

# CHRYsalis — THE DAWN OF MOOLAND TALES

A Story About the Origin of Our Stories

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## Foreward – Say What!

This little book is a tale about how the many epic tales and bigger books came to be. The seeds that grew into this book were dropped to the pastures by two brothers perching and burching on a beautiful branch of the tree of life. May the holy Mū bless their inner realms.

On the pages that follow, we join our darling friends, Izzy and Manny, for an adventure across the many fantastic realms of Mooland. Izzy and Manny are on a quest for insight into a proper means for sharing their wonderful stories with all of their friends – and with all of us.

In Mooland, everything is essential and interconnected. In the Inner Cookie Universe, everything means on multiple levels. As such, this book may be rather meta and much mystify your mind. Enjoy the journey with Izzy and Manny. Enjoy the gentle expansion of your budding consciousness. Tune in, yes please?

\* *With Love, The Wizard*

## Moologue – Where Are We?

"Moo!" Best of the day and night to you. By the looks of it, we're all set for a journey into a fantastic reality. Destination: *Inner Cookie Universe*. In the peculiar sphere of the Inner Cookie Universe, spinning in a dimension far far away – but also very near and dear, depending on how your heart is spinning – everything is full of depth and meaning, and the essences of life flow free and vibrant in all directions.

We're zooming into our favorite planet in this whole wide universe – *Mooland*, a planet of many contrasting realms, and at least as many fascinating tribes of creatures. It's a charming land of natural beauty and a field of endless tales and adventures. Mooland is mostly covered in lush and fertile pastures, glowing peacefully in the vast vastness of space as a greenish orb of marvel and delight.

Our story begins with the meeting of two friends, *Dizzy Izzy* the highland cow and her best friend, *Manny* the praying mantis. Izzy and

Manny have been inseparable since the earliest of their days. While Manny's family is originally from the mountain realm of the *Peaklands*, they've settled at the dreamy *Highlands* realm since before Manny was born. Izzy and her family are native Highlanders.

Dizzy Izzy is something of a day-dreamer, often a bit too frolicky for her own good, but always has her heart in the right place. It is a heart overflowing with essence, they say, that marks a true Moolandian cow. Izzy's full name is Izabella which, according to her darling grandmother, means "inner beauty". And true enough, she's never been one to cover the quirky dark spots of hide on her creamy and fuzzy face. Holding on to inner beauty with a sincere and spontaneous spirit has always seemed more important in her world.

Manny always seems to know what's going on. She has a certain uncanny orientation to the world about her. Every once in a while, she's struck with strange and fantastic visions that become the spark and wonder of many

conversations. Manny's full name is Mandalika, a name given to her parents before her birth by an elderly Mantisian sage from remote Peaklands. It means "circle of thousand colors", or so the good sage explained, and her insights would one day guide the realms of Mooland toward their fullness. She's certainly a trip to spend time with!

Without further ado, let's dive into Mooland and share the space and time with our friends. Something extraordinary is brewing today...

## 1. Lounging at the Riverlands

Once upon a sunny afternoon, as happened on many an afternoon, Izzy and Manny were chilling and lounging at the banks of one of the many rivers flowing from the flavored springs at the Riverlands. Strolling downhill from the Highlands to the playful streams at the Riverlands was a long-running favorite pastime, always an excellent option if nothing else in particular was going on.

These magical streams of many flavors – and we'll talk about the flavored springs later – were an inspiration for their countless daydreaming conversations. It was a pastime much like watching the dancing performance of the multicolored clouds at the stage of the Highlands skies but, for whatever reason, Izzy in particular felt at home and at peace near the vibrantly flowing waters.

Manny liked the fact that lots of interesting characters from the different realms of Mooland would travel to visit these reflective streams.

She rarely missed an opportunity to strike up a good conversation with a stranger from a place she was yet to visit, learning all that she could about their unique homelands and the experiences from their extraordinary journeys.

It was one such stranger, a grayish old bull from the *Deeplands*, that set into motion the unusual events shared in this tale. The appearance of an endearing elder figure, clearly full of kindness and wisdom and with a distinct aura of mystique, was simply too intriguing an encounter for the friends to ignore. Izzy and Manny split from watching and marveling the hypnotic play of hatchling rainbow fishes in the stream and rushed to the fascinating stranger, barely able to hold their tongues as they made their approach.

*"Hello good sir! Who might you be? Where might you be from? And how is it that you've landed at the Riverlands?",* they tooted at the height of their enthusiasm. *"And also, we'd love to hear about your adventures, if we may, please?"* The smoothly drawn-out final

*"please"*, bundled with two pairs of innocent starry eyes, usually melted even a thicker coat of a stranger's ice and frost of reservation.

It was hard not to be charmed by their unbridled and sincere enthusiasm. *"The name's Moopheus, young ladies, from the Deeplands. Here with an assignment from the Essence Archives. As perhaps you can tell, I'm in the midst of collecting samples from the many rivulets flowing from the Sweet-and-Sour Spring. And who might you be, I should ask in turn?"*

*"Oh apologies sir, we didn't mean to disturb"*, said Izzy and Manny with almost one voice. *"We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands! If you wish, and if you have the time, we can bring you to check out all of our favorite streams!"* They typically had a bit of overflow when they got enthusiastic. When you team up Izzy's heart full of essence and Manny's endless curiosity, formal introductions and awareness of the situation aren't much of a thing – it all just rolls on full speed ahead. Not that it bothered

Moopheus. He was dedicated to all things essential, obviously, and also enjoyed getting straight to the point.

*"I would much prefer to first fill these bottles and store them properly, and then I'll gladly indulge your curiosity with many a fantastic tale and legend."* Born and raised on the islands where all of Mooland's essences are collected, he sure had his lot of legends to share. *"As it happens, this expedition has me browsing the Riverlands and the Highlands for a full moon's churning. We will have all the time in the world, and I should also like to hear the best of your stories in exchange."*

Izzy and Manny were absolutely stoked. This sort of thing definitely does not happen every day, or every year even. They had often dreamed of visiting the Essence Islands and meeting the Moophins living in the Central Ocean. Deeplands was the only realm in all of Mooland they were yet to explore. Oh yes. In case you are wondering. Moophins are an early branch of Mooland evolution, an underwater

sister species to the Moocows. Cows are the most populous land-dwelling species on the Mooland planet.

*"So how long will those essences be okay in the bottles?"* This here is what we call a "leading question". They weren't quite patient enough to wait for Moopheus to return to wherever his basecamp was. *"Perhaps to the order of three to four hours? Really they should be fine in my bag for the time being. It's well-insulated standard issue Essence Islands gear."* And that's the answer they wished and fished for. *"In that case, dear Moopheus, before you head back, please indulge us with one big fat story – pretty please?"* Darn with these clever kids! He didn't really have an excuse, other than his mind being preoccupied with work. He didn't have the heart to refuse. Good for him and his good heart – if you're always too busy with work, the best of life will pass you by.

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Moopheus set aside his essence harvest bag, well-sealed and secured as usual, and sat down

by the riverbed with Izzy and Manny – now bubbling with enthusiasm like little bottles of essence. (Some varieties of essence are reactive in transit. Standard procedure is to handle all harvest as potentially volatile.) Anticipating the kids to ask for "one more story please", he dished out a series of highlights from his legendary all-Mooland expedition back in the days. That, he hoped, would do for the afternoon's story serving.

... "Heading back from the northern sector of the Peaklands, I stopped by the Caldera to deposit the stash of essences we had collected from the twelve major Mantisian shrines. We have drop-off points in every quadrant around the Central Ocean. I tell you, the Mantiwyrms dwelling in the deep of the caverns are no playthings! You enter the lair with a high priestess who knows the proper tunings to keep them peaceful – or you risk getting your head bitten off! It was a good score and my trainees picked up a thing or two on how to approach guardian creatures in the sacred and untouched corners of the realms.

"We were off to the other end of Mooland, me and my team of four harvesters in training. Destination Strangelands. We decided to just go straight ahead and pass through the Bridge Underlands – instead of trekking up and down the Highlands. When you get there, you really have to keep your head straight and your mission to the point. Every once in a while, we'd come across a Bosslike Challenger roaming around and looking to stir a bit of trouble. You know, from the syndicate of debating Boofalos who have nothing better to do than scout around and make sure everyone has a valid point and business that makes sense. Otherwise, they'll have you turn around in your tracks and head straight back home. And you really don't want to mess with them.

"Anyway, so we were actually headed all the way to the Boggy Hinterlands. That's well past the mining rigs of the Rough Patch Zones. You know, they're always digging in the underground caverns there,

extracting all sorts of precious substances. If you ever go under there, watch out for the dork rabbits. They keep on digging these abysmal holes that people fall into. We already have a good collection of the major substances in our archives. There was something very different and extraordinary brewing in the farther bogs. We'd received reports of fragments from the tail of a comet crashing into the marshlands. Native Mooland elements had fused with alien substance from the outer space. These sorts of digs get even a veteran harvester like me excited.

"So we ended up trudging deep into the marshes, following sightings by the locals – and a thickening trail of bog splatter, once we got closer to the impact zone. There was a cabin there in the middle of nowhere with a lonely old Boofalo sitting on the porch. He didn't seem lonely though, if anything he seemed quite content in his solitude. Introduced himself as Boohaush. He used to be a miner in the

caverns back in the days – and that much was clear from his casual cursing. Really he was a good old fellow who seemed to be really deep into his inner world. Set us up with some protective gear and gem-torches to help us see through the muck in the bogs. We spent days harvesting the area and landed with some very interesting essence composites.

"You know, we don't collect these essences just for the sake of it. Every once in a while there's a request from the Rainbow Spire. You know, from the Guardian of the Gateway, who oversees the interplanetary Rainbow Bridge. He also takes care of the celestial dome that shields Mooland from outer space radiation – it's like a rainbow umbrella over us. It has a fine balance of ionized and neutral essences – that is, active and peaceful elements – tuning and filtering the space rays on their way in. This heavenly canopy nurtures all of our nature – and the hearts and minds of all

Moolanders. Sometimes the balance needs a touch of retuning, and that's where our Essence Archives comes in – we provide the necessary essences to keep our planet in balance. So that's a slice of the story for you. There's plenty more, but now I must really move along and get my bottles sorted and stored. I'm camping near the Flavored Springs at the elder's guest shack. Drop by sometime tomorrow afternoon, okay?"

*"You bet your bag of essences we will! Thanks so much Moopheus!"* On that note, Izzy and Manny parted ways with Moopheus for the day. On the days that followed, the ocean of tales was churned to no end. We'll be serving out the cream shortly.

## 2. Once Upon a Time with Moopheus

It was barely early afternoon. Moopheus was still sorting his bottles from the day's harvest.

*"Good afternoon! Are you still busy?" – "In fact give me a moment will you. I need to label these clearly. A couple of these bottles need to be safely wrapped up and kept separate from the rest. Water from the Bitter Pool can ruin the entire collection if it spills on the way."*

*"So what do you actually do with all of this harvest at the Essence Islands?" – "Look girls, if you want the long answer, drop by at the islands sometime. Some of it we store raw, some of it we distill, some essences we mix together and let them age. Really still rather in the middle of sorting all this out. Why don't you go and wait by the four springs. I'll join you there in a bit."*

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His essences finally in order and his thoughts at peace, Moopheus joined the girls at the springs. He was actually quite excited. It was a

welcome break from the chores of this ordinary and uneventful assignment. He was filling in for several harvesters, out for a workshop at the *Heatlands Labs* studying volatile elements extraction. Not that he didn't appreciate the importance of every essence, but it was a month-long stretch of the same old for him. With no travel company and plenty of spare time on his hands, sharing his tales with a keen audience was just the sort of thing he enjoyed.

In the following, we must limit the volume of stories shared. Sorry about that. He must have told hundreds and hundreds of them over the month that followed. A full account of Izzy and Manny's talks and adventures with Moopheus would easily grow into a very big book. Today is not the day for that book. What you're about to read is a sampling of some of the legends that surfaced. Hold your horses for "The Legends of Moopheus" – coming out in its due season as a separate volume. Our pair of young scribes is still in training. For now, please enjoy the buffet of story hour crumbs we share.

## The Very Peaceful Rock

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We join Moopheus at the Grasslands in our first slice of legend. Grasslands is a nurturing band of endless pastures at the heart of Mooland, stretching from the inner Deeplands Caldera all the way to the outer band of the Riverlands. This isn't one of the epic expeditions where Moopheus and his team negotiate with mythical creatures or land with a cache of epic and extraordinary substances – but it's a jolly good old story all the same.

"So we often follow up on reports reaching the Essence Archives. We have dozens of scouts traveling the realms, checking in at every realm at least once in a fortnight. They bring in briefs of local ongoings and keep their eyes peeled for anything extraordinary. Something extraordinary suggests there may be new essence emerging. Retrieving essence is what we harvesters do. These reports are forwarded to the Cardinal Conservator who reviews them. If it seems credible enough, we

dispatch a team to investigate, always ready with their harvest gear.

"A couple of decades back, we received a report from the Plateau of Presence at the Grasslands. It's an unusually peaceful pocket of pastures at western Grasslands, somewhere half-way between the Riverlands and the Deeplands. There was, or so the report said, a rock slab that was so peaceful that if you sat on it, you wouldn't be able to get up again. It would zone you into eternal peace. A young Moocow had been parked there for a full week, motionless, not responding to anyone. We thought the presence of peace there might have crystallized into a rock.

"So there we went, and there he was, a youngster from the Riverlands, sitting like a rock on top of a round slab of rock. It was a fantastic rock, but I had my doubts. The Keepers of Peace there were altogether dumb and unconcerned about the whole affair. If you were lucky enough

to get a word out of their mouths, it was along the lines of '*Is there. It's okay.*', which wasn't helpful at all. On average, there wasn't much going on in their minds, or even with their bodies. They were just there, carefree and abiding in peace. Which is exactly the way it should be.

"It was the time to put this to a test. I sat on the ground, facing him, and observed for a moment. He really was very still and completely out of the ordinary world. With a deep breath, I poured out a very particular tuning of *moo* – from beyond the bottom of my belly with a slowly rising pitch – to see if he'd snap out of it. And snap out he did, opening his eyes and wiggling his limbs again. We took it slowly, he was groggy as a *moole*. Living not too far from there, his family were based around the border of the Riverlands, where streams dive and merge into the aquifers under the pastures. He'd been staring into the hidden depths for weeks on end – before one fateful day drifting to

the Plateau of Presence.

"Turns out this report originated from one of the more enthusiastic calving sisters from the Birthing Pastures. They're often a bit bubbly and less patient than the rest of the Grasslanders. She'd only just briefly seen the youngster there. Struck with care and concern, she'd galloped back and, driven by a blend of compassion and imagination, was telling everyone all about it. A novice scout took note of this without doing due verifications, beyond just confirming that there's indeed a young Moocow still sitting still there. And that's the report we landed with.

"Anyway, it was a fun little adventure. It wasn't about the rock at all. The essence was in his mind. This wasn't for our department to handle. His parents were well aware of the youngster's temperament and had learned not to worry too much when he zoned out. It happened all the time. His episode at the very

peaceful rock turned into a spontaneous rite of passage. There was no real future for him at the Riverlands and the family had surmised as much. The *moonks* at the Island of Mū were pleased to welcome this very peaceful youngster into their community. He's now the presiding abbot at the Hermitage of Stillness, one of the eight branches of the monastery there. We did take a sample of that rock just in case."

## **Telepathic Myntiworms**

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Our next slice of legend takes place at the far reaches of northern Peaklands. Peaklands is a mountainous half-band of a realm across the higher hemisphere of the Mooland cookie – bordering Highlands at the inner band, reaching the Edge of the Cookie over an unexplored and mysterious strip of insurmountable terrain. This is one of those legends where Moopheus and his team negotiate with mythical creatures.

"So Manny, you know that no Mantisian in their right frame of mind would ever

wander further than a dozen *kilomantihops* from the northermost shrine, right? It turns out our destination was well beyond that, way past the midway point between the Shrine of Projections and the north edge of the cookie. We were following up on a report of glazy-eyed Vertigoats wandering into the shrines. As in, straight into the shrines. It was our usual team, the five of us – me, harvesters Mooris and Mobby, scouts Mauchie and Moongo. We were a tight crew back in the days.

"Once we got to the Shrine of Projections, the high priestess pointed us to one such Vertigoat specimen. Poor creature kept on ramming itself into a solid corner, figuring there was a portal there to the other side. The caretakers had left a bowl of water and some wild shrubs next to the confused goat, keeping it there for observation. It wasn't looking good at all, had been going on since their early morning ceremonies. The running theory was that local

Vertigoats had come upon a new meadow somewhere far in the north, munching on plants that were developing weird essences. All bets are off when a plant absorbs rays from the lower bands of the planetary halo for their routine photosynthesis.

"We set march toward the general direction of far north, with no real bearings or coordinates at this point. Lady Manteizy, the priestess who knew the lay of the land, joined in. Her insight and vision seemed like they'd come in handy down the road. None of us had ever been that far north, all we had to go on were wild stories. After four or five hours of proper trekking, we found two flocks of Vertigoats at the base of a steep ridge. One of them seemed normal. The other flock was under a strange spell, a number of glazed creatures were still climbing back down the ridge. Looking at their faces, you would've expected them to come tumbling straight down, but the

lesser half of their wits were still sharp as ever.

"Not the sort of ridge you'd ever imagine a bunch of Moocows going up, but we had proper gear and it wasn't our first climb to harvest essence in hard-to-reach places. The priestess wanted to trial a couple of approaches to sort out the glazed flock, so she stayed back. Heave by heave, we pulled our weight upward and made it to the edge of the ridge. It was another one of those ridge-lined Peaklands heat pockets that often host unusual plants – but this one also had caverns and a northernly opening with a panorama straight to the ever-glowing golden halo. It was a fantastic space, but the plants there all looked reasonably normal for a pocket. No mutations or weird colorings to indicate anything unusual.

"At that point, four huge Mantiwyrms burst out from the southern cavern, flanked us, started making intimidating

approaches. I'd come across Mantiwyrms before, but these creatures were something else. There was an arcane power oozing from them. Mooris, one of our crew, made the mistake of staring one of them into the eye. You know, the glowing third eye smack middle their foreheads. It's hard not to be drawn to. He was falling into a trance. This was telepathic projection on sight. '*Peripheral vision only! Do NOT make eye contact!*' I tossed some Bittermynt powder over Moorie's face. Always keep a pouch with me. It brought him back to his senses, but that stuff isn't pleasant in your eyes.

"There we were, stuck back-to-back and surrounded by mythic beings, keeping our distance and bellowing out whatever *magic moos* we'd picked from the wizard *moonks* at the islands, passing around the Bittermynt. Distracted them just enough. Mauchie found an opening to slip away and alert the priestess. '*Moo, MA-Moo, Moo-Moo-MA!*', he bellowed over the

ridge. So we have a codex of sixty-four such signals, carries clear over distance. It means something like '*Dark, Fire, Attention!*'. Mantisians who study the Visions of Manisee learn a similar system, so she picked right up on it and buzzed to the topside to our aid. Just as well she joined in for the trek – there was no way all of us would've escaped on our own.

"Little did we know, Lady Manteizy was actually an elder adept in the Eye of Command, an ancient Mantisian technique of hypnotic projection. When she oriented to the scene and booted up her mystic art, I tell you... Those weirding eyes I'll never forget. She made straight eye contact with every one of the Mantiwyrms. Spinning in circles and covering the four directions, the matrix in her eyes reconfigured and reflected back their telepathic projections. In short order, the creatures tamed down and retreated back to their cavern. This place, we called it the Mantele Plateau, ended up on the general off limits list. A

living thorny fence was planted all around the base of the ridge to keep Vertigoats from wandering up there. The topside is now a sanctuary for these extraordinary creatures. Manteizy still checks in on them every once in a while."

