying to sound quiet. You hear it hit the floor. You hear silence, and then the distinct POP-ZAP of a shotgun being loaded. KNUCK! The red indicator turns to green but there’s no words on this side. The door opens with a squeak and an eyeball and barrel poke out through the crack at you.

“You are who?” says Ted with a gruff, grumpy growl. Yes, that’s Ted. He’s not used to outsiders, apparently. So you’ll have to make a good first impression.

You say your name, and Ted gives you a confused glare.

“Here doing you are what?” It sounds silly when Ted says it, but the expression of his face says he’s serious.

After taking a moment to think about what he asked and how he said it, you reply.

“What?” Ted looks at you confused. Apparently he didn’t hear what you said.

You repeat, but to no avail.

“You shoot will I or want you what me tell.” Ted pushes the barrel of his shotgun closer to your chest.

You think about what he said, and how to reply. But you’re taking too long. By the look on his face, you can tell he’s getting ready to shoot you for real.

Suddenly a butterfly floats nearby and Ted forgets about you. He immediately grabs you and pulls you into his hut, and then locks the door behind him.

You’re about to inquire about his sudden change in attitude, when he interrupts you. “Dangerous are butterflies those.” He peers out the window, watching the butterfly.

You stand next to him at the window, and scan the outside picture for the butterfly. You find it just in time to watch it land on the low hanging maple branch you walked under earlier. The branch immediately changes color from a normal brownish-grey to a vivid pink with yellow curly stripes. Well, when it changed, it looked more like a spiral of color engulfing the area of the branch within the effect range. Either end of the branch was unaffected.

The butterfly then changes its own color to the color that formerly belonged to the branch. It dismounts and is listlessly carried off in the wind.

Not knowing much about this world, you inquire about the inherent danger in that butterfly.

“Things changes it.” Ted replies in a whisper as if the butterfly could be eavesdropping. “Out far this come one seen never have I.”

He stands there silently thinking as he stares out at the pink and yellow spot on the branch. You look at it too, but it doesn’t change. It stays pink and yellow, just like the butterfly had left it. Then he turns his head and stares at his toilet seat on the wall opposite the door. It’s partially hidden by a folding card table on its last legs and an unopened box crate large enough to sit on. The newspaper he had been reading lies neatly folded on the floor next to the table. A box of shotgun ammo rests emptily in peace on the table next to a microscope with a “Mr. Yuck” sticker in the slide being examined.

It took you until just now to notice that there is no smell. Well, it smells like old man, but other than that, there’s smell of defecation or other by products. In fact, it smells more like Febreeze.

Ted moves away from the window to a plywood cupboard with cardboard doors positioned just opposite the window. He reaches inside and pulls out two brightly glowing stones.

“This take here.” He holds one of the stones out to you, and they both slightly decrease in brightness.

You’re about to ask about the purpose of the stone and why he’s suddenly entrusting you with his stuff, when he shushes you and opens the toilet seat and motions towards it. The toilet seat is black and made of plastic, but is covered in what looks to have formerly been a pillow case. The base of the toilet is also black and is rectangular. The whole toilet looks like a black plastic cube with a toilet seat laid on top of it.

“Fit you can?”

You come over to the toilet seat and peer down it. It looks like a deep, dark, bottomless pit. You think about whether you want to answer yes or no, whether or not you can actually fit.

Coming to your rescue, a loud scuffling sound echoes from below. Ted immediately pushes you away from the toilet and shuts the lid, locking it with a make shift latch and a tough twig.

“Nevermind.” He says. He thinks for a moment, and then grabs his shotgun and unlocks the door.

You follow him out and the door automatically shuts behind you. You ask him if he’s going to lock it, but he points at the door. Looking at it, you realize that there is no way to lock it. Then you notice the red “X” painted on the door, which you don’t remember being there before.

“Go us let, on come.” He dashes down a forest path suddenly and you feel the stone in your hand dim as he does so.