### **3. Welcome to the Jungle**

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Next up, we wander into the dense jungles at southern Riverlands. Riverlands is a full band of a realm surrounding the Grasslands, bordering Highlands across the higher hemisphere, stretching all the way to the Strangelands – almost – in the lower realms. There's a thin sliver of Highlands separating the two realms, but strange effects emanating through the Bridge Underlands are loud in the whole of the south. Moolandians usually just stick to marveling the jungle from the safety of the Hang-Out Bridge at the Highlands.

"Ever been to the jungle, kids? I hope you didn't go alone. That place is full of all sorts. It was our usual team on the road. The miner consortium of Strangelands,

digging around at Bridge Underlands, had sent in a report about a massive tunnel that seemed to stretch all the way to southern Riverlands. It was full of precious substances they'd never seen before. A separate underground team was dispatched to the Strangelands. Our crew was sent to the southern jungles to investigate plant-life anomalies.

"If you head in there, make sure you have enough *mosquito* repellent. Hideous creatures, those. We had a full extra backpack ready to make sure we don't run out. It wasn't just the little buggers we had to worry about, though – heard of the Wave Tigers? Gorgeous light blue creatures, usually lurking in the streams. They're amphibian, you know – they live mostly underwater, but they'll surface and run across the jungle and back if they feel like it. It's one of the few predators on our planet. They usually chase down the fish in the rivers, but they'll take down a Moocow if you happen to disturb a mother

with her cubs.

"Anyway, so we were trekking through this green labyrinth and lost our bearings every so often. Of course we had a compass, but it only helps you so much if you can't go straight. Wandering somewhere in the heart of the jungle, more or less lost, we came across a camp of Medicine Moos. They call them *shamoos* for short. Not sure what it's short of, but sure it's shorter. They had a very good idea of the paths through the jungle – and, to our surprise, knew about the strange tunnel underneath. None of them had been there, as in actually, but they knew it from their visions. Medicine Moos do this thing where a pot is filled with exotic plants and left to brew under the full moon. In the morning the chief *shamoo* dunks their head into it for fifteen minutes. They see things.

"One of them joined in for the journey. They were curious about our expedition. After clearing through a number of

quickswamps and chopping down some vine thickets when there wasn't a way around – good thing the *shamoo* brought his slash blade – we saw a massive flower shimmering like a gemstone, shaped like a gemstone too. '*That's not usual at all, never seen that!*', said the *shamoo*. We were clearly in the zone. His reaction suggested this was a new development. It's possible that substances in the tunnel became activated when the opening was breached by the miners, and it was all now migrating into the ecosystem. Not too far down the road, an opening in the dense canopy revealed a field with all sorts of peculiar plants basking in the sun.

"We took out our sample kits and split up to extract some plant materials to bring back. Something odd was in the air. All of a sudden, Mauchie started giggling for no reason at all. Uncontrollably. Then I found Mooris just sitting sad in the bush, so depressed he couldn't get a word out of his mouth. Mobby seemed to be very agitated

by something. Kept butting his horns into the ground, a small crater there at that point. Moongo was chasing after anything and everything like it's the most interesting novelty in the world. A sense of fear was creeping up my spine – and that's when I pulled a fabric from my backpack and covered my snout nice and tight. The pollen from the plants was psychoactive – as in, it messes with your head when you inhale it.

"I grabbed some Bittermynt from my pouch – that stuff has saved my hide more than once – and shoved some into each of their noses to reset their senses. It has bite. The *shamoo* kept on puking in the background, I have no idea what went down with him, but it looks like he managed to clear the pollen from his nostrils in the process. We all put our fabrics on and continued with the samples. Pooled up a decent selection of plant pollen laced with mysterious minerals. If I hadn't figured out it was the pollen, no

telling how far gone we'd ended up. Might have never returned. This stuff was going straight back to the Integrator Incarnate, our elder at the Essence Archives. He has a higher wit that's never phased, even by exotic essences like these."

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Moopheus eventually continued his journey into the southern realms in search of the next essences on his very long harvest list. Izzy and

Manny landed with a treasure trove of tales to reflect on. And really, they ended up musing and contemplating on just about everything they had ever experienced or imagined in their lives. It was the dawn of a new chapter in their story – a chapter that would easily rival the epic adventures of Moopheus himself. Today is the day for exploring that chapter – this is the book of Izzy and Manny's ground-breaking quest across all of Mooland.

Reflecting on the all the marvelous tales Moopheus had shared, they realized that truly precious things – the kind everyone longs for – are always worth sharing. There were all the legends of Moopheus, then the stories they had heard from the countless other visitors to the Riverlands – and for good measure, the abundance of tales they'd been hearing from Izzy's grandmother Ammoolia since they were mere toddlers. Izzy and Manny were sitting on a significant chest of living treasures. It'd be selfish to not do something about it.

Izzy was humoring herself with the idea of

becoming a wandering bard, traveling from realm to realm and singing the best of her tales. Her voice wasn't exactly the sort that attracts a big audience, even if she could come up with series of rather charming *moos* up and down an octave or two. Manny was busy mapping the stories in her mind. She had a way of sorting out significant volumes of content into her inner spaces. Sort of. It often made her seriously spinny – to a point where it looked like she dropped off the edge of her cookie. Again. Izzy was used to that by now.

*"Do you think we should write all of this down?",* asked Manny – though really she knew the answer already.

*"If indeed we did",* said Izzy, *"it would touch and open a thousand hearts in every realm of Mooland."*

In a rush of inspiration, Manny took it straight to the next level. *"Moopheus was talking about the Rainbow Spire at the center of the Central Ocean. Where other Doughland planets have their embassies. He'd definitely help us drop*

*some copies there. I mean, he helped train the Guardian of the Gateway back in the days. I see interplanetary horizons opening. Izzy, this could be extraordinary."*

*"From where I look at things", said Izzy, "it doesn't matter if it's all of Mooland, every Doughland planet, or all the galaxies in the universe. When I hear these sorts of tales, I feel what others feel, and I see the world through their eyes. Stories from the realms are bridges that bring us all together. They are like seeds of unity. Are we then the gardeners? Do I sound like a bard yet?"*

Izzy and Manny weren't exactly authors. They had lots of enthusiasm, two vibrant hearts in the right place, and a pretty good sense of what truly matters in life. That's really what matters the most – the rest will fall in place. Just move ahead and do what's right, guarding your pure intention – and be true to yourself, always keep your spirit real. Listen to the world around you, follow your dreams and your calling. For Izzy and Manny, there was clear calling that was

growing louder and louder. They were on a journey to share something special with the whole universe. It was a beautiful dream in the making.

*"Honestly Manny, I have no idea where to start or where to end. Or even what to do in between. I mean, I can read and write and stuff. I've read a couple of books, but that's about it. How would we write down and organize like a thousand stories?"*

*"We'll figure it out!",* said Manny. *"We always figure things out, don't we?"*

*"We should visit the orchards. Grandma will help us wrap our heads around this."*

### 3. Grandma's Cloud Orchard of Mysteries

Izzy's dear grandmother, Ammoolia, was a wise and lively old lady who lived near the Highlands Grand Orchards. She had planted more fruit trees than anyone in her village could count or remember! In her younger days, she spent her summers at an ancient monastery on the Island of Mū in the Deeplands. The community there are dedicated to studying the Scrolls of Mū and "tuning" into the echoes of unity from the dawn of the universe. It's a sort of spiritual order there. Long story short, Ammoolia had deep insight and wisdom.

*"I was expecting you"*, said Ammoolia, her gaze still fixed on the extraordinary cluster of clouds she was tracking. *"It's all written in the clouds you see, your arrival, the quest that looms ahead."* In the outskirts of the Highlands, the oracles believed that the trails of future were painted across the sky. Izzy's grandmother was one of these oracles, exceptionally gifted in the art of reading symbols in the clouds. *"Go ahead though, Izzy,"* she added with a smile, *"I do*

*love to hear your stories!"*

Izzy and Manny bubbled on about their time with Moopheus and shared a number of stories – and finally reached the actual question that brought them here. *"Grandma, we have no idea where to even begin,"* Izzy admitted. *"All these stories we'd like to share with everyone – in a way that's meaningful. It's all a bit much to handle. Even Manny's head is spinning. Is there something written in the clouds that could help us? Maybe some guidance from the wisdoms of Mū – and please, in a way we can actually understand?"*

Tuning into the deeper essences of life was second nature to Ammoolia. At this point in her life, it was arguably her first nature. She was living and breathing in the flow of the universe. *"Let me tell you a story from the beginning of time, girls. You've heard about Mū, the primordial cow, haven't you? Mū was born from the churning of the ocean of milk – a cosmic dance by the positive and negative spirits of the universe. Time itself was still, the universe*

*filled with emptiness. It was a peaceful time, yes, but also melancholic. This was the very dawn of everything yet to come, waiting in their turns."*

Manny had actually browsed the Scrolls of Mū in Ammoolia's library once or twice. She'd read the creation myth – the cosmic void, the ocean of milk, its magnetic churning, and how the first cosmic cow, Mū, became the countless flavors and realms of the universe. Izzy had never taken much of an interest in interest in deep and abstract ideas. To her, it felt distant from the touch and meaning of real life. Manny's uncle was a good example: his head was full of knowledge, but none of it seemed to connect to anything real or useful.

*"Grandma, please, we know that you can tell us deep stories from the beginning of time for days on end. But it would take us years to digest all of that, and we could really use something that helps us today and tomorrow!"* Ammoolia was well aware that she could get endlessly lost in these cosmic legends, and understood that not

everyone shared her patience to journey through the countless mind-bending realms that were second nature to her. "Alright then", she said, *"Let me distill all of that into a simple compass that you can carry with you on all of your life's journeys. It'll still take a bit of patience, so please stay with me for the moment."*

This "simple compass" of Ammoolia is none other than the teaching of the *Mūltifold Ancient Elements*, usually reserved for the senior *moonks* and wizards-in-training at the monastery. She had her way of making these sorts of profound ideas accessible – even for children who were yet to learn how to read or write. She brought distant concepts into familiar environments, shared simple stories full of insight, and even doodled some pictures – it's like she poured flavors of philosophy into the tea-cup of daily life.

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*"Let me tell you about the Elements of Mū that existed a very very long time ago. They moved*

*among each other in the vastness of space, churning in the womb of the universe, before our world with its shapes and creatures was born. These ancient elements are still with us today. They are everywhere, they influence everything at all times. If you understand these elements and mindfully tune into their presence, you'll find support in every situation, and guidance for every quest and mission you may ever undertake."*

Manny already had an idea of what's coming. *"Are these like the heavenly Mantigels that the Mantisian priests speak of?"*

Ammoolia chuckled. *"Something like that, yes. When you spend enough time at a lonely mountain top or at the bottom of the ocean, pondering the deeper realities of life, your mind has a way of dressing up the abstract into something you can hold on to. Everyone needs friends and companions, imaginary or otherwise, and that's a part of the beauty of life. As for you two, you don't need to believe in spiritual holograms in the outer space. Our*

*elements are more universal and more present than that. This is all a part of you."*

Manny hadn't seen that coming. *"Like seriously wow!"*, she exclaimed. *"Did you learn all this at the Essence Islands, Nana Ammy?"* Ammoolia chuckled again. *"I did learn many fantastic and meaningful things during my time there, but it is life itself that directly teaches us – if only our hearts are open and sincere, tuned with nature. Only Earth can teach you of the peace of the pastures beneath. Only Water can show you the joy of the flowing rivers. Only Fire can reveal the warmth and clarity of dancing flames. And only Air can give you of the freedom of the wind across the skies."*

*"That's all wonderful, Grandma. But I know about the pastures that support us. We hang out at the rivers almost every day. We've been to the Heatlands and felt the sun shining all day long, There's plenty of wind at the Highlands! How's that going to help us write and sort out our stories?"* Izzy was not shy to speak her mind, especially when she felt a distance

between her heart and whatever that was going on. This habit of hers often annoyed people, but Ammoolia didn't mind. She knew Izzy's doubt came from the right place, and she was also incredibly patient. It happens when you spend enough time watching and learning from the clouds.

*"Now look Izzy, that's all true. But have you ever paused to wonder – what is the pasture of your inner being? Whence do the rivers flow in your sensitive heart? How is the sun shining in your brilliant mind? And how vast is the great atmosphere of your understanding? You see Izzy, these ancient elements didn't simply become the physical world. They are also present in your inner world. They are even in between the inner and the outer worlds – present in every experience you ever have in this life."*

*"Wow alright. Well that's a new angle."* Izzy fell silent for a moment, digesting and contemplating. Manny too was silent – way out there, exploring and redesigning her inner

world. Ammoolia enjoyed dropping lines that make your mind spin. First disorienting, to snap you out of your usual way of thinking – and then giving you fresh bearings. The girls were still wrapping their heads around the idea of cosmic elements in their hearts and minds and lives.

*"As soon as Manny returns to Mooland, can we please continue?"*

## 4. Compass of Ancient Elements

Manny was back in Mooland, her wits primed for the teaching. Izzy was comfortably settled in a patch of grass, curious about this compass of all-pervading elements. Ammoolia was always ready. For her, these sorts of topics were like a homecoming journey to the pristine gardens of Mū, blooming in the foreverness of timeless essence. That is, she was more than ready. *"Now that you kids are in the zone, let's walk through the basics. Four elements. We have these four essential sayings."*

"First, Earth.

The pasture beneath, your material foundation.

Whatever that forms a structure: Strings holding you firmly together,

Framing and supporting the dynamic shapes of life.

It's a solid and heavy substance — so remember:

Stay grounded — but never let the ground swallow you.

Know your roots – but don't be stiff and rigid in your ways."

*"You girls got that?", Ammoolia checked in. She spelled them out slowly. "There's a lot to each element. This is a bit dense, but it's important."*  
– *"We've got our notebooks here. It'll be a bunch to think about, but we're still following – all good, thanks grandma."*

"Next, Water.

The flow of rivers, the ocean and the rain.

Whatever that holds together: Flowing from one moment to the next,

Adapting to the shapes it meets on its course.

It's a flexible and ever-changing flow – so remember:

Flow along – but never let the flow carry you away.

Feel your stream – but don't get lost splashing around in it."

*"Got that? It's good that you write it all down. This is how it's taught at the Island of Mū." – "Ammy, are these teachings from the scrolls?"*

– *"That's the way our wisdom has been kept since the beginning, Manny. Use your imagination."*

"Then, Fire.

Flames boiling the pot, the sun shining in the sky.

Whatever power and potential: Kindled in every encounter and reaction,

Illuminating and transforming everything it meets.

It's a reshaping and clarifying force – so remember:

Shine bright – but never let the flames rule you.

Wield your power – but don't let it seize and scorch your mind."

*"You are going to then walk us through all of this, step by step, right grandma?"* Izzy was beginning to feel the brain strain. The scrolls pack a lot of material into short statements. *"Don't worry Izzy, we'll workshop this properly."*

"Finally, Air.

The wind crossing the skies, the air we breathe.

Whatever that moves freely: Spreading and pervading all directions,

Rising to heights and broadening your perspective.

It's a light and uncluttered expanse – so remember:

Soar high – but never evaporate into the sky.

Expand your reach – but don't be scattered by the winds."

*"And that concludes the classic opening for the Elements of Mū. Earth, Water, Fire, and Air – Substance, Flow, Force, and Expanse. Present in all things. Let's start with that and take a little break, alright? I have a nice pot of herbal tea brewing for you."*

Ammoolia was aware that this brief teaching was already quite the mouthful – with lots more ground to cover for Izzy and Manny's upcoming adventures. Her backyard was full of wild herbs, she had natural fixes for most ailments – from a

sore tummy to a common cold or a budding headache. Budding headache was a very real prospect for Izzy and Manny – but this had to be a crash course. The girls would never ever study this in a monastery for months or years – and the clock was ticking toward their departure. So said the clouds.

*"Here, a soothing brew of umbrella-shaped Mootu leaves. A well-known brain tonic straight from my backyard. It's a common drink served for students at the Peaklands Academy. Mountain herbs. Improves concentration and helps you remember everything we discuss. Also great for adding a bit of bite to a fresh salad!"* It was not a particularly tasty tea. Really quite bitter with grassy undertones, but Izzy enjoyed most flavors of grass and Manny was into anything that improves her mental capacity.

Sipping their third serving of the herbal tonic, Izzy found herself pondering. *"Say, Manny, do you think we're at the hands-on stage of this teaching yet? It's a beautiful concept, but still*

*quite abstract for me.*" Manny was seeing fractals in her mind again – as often happened when she plunged into more intricate thoughts. Ammoolia's herbal tonic helped her balance and organize the general flux in her mind into words. "*I do have a couple of ideas shaping up*", said Manny with a little smirk on her face. "*Let me share it with Ammy and we'll see how she responds. It does sound like she has lots more to share.*"

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So that was a lot of herbal tea there.

*"Ammy, thinking about the elements everywhere. If I look at myself, my body. Bones and muscles are the solid Earth that supports me, right? And Water is blood and other liquids flowing in me. I guess there's the Fire of digestion in my belly – and my body heat? I don't know what Air is, other than my breathing. Am I going in the right direction?"*

*"Well aren't you quite the clever little grasshopper, Manny!"*, Ammoolia exclaimed.

Manny didn't like being called a grasshopper, but technically a mantis is a type of grasshopper, and she knew that perfectly well.

*"That's very much correct and a fair starting point for understanding how the Elements of Mū are a part of your being. Even the currents of the nerves running criss-cross throughout your body are aerial essence. The breath, the nerves, and the mind are connected. Everything is connected with the elements. Just tune in."*

She then took a deep breath, pouring out a long and peaceful low-pitch *Moooooooo* – a bit out of the blue. It wasn't your average moo-sound. It wasn't like any moo-sound Izzy had ever heard before, but the sound filled her with a familiar sense of peace. Even the twitch she had in her left ear from yesterday suddenly calmed down.

*"Whoa grandma. Was that a sample of the legendary moo of Mooses?"* Mooses is a reference to an epic ancestor of the Highlander cows whose bellowing *moo*, or so the stories tell, had the power to halt rivers and allow the wandering herds to walk over and above their momentarily still and solid waters.

*"Ah don't be a goofball, Izzy! It was just a simple moo from the bottom of my heart."* It was definitely a bit more than that, given Ammoolia's background in training the *Tunings of the Mū*. They have retreats at the Island of Mū for tuning into the echoes of the universe. If you were to ever hear them reflecting the ancient vibes of the Mū together, you'd witness a magical concert of every sort of weird and wonderful *moo* saturating the atmosphere. Sounds rarely heard on the everyday pastures.

*"But it does touch and calm the heart, it does when it springs from our inner essence. Can you feel the Elements of Mū in your heart, Izabella?"*

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It was a tall request for Izzy, but the heart was her heartland. She had spent lots of time by the streams and springs of the Riverlands, reflecting on the feelings and emotions bubbling in her heart, ruminating through the flavors of her life. Her usual daydream drifts were journeys into what and how she feels,

instead of dreaming about every sort of diversion that lets your mind escape the challenges of daily life. She was a deep little Moocow in her heart of hearts.

*"So if I set my heart to the Earth you described, Grandma, I settle into peace and patience and safety."* Izzy wasn't famous for her patience in general, but she did have abundant patience for things that deeply matter. *"And if I let my heart flow with the Water, there's joy and empathy and flexibility. When I allow the Fire into my heart, I find courage and precision and sharpness. And when I let my heart soar with the Air, I discover hope and freedom and wisdom."*

*"These are very much on the mark, Izabella!"*, Ammoolia affirmed with a distinct delight in her voice. *"You've found many of the sacred flavors of Mū in the elements of your heart – and these are of the best we may ever hope for. But in this world, the elements are often all topsy-turvy within us, polluted and corrupted by our selfish designs. Earth sinks us into dullness and*

*lethargy. Water lures us into heedless indulgence. Fire kindles our anger and arrogance. Air spins us into anxiety and confusion. Guard your precious heart, darling, keep it shining bright. It'll protect you from the shadows of the elements."*

At this point, all of it started making practical sense to Izzy. Her heart was her super-power for the journey. Tuning into the elements, especially in the hearts of everyone, would be most helpful in navigating the curvy roads of life. *"Grandma, so I'm musing about our mission with a deeper heart here. Every story is like a flowing river of flavors. The flavors are the elements in so many forms. I'm sure there's just the right story for every person. If we can match the elements in their hearts with the elements in our stories, there can be comfort and insight, healing and meaning, for everyone who hears them. It makes sense."*

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Enthused with the kids getting the gist of her message, Ammoolia pushed the topic higher

and deeper. *"Now where's my favorite grasshopper again? I have a question for you!"* She'd spotted Manny's reservations over the grasshopper call and decided to keep spinning it to see what comes. Manny was a bit flabbergasted with being put on the spot while contemplating on Izzy's newfound insights, still also dealing with the visual vortex spinning somewhere at the back of her head. *"Yes Nana, where? I mean, here, I'm here. What? I am Manny from Mooland!"* She would often say that to ground herself back into the present world.

*"Be a clever little cricket and explain to me how the Elements of Mū help shape your orientation in any and all situations. I'll give you hints."* – *"Okay Nana, Manny from Mooland! All fractals at your service!"* Manny had a way of making these inner vision bursts function – more or less – in making sense of the world about her. Her untamed capacity for perceiving structures in nested dimensions, technically a fractal motion parallax anomaly, is considered a most high gift in the Mantisian cultural tradition.

*"Here, let me paint a scenario for you to work with, Manny. You and Izzy are roaming the Strangelands with your backpacks full of gear. You encounter Buffy Smokarus, the cigar-smoking buffalo from beyond the bogs, amidst a little patch of tangly and overgrown forest. He seems restless. What do you find here? May the spirit of Mū inspire you, and remember that there are no bad answers. We are always learning and our insight is forever evolving. This is a journey of tuning your soul ever-deeper into the echoes of deepest essence."*

*"Alright, let's see. If I think about Earth. Substance and structure. For sure it includes the details of the actual place we're at. Also the selection of gear in our backpacks, I think. Buffy and his homeland have a particular shape and structure and identity too."*

*"Yes very good Manny, these are all a part of the foundation of the scenario. Much more will be shown to you in the fullness of time. Earth includes all the basic ingredients that we have on the table. If you don't know the shape and*

*character of your ingredients, how would you ever cook for us a well-rounded dish."* Ammoolia was fond of her metaphors and cooking was one of her cherished hobbies.

Izzy interjected, *"It seems to me that Buffy isn't very grounded! Isn't restlessness from the element of Air – spinning too fast? I'd ask him to sit down on the ground and take a couple of deep breaths."* – *"You're racing ahead of the program Izabella, but that is all true! We hear these sorts of ponderings from the healer cows of the Riverlands. They too tune into the elements, weighing their conflicts and complementarities, always with an eye for restoring the balance. Air is both the friend and enemy of Earth. Water is both the friend and enemy of Fire. But these are topics that we'll explore at a later time."*

Combining elements in multiple dimensions sounded like the work of the scientific alchemists at the *Heatlands*, but this went way beyond the workshops and the laboratoriums. Manny was fascinated. *"So Manny, onward we*

*go. Where and how does the Water flow, in your meeting with Buffy in the midst of this overgrown forest patch?"*

*"I see the Water as the river of life, Ammy. We flow from a source and we flow toward a destination – like a river flows from a spring into the central ocean. Forever changing its shape and adapting to its path, it's still the same river, more or less. Anywhere I meet the river, at any point in its journey, I can hear echoes of its past and touch the dreams of its future course. All of this makes me think about Buffy's journey. Wherever that he came from, wherever that he may wish to go. And the nature of the stream that's pushing and pulling and guiding his path. The Buffy that we meet in the moment is like a snapshot of the river of his life."*

*"Well aren't you quite the philosopher, Manny."* It wasn't the precise answer Ammoolia was pitching for. It was much more than she dared to hope for at this point. It touched on the essence of Water in a very universal way and

would've made the contemplative philosopher *moonks* at the islands proud. "*Hold on to that insight, Manny. You'll find the Mirror of Empathy that will, just as Water adapts to the shapes of its environment, fill you with insight into the deepest currents of everyone you may ever meet.*" There's a famous relic called the *Mirror of Empathy* at the Island of Mū, but it's just a reminder of the real mirror that exists in our hearts.

*"I often find myself pondering how people feel, and why they feel the way that they do."* Izzy was also bubbling with insight. *"Feelings are also like rivers that flow in our hearts. Some rivers are peaceful little streams. Other rivers are turbulent rapids, powerful enough to move boulders. If we look at the Earth that forms the riverbed, we see the structures that tune the Water – and we understand why rivers flow the way they do."* She'd been hanging out with the *Flow-Moovers* at the Riverlands. They track the flows and make adjustments in the terrain, helping every river flow to their fullest potential.

*"And you clearly have a poet's heart, Izzy!"* At this point, Ammoolia was quite excited. This pairing of a day-dreaming darling cow and a dimensionally challenged praying mantis – considered by many a lost cause as far as getting ahead in their lives and becoming something significant... Much more than mere drifters, she saw before her a budding philosopher and a budding poet, a sprouting visionary and a sprouting empath, a team of two naturals with complementary talents and promise of an extraordinary future. *"You two are like the Sun and Moon that color the clouds I watch day and night with fascination. Which one is which, I have no idea, or perhaps both of you are both of them in turn, as the wheels of the heavens are turning to their tunes."*

Manny's inner world of fractals was settling toward a system she can zoom and manage without getting overwhelmed. *"Nana, it seems that the elements help me contain and manage my visions. What's going on here?"* – *"And we would expect nothing less, Mandalika. As I noted at the very beginning, the Elements of Mū*

*will support and guide you at all times and with all things. The "circle of thousand colors" in your mind – simply the children of the great elements. Just as an artist might mix together primary colors into countless combinations, so too the elements become a palette of the endless colors and flavors of your existence."* This was once again a mind-blowing insight for Manny. But it felt more like a harmonic fusion, not another one of her disorienting fractal explosions.

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*"Shall we boldly jump into the Fire, then? I'm tickled to hear what the two of you will come up with. Manny?"*

*"Alright, Nana. When I tune into the Fire in your scenario, the first thing that comes to mind is the tension in our meeting. A cigar-smoking buffalo dressed like a boss is not the sort of character I'm used to interacting with. What are we supposed to say to him, how are we supposed to deal with him? Fire is clearly blazing in my thoughts when I examine the*

*situation, grasping for a correct way to handle it. It's probably the same for him – and I think he's restless trying to figure out something else too. That's all Fire, right?"*

*"Yes Manny, that's all in the tunings of Fire there. Now, that's what Fire is. But what does Fire do?"*

*"Right Nana, that's the other part of Fire you mentioned. It reacts and transforms things. It seems that there's a seed of Fire in all the decisions we make and actions we take. It's a spark that grows into transforming flames. That responsibility is a bit stressful and it definitely heats up my mind. I find myself thinking about the best way forward, looking for a course of action that all of us will benefit from. Izzy has more courage than me, and I think that courage is also a kind of Fire that we have within."*

Izzy had sudden insights again. *"How strange that there can be Water in Fire and Fire in Water! Like the turbulent rapids bouncing around and moving boulders, that's definitely a river of Fire there. Here, we have to choose the*

*attitude we take with Buffy. If we tune into his flow, find a stream of empathy, and understand how to relate and respond to him, we bring Water into the Fire of our meeting. If we ignore his heart and needs, pushing on with what we want – and he'll probably do the same – it turns into a battle of Fire and Fire in the Fire! And that's a scary thought, messing with someone like Buffy. We need to be careful with the Fire."*

*Ammoolia was pleased with Izzy's insights. "We sure need caution there, Izzy. With the elements of Mū by your side, you'll find the tuning that works best in every situation. When you meet a person who's hungry but has nothing to cook with, you bring Earth into the Fire – provide the substance that bolsters them. With Earth, you provide support and structure. Earth is a very stabilizing element. Again, when you meet a person who's ailing on the path, you bring Water into the Fire – flow together with empathy and kindness. With Water, you reflect and adapt and nurture. Water is a very healing element.*

*"When you meet a person who's wrestling with a challenge, you bring Fire into that Fire – put your clever heads together to find the right solutions. With Fire, you analyze and clarify and transform the world. Fire is a very practical element. Again, when you meet a person who's lost on their journey, you bring Air into the Fire – help them discover guidance and meaning for the long and windy road ahead. With Air, you expand with perspective and meaning across the planet of life. Air is a very uplifting element."*

*"But Manny, let's return to our scenario with Buffy once again. There's one more important element to cover. What does the Air reveal to you when you tune in and reach for the higher ground?"*

*"Oh yes of course, the Air. Let me see. As I flap my wings and rise into the Air, I find my mind growing broader with perspective. I am looking in all directions to better understand the meaning and purpose that Buffy carries on his journey and in his life. All the other elements*

*are present and related to each other, and the expanse of Air helps me to understand the bits of this tricky situation all together. If we consider how everything here relates to Buffy's life as a whole, I'm hoping that we can find a path of harmony between us and him and his deeper concerns."*

Ammoolia gazed at the strips of fluffy clouds fluttering by. A cluster of large rainclouds up high was rolling in the opposite direction. She took a number of long and peaceful breaths before responding. *"And this is our wisdom in the clouds, Manny, the threads spreading across the heavens. Air connects all things together and fluffs out their shared meaning. Some threads are thinner, some threads are thicker. As we watch their movements, how they weave together, we discover the great net of our lives."*

These were the sorts of insights that Izzy and Manny had been hoping for. Sure, it was pretty and poetic, but also absolutely practical and meaningful on a deeper level. Manny was already busy working on her newfound inner

palace of elemental visions. Izzy was humming out the spectrum of *moos* she felt bubbling in her heart, tuning into the feels of the elements. But there was one more question troubling their minds – and a big one at that. It was about the journey looming in the clouds above their horizon.

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Ammoolia was expecting the final question. Not just for having read the signs in the clouds. She also excelled at reading the signs in the inner horizons. She knew how a tree of questions and answers grows through its phases. For all of our questions, there is a time and a season – and not all questions may be asked at the very beginning. We're all on a journey to discover our actual questions.

Izzy lifted the Moomooth in the room onto the table. *"Grandma, all of this is super helpful for understanding ourselves, and relating to the flow and feelings of the people we meet, and for resolving tricky situations, and for a broader sense of our lives as a whole. But how do we*

*link these elements into our mission – sharing all of our stories? Where do the elements fit in with all of this?"*

*"Look Izzy, there are a thousand ways they fit into all of that, and in between all of that. As I said at the beginning, the Elements of Mū themselves are you best teachers. As you go on about your fair journey in life, you'll uncover a hundred lessons in a thousand contexts with the elements. When you work with your stories, the elements present in the stories will emerge and guide you into ever-new insights. I cannot do all of your homework for you. I'd be spoiling all the fantastic lessons waiting for you on this path."*

Izzy was still hoping for something more concrete. Just to give her a vibe of conviction – a sampler to illustrate how it might all come together in the end. *"Can you give some practical applications though, please? Just a handful of hands-on pointers to inspire us."*

*"Well alright, sure. First of all, there's what they call a target audience. In your case, all of*

*Mooland and beyond. Tune into their natures and their needs, understand their flows and their problems. Map the elements in your stories, see how they relate to your audience. It's really a matter of supply and demand. Supply and demand are born from the push and pull of the positive and negative spirits of the universe, embedded in countless combinations in the hearts of all living beings. Need to tune into all of that. Earth, Water, Fire, Air: Match the needs of your audience. Design the distribution flow. Prioritize your productions. Stay on top of your strategy."*

Ammoolia used to be the general manager at the Grand Orchards and packed some proper *moomp* when things got involved. She was long since retired, content being a simple Highlands oracle gazing at the heavens and tending to her seasonal gardens – but the kids were in for a serious journey, the situation called for a display of executive flare. She had no trouble booting up the vintage circuits in her mind, recalling every experience that ever was. All systems operational and streamlined, just

like all of it were yesterday.

*"You'll also want to match the major themes in your stories with the greater concerns of our society. You may want to connect with the experts on the various fields that relate to the categories of insight found in your narratives. When you have a bigger stash of stories ready, if you turn them into thematic collections, people can follow their particular interests and even undertake topical studies. Some old friends of mine at the Essence Islands would be very interested. They've collected all sorts of essences at their island archives, but the essences of life as an orderly library is something they've only ever dreamed of in their deepest hearts."*

*"Okay wow Grandma, that's a serious bale of grass there." Izzy was asking for a mouthful and Ammoolia wasn't feeling skimpy with her catering anymore. Manny was somewhere far out there – nowhere near coming up with a response. "Would you like me to continue, Izzy? I've only just barely hoofed the pasture*

*here. Or would you like to have some more Mootu tea." There was a lot more that was scribbled in the clouds before Izzy and Manny arrived – but Ammoolia was getting a sense that it's probably more than enough for now. "I think I'd like some Mootu tea now. A big cup for Manny too, please. Thank you so much Grandma."*

## 5. Mooland Map – All Systems Ready!

Night had fallen by the time Izzy and Manny finished their last mugs of Mootu tea, flushing down the final crumbs of Ammoolia's mooncakes. *"Look kids, the night has arrived. Why don't you camp here, we'll get you set up for your journey first thing in the morning."* Ammoolia's house was on the far side of the Highlands, while Izzy and Manny lived in a valley closer to the downhills leading to the Riverlands. *"I'll send a hummingbird to let your folks know you're staying over at grandma's again."* She had any number of friendly hummingbirds nesting and humming at her home orchards.

*"Nana, so we have the general idea that there's clearly a journey ahead of us here",* Manny said. *"But the way you speak of it, it sounds like you have a more exact idea of where we should be heading."* – *"Indeed I do. I wasn't browsing the spectacular clouds over today's high noon just to pass my idle time. You two will be traveling to each of Mooland's realms and will have*

*homework to complete at every one of them. Bits and pieces of the grand puzzle of stringing all of your stories together are scattered in every one of our realms."*

Many Highlanders surmised that Ammoolia was clairvoyant, but she always brushed it aside with a hearty laughter. "*I simply watch the dancing of the clouds and listen to the sounds of nature*", is how she usually responded. She never elaborated on watching the cloud constellations in everyone's minds, or listening to the songs that are flowing in their hearts. Just as we all have two eyes and two ears for watching and listening to the world about us, Ammoolia had a third eye and a third ear that she kept as her inner secret – called the *Eye of Mū* and the *Ear of Mū*, unsurprisingly – and she watched over and listened to the inner worlds churning in the hearts and minds of all living beings, guiding them toward the Unity of Mū that she felt at keenly her deepest core.

*"Alright then, Izabella and Mandalika, off to your beds already. The full moon of Moovember*

*has risen high and many are the dreams it weaves, patiently waiting for you just behind the curtains of your drowsy eyelids.*" She only ever used Izzy's and Manny's full names when she was particularly serious. It usually happened when she was steeped in contemplating on futures that were flowing closer to the present tomorrow. "*Good night Grandma.*" – "*Good night Ammy.*" – "*Good night to you two darlings too.*"

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Ammoolia's pet Mooster was bellowing out the wake-up call into the rays of the rising sun. Moosters are winged little egg-laying cows endemic to the Highlands. They can't really fly, but that doesn't stop them from trying. Izzy and Manny were gradually waking up from their slumber, pondering the vivid dreams they soared in just mere moments ago. "*Good mooooooooorning!*", Ammoolia called the moment she spotted them returning to the daytime world. "*Good mooorning, Ammoolia*", they said in surprisingly perfect sync. "*It's*

*breakfast time! Up you get and wash your faces, and we'll meet at the pavillion in the orchards."*

It's anyone's guess how and when she managed to prepare a breakfast buffet with every sort of Highlandian morning dish on the menu. Izzy and Manny arrived at the pavillion, still rubbing their drowsy eyes and, seeing the unreal buffet, they rubbed their eyes some more, wondering if this was all still happening in a dream. *"Fill your big little bellies first, and then we'll talk about your journey."*

Izzy had a bit of a sweet tooth. She was very fond of her grandma's Moolberry Moofins. Manny was surprised to find Mantigo fruits from the Peaklands on the table and enthusiastically nibbled through a bunch. Mantigo trees are not native to the Highlands. They only grow in rare sunny spots at high altitudes. Manny had last tasted them in her early childhood during a family visit to the peaks. Ammoolia's catering also included traditional Mookies baked with oats and cream, and there were spongy Moochi cakes, and a sizable bowl of Mootato salad with

herbs too. All in all, it was a legendary breakfast she had whipped together.

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*"Moo-e-Moo! Meeting time! Chop chop, gather around! Meet-up starting!"*, Ammoolia hollered, clanging on the bell hanging from the corner of the pavillion, summoning Izzy and Manny for a meet-up about the journey orientation and preparations. She was well aware that they were mere meters away, still burping away after the elaborate meal they'd chowed down with quite some speed. Strictly speaking, Ammoolia's dramatic summon wasn't really necessary, but it definitely framed the vibe for the upcoming discussions.

*"Alright, you two, now pay attention and keep your notepads handy! The path for every quest must match the nature of the mission you have. And with what the two of you have in the works, nothing short of a journey covering all of Mooland's realms will do. I have given you a compass, and now I'll share with you the map and the itinerary. Are you ready to roll?"*

Izzy and Manny were holding on tight to the comfy grasspads under their bums. It's the Earth, right, that gives you stability and support and structure. Hold on to it like your roots when the tall gale is blowing across the skies! They absolutely felt the need for a supporting element here. The mission was no longer a daydream they were fiddling with – things were getting proper real and concrete. *"No drifting, Manny! Stay tuned, Izzy! Important!"* Ammoolia was stark with things that mattered. Izzy and Manny appreciated her devotion to guiding them and respected its importance. *"We're in the zone, grandma."*

*"So as you know, we have seven or eight realms on the planet of Mooland. Grasslands, Peaklands, Riverlands, Highlands, Strangelands, Heatlands, and Deeplands are the major realms. In the midst of the Central Ocean of the Deeplands, the Rainbow Spire stands tall and majestic, reaching above the highest peaks of our mountains. It's a translucent fragment of the Chrystal Planet at the outer rim of the major Doughland planets –*

*and there's one such on each planet. Your present journey will cross through each of these realms.*

*"What many do not realize is that these eight realms are the children of the four Elements of Mū we've been reviewing. Grasslands and Peaklands are the low and high children of Earth. Riverlands and Highlands are the low and high children of Water. Strangelands and Heatlands are the low and high children of Fire. Deeplands and the Rainbow Spire are the low and high children of Air. The elements set the tunes of these realms and their residents. Stay tuned and the tunes of Mū will guide you on your journey as your compass."*

Mooland is a such peculiar world. The compass and the map are so very similar. The folks of the realms are also very similar to the map and the compass. Mere lucky coincidence – or is there an underlying cosmic design, parallel threads of colors and flavors and essences that connect all things? If you were to ask Ammoolia, you'd have to book lots and lots of time for attending

to her endlessly elaborate answer. She kept the lid on tight with many such deeper topics, first of all to not confuse Izzy and Manny – and also to guard the joy of their discovery, unfolding as they water and tend to the elemental seeds she'd dropped into their inner pastures.