You quickly follow as you watch the stone get brighter as you get closer. He leads you from the edge of the narrow meadow to the other side of it, and then into the forest. The stones seemed to glow brighter in the forest, but that could just be because the sun’s light isn’t drowning out the light from the stones as much. Ted leads you through a long, winding path into the forest, but you keep up fairly well. Along the way, you cross over what seems to be some kind of asphalt, but you don’t have time to examine it as you follow Ted.

After a traveling a few miles into the forest, Ted stops at a lonely building in the middle of the forest. It looks like an old abandoned roadside diner mixed with a trailer house. A tall old tree rests squarely in the center of the diner, crushing the middle of the roof and walls and effectively splitting the diner in two. Moss grows on every outside surface of the diner, not just the north side. In fact, if you look closely enough, you can actually see it slowly get bigger.

Ted pulls you away from the moss and takes you to the diner entrance on one end of the building. He opens the door a crack, peeks in, and then opens it all the way, but blocks you so you can’t enter.

Inside, the walls and floor are coated with all colors of silly string. Several small yellow pools of water loiter on the floor amidst the silly string. Looking to the shiny silver counter, you see several cats napping on each other. Their synchronous purr vibrates the whole building periodically. It seems the delay between purrs is more or less random. The space where the cooking equipment should be is empty and the lack of paint on the walls look like shadows of where they had been. Sunlight leeks through the huge crack in the ceiling where the tree had fallen through. Ropes arranged like vines strangle the old tree and several red dots hustle around on the tree in the light. The tree – and the rubble it generated -- completely block entry to the other half of the diner.

Ted lifts a finger and touches one of the silly strings clinging to the wall next to him. The silly string ripples from the touch. Soon a shadow emerges on the bare kitchen wall and an old black-haired woman appears. However, her shadow says that she looks more like a giant arachnid.

“Ello hagain, Ted.” She says unenthusiastically in a raspy voice. “Brat whings tou yo hy mumble abode?”

“Sloak Iced, news bad have I.” Ted proclaims.

“Ploh, ease, cin ome.” “Sloak Iced” gestures for both of you to enter.

You start to take a step inside, but Ted stops you.

“Diner this enter ever, ever, never.” He whispers it to you so loudly the woman inside clearly heard it.

“Tho sen te mell, at whis bis thad news?” She strides up toward the counter she’s behind and starts stroking the back of one of the cats.

“Habitat the reached have butterflies the.”

Sloak Iced pretends to not care and continues stroking the cat. A moment of silence passes.

“Comprehend you do?” says Ted in a rather urgent tone.

She doesn’t respond right away, but in her own time she silently goes to the kitchen wall and touches the silly string that’s coating it. A ripple of energy surges through the room, in time with the cats’ unanimous purr.

Outside, you hear several birds squawk as they take flight from the trees. You see a blob of white hit Ted’s head and you feel a knock on your skull like someone cracked open an egg and dropped the yoak on you. Your first thought after that is *Go to the bridge stone cave.* Weird, that’s not what you were thinking a moment ago. You see the birds – crows – fly up into the air and form a moving pattern that looks like a figure 8, but just isn’t quite. You feel the back of your head where one of the crows dropped something on you. It’s not gooey, but rather, rubbery. You pull it off with one clean, painless pull and look at it. It writhes harmlessly in your hand and you immediately throw it to the ground out of shock. It turns to liquid when it hits the ground and Ted pulls you away from the puddle it forms. Thin, inch-high spikes form out of the puddle, drying it up.

“Goo of pile good a wasted you.” Ted says to you with a disapproving frown on his face. “Now matter not does that but. Go must we, come.”

Ted puts the “goo” he pulled from his head in his coat pocket. He takes off deeper into the forest and you follow. You soon come to a small creek with little orange triangles floating in it. Ted reaches down, picks one up, and crunches on it. The other orange triangles immediately swim around crazily as they float downstream. As he munches on the orange triangle, he gestures to you to grab one too.