\* \* \* \* \*

*"Grandma, you mentioned that there's homework for us at each of the different realms."*

*"Very much so, Izzy. You're not heading out for a holiday are you. There's homework from each of the elements for you.*

*"When you reach a new realm, take your time and settle in with the lay of the land. Immerse into in the landscape and establish yourselves in its essential character. This is your homework from the Earth. Then, explore and follow the native flows of that realm. Observe the comings and goings and feelings and hopes of all the folks there. This is your homework from the Water.*

*"Then, meet and interview the people of the realm. Grasp their skills and their challenges, seek their unique insights for your mission. This is your homework from the Fire. Finally, find the heart of the realm, ponder about in all directions. Seek the meaning and purpose of everything you've experienced. Understand the role of the realm in the unity of Mooland. This is your homework from the Air.*

*"When you tune into each of the elements in each of these realms, few things will remain beyond your reach."*

What Ammoolia dished out stretches above and beyond the scope of any homework ever heard of in the schools of Mooland. But Manny wasn't phased by it. *"Ammy, a homework assignment of epic proportions!"*, she noted with glee and enthusiasm. *"Studying the four elements in each of the eight realms – a grand total of thirty-two assignments!"* A tree of matching fractals was already gaining shape in her creative mind in preps for the journey, but surprisingly there was no vertigo this time

around.

*"That seems to be the number, yes, and the final and thirty-third assignment is with you yourself in understanding yourself."* It was a cryptic thing to say but, who else, aside ourselves, should one find at the core of our experiences and insights? *"In the ancient scrolls, they call it the Grand Prism of Inner Mū. The legends say that whosoever looks into the Grand Prism and beyond, that rare soul will become all things at all times, forever tuned in with the turnings and churnings of the universe."*

*"Did you just say there's something beyond the Grand Prism of Inner Mū?"* Alas, few things escape the radar of Manny's mind when there's a even hint of something more to compherend. *"Now that is most definitely a story for another time. The conservative moonks at the Island of Mū would seriously frown at me for sharing as much as I already have with the two of you."*

Izzy wasn't quite as keen on the numbers and the multiplications as Manny, but the echoes of

what Ammoolia shared were resonating deep. A profound sense of connection and unity poured into her heart – like a creamy stream of liquid rainbows flowing in from every corner of Mooland's cookie-shaped planet. *"I have a feeling this'll turn out a very beautiful journey"*, said Izzy. *"And our adventures will surely turn up many more stories to be shared."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Ammoolia was suddenly a bit twitchy for no immediately obvious reason. *"But I will say a thing or two about space, because none of those old island bulls can ever claim their copyrights over space."* She had a strained slice of history with the *moonks* and their proprietary doctrinal formulations. Izzy and Manny were wondering if Ammoolia was just a little bit triggered by her emerging memories. *"That thirty-third assignment, or yourself, rests in the Fifth Element of Mū called the Space, and specifically in the final space that is unbound. Space is the unseen center of your compass. It is the potential emptiness where the Elements*

*of Mü churn and combine, a liberated field hosting their countless mutual reflections. You will first experience it clearly at the Rainbow Spire."*

Manny jolted up out of the blue and gazed long into the heavens with her large and now mesmerized eyes. *"And, what if there's a multidimensional wizard somewhere out there in the sky or in that final space, watching in on all of us, writing down a story about the story of our journey for insight into sharing all of our stories!"* She was seriously out there with this one. *"That may or may not be",* said Ammoolia, *"but wouldn't it be fantastic if that were the case."* Izzy was getting dizzy trying to wrap her head around Manny's cosmic imagination and simply said *"Moo"* in the funniest way, without really knowing what she meant to say.

Ammoolia too stood up and started ringing her bell again. *"All right, that's enough kids! Don't get in way over your heads there! The lesson's over, it's time to go home and pack your bags for the journey ahead!"* Somehow she managed

to conclude the session ever-so-casually, like wrapping up a basic kinder-gardening lesson for junior farmers, in full awareness that she had loaded up the kids with a serious chunk of ancient wisdoms that few on the Islands of Essence have ever truly mastered. *"Please share my greetings and love with your families – and stay tuned, always and everywhere, and you'll find all that you hope for, and so much more."*

\* \* \* \*

Over the week that followed, Izzy and Manny were home and about at their corner of the Highlands, discussing the insights that Ammoolia had shared, brainstorming through their saturated imaginations, sketching together practical travel plans, and shaping up some basic strategy concerning everything they should be looking into. It was all coming together quite nicely. Just as well they took their time before venturing out into the realms, because this upcoming journey really was a rather elaborate undertaking.

*"I think we should also meet with the elders in the different realms", Izzy was pondering. "Ask them to share something unique about their realms and their ways of life. We could ask them for a short aphorism that neatly sums up all of their basics."* Aphorism was a tall word lifting its ornate head from amidst her usually not very sophisticated vocabulary. Izzy herself was wondering how she managed to come up with such a fancy term. *"And I'd like to also hear a poem or a song full of essence from every realm we visit!"*

*"We should also ask the elders about the biggest challenge their realm has ever met", added Manny. "And ask them to share the most meaningful story they know. A key aphorism, a poem or a song, a major challenge, and a most meaningful story. These would make for a nice introduction package to the tunes of every realm in Mooland."*

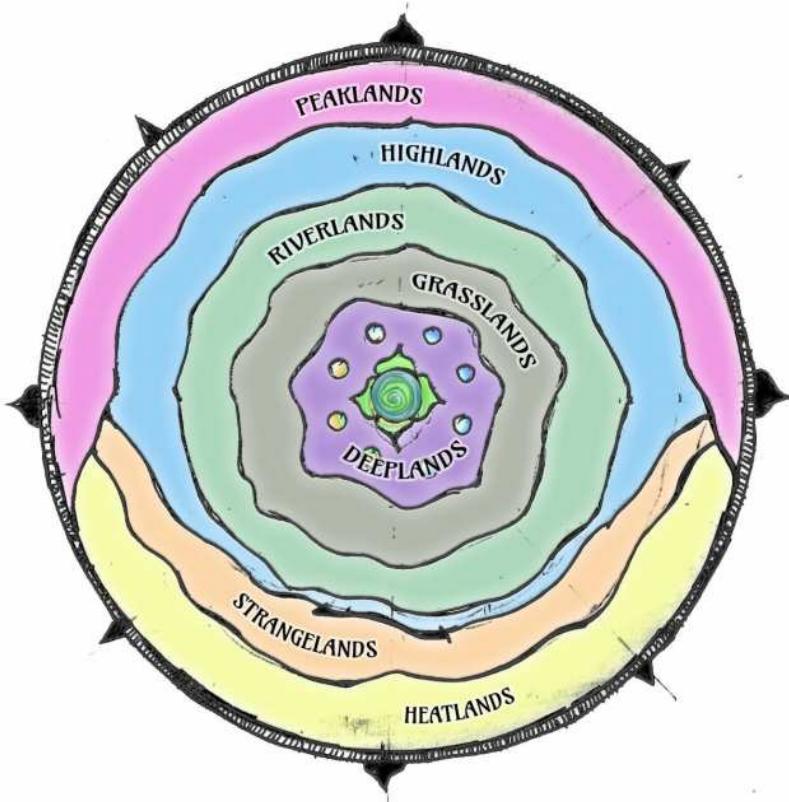
*"Hey Manny – hang on – check this out. So a short aphorism is a basic statement about the roots of the realm. Like the Earth underneath.*

*And how the poems and songs are flowing with feeling. Much like Water streaming. Then how they met the challenges and figured out the solutions. Clearly the Fire there. And the most meaningful story covers everything essential in that realm. Like the expanse of Air, it seems to me. Does that seem a bit weird to you?"*

*"Wow, Izzy! A very much spot on observation there. But we weren't even thinking about any of that. We just came up with all of this off the tops of our heads. Do you think Ammy programmed our minds with the elements or something?"*

*"I have no idea at all, Manny, but I find all of this most entertaining. Maybe it's Mū magic? And how are your fractals looking like?"*

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## 6. Grasslands: Grounding Pastures

It was one of the most peaceful mornings ever. At ease and all preparations done, Izzy and Manny set out from their Highlands homebase. A long enough road loomed ahead of them before the first station of their journey. Starting right at the Riverlands would've been easy enough, just a short stroll down the hill from their village. However, Ammoolia had been very clear about the choice of Grasslands for the first realm to visit and survey. They trusted her insights and guidance. There was surely a sense and strategy to all of this.

Grasslands lies at the very other side of Riverlands, a vast band of lush pastures before the Deeplands and the Central Ocean. But Riverlands was a pleasant enough realm to wander in at any length, even over and over again. Playful streams of many flavors were a perfect companion for the first leg of their journey. Familiar sights on the way soothed their somewhat nervous spirits on this epic journey into the unknown.

## Settle Down: Foundation of Grasslands

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Landing at the boundary where the last of the rivers dives underground to join the aquifers that feed the pastures, it was clear they had arrived exactly at where the Grasslands starts. At Mooland, there are no borders drawn or signs planted between the different realms. Nature herself has been quite clear about what is what, where it starts, and where it ends. When you're there, you know you're there, and that is where you are. Nature is not very complicated – and the Moolanders didn't have much of an interest in complicating it. Life is complex enough as it is – even in a place like Mooland.

At the outer band close to the Riverlands we have the *nether pastures*, a lowland area where water-hungry grasses prosper, with pools of water that emerge whenever the underground aquifers are saturated. At the inner band, the very other side of Grasslands bordering the Deeplands, we have some *highland pastures* bordering the outer rim of the caldera that separates the two realms. It reminds you of

both the Peaklands and the Highlands but the vibes are more broody and contemplative. It's a good place to ruminate. The broad middle band between the two extremes, called the "Middle Grounds", hosts the greatest diversity and abundance of grasses.

*"Alright, Manny! Settle down! Orientation time! What do we know about the Grasslands?"*

*"Well you'd know more than I do, Izzy. Grasslands is the native turf of the Moocows. Mantisians like me are more in touch with the mountains. What all do you know?"*

*"Right. Well I always hear that the pastures here are the place you should visit to reconnect with your roots. When we were kids, mom would always say, 'Back to the pastures, Izzy, at once!', when I and Billy were too frolicky and restless. Mom actually came down here to the Birthing Pastures when she was ready to calve. This is where I was born."*

*"Oh is that so! For all the things I know about you, I didn't know that you were born here.*

*Grasslands is also obviously the place where lots of grass grows. They say that the pasture grass is much more tasty and nutritious than the Highlands grasses. I have no idea, we don't really cook grass at my family. Okay, should we mooditate now, like Ammoolia taught us?"*

*Mooditation* is a type of meditation practiced by the Moocows. It's quite common with the folks at the Highlands and the Deeplands. Different from the *adamantition* technique taught in the Mantisian Cultural Tradition, it's not about having sharp focus and trying to burrow into a particular thing. It's more about feeling and understanding yourself and the flavors and flows of the world in and around you. *Mooditation* is a very reflective and intuitive sort of practice. Your heart grows calm and turns into a sensitive mirror of intuition. Just ideal for immersing yourself in the landscape all around you. You can do it even if you're walking – though you need to walk quite slowly to stay properly tuned. It's a beautiful method.

At times sitting down, at times peacefully

pacing about. At times standing still, at times lying down. That's how Izzy and Manny spent about an hour of that peaceful morning. Immersed in the fertile lowlands, there was a sense of tranquil nourishment. Immersed in the endless middle ground pastures, the whole of the concrete world felt like a plane of hushed fullness. Immersed in the uniformly lush terrain of the Grasslands, tunes of peace, stability, and support grew vivid in their hearts and minds. They didn't zone into the pastures bordering Deeplands yet – they seemed a bit too haunting and distant. All in all, a calm and beautiful hour of contemplations.

*"I can see why you Moocows say that Grasslands is where your true self settles down. This is so settling. The endless fractals in my head are still there, but they are sitting still like snapshots. It feels like they are in my body, and my body is restful and at peace."*

*"Definitely take note of that, Manny! What you just said is close to the 'essential character' Ammoolia said we should pin down at the end*

*of our homework from the Earth. How do we write it down? You're better with exact words."*

*"How about, 'Restful stillness and stable presence in your body'?"*

*"That's compact, that works! Thanks Manny! We can always tinker these later on."*

## **Tune In: Flow of Life at Grasslands**

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Seasons at the Grasslands are not particularly distinct. We have the season of grass growing normally, the season of grass growing more, the season of grass growing like a lot, and the season of grass growing just a little bit less. The unremarkable seasons of the Grasslands are mostly influenced by the climate at the Riverlands and the Highlands, except for the very southern part close to the Strangelands. There are some truly strange grasses growing there. Some of them are medicinal, others are possibly poisonous, and many of them are just weird. Healer cows from the Riverlands often venture there to stock up their herbal cabinets for more exotic ailments. The *Deeplands*

*Caldera* is a buffer between the Central Ocean and the Grasslands.

Forever fertile and rich with the building blocks of life, the soil supporting the lush pastures was nourished by aquifers fed from the hundreds, if not thousands, of streams coursing in from the Riverlands. There are many different flavors of grasses growing in the various sectors of the Grasslands, tapping their roots into the undergrounds and matching the flavors of the streams absorbed into that sector. Aromatic mists from the Highlands periodically drift down to the plains and coat a particular slice of the pastures, giving birth to exceptionally multiflavored batches of grass that are stored at the *Great Fodderstock* for special occasions.

Grasslands is host to a number of creatures that live in harmony with the native ecosystem. Importantly, there are the Wobblyburds wobbling about with their stout legs and plumpy bodies. These terrestrial birds nest by the mounds and burrows toward the inner band and come out in flocks to feast on the bolting

seeds of grass. In a favor to the pastures in return for food and shelter, the *wobblies* carry seeds to different corners of the realm and contribute to its biodiversity. There are also the Mooles, subterranean critters constructing vast networks of burrows underneath the pastures. They cultivate and rotate the soil, preserving the balance of nutrients that nourish the fertile fields. The humble Mumblebees, sluggishly floating around and pollinating plants, must also be mentioned here.

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It was early noon, or late morning. However you may prefer to look at it. It was the time that it was – the present hour in the flow of time. It was the time to flow. Izzy and Manny set sail into the sea of grass to marvel the nature of Grasslands and the various folks living there. At this point, following Ammoolia's instructions, it was to be strictly observing only, not hands-on yet – except for a casual conversation just to be polite, or to get directions in case they were lost. Questions and interviews were left for

later as the homework of Fire. Right now was about tuning in and going with the flow, into the homework of Water to explore the reflections of the realm.

In the northern parts, they browsed the pastures around the *Great Fodderstock*, the famous grand granary of grasses, really a *grassary* to be precise. Every sort of grass one may imagine was stocked there, both fresh harvest and vintage, all stored in their sheds in neat order, kept diligently at the ideal humidity to preserve their tastes and nutrients. Sure, one could freely wander and munch at leisure anywhere at the Grasslands – grass was free for all after all. But in all the bustle of modern Mooland, most folks found it convenient to visit the Great Fodderstock for easy access to a variety of basic and special groceries. That too was free for all in *moderation*.

Steady at work in and about the Great Fodderstock, the *Pasture Keepers* were tending to the endless fields, harvesting as necessary to keep the supplies full. Not that there was much

to tend to, it was more about ensuring that everything is fine as usual, and sometimes scattering new seeds for more variety. While the *Kinder Gardeners* at the Highlands were more about aesthetics and exotic plants that may or may not be fit for food, the Pasture Keepers were hard-working farmers bringing the staples to every household of Mooland.

In the eastern parts, Izzy and Manny visited the *Birthing Pastures*. That's where Izzy was born. Birthing Pastures are a grouping of serene and nurturing fields covered in budding shoots of soft grass and broad-leaved plants. If at all possible, Moocows will come here to give birth to their calves, with hopes that their newborn will be a true Moolandian cow in tune with nature's supporting spirit.

This is where you find the *Calving Sitters*, the caring midwives of Mooland, and their many thatched huts made of straw and clay, all set for welcoming newborn Moocows into the world. The sisters often assist with the First Milk ceremony if the family wishes to have it at

the pastures. It's a traditional bonding between the mother and the newborn calf. They also provide maternal guidance and counseling to provide a stable foundation for life. Some Calving Sitters even specialize as dedicated *mooternal counselors*, providing extended support for Moocow families who struggle with the hardships of caring for their younglings.

In the western parts, Izzy and Manny landed at the most still *Plateau of Presence*. It was a place like no other, acclaimed as the most peaceful place in all of Mooland. The grass growing in there wasn't fascinating by any measure. It was just a very big batch of straight-up standard Grasslands staple grass without any particular special flavor. There were no mounds or slumps and such. Really there were no unique features at all, except for a couple of rather boring slabs of rock to sit on. It may be that the extraordinary plainness of this place was the very secret to its tranquil aura and its unusually peaceful presence.

If there wasn't anything to get particularly

excited about at the Plateau of Presence, you also wouldn't feel the urge to get excited about anything in particular when you're actually here and now and tuned in. It was all perfect just the way it was, in all of its ordinary tranquility. Izzy and Manny watched the *Keepers of Peace*, the ever-present guardians of this sanctuary of silence, and found themselves wondering what exactly is it that they do here. Perhaps in fact they don't do anything in particular at all, and that is how they keep its peace and presence. In the carousel of our busy and distracted lives, sometimes just stopping in our tracks and being patiently at peace – and not trying to do or to be anything in particular – is the very thing we need to restore ourselves.

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*"So Izzy, it's summary time. We should pin down the 'feelings and expectations' that we find flowing here. Any thoughts?"*

*"There's a very strong feeling of nurturing and peace at the Grasslands. The pastures under my hooves are like the foundations of a well-built*

*housing. I feel safe and at ease. I feel relaxed and stable. I feel supported and free of worries. I don't know about expectations though. Honestly I don't really expect anything in particular here. I guess I just expect to be at peace with what I am. How does a newborn calf feel with her first nap in the mother's lap? I wish I would remember. It must be a beautiful feeling."*

## **Gear Up: Meeting the Grasslands Natives**

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Get set ready. *Mooyah!* All geared up and ready to rock and roll. It's early afternoon and the hour of interaction is finally at hand. Time to get serious and engage the natives of the realm. While your average Moolandian might be shy about striking up conversations with the various folks in every-which-realm, Izzy and Manny had already clocked plenty of practice with all of their encounters at the Riverlands during their afternoon hang-out sessions. They had also marked down a number of interesting characters while roaming about the Grasslands earlier, some potential contributors who might

help them in their mission.

\* \* \* \*

**First Destination: The Great Fodderstock.** Izzy and Manny were hoping for an interview with the Master Keeper himself, the steady overseer of the entire Fodderstock operation. Seemed like a character with lots of experience and useful insights. Quite a few *mooters* were covered with all of these loops up and down the realm, but there was a necessary process to be followed through in good order and they didn't mind the exercise. (*Mooter* is the measure spanning from the front hoof to the back hoof of an average cow. It was originally modeled after *Mootron*, the famous Heatlands experimental researcher who used himself as the measure of all things for the early steps of his alchemical science.)

Izzy and Manny marched straight into the central office shed and knocked on the Master Keeper's door. It had a sign saying "FODDER-KEEPER MUKRAMAT", sketched on an unpretentious rough plank in clear capital

letters with no attempt at sophistication.  
*"Enter."*

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are the Fodder-Keeper here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"Sure. Here at the Great Fodderstock, we are always busy. But we are never busy. We are at ease when we choose to be at peace. Take a seat."*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Mukramat. The Fodder-Keeper at Grasslands. I keep the fodder safe and the stocks in good order."*

He didn't seem particularly talkative or keen to be elaborate. Grasslanders rarely are. They prefer to keep their thoughts, words, and deeds most simple and down to earth. He got to the point though.

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do*

*here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"Many questions you have. I make sure there is enough grass of every kind. Also I make sure that it is kept well and fresh. If we do not keep a stable stock of good quality basic food, people will be hungry and life will be difficult. It is my skill and duty to maintain the Fodderstock in good order. To make sure the pastures are healthy. This is the foundation of our life. We support all of Mooland."*

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to the Great Fodderstock to study all of this in more depth."*

*"If you do, be patient and steady with your every basic duty. Done now – or have you more questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"Make sure that you have basic story of every*

*kind. Moocows in different realms have different tastes. Need different nutritions. Serve all equally. Keep your stories fresh and well. Old stories and new stories. Many will be nourished."*

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

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**Second Destination: Birthing Pastures.** Izzy and Manny had spotted an elderly lady who directed the Calving Sitters and was shuttling up and down between the huts there, most devoted to looking after everyone present and making preparations for those yet to come.

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are the caretaker of this place. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"That I am and all children are always welcome to our peaceful huts. Please have a seat and make yourselves comfortable."*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Sister Muumama, the senior caretaker at Birthing Pastures. And you are indeed Izabella of Highlands, aren't you? How you have grown since our last meeting! I remember you and your mother from many many moons ago!"*

She was clearly more talkative than the Fodder-Keeper and her advanced years bore little impact on her memory. Izzy didn't mind that Muumama pinched her cheek a bit harder than necessary. She had quite the grip but also an abundance of affection for youngsters.

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"Here at the Birthing Pastures we are dedicated, body and soul and all, to the care of all the newborns of Mooland. Every little calf must be nurtured in a stable and peaceful environment. We support the mothers and their growing families. We provide a safe environment with many seasoned sisters calmly settled into their*

*various duties. Just as the so many organs support the life in your body, here we support the foundations of life itself. We sisters rock the cradle of a well-rooted life at the Birthing Pastures. This is our commitment."*

She even had a flair for the poetic. Most unusual for a Grasslander. Supporting countless sprouts of new life must contribute to her inspired character and the warmth of her grounded heart. It is true that much poetry may be found at the base and cradle of our being. Simply tune in and listen to the stillness and its whispers of life. Muumama did.

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to the Birthing Pastures to study all of this in more depth."*

*"It would be lovely if you did. Every good-hearted Moocow is welcome here to help us sisters in building the foundations of a wholesome new life. Here we aspire to support and care for everyone from every realm. We'd be lucky to also have a Mantisian youngster here. Whenever I see one of your people, I see*

*the mountain peaks looming behind, and I think about how we all rise from the ground of our birth into greater and greater heights. Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"The stories you will find across all of Mooland are like the spoken cradle of life for our planet. If you can share them in a way that even a newborn calf will follow, you may one day share this gift of the fullness of life with everyone. I have some artist sisters at the Highlands who'd be excited to create illustrated storybooks for shaping and nourishing the youngling minds of our realms. Helpful and meaningful stories for all ages in every realm really. Stories that nurture our simple but important roots."*

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

\* \* \* \*

**Third Destination: Plateau of Presence.** All the Keepers of Peace at the plateau looked very similar, save for the colors of their hides and the sizes of their bodies. One of them had actually noticed Izzy and Manny during their wanderings earlier in the day. The rest of them were seated in silence and absolutely blanked out, in a standstill as if frozen into the moment, contributing to a dense atmosphere of present peace. The stillness was so thick that it almost made you nervous. It is never ever that serene in any normal place. And when it's suspiciously quiet, we often start worrying that something must be wrong. It's usually all just fine though.

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are one of the Keepers of Peace here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"Okay."*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"They say Dweller Muksama. Okay Abider. I am*

*here."*

If the Fodder-Keeper they met earlier was a bit sparse in his words, this Okay Abider was extreme in his brevity. They did pitch for "introduce yourself briefly", so fair enough. There was a certain charm to his resigned equanimity. His presence seemed to speak more than his mouth. It was an opportunity for listening to all that isn't said in so many words.

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"Here we keep peace. Peace is in stillness. Is simply you. If you are quiet. Whatever that you are. That's okay. It's enough. We hold to that. No other duty. Peace is for peace. No other reason. Other breaks peace. We let go. We are here. It is what it is. We are okay. Okay is peace. Peace is okay."*

It was the most simple reply ever. The highest word count in Muksama's sentences was all of five – and that was a single exception. All the

same, every word he let out of his mouth was both necessary and profound. There was no fluff, there was no decor to it. It was beautifully raw. Izzy and Manny wrote it down word-for-word. It was actually a whole lot to digest. They felt awkward about repeating their well-prepped interview stock phrases in face of these extremely simple expressions. Izzy whispered to Manny, *"We should really revisit how we speak with all these folks. Somehow tune our language to match the people we meet."* Still, they went with the safe standard phrasing for now. It was okay. Maybe a bit much. But it is what it is. Whatever that we are. Okay then.

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to the Plateau of Presence to study all of this in more depth."*

*"If you come here. Also be quiet. Calm is good. Okay. More or not?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something*

*particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"I know a good story. When I hear it. I am still in myself. I have peace. Too many stories use so many words. Long hard words. Busy stories. Keep it real. Real is enough. Will sink in. Have basic stories. Simple words. No other-other. Other breaks peace. Good luck."*

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time. We would also like to meet an elder in this realm. Someone who knows all the legends and histories of the Grasslands. Could you point us in the right direction?"*

*"Meet with Muum. That one there. Sits on flat rock. Comes here often. Peace out."*

### **Soar High: Elder Essence of Grasslands**

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It wasn't a particularly long or exciting quest in search for the Grasslands elder. He was sitting on a rock slab about a hundred *mooters* out from where most of the Keepers of Peace were camping in all of their stillness. An elderly bull with an almost entirely gray hide, he was gracefully aged with the gentle seasons of the

realm. The smooth and round rock pedestal complemented his serene appearance. He too was clearly at peace, but there was a distinct vibrance in his presence. Even as this was the first elder interview, Izzy and Manny found themselves feeling surprisingly at ease.

Our novice surveyors had thoroughly rehearsed their introduction and the specific questions that should be asked. A faithful and well-structured walk-through of their meticulously crafted survey template, just as they intended to do with every other elder in every realm down the long road ahead. It felt a bit awkward to think that they would be repeating almost the exact same words over and over, but it was a formula that seemed to get all the boxes ticked and should result in a job well done.

*"Good day, dear elder! We are Izabella and Mandalika from the Highlands. We'd love to ask you a couple of questions. We are on a mission, you see, to tour all the realms of Mooland, collecting the best of insights and stories from the realms. If you could help us out with your*

*wisdom covering the Grasslands, we would be very grateful. We hope to share what we learn on our journey with all of our friends – and with all of Mooland and more."*

It was a bit elaborate and grandiose for an opening blurb, with their proper full names and all included. Definitely more eloquent and formal than fits their profile and their typically enthusiastic and untamed mouths. Be that as it may, they thought it was a suitable and respectful way to approach and address an elder who knows the stories and histories and literatures of the entire realm. It was a well-formed intention behind a strategy that would work in their favor with the elders.

*"I am here for you. Welcome to my humble abode. What is it that you wish to ask, Izabella and Mandalika?"*

*"You can actually just call us Izzy and Manny, please. Could you please first introduce yourself?"*

*"I am Muum. Pastoral Custodian, one of the*

*elders here. I roam about and oversee the ongoing of the realm. When the folks meet me, sometimes they ask for advice and guidance. I am present for you all, helping you to settle down into your basics. In my younger years, I toiled at the Great Fodderstock to support the realms. Our team would tour the pastures and take notes on the states and types of grass that grow around the entire band of the Grasslands."*

*"Pleased to meet you, elder Muum. First of all, we'd like to ask about the basics. Is there a motto or an aphorism that's well-known in the Grasslands? A short statement to help everyone understand what the Grasslanders are all about?"*

*"Of course. Every Grasslander would know these words:*

*"Soil below and grass above. Support life and sustain peace. We are the roots."*

*"Thank you! That's definitely a well-rooted statement. We'll write it down for all to remember. We'd also love to hear a poem or a*

*song. Tunings of feeling and flow of life that resonate with the Grasslands."*

*"Why certainly. There's a traditional rhyme called 'Cradle of Pastures' in eight-syllable rustic meter.*

*"Born of our peaceful pasture grass  
We grow to nurture every class;  
Our steady-yielding motherland  
May cradle us with nature's hand."*

*"It's a simple but touching rhyme. Touches the spirit of the pastures. Thank you elder Muum.*

*"Then, can you share with us the greatest challenge that the folks of the Grasslands have ever met – and how they overcame it?"*

*"There was the Great Wilting before the days of my great-grandmother. That was the most terrifying and stressful calamity we have ever faced. All the grass on the pastures was wilting. We had no idea why. The streams from the Riverlands were still flowing into the underground aquifers. Engineers from the Heatlands came to help and they dug a system*

of surface irrigation canals to redirect the streams, but that only made it worse. Water was spilling everywhere – but the pasture soil was still depressed and uninterested in supporting grasslife.

"In the end, in our desperation, we sought for guidance from the celestial Guardian at the Rainbow Spire and collaborated with elemental experts from the capital sphere of Moopetals to get to the bottom of this. It turned out to be a planet-wide catastrophe in the works. Its first symptoms were shown here at the pastures. The realms had fallen out of harmony and Mooland had simply grown tired of supporting life altogether. We had become a burden to her and were not worthy of our grass. It took all of us from all of Mooland, reconnecting with the Rainbow Spire as our center, to restore the balance of nature."

*"Oh wow. Thank you for sharing this. It must have been a truly troubling time to live in. All of Mooland depends on the well-being of the pastures. We should all work together to make*

*sure that the nature of Mooland remains stable."*

*"Exactly so, Izabella. And with the stories you collect and share, you must inspire the realms to grow closer together – and never again forget the importance of harmony and shared responsibility. The stability of Mooland as a whole depends on the unity of all the realms."*

*"That is a big responsibility, elder Muum! We promise to do our very best. I hope that many others will join our cause and help with the common good."*

*"As long as you remain true to yourself and steady in your stance, the pastures will support you on your mission. Have no fear or worries."*

*"Thank you, we will note down and carry that advice with us always. As our last request to you, we'd like to hear the most meaningful story you can remember from all of the history of Grasslands. What would it be?"*

*"It would surely be the myth of the ancient Mauha. The myth of Mauha takes place back*

in the most distant of days, when Mooland was still gaining its shape and cracking every-which-where at random. The terrain beneath our pastures was unstable and hazardous, truly frightening with its restless and never-ending motion and unfit for supporting the ways of life as we know it. Mauha was a granddaughter of Mū – the one who became the many – and the first daughter of the Earth of Mū, one of the four primal elements that guide and shape all of our existence.

"Grieving over the chaos that turned and churned aimless and violent, the spirit of Mauha descended from the darkness of space to establish an order that supports growth. Merging with the disc of Mooland, she became the bonds between the moving chunks and the glue of life that held all things together. Mauha, now embodied, is why our world is still firm in its place. We remember the stabilizing spirit of Mauha in all of our thoughts, words, and actions. The pastures that hold us in their motherly lap are that ancient Mauha, the grand-daughter of Mū. This is our deepest

story."

It was certainly deep enough. Izzy and Manny were stunned and dumbfound. Finally Izzy stammered, slow in her pace, *"We... We did not expect a story quite like that. Thank. You."* Surely they expected an engaging legend that illustrates the spirit of the Grasslanders, but the story of elder Muum went straight to the ancient core of the Grasslands and beyond. It was a most meaningful addition to their budding collection of stories. With this, they bid farewell to the elder and took leave from the Plateau of Presence.

\* \* \* \*

Sister Muumama had promised shelter for Izzy and Manny for the night. *"For as long as you need, you may rest and recover your strength, in any one of our vacant huts."* They set camp at one such hut, all of them quite similar, and sat down to ponder the harvest of this very long day and the wealth of experiences it carried.

*"Well that was quite the finale with elder*

*Muum!", said Manny. Izzy was still adrift in her heart, musing on the story of Mauha. "Now I understand how the true spirit of every Moocow is born. Whatever realm that we may call our today's home. We are born and we come together at the pastures. And there's something deep in there that supports all of our lives. I feel like this is the home of my home. It's all so calm now..."*

*"So we still need to wrap up, right Izzy? Don't fall asleep yet! We have this in our checklist, 'understand how this realm relates to everything we have discovered'. What do you think?"*

Izzy was tired and groggy from all the walking back and forth and the high-impact story of Mauha that had knocked her heart straight into tranquil silence. She was rolling in slow motion.

*"Grasslands supports every realm. It's calm and peaceful and safe here. Grasslanders are good simple people. We are all born on the same pastures. Here you can rest and recover. We are no other. Our roots are one. Is that enough. We*

*have lots of notes. We can get back to this."*

It was plenty. She sounded like a Keeper of Peace. Manny was also getting tired. There was very long hike ahead with an early dawn departure toward the Peaklands. Sleep well, little seekers. May your dreams be as peaceful as the pastures beneath you.

### **Dreaming of the Pastures**

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## 7. Peaklands: Visionary Heights

The first rays of the sun were barely above the horizon as Izzy and Manny awoke from their slumber, both surprisingly fresh and well-rested. Manny was more of an early morning creature. Izzy not so much. They packed their backpacks and wanted to bid farewell to Sister Moomama. She was still asleep, so they just tagged a note of gratitude to the door of her hut. *"Ssh! Quietly! Watch your steps in the dark!"*, whispered Izzy. Not to wake up the sleeping sisters who had earned the calm of their rest after a very busy day of caring.

Ammoolia had left them with a precise map of Mooland to help plot their routes and not to fall into harm's way. Manny had memorized almost all of it. The decision was to take the eastern route to the Peaklands. Peaklands is a mountainous half-band of a realm beyond the Highlands, towering tall above the northern realms. It stretches from the East through the North all the way to the West of Mooland, bordering the Strangelands and the Heatlands

in the southern *hemiscookie*. (Which is the proper scientific term used by Mooland cartographers. The term *hamiškooky* is also in use and more common in the southern dialects.) The terrain of the East Peaklands would be easier to trek and it leads to the more densely populated areas around the Mantisian Academy.

## **Settle Down: Foundation of Peaklands**

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Nearing the inner edge of the Peaklands brought a distinct change to the landscape. The roundness of the hillside began to yield before the sharp and rugged features typical of a mountain realm. Orchards and abundant flowers were absent from these mountain steppes. In their place, we had low-growing shrubs, herbs, and hardy grasses scattered in patches of mostly poor soil supporting life amidst the harsh and rocky terrain. The sort of fodder you might like to cook first. Izzy wasn't particularly picky about choice of food as long as it provided the nutrients necessary. At any rate, this here was the natural boundary of

## Highlands and Peaklands.

The eastern sector of the Peaklands, where Izzy and Manny had just arrived, was typically more approachable and in some ways similar to the higher regions of the Highlands. If you were headed to the northern sector, you'd usually pack your trekking gear for the road. There are countless ridges, narrow passes and, of course, the caverns where many a Mantisian shrine had been set up. Extremely tall mountains dominated the landscape of the western sector. West Peaklands is a sparsely populated and very isolated region, mostly inhabited by reclusive Mantisian sages, along with a handful of visionary pioneers who set camp there in search of novel insights.

It's time to settle down and orient again. Homework of the Earth ahead. Manny was all enthusiastic.

*"So Izzy. What all do you know about the Peaklands?"*

*"Wouldn't this be your area of expertise,*

*Manny? We're at the ancestral lands of the Mantisians. This is where your family comes from."*

*"True that. Let me see. We come here in search of clarity when the winds of the Highlands confuse our antennas. Mountains open for us a door to our unclouded perception and reorient us with a vision of what actually is. We gain new insight from above the clouds into the things that matter. Fog of life clears away. We return from the peaks with clear perspective and focused direction. Much of the Mantisian Cultural Tradition is guided by the importance of clear vision. But you've been here with your family Izzy, haven't you?"*

*"Did you just speak like a Mantisian priest. Yes, that was way back in the days. Grandma brought us to the shrines for a special event. I can't remember what it was all about, I was so young. But she'd remember – it's all so fresh in her mind. I do remember I saw ranges after ranges of mountains, far into the high horizons. I even saw the Central Ocean from there in one*

*amazing view!"*

*"That's absolutely a view you'd remember. Hey Izzy, here's an idea. I really liked our mooditation at the Grasslands. But I'd like to try something new today. In the Mantisian tradition, they teach us the basics of the adamantition technique. It's also a kind of meditation. The priests always ask us to practice it at the shrines. They say it helps you focus and makes sure your efforts will be on the mark. I think it might help us catch the basic character of this realm. I can give you a crash course. See how you find it."*

*"Sure Manny. Sounds like a useful skill. I'm often floating around with my moods. It might help me focus a bit better. We're going to need all the focus we can find on this journey. But I'm not going to start seeing fractals like you, am I?"*

Manny taught her the brief basics of this ancient Mantisian technique. Basically, first you sit down and close your eyes. You have to be very still and form an adamant intention to

keep yourself focused. No drifting. Always returning to your intention and sharp attention. Then you take on a particular point of focus and hold it steady in your mind. If you keep at it, your mind is compressed like a diamond. Then you only see the essence of the object you focus on. Your vision sharpens into a beam of laser. There's nothing else for you at that time. Not even time. When you break your concentration, you may find that a very short or a very long time has passed.

Manny has a special mind. When she turns her attention to something deep or complex, her mind races spontaneously to a prismatic focus. All those bewildering fractals are the result of this special trait. Some Mantisan sages develop such capacity through dedicated cultivation in solitude. She's a natural but by no means an adept yet. We'll be learning more about this when Izzy and Manny consult an elder at a remote peak toward the end of their Peaklands expedition. For now, let's return to Earth and their pending homework.

Izzy and Manny agreed to first focus on the rugged and rocky landscape in general. All the shapes were clear and well-defined and easy to hold in the mind's eye. It was therapeutic for a mind saturated with much muddled content. Then they switched focus to the sky-scraping peaks and chose one mountain in particular, its captivating peak sharp and radiant against the canvas of the clear blue sky, towering above all others like the magister of Peaklands. A crisp sense of unflinching high vision held their minds at a singular point. When they focused on the caverns looming at a distance, Izzy began to drift and lose focus. Manny was flipping out with too many fractals bursting into her mind and saturating her field of vision. They both snapped out of it and figured it had been quite enough. A fair hour had suddenly passed. They must have spent a long time attending to that highest of peaks.