You kneel down in front of the creek and watch the orange triangles swim frantically. You try to grab one but it easily dodges, knowing now that there are predators nearby. After several failed grabs, you place your hand in the water to try and block their path. A jolt runs up your arm and you immediately pull it back. After that, your hand is numb but you can still move it. Ted chuckles at you and slaps you on the back in a you’re-a-jolly-good-fellow kind of way.

You see that the creek is too wide to step over, and jumping over it would be risky.

Ted takes off down the river and you watch the orange triangles in the water as you follow. You soon come to a point where the orange triangles rise up out of the water and float into the air. Ted grabs one and eats it. You also grab one, and it’s actually very easy this time. You put it up to your mouth, and crunch the tip of it. It slightly jolts your lip, in what seems more like a tickle than an electric shock. It tastes like Doritos mixed with strawberries. Funny how it doesn’t taste like oranges, or like triangles, isn’t it?

Ted takes off after a few bites, and you have had barely any time to eat even the first orange triangle you caught. You discard the half-eaten orange triangle and follow Ted. You feel a wave of heat and a burst of light encroach from behind. You turn to look and see an explosion caught mid-frame, frozen in time. It is still emanating tons of heat and light, but remains motionless. After a moment of two, the explosion ball cracks and falls apart as if it was a shell. Inside, a bright orange being glows. Once the shell has completely fallen off, the orange being makes a bow to you, recognizing that you exist. It is still emanating tons of heat and light.

Ted comes up behind you and blurts out, “One another made have you!” He grabs you and tries to pull you along.

However, a unique wave of heat washes over you and you stop. You and Ted turn around to face the glowing orange entity standing before them. It is shaped like a human, but has a fiery mess of hair and no discernable facial features. It floats above the ground, scorching the earth beneath it. It reaches out a blazing hand to you, and you feel another very distinct wave of heat wash over you.

You reach your hand out to touch it, but Ted stops you.

“It touch not do!”

The fire being pulls its hands back and holds it with its other hand, as if ashamed of having tried to reach out to you. Soon after, it began to shrink. Immediately aware of its size diminishing, the fire being starts grasping at whatever is near it. However, it is stuck floating in that one spot and can’t move. It just happened to hatch in a place with no tree close enough to be in reach. After flailing around for a bit, it stops moving and looks towards you. It has shrunk to the size of a house dog at this point. It puts its arms in a praying position and shakes them gently, sending out another distinctively unique wave of heat.

“Die it let,” says Ted, staring at the fire being. He spits on the ground towards the fire being.

You ignore him and pick up a twig, poking it at the fire being. The fire being immediately grasps it and pulls it from you. The twig is engulfed in flames and its ashes fall to the ground. From this, the fire being stops shrinking at the size of a fairy. It then sends out another unique wave of heat and bows to you.

You look at Ted. He looks at you, then at the fire being. Then he looks at you still looking at him.

“Ok,” he finally replies. “Me to close too get it let not do just. Time next triangle your finish and.”

Ted continues on along the creek and you motion towards the fire being to follow. The fire being stops emanating heat for a second. The effect is a unique wave of cool. The fire being can’t move. You look around for a stick, and poke it at the fire being. It grabs onto to it, but this time the stick doesn’t immediately catch on fire.

(2014-10-27)

You pull the stick in front of you and turn to Ted. He shakes his head quickly but then continues. Shortly after you come to a bridge over the creek and Ted and you cross it. As you follow Ted down the path, you notice the stick slowly burning away as you feel the heat of the fire being getting closer and closer to you. You stop for a second to pick up a new stick, letting it eat the one you had previously had. As you follow Ted, you constantly have to keep finding new sticks because the fire being seems very hungry.

Soon enough, Ted and you run past a statue of a sword in a stone. He all of a sudden decides to turn around and go back to it. He stands in front of it, takes a deep breath, and grasps the stone handle sticking out of the stone block. He pulls with all his might, but nothing happens. Finally he drops his hands and takes off again. You see an inscription on the stone block that reads “WHT Y THNK Y S S NT WHT Y RLY S”. You take off after Ted.

You soon come to a building that looks like a covered bridge lying flat on the ground in the middle of a circular clearing. Its front is as wide as two car widths and there’s an idle light hanging above the wooden door. The door has a particularly shiny golden door knob and has a big, red “X” painted on it. Above the door but below the light is a wooden plaque that reads, “LGHTHS NRTH”. Ted stops in front of the door and places both of his feet on the welcome mat in front of the door. He grabs the knob with one hand and it lights up for a second, and then sends a shockwave of golden light through Ted. Soon the red “X” fades away and Ted turns the knob to open the door.

Before you can get close to the building, Ted stops you. “Here in thing that bring not can you.”

You look at the fire being, who clearly wants to come along with you. You tell Ted that you’ll be careful with it. Ted stares at you, and then finally walks inside. You walk inside, making sure to keep the wooden walls out of reach of the fire being. The windows let brilliant beams of light in and the fire being is enthused by them.

The hallway takes you to another door, and behind that is a long, windowless hallway with bright overhead lights. In the center of the hallway waits a silver lever with a bright red handle. Ted passes by it and ignores your inquiries about it. He rushes to the next door. Behind the door is another hallway. Through the windows you can see the clearing from the glowing light of the moon. Through the final door, you exit into the cool clearing, basking in the moonlight. The wind playfully nips at your face and other exposed body parts. You huddle closer to the fire being to keep warm, and dash to the edge of the clearing to get another twig for it.

Ted is unaffected by the sudden chill and waits for you to continue on. Once you reach the door to the covered bridge, he takes his hand off the golden knob and a red “X” appears over the door. Ted takes off towards the forest. Following after, you soon come to another small body of water. It’s so narrow and shallow you can easily step over it in one step. You rush by it, but stop when the fire being points to it. You turn around and examine the small trickle of water. The fire being spits an ember into the small trickle of water and the glowing ember floats downstream. Satisfied, the fire being emits a pulse of heat and stands about idly, as if expecting you to continue.

You continue after Ted, who had apparently slowed down when he saw you had stopped. You come to the base of a mountain, and have to climb. The mountain side looks like someone took a pile of head-sized rocks and made a mountain out of it. It seriously looks as if it’s going to crumble down at any moment. But still, testing it out, you find that it is stable enough to climb. You also find out that it is particularly difficult to climb while holding a fire being. With a stick in one hand and a hand hold in the other, you forge ahead, trying to keep up with the spry Ted. Finally a good tree’s height up the mountain, he stops and ducks into an opening. You follow him. The opening is big enough that you can stand up in it. You take a break and stretch a little, and switch the stick to the other hand.

“Cave Stone Bridge to welcome,” welcomes Ted with his usual gruff, unwelcoming voice. “Wait we now.”

You sit down and rest for a bit. The fire being eats the rest of the twig so you don’t have to hold it anymore. After a while of sitting down, the fire being makes a lot of motions that seem to communicate that it’s hungry. You don’t see any twigs or sticks laying around on the ground, and you didn’t think to bring any with you up the mountain. Ted looks at you dumbfounded. The fire being looks at you disappointed and with a hopeless glint in its eyes.

You consider going back down the mountain to get some sticks. But without a stick to carry it back down with, you’d have to leave it in the cave alone with Ted. Either way, the fire being has a good chance of dying.

The cold wind chills you as you scooch closer to where you left the fire being. But even as you do that, you feel the energy emanating from the fire being diminish as it loses power. The wind brings the cold chill into the Bridge Stone Cave, but not only that. It also, miraculously, brings a barrage of leaves recently loosed from their perches.

The fire being charismatically reaches out for them, trying to grab all of them. It burns brighter and warmer with each leaf it captures. Finally, it seems satisfied for the moment.