*"Wow that was intense!"*, Izzy yelped. Manny was collecting herself from the avalanche of her visions. *"What do you make of all that? Can we come up with a line about the essential*

*character of the lands here based on that? Manny? Hello?"*

No response. It looked like Manny might need a while longer than usual to recompile her mind. Must have been the influence of her ancestral lands, possibly in combination with the thinner mountain air and the fact that they had skipped breakfast. *"I'll just write this for now. We can revise later. 'Unflinching attention and sharp vision. Clarity on the core character of things.'"*

*"That's good Izzy. It's clear. A good kernel."* Saved by the clear kernel, Manny gained focus and was returning to her normal senses. *"Are you okay, Manny?"* – *"It's fine. The caverns took me for a ride. There was something unusual happening in my mind. I think I'd like to consult the Mantisian elder about all this when we find her somewhere in the upper ranges."* – *"Of course Manny. We know there's something unusual about your mind since before you were born. Your mom has told us the stories. Let's see what we can find out."*

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**Tune In: Flow of Life at Peaklands**

Peaklands climate was famous for being on the chilly side even at the lower altitudes. At the eastern sector, it's still just pleasantly fresh and crisp. Further toward the north where most of the shrines are, it gets frosty to a point where you'll want to wear a jacket to cover your hide. There are a couple of high-ridged little valleys that become heat pockets in the warmer season and support a richer than average ecosystem, including some fantastic wildflowers. In the snow-capped peaks of the western sector, air thins to a point of concern. Keep that in mind if you ever aspire to trek as far as the *Uppermost Viewpoints*. These majestic peaks may trigger a sudden episode of vertigo – even when seen from the safety of lower altitudes with more saturated air.

East Peaklands shares much of its seasons with the general climate of Highlands, though temperature is more likely to drop below freezing point during the colder quarter of the year. In the north, there are really only two seasons, the frosty season and the not-so-frosty season with warmer waves of air flowing in from

the lower realms. Wind can be unpredictable as it funnels through narrow passes, nowhere near as constant and smooth as at the Highlands. Eerie mists and fog are very frequent. West mountains only ever experience one season, the very cold season, with regular snowfall throughout the year. A shining white blanket covering this sector conjures an otherworldly aura of constant clarity, invoking high sages and visionaries into this inhospitable environment.

Vertigoats are a common sight at the lower altitudes and around the shrines, effortlessly climbing up and down the steepest of ridges to graze on the shrubs growing in all sorts of inaccessible and impossible spots. In the Mantisian Cultural Tradition, they are revered as symbols of the ascending spirit and its challenging uphill journey. Then we have the mythical Mantiwyrms, an early and bizarre offshoot of Peaklands evolution, often found lurking in the deeper caverns and rarely seen in the daylight. They have antennae very much like a mantis, and a bioluminescent third eye

bulges spooky amidst their foreheads. Hawkaims are another iconic species at the Peaklands, soaring high across the skies and even across the highest of the western peaks. There's a belief that the Hawkaims carry sacred knowledge of what lies beyond of the edge of the Mooland cookie. It's unfortunate that no-one understands their language.

\* \* \* \*

A long trek and a late arrival with an elaborate settling-down session had run the day well into the high noon. It was time to venture out into the realm and tune in with the comings and goings and flowings of the Peaklanders. Izzy and Manny decided against doing two round trips from one end of the Peaklands to the other, with the western sector better left for later. They'd be lucky to reach the western sector and the higher altitudes before nightfall – even without attempting to trek there and back and there again.

Landing at the east side, Izzy and Manny were close enough to the *Mantisian Academy*

grounds. Quite the bustling community had grown around this prestigious educational institution. The brightest of the youth from every realm of Mooland were sent here for higher learning. It was obviously a fair long way away from most of the realms, except for eastern Highlands, and most students lived in campus housing or at one of the nearby villages. Some even lived here with their families on a temporary basis.

It was mostly the students roaming about, in between lessons, eager for insight to bring back to their realms. Once in a while you'd see a *Primary Orientor* walking about and observing the premises. Manny's uncle was one such Primary Orientor, really an associate professor at this point as he'd been teaching at the Academy for decades. Most of the teachers were Mantisian, but there were quite a few Moocow professors too, typically focused on fields of knowledge that deal with Grasslands, Riverlands, and Highlands.

At the north side, Izzy and Manny toured many

of the better-known and more accessible Mantisian shrines. Manny had a fairly good idea of the lay of the land and the routes there. It wasn't the first or the fifth time she'd been here with her family. They would visit the shrines at least once in a season, if not more often, holding true to the heights of their Mantisian roots. These shrines were typically tucked away in caves and caverns, though some stood on cliffs and high boulders, gazing over the vast panorama of Mooland. Each shrine had its distinct themes and tunings, typically influenced by surrounding landscape and dominant features of nature.

Not much anyone lived here aside the *Mantisian Priests* taking care of the shrines, assisting visitors and pilgrims in traditional ceremonies and guiding them in the practice of *adamantition*. They were priestesses really. Males of their species, seen as physically less able and often a bit daft, mostly handled auxiliary duties. The Mantisians were traditionally a matriarchal society and, while the practice of "*biting his head off*" is

considered barbaric in modern culture, this inequality of genders is still reflected in their traditions.

As for the west side, it was indeed a long way away, even when seen from the farther shrines. In a direct line of sight it was just as near or as far as the Mantisian Academy. Alas, Izzy and Manny were not Hawkaims soaring from one point to the next across the sky. There was a lot of up and down ahead there. Mostly just up really. In order to tick the box, they shared some of the stories they had heard about the *Uppermost Viewpoints*, sitting on a cliff facing the tallest peaks in the west. *"I wonder what lives there, if anything at all. I don't think there are plants under the snow there. It's all frozen."* – *"I'm sure there's a flower growing somewhere – next to a high mountain spring!"*, said Izzy, ever the optimist. Would not the springs be frozen too? We'll find out once we get there.

It was hard not to let your imagination run wild with *Visionary Pioneers* on the list of local folks to meet. There's the saying, *"Solutions to*

*problems are found on a higher plane.*" These pioneers were prodigies and polymaths from the various realms who commonly sought the elusive "extremely high plane of awareness", a legendary vantage point that would provide answers to all questions and solutions to every problem. Most of them returned to their realms with just a particularly advanced particular point of view, leading to inventions and creations with promise to usher in a new era of skill and insight. Izzy and Manny knew a number of them from the pages of history and had heard about their contributions to Mooland, but they had never met a Visionary Pioneer in person. It was a bit unnerving.

\* \* \* \* \*

*"Why don't you summarize this, Manny? The feelings and expectations that we have found here."*

*"There's insight and clarity at the Peaklands. It elevates my mind, though I'm feeling a bit aloof. Promise of a clear path ahead, seen from a higher plane. A conviction that unclouded*

*vision will lead our journey to the destination we seek. There's a calm here that reminds me of the Grasslands, but it has a much higher pitch. It's more of a mental calm. It's soothing for my fractals."*

*"Ammoolia did say that the Grasslands and the Peaklands are the low and high children of Earth."*

*"Wow that's true, she did! I was wondering what she meant there. Now we are experiencing it."*

### **Gear Up: Meeting the Peaklands Natives**

After a significant trek from the shrines back to the Peaklands Academy region, Izzy and Manny had serious doubts about the planned itinerary for the rest of the day. It was already well into the afternoon. Chilly winds biting into their faces in some of the shadowy passes would be a challenge to cross again, even just as far as the major shrines – and continuing toward the western sector after nightfall was unthinkable. Preparing to stretch their Peaklands survey over

two days, they had inquired at the shrines about the possibility of camping overnight. That option was looking increasingly likely with even the Academy still ahead of them. Distances between sectors at the Peaklands are significant and the terrain easily doubles or triples the travel time across most of this realm.

\* \* \* \*

**First Destination: Mantiland Academy.** Izzy and Manny had their marks set high – aiming straight to the top with their first choice of informant. They were hoping to score an interview with the Principal Orientor herself. They'd actually checked in briefly with Manny's uncle and asked if he could link them up with her. Uncle Mantrana was still quite impressed with the table of elements he'd helped the girls sketch together and organize. He'd also reviewed the survey checklist with an eye to retract any of their possibly silly questions. Setting up the interview was no problem for him and he was quite curious about hearing the Orientor's answers himself.

The senior faculty of the Academy all had their offices at the higher floors of the significantly multi-storey main building with a peak tower office reserved for the orientor in charge. It was quite the hike up there over a spiral staircase with almost a thousand steps – but Izzy and Manny got there in the end. Catching their breath for a moment, they knocked on the door.

*"Come in!"*

*"Good afternoon! We are Izabella and Mandalika from the Highlands. We understand that you are the Principal Orientor here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"I understand from Mantrana that you have a set of excellent questions primed for the interview. Do go ahead."*

The mind-piercing clarity in the Principal Orientor's chill demeanor was hard to ignore. Her opening line amplified the already significant high-pitched tension in their minds. This wasn't going to be like yesterday's relaxed interviews at the Grasslands. They had an idea

that something like this was ahead of them and had decided to use their full proper names for the introduction.

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Orio Mantagelan, seated in the high tower as the Principal Orientor for Mantiland Academy. I've taught and oriented students here since long before you two were conceived. I have one of the most acute minds in the region."*

Now it was clearly high in the realms of stressful. Her mere presence forced Izzy and Manny to sit upright and sharpen up. It invoked significant attention to the meticulous clarity and correctness of each and every word that should escape their mouths in this office.

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"I am evidently the Principal Orientor. Take good note of that and remember everything I say. I preside here to ensure that each and*

*every student understands exactly the import of the teachings we provide. I orient, organize, and regularly audit the Orientors to ensure that they remain properly oriented and convey the teachings in good form and perfect clarity. We sharpen the intellects of the realms. We are the pride of Mooland's higher education and strive to ensure that every realm receives the exact insights they require in life."*

*"Thank you! Highly significant skills and duties. One day we may return to Mantiland Academy to inquire of these in more depth."*

*"If you do, then leave the chatter and the scatter of your minds behind. We are here to focus on one thing only – the subject matter of our teachings. Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"It sounds like an ambitious undertaking. Are you certain that you're up for it? First of all – Clear and undistracted attention at all times to everything you may observe during your expedition is vital. You must record the stories in their thorough and accurate form. Then you must ensure that each major and minor point in your story stands out clearly. If your stories are muddled and lack attention to detail, no student will ever gain insight from them. If you do succeed and publish a proper compendium of stories, it will make for a valuable contribution to the Mooland corpus of knowledge. We should then like to have a copy for our library."*

*"All of that we will keep in mind – and put our best efforts and attention to it! Thank you so much for your time."*

Izzy and Manny let out a sigh of relief as they left her office. They weren't quite sure if they were holding their breaths for the whole duration or just for parts of it. The stairs back down were a stroll in the park in comparison to having a conversation with the Principal

Orientor. They would not dare to forget her answers. It would've been difficult even if they'd dared to try and forget – what with the way she had engraved it all into their minds with the sharpest of pencils. Upcoming points shall all be made clearly then!

\* \* \* \*

**Second Destination: Shrines of Orientation.** It was already twilight by the time Izzy and Manny reached the region of the shrines again. Many of the Mantisian Priests they'd observed earlier seemed rather aloof and preoccupied, and even obsessed, with attending to their specific rituals and practices. A certain priestess at the Shrine of Starlight had caught their attention. Her vibe was different.

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you may be the High Priestess here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"I did see you from a distance earlier today – and I did see you from a distance once again as*

*you crossed the path on the high ridges to return to our shrine. Yes, Izzy and Manny, I and the stars will attend to your questions."*

In stark contrast to the Principal Orientor, her presence was very comforting. They felt a vivid aura of concentrated insight and clarity – but hosted in a broad and spacious mind. Typical Mantisian Priests can come across as rather narrow-minded with their particular fixations, but this didn't seem to be the case with those devoted to the starlight. A broad ethereal calm prevailed in this shrine.

*"Could you please briefly introduce yourself?"*

*"I am Lady Missty, the High Priestess at the Shrines of Starlight. I've lived at this shrine for most of my life. My mother, too, was a devotee of the starlight. When she passed away, I decided to become a priestess here. It was my calling from the heights."*

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"I am here on behalf of the stars. I gaze them at night, often all night, and I absorb the spread of their rays into my soul. Rays of insight from the stars guide me through the day 'til the night falls again. I assist the pilgrims with their ceremonies and various requests here. We also hold regular adamantition retreats for those who wish to clarify their minds and behold the realms of life from the orbit. In the tradition's belief, we assist them in their ascension and return to the stars. But I'll say this to you, young seekers: Such a view has never brought peace to my soul for its final aim. I know that there's something beyond – and I know that the stars know it too."*

*"Thank you! Such fascinating skills and duties there. One day we may return to Shrines of Orientation to study all of this in more depth."*

*"If you do, then may the stars guide your passage. Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and*

*insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"Such an inspired quest you two have, Izzy and Manny! If I should say to always keep the stars in your mind, I mean to say this: In every story there are many layers of insight. Seek not only the intimate and the immediate meanings at the ground level. The higher lessons are seen from far above – and it is these very lessons that guide you beyond the context of that story, to the meaning that is recorded in the stars. There are essences of the universe in all things you'll encounter – hold tight to the heights of your vision!"*

*"That was very wise. Thank you, Miss Missty. All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time.*

*"Our plan was actually to continue toward the Uppermost Viewpoints, but it turned out to be a very long day and it's already dark. We met one of the caretakers here earlier, the one who was looking after the violet flowers just atop that*

*cliff there. He said it'd be okay if we camp here for the night and continue tomorrow morning for the western sector. Is it okay?"*

*"Of course you can stay here! But you must spend a part of the night star-gazing with me on the roof of our shrine. You don't have to, what I mean to say is, I'm sure you would like it very much. I have woolen blankets for you here."*

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**Third Destination: Uppermost Viewpoints.** Stars were returning to their secret abodes. Rays of the sun peeked into the Shrine of Starlight, reaching the cosy corner Izzy and Manny huddled in with their extra blankets. It was time to hit the road again. They bid farewell to Lady Missty and promised to visit again and gaze at every star with her – and next time for a longer while. Last night demanded for a proper rest, regaining strength for their trek into the remote and inhospitable western sector of the Peaklands.

A coat of frost over the terrain grew thicker by

the step as they circled westward in the direction of the viewpoints basecamp. There was a lot of trudging through the snow and slipping around on ice through most of the sector. Izzy took a good tumble down the slope and landed in the heart of a huge heap of snow, luckily all safe and sound. Her hooves didn't quite have the grip of a vertigoat and she packed quite a lot more bulk than Manny, slender and agile as the Mantisians usually are. A silver-foiled tent loomed at a distance after many long hours of struggle on the challenging trails. There was a *watch-mantis* keeping an eye on the basecamp.

*"Well by the old Magister Peak, I'll say!  
Whenever have kids ventured here before?  
What are you doing here? Did you get lost?  
There's a path back to the Highlands due east."*  
– *"No ma'am, we are trekking to the Uppermost Viewpoints to meet the Visionary Pioneers. We are on a mission."* The watch-mantis evaluated them, scanning head to toes and back up again, rolling her eyes and jiggling her antennas, reflecting on the young twinkly-eyed Mantisian

with a snow-coated Moocow tagging along. *"You two are not geared up for the trek. I'll take you to the astral teleporter. We usually only teleport high dignitaries and visionaries with urgent matters. But you two youngsters seem to be serious with your mission, so I'll make an exception and help you up atop via the fast track. Once you're at the top, look up the Prime Pathfinder. Others may not have the attention to spare for you."* - "Wooow. Thank you!"

Few Moolandians had ever heard of the astral teleporter, tucked away in a cave not too far from the basecamp. A certain visionary veteran, Sir Borgflash from the Strangelands who had a background in occult harmonics, had constructed the device to aid his fellow visionaries. It operates with the help of a quantum entanglement slipstream and casts an equivalent version of the teleporTEE to the other side. But it must always be a two-way trip, otherwise there are no guarantees on the stability of your subatomic matrix. These were the sorts of insights and inventions that some of the brighter visionaries conceived in the

solitude of their peak alcoves.

Izzy and Manny stepped hesitantly into the teleporter, both surprised and astonished with the strange and sudden adjustment to their trekking plan. The watch-mantis began to jiggle her antennas and vocalized a series of very precise high-pitch sounds in very particular patterns. An eerie field of resonance filled the cave and – *whoosh!* – in an instant they were zapped to the topside. And straight into the alcove of the Prime Pathfinder at that – our watch-mantis had some mad skills in calibrating resonance matrices. The Prime Pathfinder was used to these sorts of surprise visits. There was to be no knocking on doors or hailing of hellos here, standing as they were right before the prime visionary in her spacious alcove. Reorienting for a brief moment, they rolled on with the program.

*"Good morning! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are the Prime Pathfinder here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"I can and I will respond to your queries. My responses will be compact, thorough, and essential. Gather your best attentions."*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Margatama – the Prime Pathfinder at the Uppermost Viewpoints. In absolute focus, I attend to all that merits attention. I direct my gaze at will, I pierce the targets of my vision to their core. I extract the kernel in all things."*

Much more unsettling than anything so far. Not as confrontational or intimidating as the Prime Orientor, but they felt absolutely naked before the Prime Pathfinder's prowess of vision. There was a stellar ethereality to it, as with Lady Missty, but a much sharper tuning of a much higher pitch. If Missty had her vision tuned into the wide-band ultraviolet, then here we had a conduit of concentrated gamma-rays – a radiant force of vision that would effortlessly penetrate your soul and journey into the far reaches of the universe.

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about*

*your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"I reorient the collective of visionaries. If there are blockages on their paths of inquiry, I direct my all-specifying gaze into their cognitive processes and the objects thereof. If there are conflicting outcomes of inquiry, I direct my all-unifying gaze into the superstructures of their respective premises and reconcile their abstract kernels. I resolve and unify their voyages of discovery. As for the visionaries, they each have their respective domains and trajectories of inquiry – philosophical, spiritual, scientific, and so on – each with their specific quests for insight and innovation. Through unflinching focus and dedication, we cross above and beyond the vulgar mind, reaching extraordinary visions and insights."*

Izzy and Manny honestly had no idea of what half of this meant, but it all sounded very interesting. *"Thank you! Those are unbelievably high-level skills and duties. One day we may return to Uppermost Viewpoints to study all of*

*this in more depth."*

*"If you do, then sharpen your minds into a laser-like focus. Reform your cognition into a network of concentrated beams. This network of thorough and all-grasping attention is the Absolute Eye of the Beholder – the eminent capacity of uncluttered and comprehensive vision. You will then behold and comprehend without constraints. Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"Stories are the media of the masses who fail to directly perceive and engage the abstract principalities of existence. Regardless, narratives are a necessary intermediary in extracting the attention of the populace, in redirecting their focus into the universal principles that govern all of unobscured actuality. In your stories, identify such*

*abstractions that lend themselves to broad-ranging parallel applications. Ensure that diverse concrete renderings of parallel principalities are well-bridged together. The minds of your audiences will be reformed into harmonic matrices of consciousness. The world will then benefit from your work."*

*"Could you please repeat that? I will have to write it down, word-for-word, and unpack it over time. I'm going to need a dictionary. Everything you've said we will definitely keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

*"We would also like to meet an elder in this realm. Someone who knows all the legends and histories of the Peaklands. We've heard of an elder Mandakini, a certain Mantisian sage dwelling somewhere up here. Could you point us in the right direction?"*

*"Oh Mandakini. Yes, I consult her at times. She's seen it all. She has access. Exactly 1440 mantihops, 12 degrees north-west from here, locate a patch of wildflowers near a mountain spring. You'll find her abode there."*

## Soar High: Elder Essence of Peaklands

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Snow was thin and powdery on the rugged and almost invisible path leading to elder Mandakini's abode, thinned by constant high winds scavenging these desolate altitudes. Izzy and Manny had packed several layers of warm under the thickest of jackets they had brought. It was absolutely freezing cold up there! Manny's typical agility was all but gone. Underneath the bulk of her gear she was almost as clumsy as Izzy on her better days. It was an effortless path to navigate with the precise coordinates given by the Prime Pathfinder, especially as she obliged to point out which way the 12° NW actually was.