You, Ted, and the fire being sit patiently in the cave, waiting for who-knows-what. You and Ted don’t talk, mostly because Ted says nothing and he responds with nothing to anything you say. The wind chills all three of you but brings in enough leaves often enough to keep the fire being happy, which keeps both you and Ted warm.

(2014-10-29)

After a while of silence, you hear a shrieking commotion in the distance. It’s hard to make out in the dark, but you can see a distant black mob in the sky in a kind of figure 8 shape. But still, it seems like it’s more than just a figure 8.

“Approaches she.” Says Ted, standing up.

You and Ted watch the horizon, waiting for “her” to show up. The part of the path below you that is visible is also clear and no travelers walk along it.

Suddenly a voice comes from behind you. “Mello, hy friends,” says a raspy voice.

You turn around, to see that it is the same old woman you had seen at the diner. She is completely covered by the caves shadows, and the fire being’s light does not reach out as far as where she is standing.

“Discuss to business important have we.” Stated Ted.

“Yes,” replied the old woman. “De wo. Thabout e utterflies, bis nit ot?”

“Butterflies the about is it, yes. Man Redrun the with talked you have?”

“Hi ave. Hand e thays sat she would act immediately.”

“Else what and, yes, yes?”

“At this it. De hid sot nay anything else.”

Ted picked up his shotgun and began climbing down the mountain. You watch him start, and then look over to wear the old woman is standing in the shadows. You can only see her reflecting eyes, and then an eerie grin.

“Ou yare sot nafe ere halone mith we. Shou yould no gow.”

On that note, you follow Ted down the mountain. You expect him to take the path that you had come up, but instead he veers off and takes a different path. The path leads to a flat opening hidden in an open cave. The moonlight shines brightly through the missing ceiling and the whole clearing is clearly visible. It is surrounded on all sides by tall mountainous walls and has a smooth, flat rock surface, which seems odd being that the mountain is apparently made out of several medium-sized rocks.

Ted walks out to the middle of the stone floor and looks at the moon. The area he is standing in begins to brighten as he stares at the moon. Soon you can see a concentrated beam from the moon to him and the beam soon obscures your vision of Ted. You put your hand in front of your face to keep yourself from being blinded. When the light goes out, the moon is still brightly lighting the clearing like before, but now Ted has disappeared.

Following his example, you step into the middle of the clearing and stare at the moon. You see concentrations of beams around you and you close your eyes to keep from being blinded. However, as soon as you close your eyes, the beams stop and the moon returns to normal. You will have to keep your eyes open through the whole process. Trying again, you look back up at the moon. This time, when the beams come down, he keep your eyes open, even though the light is now getting to you. You squint to block out as much as possible while still keeping eye contact with the moon. The light intensifies, and your eyes hurt like crazy. You use your fingers to keep your eyes open so that you don’t close them.

Finally, it’s over. You see nothing but blackness. You put your hands in front of your face, but still, you see nothing. You feel around for something, anything, but find nothing. You get down on your hands and knees to see what the floor feels like. It is also very smooth, just as smooth as the platform you saw before staring at the moon. You feel around for some imperfection to give yourself a point of reference. Nothing. The floor is so smooth that you can’t even find any spot that feels any different from any other spot.

After a while of groping around, you feel a hand on your shoulder, and it throws you off guard for a second, until you realize that it’s probably Ted. You see a small circle of light in your field of vision now, so at least you’re not completely blind anymore. Slowly, the circle gets bigger and you can see a small part of the smooth surface you are on. It glows silver like a glow-in-the-dark toy with a coat of silver over it. You turn around, looking for Ted. You don’t find him. You try to put your hands in front of your face in your seeing spot, but you can’t seem to see them.

Finally, the seeing spot becomes a seeing half, and then your vision is restored except for a few blind spots, which soon also fade away. When your vision is finally fully restored, you see Ted. Or a ghost of Ted. It’s hard to tell. It looks exactly like Ted but glows silver and is partially transparent.