After a good 1440 mantihops, with one good hop a rather long span to cover in this climate, they reached a patch of flowering shrubs and a mountain spring. It was much like the vista of the optimistic painting in Izzy's imagination the day before. For some peculiar reason, snow was sparse in this idyllic setting. Clear horizons extended in all directions, broad panoramas

with open views as far as the eye could reach. The multicolored Highlands clouds were distinct in the east – but at this height, no longer above their heads.

A mystifying glow tinted the distant western horizon, looming beyond a landscape that only the Hawkaims would ever dare to cross. *"Are you seeing that, Manny? Whatever is that glow in the far horizon?" – "Could it be... it might just be that, Izzy, you know... I've only ever heard legends of the golden halo at the edge of the cookie. I've never seen anything like that. Just wow..."* Their eyes were sensitive to different spectrums of light, so whatever that Izzy actually saw may have looked quite different in Manny's vision. Awestruck and mesmerized with the otherworldly radiance, they gazed into the farthest known reaches of Mooland. These were regions that few had ever witnessed in person. This was the stuff of legends – but the real legend was still a few steps ahead of them.

There was no-one in sight at this little plateau. A cave not too far from the spring seemed like

the only conceivable place for a dwelling. Manny, whose high-pitched voice carried farther than Izzy's, called into the darkness through the opening: "*Hello?*". A long series of echoes repeated her words in varying pitches. Out of the blue, really of the pitch black in this case, a trilling voice responded. "*Hello, Mandalika. Please come in, both of you.*" Multicolored lights began to emerge from the ceilings of the cave in tune with a high-pitched melody. An all-around surreal experience, beautiful in all of its intensity, unfolded before their eyes.

*"Yes I know you are Mandalika and Izabella from the Highlands and you have your questions for me. Spare your words. Have a seat, don't be shy. Fractal visions and the circuits of your mind, Manny, we shall discuss in due time. Let's cover the hops you've prepared."*

They were stunned and star-struck to the maximum with Mandakini's opening. Referring to the survey checklist was clearly pointless.

*"How could you possibly know my name*

*already?" Both were still in utter disbelief of the ongoings in this cave. "I have known you, Mandalika, since the day your visual cortex began to crystallize in your mother's egg-pouch." In short order, Manny connected the threads with her mother's stories. "You are the one who named me before my birth?" – "Exactly so – Mandalika. It's been long since our last meeting. Your maturing compound eyes are a delight to see eyes-to-eyes. But let us tick the boxes in your checklist first."*

*"So. I am Elder Mandakini. I dwell in my solitary abode, beholding dimensions you two are yet to begin to imagine. When I meet folks from the realm, I share slices of my visions for their insight and orientation. I too was a priestess in the shrines once upon a time – greetings to Missty when you next meet her. You still carry a spectrum of her lovely aura. I ascended to the Uppermost Viewpoints on a vision quest in my younger days, seeking to gaze beyond the stars into the uncharted mysteries of being and becoming. I am here."*

*"We are absolutely thrilled to meet you, Elder Mandakini. First of all, we'd like to ask about the basics. Is there a motto or an aphorism that's well-known in the Peaklands? A short statement to help everyone understand what the Peaklanders are all about?"*

*"There certainly is. Every Mantisian would know our ancestral maxim:*

*"Of the shrines to the peaks of insight – we orient, envision, ascend!"*

*"Thank you! That's a very clear statement of intention. We'll write it down for all to remember. We'd also love to hear a poem or a song. Tunings of feeling and flow of life that resonate with the Peaklands."*

*"Why certainly. There's a Mantisian rhythmic invocation called 'The Eye of Ascension' –*

Behold the zenith, let your vision fly;  
A peak within me lifts my spirit high!  
Attention, Ascension –  
We congregate to clarify our fates!

I fix my vision in the brightest sky;  
Master the spectrum, meet the sacred eye!  
Attention, Ascension –  
We concentrate to reach the ancient gate!

*"I've heard this recited in the shrines. They usually repeat the second half of each verse in chorus, right? It's a classic high invocation, very nice, thank you Elder Mandakini.*

*"Then, can you share with us the greatest challenge that the folks of the Peaklands have ever met – and how they overcame it?"*

"I was still an acolyte at the shrines when the Obscure Glow-Fog fell and blanketed the Peaklands. It was severely disorienting. A blurry shimmer blinded our vision and confused our bearings. It was like a thick hood pulled over our heads. At first, we thought this was an atmospheric interaction from the recent heavy rainfall at the Highlands. Then we considered an origin at the Riverlands, where the Flavored Springs had been pumping out extra flavor. Even the Occult Operators at the Strangelands were lost as to the cause. An

eerie hot shimmer of precious substances was reported from the deeper rigs, but that didn't help much at all.

"It was my predecessor Mandisari, once dwelling in this very same cave, whose vision pierced through the obscuration and unveiled its actual source. An undetected leak at the Essence Islands was the culprit – and there were strange things brewing in the depths of the Central Ocean. The Moophin Collective was aware of an ongoing anomaly but never thought its effect would reach as far as the Peaklands. Barely detectable arcane mists of confused essence were rising to the atmosphere and, interacting with the celestial dome that sheaths the Mooland cookie, became ionized at higher altitudes. Most of us had retreated to deep caverns by then.

"A coalition of our brightest visionaries, accompanied by high priestesses and their acolytes, were dispatched to the Deeplands. I was one the acolytes recruited for the task force. We pleaded our case at the Moopetals

and sought assistance from the Elemental Ministers of Fire and Air. A multi-stage operation was set into motion. Our team concentrated on locating the scattered essences, each dialing into an acute tuning for a particular key frequency. The coordinates were translated for the Moophin troops who had no trouble echo-locating the escaped substances, fetching them back from the depths into clear daylight's revealing embrace.

"The Minister of Fire and his retinue took stock of every essence and analyzed their particular properties. The Minister of Air and his assembly organized them all into proper relations. Reflecting upon this significant assortment and its integration into the planetary sphere, the guardian of the Rainbow Spire gave it the celestial stamp of approval. It was a harmonic order that would remain stable for a thousand cycles. Guidelines were sketched for the archivists at the Essence Islands to prevent the makings of another disaster. In short order, the obscure glow-fog

began to dissipate and life at the Peaklands returned to its normal orientation."

*"So uncontained essence can have a negative effect? I thought all essence was basically good."*

*"You see, Mandalika, essence only ever remains pure when it exists in isolation or in a harmonic assortment. When essences are in a haphazard order and left to freely brew, they can be quite reactive. But it wasn't only that. Some of the archivists had been sloppy and stored unrefined essence – still contaminated with all sorts of particulars from the realms. That's a recipe for a disaster. You must keep your essences well! Only then will the goodness of essence bring its true benefit to you and those you may meet."*

*"Thank you, we will remember that well and make sure that our essences are pure and orderly. Finally, we wish to hear the most meaningful story that you can remember from all of the history of Peaklands. What would it be?"*

"Surely the Epic Visions of Manisee. Manisee was the founder of our Mantisian civilization. In the ancient of days, we were barbaric tribes scattered about in the mountains, every other tribe claiming themselves the true Mantisian Imperium. Bloodshed and biting off heads was a routine affair. We had neither good sense nor orientation. Manisee, troubled to the core by what to her seemed like a mindless existence, sought refuge at the Uppermost Viewpoints and found some solace in gazing at the golden halo of the edge of the cookie. In time, her vision broke past the boundary of the realms – she ascended to the "extremely high plane of awareness".

"Wherever she directed the piercing might of her vision, there she found reservoirs of concentrated clarity and essence. Gazing at all of existence from beyond the finite sphere of the realms, actuality was no longer bound by the clutter of particularity. She beheld and journeyed in a dimension of pure abstractions, transcending all subjective confusion, and studied the principles behind the world as we

know it. As years passed and her visions matured and concentrated, a youngster of her temperament ventured to the heights to find solace and clear direction – only to discover Manisee sitting in deep trance in this very cave.

"Our bright-minded youngster, my ancient prime predecessor and the first matriarch, took it upon herself to encode Manisee's visions into an organized codex that became the foundation of the Mantisian Cultural Tradition. As Manisee and her acolyte descended from the heights and into the realm below, visiting one tribe after another, transformation followed in their wake. It was not only for the knowledge that was imparted – the halo of Manisee's breakthrough had an orienting power of its own. This very breakthrough is still the source of inspiration for the Visionary Pioneers who dwell here. The shrines you've explored in the northern sector are each dedicated to a chapter of her visions. We owe her the debt of a world of clarity, the greatest gift ever bestowed."

It was the story behind all stories. Izzy, while not a Mantisian, was deeply touched with the legend. It seemed to resonate with the mission they pursued. While perhaps not as groundbreaking as Manisee's visions, they both felt deeply the orienting potential in the best of Mooland's stories. Compiled with the counsel of the brightest and deepest mind of every realm, the transformative potential was evident – the sort of potential that leads to reorientation and attention to things that truly matter. *"I'm wondering, Mandakini, is there such a story for the Moocows as well?" – "That, Izabella, you will find at the Riverlands. I should not spoil the story for you."*

*"So then, we could say that Manisee was like the first Primary Orientor, the first Mantisian Priest, and the first Visionary Pioneer, all in one?" – "Very much so, Izzy. She was all of them – yet she was none of them. These are all potentials we have here at the Peaklands. Most people follow a particular calling and step into particular roles. But Manisee was the best of everything in us. When your vision breaks*

*through the golden halo at the edge of your world, you reach into a new sphere of freedom where you can become anything, or everything, or even nothing at all. That was our Manisee. Such is life beyond the cocoon of the limited self."*

*"Can I become like you one day?", asked Manny. Of course she should ask such a thing. "You, Mandalika, are already like me. We are but in different points along the stream of time. I did not become me by seeking to become someone else. Why don't you spend the rest of the day and the night here. We still have much to discuss. But for now, I have a buffer of incoming visions I must tend to. Do wander about the plateau and, the both of you, spend some time with the golden glow too. We shall reconvene at nightfall."*

\* \* \* \*

Izzy and Manny left elder Mandakini to her pending visions at the cave and set out to explore the little plateau. Mandakini recollected her resonant projections and

reabsorbed into the trance she had set aside with Izzy and Manny's arrival. The glow in the cave slowly dimmed and returned to pitch black again. *"I think I'd like to go watch the halo for a bit. Then we can sit down and wrap up our experiences from the Peaklands. What say you?"* – *"Yes, let's! Something very soothing to it. When I saw it earlier, I felt like my heart returned to the source of the Flavored Springs at the Riverlands. One wonders what the beyond of the glow is like."*

The cold seemed not to bother them – or perhaps it wasn't that cold in this spot – as they set for what turned out a good long session of glow-gazing in the early afternoon sun. The patches of flowering shrubs along the path, their colors tuned to the higher spectrum of light, were a curiosity – alive and well, and even quite robust, despite the harsh environment. Izzy and Manny filled their bottles with crystal clear water from the mountain spring and, waiting for Mandakini to conclude her chores, got into their wrap-up meeting.

*"So, Manny, conclusions? How does this relate to the other realms?" – "Peaklands is like the beacon of Mooland. We come here to regain our bearings and discover a clear vision of life. The unity of the realms depends on a shared vision. We all cherish our particular essences, but they are like the shrines born from the visions of Manisee. Each of them is important – but none of them is the most important. If we reach the highest viewpoint, we will see eye to eye and understand. The confusion between us will evaporate."*

The opening of Mandakini's cave began to glow like a rainbow soon after the minutes of their meeting were jotted down. *"Clear!..."*, echoed the announcement from Mandakini's cave – followed by the good elder herself. She sat down next to Izzy and Manny, still in silence as she wrapped up the tails from the trails of her visions. The spectral glow in her eyes was slowly subsiding.

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## **Manny's Circle of Thousand Colors**

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## 8. Riverlands: Intuitive Streams

Izzy and Manny woke up to the echo of gentle humming. Soft colors painted the cave's interior, easing their journey back to the waking world. It was a night full of dreams unlike anything they'd ever experienced – some of it very real and lucid. They were still working out how to ground themselves back into daytime reality. *"Whatever all that you witnessed last night,"* counseled Mandakini, *"keep that only to yourselves and those closest to you. Some dreams are made of past, some are of the present, and some flow in from the future. Discuss the last of these with the Mistress of Clouds when you reach the Highlands."*

*"We thank you so much for everything, Mandalika. It's honestly been the most incredible experience of our lives here. You are absolutely next level. May we come and visit you again?"* – *"You, young ladies, will visit me again in exactly a year's time."* It wasn't an order, and it also didn't sound like a prophecy. It was a plain matter-of-fact statement,

perplexing in all of its casuality. *"Hurry up now, the teleporter is ready. Keep your visit to Ammoolia's brief, or you'll be caught in the rain."* – *"Wait, you know Ammoolia?"* – *"Yes Izabella, from way back. I'll leave that story for her to share. Chop chop, time is running."*

It took some effort for Izzy and Manny to make their exit, they could've stayed forever – but alas, time was running indeed. Grabbing their backpacks, they lingered for a brief moment outside the cave for one last look at the unfreezing spring, the wildflowers – curiously, now in shades of sage and teal – and the golden glow at the edge of their world. Exactly 1440 mantihops later, 12 degrees south-east, they were back at the Prime Pathfinder's alcove. *"You two had an experience, did you."* That was the first smile they'd spotted on her face. *"Let me get you back to the basecamp. Hold on to your visions. Five steps to the left, please – right under that dome in the ceiling."*

As soon as Izzy and Manny were in the zone, Margatama began to vocalize a matrix of

sounds that resembled the melody of the *watch-mantis*, but played backwards, and – *hsoohw!* – back in the chamber at the foothills they landed. Taking a moment to ensure they were intact, the girls saw the operator mantis standing by. *"Exact replay in reverse, all atoms intact! Good for you. Now, step out of the chamber please."* From the smirk on her face, it was clear she got a kick out of playing "what if" with greenhorn returnees. Exchanging uncertain looks, they stepped out of the chamber.

*"Have a good visit topside, hey? The path to Highlands is due east."* With a brief thanks, the thought of "what if" still haunting their minds, Izzy and Manny rolled down the trail, feeling out the layouts of their atoms all the way to the Highlands boundary. Not that anyone's ever been scrambled in transit – a misresonance fail-safe was one of the first things that went into the teleporter. It wasn't long before the first Highlands fruit orchards loomed in the distance. Ammoolia's place wasn't too far from this corner of the Peaklands. Not visiting her, and not sharing at least some of their

excitement, wasn't an option in their minds.

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Ammoolia was sitting on the porch of her cottage, sipping a warm cup of flower tea, waiting for the girls' arrival. *"How's it going, girls? So far so good?"* – *"Ammy, you have no idea! It was absolutely nuts, what just happened at the peaks!"* Rivers flow, the wind blows, and these two roll like a tidal wave. There was no stopping them with the tales. *"Have a cup of tea, your throats will run dry if you only use your mouths for talking. Do keep it brief, just the highlights please, unless you want to catch the storm coming in from the south. You do want to reach the Riverlands in good time before the noon, don't you?"*

The notes in their travel journal made for a compact summary. Ammoolia flipped through the pages, her face shifting through a dozen expressions, mostly in flavors of amusement. *"So you also met Muum, huh. We've known since he worked at the Great Fodderstock. Pops by once in a while, the good fellow is fond of my*

*cloud-apples." – "And at the highest peaks, we saw the golden halo, and we met Mandakini, and she said she knows you!" – "Yes girls, but that's a long story there. Longer than the time we have today."*

*"And we had all these crazy dreams, also about the future. She said to discuss them with the Mistress of the Clouds when we meet her at the Highlands. I guess we will meet her when we return here? Who is she?" Ammoolia burst out giggling for no apparent reason. "Yes girls, you'll met her. Ask the oracles at the Cloud Platforms. Be sure to mention you're with Ammoolia. They keep her identity a secret. But now, you should make haste. A storm crossing in from the Strangelands isn't something you want to start your day with."*

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## **Settle Down: Foundation of Riverlands**

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ARRIVAL

SET LAND

Regions:

- East Sector: Major water-source
- South Sector: Saturated jungle
- West Sector: Idyllic streams
- North Sector: Flavored springs

- Recall the basic facts that we know about this realm.
- Immerse into the features and patterns of its landscape.
- Identify the defining characteristics that set its foundation.

## RECOLLECTIONS

## IMMERSION

### Landscape:

- Abundant waterflow
- Diverse ecosystem
- Reflective pools
- Springs of essence
- ""

## STATE: FOUNDATION

### **Tune In: Flow of Life at Riverlands**

- Observe the seasons and cycles of nature in this realm.
- Watch the comings and goings of the diverse folks here.
- Reflect on the feelings and expectations that are flowing.

## SET SCENE: SEASONS

## FAUNA

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## WANDERING

### Native Folks:

- Flow-Moovers
- Medicine Moos (*shamoos*)
- Empathic Mediators
- Stream Elixirists

[ coming and going from/to: ]

## Interesting Places:

- Origins Watershed (East)
- Multiflavor Brewery (South)
- Wellness Sanctuary (West)
- Blessed Springs (North)

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## STATE: FEELINGS\_EXPECTATIONS

### **Gear Up: Meeting the Riverlands Natives**

#### SET SCENE: READY

- Find people to interview and notice how they react to us.
- Learn more about their skills, professions, and expertise.
- Discuss our story project and ask for constructive feedback.

### **First Destination: Origins Watershed (East) -** **Flow-Moovers / Moodulus – Stream Conductor**

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from*

*the Highlands. We understand that you are the [Moodulus – Stream Conductor] here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"[ AS A Riverlander WOULD RESPOND ]"*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Moodulus – Stream Conductor at Origins Watershed (East). ..."*

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"[ GLOSS ON DISTINCT Flow-Moovers SKILLS ]"*

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to Origins Watershed (East) to study all of this in more depth."*

*"[ If you do, then .... ] Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the*

*realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

—“FEEDBACK”—

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

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**Second Destination: Multiflavor Brewery (South)** - Medicine Moos (*shamoos*) / Musha – Eminent Remediator

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are the [Musha – Eminent Remediator] here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"[ AS A Riverlander WOULD RESPOND ]"*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Musha – Eminent Remediator at Multiflavor Brewery (South). ..."*

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about*

*your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"[ GLOSS ON DISTINCT Medicine Moos (shamoos) SKILLS ]"*

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to Multiflavor Brewery (South) to study all of this in more depth."*

*"[ If you do, then .... ] Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

*"\_\_FEEDBACK\_\_"*

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

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**Third Destination: Wellness Sanctuary (West) -**

## Empathic Mediators / Samuumma – Attuning Balancer

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are the [Samuumma – Attuning Balancer] here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

***"[ AS A Riverlander WOULD RESPOND ]"***

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Samuumma – Attuning Balancer at Wellness Sanctuary (West). ..."*

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

***"[ GLOSS ON DISTINCT Empathic Mediators SKILLS ]"***

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to Wellness Sanctuary (West) to study all of this in more depth."*

*"[ If you do, then .... ] Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

"\_\_FEEDBACK\_\_"

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

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**Fourth Destination: Blessed Springs (North) - Stream Elixirists / Somu – Quintessential Refiner**

*"Good afternoon! We are Izzy and Manny from the Highlands. We understand that you are the [Somu – Quintessential Refiner] here. Would you have a bit of time to spare for our questions?"*

*"[ AS A Riverlander WOULD RESPOND ]"*

*"Could you please introduce yourself briefly?"*

*"I am Somu – Quintessential Refiner at Blessed Springs (North). ..."*

*"We are always learning and wish to hear about your skills and expertise. What is it that you do here – and how and why do you do it?"*

*"[ GLOSS ON DISTINCT Stream Elixirists SKILLS ]"*

*"Thank you! Those are valuable skills and duties. One day we may return to Blessed Springs (North) to study all of this in more depth."*

*"[ If you do, then .... ] Was that all, or did you have other questions?"*

*"We are also collecting stories from all the realms of Mooland. You have unique skills and insights. Not to bother you with all the details of our project, but is there something particularly important to keep in mind?"*

—"\_\_FEEDBACK\_\_"—

*"All of that we will keep in mind! Thank you so much for your time."*

We would also like to meet an elder in this realm. Someone who knows all the legends and histories of the Riverlands. Could you point us in the right direction?"