You inquire as to where you are.

Instead of answering, Ted walks toward an exit. You see that you are in an area very similar to the one you had just left. In fact, it’s exactly the same except for the glowing rock. Following Ted, you come out onto a slim mountainside pass overlooking a lunar landscape with a large urban area far off in the distance.

“Welcome,” responds Ted. “Moon the to!”

(2014-11-07)

He gestures in sarcastic grandeur toward the settlement at the bottom of the mountain.

From the point of view on the mountain you can see the large urban area below. Most buildings are a max of about 3 stories tall but several of them have up to 10 stories. All the buildings seem to be the same color.

The hike down the mountain is fairly easy. The trail zigzags down steadily and there is always a view of the city below. Plus the gravity is lighter on the moon.

You soon remember that the moon has no atmosphere. But here you are, breathing like normal. You ask Ted about this.

He shrugs. “Know people moon the.”

You continue walking down to the city. At some point you are close enough to see the streets and you can tell that they are empty. You can now also see that the buildings are all made of moon rock and that there are no sidewalks. No light poles, no sewer drains, no fire hydrants, no signs. Only buildings.

Looking over the city from the trail, Ted comments, “Grown has city this how my.”

Maybe no one’s on the streets right now because they’re all sleeping?

You and Ted finally get to the bottom of the mountain and you’re on the street. He walks up to a building that looks like it’s wearing a giant stone top hat on it. He walks up to it and presses his body up against the door. Then he strokes the door as if it were a furry animal.

The door is flat and glowing like the rest of the building. It has no discernable door handle, but promptly swings open to the inside after a good petting.

Ted walks inside. The inside of the building is completely hollow. This building is about two stories tall, without the top hat on it. But the whole thing, including the top hat, is hollow. There are no rooms, no windows, no furniture, and – strangely of all – no people. No one seems to live there.

However, the floor is littered with several small stone spheres, also made out of glowing moon stone. Ted picks up several of them and sticks them into his coat.

“Can you as many as take.”

You oblige and bend down to pick up a sphere. It glows slightly dimmer than the walls around you. It’s rough and not perfectly round, but is still rounder than a glob of hand-rolled cookie dough. They’re small enough that you can easily fit two in one hand. You stash it on your person, and pick up some more. After picking up as many as you can carry, Ted heads out the door and you follow.

Outside, you again notice the lack of moon people on the streets. You inquire about what happened to the moon people, and if these spheres belonged to them.

“Them to happened what?” Ted looks incredulous. “People moon the are these!” We makes a sweeping motion with his hand. “Thriving are they and! Before as big as twice is city the!”

You stop moving and do a 360 around you to get a good look at the buildings around you. So these are the moon people!

You and Ted have no trouble taking the spheres to the landing area, although it is a bit of a workout climbing the zigzag trail back up. Once you get to the landing area, Ted looks up at the world and gets zapped away just like last time. You follow too, and the light and the temporary blindness is just as painful as last time, although it’s more bearable because you know what to expect. The surrounding mountain stones look rather depressing and grey after having just come from the glowing moon.

You carry the stones with you back the way you came on the narrow mountain pass. It’s still in the middle of the night out here, but the glowing moon stones brighten the path by a lot. Soon you and Ted return to Bridge Stone Cave with the glowing moon stones. Sloak Iced is waiting there for you.

“Ood, gi yee sou rave heturned!” She speaks with her raspery voice.

“Half your is here,” says Ted, taking out several stones from his jacket and laying them down in front of him. Then he turns to you. “Stones you of half her give.”

Without asking you do just that, in the same manner that Ted did.

“Yank thou,” she says with a giant smile. She starts to approach the stones.

Before she leaves the deep shadows of the cave, Ted turns around and walks out. You follow, remembering the last time you had been left alone with Sloak Iced.