"\_\_POINTS\_\_"

### **Soar High: Elder Essence of Riverlands**

- Scan for a center of essence that reveals the meaning of this realm.
- Meet a wise elder and gather aphorism, poem, challenge, and story.
- Understand how this realm relates to everything we have discovered.

\_\_CENTER\_\_ [ SYMBOL: River - Elder Emmoo Matirta – Riverlands Sweet Mediatrix ]

\_\_ELDER\_\_

Literature:

- Symbol: River

- Aphorism:
- Poem:
- Challenge: Flood
- Best Story: Epic of Mooses

*"Good day, dear elder! We are Izabella and Mandalika from the Highlands. We'd love to ask you a couple of questions. We are on a mission, you see, to tour all the realms of Mooland, collecting the best of insights and stories from the realms. If you could help us out with your wisdom over the Riverlands, we would be very grateful. We hope to share what we learn on our journey with all of our friends – and with all of Mooland and more."*

"I am here for you. Welcome to my \_\_ abode. What is it that you wish to ask, Izabella and Mandalika?"

[Our novice surveyors had thoroughly rehearsed their introduction and the specific questions that should be asked. A faithful walk-through of their well-crafted survey template, just as they would do with every other elder in every realm

down the journey. It felt a bit awkward to think that they would repeat almost the exact same words over and over, but it was a formula that seemed to get all the boxes ticked and result in a job well done.] [ONCE, then ref.]

*"Could you please first introduce yourself?"*

*"I am Somu – Quintessential Refiner. One of the elders here. I roam about and oversee the ongoings of the realm. When the folks meet me, sometimes they ask for advice and guidance. I am [here] for you all, helping you to [[settle down into your basics]. In my younger years, I toiled at the [...] to [...]. [[Our team would tour ...]]"*

*"Pleased to meet you, Somu – Quintessential Refiner. First of all, we'd like to ask about the basics. Is there a motto or an aphorism that's well-known in the Riverlands? A short statement to help everyone understand what the Riverlanders are all about?"*

*"[Of course.] Every Riverlander [would know this]:*

""

\_ "Thank you! That's a \_\_ statement. We'll write it down for all to remember. We'd also love to hear a poem or a song. Tunings of feeling and flow of life that resonate with the Riverlands."\_

"*[Why certainly.] [This is our ...] called . "*

\_\_ POEM \_\_

\_ "That is a \_\_ poem, thank you Somu – Quintessential Refiner.\_

*"Then, can you share with us the greatest challenge that the folks of the Riverlands have ever met – and how they overcame it?"*

"*[There was a time when...] Flood – ???[S] -> 100, 101 [V-] -> 00[V] & 10[V]"*

\_\_DISCUSSION,ADVICE\_\_

*"Thank you, we will note down and carry that advice with us always. Finally, we'd like to hear the most meaningful story that you can remember from all of the history of Riverlands. What would it be?"*

*"As our last request, we'd like to hear the most meaningful story you can remember from all of the history of Grasslands. What would it be?"*

"[It would surely be...] " \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_RELATIONS\_\_

\_\_SET CAMP\_\_

## **9. Highlands: Wandering Freedom**

## **10. Strangelands: Challenging Aims**

## 11. Heatlands: Expert Engineering

## **12. Deeplands: Integrated Basins**

## **13. Rainbow Spire: Celestial Gathering**

## **14. Moopetals: Touring the Capital**

## **15. Home: Is Where the Heart Is Home**

## **Epilogue – Our Beautiful Chrysalis**

## Bonus 1: Mooland Realm Survey Checklist

Izzy and Manny sketched together a checklist to make sure they don't miss anything in any of the realms. It's easy to get so excited and overwhelmed in the spur of the moment that even important things can fall off the mind's radar – and their epic journey was sure to be full of buzz and excitement. Here's the distilled outcome with a list of the key aspects of their research assignment into the major realms of Mooland. You can use it too for your surveys in life – if you find it useful, that is. See if you find it relevant.

\* \* \* \*

### Realm Survey - Checklist and Walkthrough

#### 1. *Homework of the Earth:*

- **Settle down.**
- Recall the basic facts that we know about this realm.

- Immerse into the features and patterns of its landscape.
- Identify the defining characteristics that set its foundation.

## *2. Homework of the Water:*

- **Tune in.**
- Observe the seasons and cycles of nature in this realm.
- Watch the comings and goings of the diverse folks here.
- Reflect on the feelings and expectations that are flowing.

## *3. Homework of the Fire:*

- **Gear up.**
- Find people to interview and notice how they react to us.
- Learn more about their skills, professions, and expertise.

- Discuss our story project and ask for constructive feedback.

#### *4. Homework of the Air:*

- **Soar high.**
- Scan for a center of essence that reveals the meaning of this realm.
- Meet a wise elder and gather aphorism, poem, challenge, and story.
- Understand how this realm relates to everything we have discovered.

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Izzy and Manny condensed the essence of their homework into a short mantra. Something to help them recall the elements in the snap of a heartbeat. This excellent little maxim now decorates the cover of their travel journal. *"Earth. Water. Fire. Air. – Settle down. Tune in. Gear up. Soar high."*

For quick reference, they had also written down Ammoolia's practical guidance from their

journey meet-up at the back of their journal:

- ＊ *"When you reach a given realm, take your time and settle in with the lay of the land. Immerse into in the landscape and establish yourself in its essential character. This is your homework from the Earth. Then, explore and follow the native flows of that realm. Observe the comings and goings and feelings and hopes of all the beings living in there. This is your the homework from the Water."*
- ＊ *"Then, meet and interview the people of the realm. Grasp their skills and their challenges, and seek their unique insights for your mission. This is your homework from the Fire. Finally, find the center of the realm and ponder around in all directions at once. Seek the meaning and purpose of everything you've experienced. Understand the role of the realm in the manifold unity of Mooland. This is your homework from the Air."*

## Bonus 2: Mapping of Ammoolia's Elements

Ammoolia shared several sets of insight and illustrations on the *Elements of Mū* when she walked through and around her helpful compass of orientation. Izzy and Manny took careful notes of everything she said and organized them for future reference. We share these notes here with you, just in case you ever find yourself in need of a compass to guide you on your upcoming journeys. Remember to not venture too far from home without a map and a compass. You may get lost and slip and fall into a hidden cavern of dark rabbit holes – or worse, find yourself bouncing off the edge of the cookie altogether!

Each of these elements have two separate lists. The first is from the main orientation that Ammoolia provided. The second is from their follow-up exploration, and Izzy and Manny also contributed some insights that are included in there. They came up with the headings and wrote this clean with the help of Manny's

intellectual uncle, Mantrana, who's an assistant professor at the Mantiland Academy and sorts through a lot of data to prepare his lessons. Mantrana found all of this extremely interesting and could hardly believe that it was spelled out by a cloud-gazing gardener oracle. It seemed to have a lot of academic applications.

\* \* \* \*

## — EARTH —

### *I: Orientation*

- **Is:** Peace of the pastures beneath.
- **Question:** *What is the pasture of your inner being?*
- **Basics:** Ground beneath your feet.
- **Property:** Has a concrete structure.
- **Does:** Supporting you, staying firm in its place.
- **Quality:** Substance of Earth is solid and heavy.
- **Attitude:** *"Stay grounded – but never let the*

*ground swallow you."*

- **Remember:** "Know your true roots – but don't be too serious and rigid in your ways."

## *II: Applications*

- **Body:** All the bones and muscles and so on.
- **Feeling:** Peace and patience and safety.
- **Darkness:** Earth sinks us into dullness and lethargy.
- **Scenario:** Details of the actual place. Everything we carry with us. Any particular shape and structure and identity.
- **Also:** Basic ingredients that we have on the table. Shape and character of your ingredients for cooking.
- **Helps:** Provide the substance that bolsters someone.
- **Usage:** With Earth, you provide support and structure.
- **Effect:** Earth is a very stabilizing element.

— WATER —

## *I: Orientation*

- **Is:** Bliss of the flowing rivers.
- **Question:** "*Whence do the rivers flow in your sensitive heart?*"
- **Basics:** Flow of the rivers and the ocean and the rain.
- **Property:** Holds together as it flows from one moment to the next.
- **Does:** Adapting to the shapes that it meets on its course.
- **Quality:** Flow of Water is flexible and ever-changing.
- **Attitude:** "*Flow along – but never let the flow carry you away.*"
- **Remember:** "*Feel your stream – but don't spend your days endlessly splashing around in it.*"

## *II: Applications*

- **Body:** Blood and all the other flowing liquids.

- **Feeling:** Bliss and empathy and nurturing comfort.
- **Darkness:** Water lures us into heedless indulgence.
- **Scenario:** Where we came from and where we wish to go. Stream that is pushing and pulling and guiding our path.
- **Also:** Like the river of life. We can hear the echoes of its past and touch the dreams of its future course.
- **Helps:** Flow together with empathy and kindness.
- **Usage:** With water, you reflect and adapt and nurture.
- **Effect:** Water is a very healing element.

## — FIRE —

### *I: Orientation*

- **Is:** Warm clarity of the dancing flames.
- **Question:** *"How is the Sun shining in your brilliant mind?"*

- **Basics:** Flames boiling a pot of tea and the Sun shining in the sky.
- **Property:** Power and potential, the emerging force in every encounter and reaction.
- **Does:** Illuminating and transforming whatever that it meets.
- **Quality:** The force of Fire reshapes and clarifies.
- **Attitude:** *"Shine bright – but never let the flames rule you."*
- **Remember:** *"Wield your power – but don't let it seize and scorch your mind."*

## *II: Applications*

- **Body:** Digestion, body heat, metabolic energy.
- **Feeling:** Courage and precision and sharpness.
- **Darkness:** Fire kindles our anger and arrogance.
- **Scenario:** Tension in the meeting and the

interaction. Examining the situation for a correct way to handle it.

- **Also:** Reacts and transforms things. All the decisions that we make and actions that we take.
- **Helps:** Think clearly and find the right solutions together.
- **Usage:** With Fire, you analyze and clarify and transform the world.
- **Effect:** Fire is a very practical element.

## — AIR —

### *I: Orientation*

- **Is:** Freedom of the wind across the heavens.
- **Question:** *"How vast is the great atmosphere of your understanding?"*
- **Basics:** Wind crossing the skies and the air that we breathe.
- **Property:** Moves freely and travels in all directions, pervading every corner of the world.

- **Does:** Uplifting you and expanding your perspective.
- **Quality:** The vastness of Air is light and uncluttered.
- **Attitude:** *"Soar high – but never evaporate into the sky."*
- **Remember:** *"Expand your reach – but don't be scattered by the winds."*

## *II: Applications*

- **Body:** Breathing, movements of gas, network of nerves.
- **Feeling:** Hope and freedom and wisdom.
- **Darkness:** Air spins us into anxiety and confusion.
- **Scenario:** Mind broadens with perspective. Looking in all directions to better understand the meaning and purpose in the situation.
- **Also:** Relations between all the elements that are present, understanding the complex scenario as a whole.

- **Helps:** Discover guidance and meaning for the long and windy road ahead.
- **Usage:** With Air, you expand with perspective and meaning into the vastness of the spheres of life.
- **Effect:** Air is a very uplifting element.

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Ammoolia's opening phrases in their meet-up made a deep impression in Izzy and Manny, and they noted it down for inspiration:

*＊ "I will then share with you the Elements of Mū that existed a very very long time ago, moving amongst each other in the vastness of space before the crafting of our world with its particular shapes and diverse living creatures. These ancient elements are still with us today. They are everywhere and they influence everything at all times. If you understand these elements and mindfully tune into their presence and its echoes, you'll find support in every situation and guidance for every quest and mission you may ever undertake."*

They also took some notes on Ammoolia's "Fifth Element", even if they didn't quite understand it yet. Even Manny's uncle didn't have a very clear idea of what this was all about, because he was very preoccupied with all sorts of more concrete and tangible concepts. So the notes here are a bit scattered, and some of it they just wrote exactly as she said, but I suppose all of it will become more clear after their epic journey.

## – SPACE –

- **Is:** Unseen center of our compass – and where we actually are?
- **Basics:** *"Liberated field hosting the countless reflections between the elements."*
- **Property:** *"Potential emptiness where the Elements of Mū churn and combine."*
- **Does:** Become more clear to us when we finally reach the Rainbow Spire.
- **Helps:** One to become all things at all times and always tuned with the universe.
- **Usage:** We find it after looking into the

*Grand Prism of Inner Mū* that is in us – or is us?

- **Also:** Ammoolia says that the *moonks* at the Essence Islands can't copyright Space.

## **Bonus 3: Summary of the Major Realms of Mooland**

### **Grasslands**

#### **Regions:**

- Outer Band – Lowland pastures bordering Riverlands
- Middle Band – Most lush and fertile "Middle Ground"
- Inner Band – Highland pastures bordering Deeplands

#### **Landscape:**

- Fertile Lowlands
- Endless Pastures
- Uniform Lushness
- "Restful stillness and stable presence in your body."

#### **Animals:**

- Wobblyburds – Distributing seeds
- Mooles – Cultivating soil
- Mumblebees – Pollinating fields

## **Interesting Places:**

- Great Fodderstock (North)
- Birthing Pastures (East)
- Plateau of Presence (West)

## **Resident Tribes:**

- Moocows – Ancient origins from here
- ...

## **Native Folks:**

- Pasture Keepers
- Calving Sitters
- Keepers of Peace

## **Interviewees:**

- Mr. Mukramat – Fodder-Keeper

- Sister Muumama – Senior Calfcarer
- Dweller Muksama - Okay Abider
- Elder Muum – Pastoral Custodian

### **Project Advise:**

- *"Have a basic story of every kind. Different realms, tastes, nutrients. Old stories and new stories. Serve all equally. Many will be nourished."*
- *"Stories are the spoken cradle of life. Simple and meaningful stories for all ages and all places. Share in a way that even a child will follow."*
- *"When I hear good story. I am still in myself. I have peace. Have basic stories. Simple words. Keep it real. Real is enough. Will sink in."*

### **Literature:**

- Symbol: Pasture
- Aphorism: *"Soil below and grass above. Support life and sustain peace. We are the*

*roots.*"

- Poem: "Cradle of Pastures" – In eight-syllable rustic meter
- Challenge: "The Great Wilting" – Pastures no longer supported grasslife, Mooland was burdened with disharmony.
- Best Story: "The Myth of Mauha" – How the formative chaos of Mooland was bound and stabilized to support life.

## **Peaklands**

### **Regions:**

- East Sector: Approachable altitudes
- North Sector: Narrow passes, ridges and caverns
- West Sector: Extremely tall mountains

### **Landscape:**

- Rugged terrain
- Systems of caverns
- Sky-scraping peaks

- "Unflinching attention and sharp vision.  
Clarity on the core character of things."

### **Animals:**

- Vertigoats
- Mantiwyrms
- Hawkaims

### **Interesting Places:**

- Mantiland Academy (East)
- Shrines of Orientation (North)
- Uppermost Viewpoints (West)

### **Resident Tribes:**

- Mantisians – Mantisian ancestral land
- Moocows – Mostly Highlands migrants

### **Native Folks:**

- Primary Orientors
- Mantisian Priests
- Visionary Pioneers

## Interviewees:

- Orio Mantagelan – Principal Orientor
- Lady Missty – High Priestess
- Margatama – Prime Pathfinder
- Elder Mandakini – Mantisian Sage Ascendant

## Project Advise:

- *"Pay clear and undistracted attention to everything. Record the stories their thorough and accurate form. Ensure that each major and minor point in your story stands clear."*
- *"In every story, there are many layers of insight. The higher lessons are seen from far above. They guide you beyond the moment and into the essences written in the stars."*
- *"Identify universal principles that have meaning in different contexts. Make sure they are well-bridged across the stories. It will help the minds of the readers to become more harmonic."*

## Literature:

- Symbol: Mountain
- Aphorism: "*Of the shrines to the peaks of insight – we orient, envision, ascend!*"
- Poem: "The Eye of Ascension" – Mantisian rhythmic invocation
- Challenge: "The Obscure Glow-Fog" – A mysterious shimmer blinded and confused everyone, resulting from an uncontrolled essence leak.
- Best Story: "Epic Visions of Manisee"

## Riverlands

## Regions:

- East Sector: Major water-source
- South Sector: Saturated jungle
- West Sector: Idyllic streams
- North Sector: Flavored springs

## Landscape:

- Abundant waterflow
- Diverse ecosystem
- Reflective pools
- Springs of essence
- ""

### **Animals:**

- —
- Salmoos
- —

### **Interesting Places:**

- Origins Watershed (East)
- Multiflavor Brewery (South)
- Wellness Sanctuary (West)
- Blessed Springs (North)

### **Resident Tribes:**

- Moocows – This is their historical heartland
- ...

## **Native Folks:**

- Flow-Moovers
- Medicine Moos
- Empathic Mediators
- Stream Elixirists

## **Interviewees:**

- Moodulus – Stream Conductor
- Musha – Eminent Remediator
- Samuumma – Attuning Balancer
- Somu – Quintessential Refiner
- Elder Emmoo Matirta – Riverlands Sweet Mediatrix

## **Project Advise:**

- —
- —
- —

## **Literature:**

- Symbol: River
- Aphorism:
- Poem:
- Challenge: Flood
- Best Story: Epic of Mooses

## Highlands

### Regions:

- —
- —
- —

### Landscape:

- —
- —
- —

### Animals:

- —
- —

## Interesting Places:

- Grand Orchards
- Hang-Out Bridge
- Cloud Platforms

## Resident Tribes:

- Moocows – Mostly migrants from Riverlands
- Mantisians – Mostly migrants from Peaklands

## Native Folks:

- Kinder Gardeners
- Artistic Muses
- Cloud Oracles

## Interviewees:

- – High Cultivator
- – Lofty Aesthete
- – Augural Skyreader

- Elder Ammoolia Amegha – Highlands  
Mistress of Clouds

### **Project Advise:**

- –
- –
- –

### **Literature:**

- Symbol: Windtree
- Aphorism:
- Poem:
- Challenge: Tornado
- Best Story:

### **Strangelands**

### **Regions:**

- –
- –
- –

## **Landscape:**

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- —
- —

## **Animals:**

- —
- —

## **Interesting Places:**

- Bridge Underlands
- Rough Patch Zones
- Boggy Hinterlands

## **Resident Tribes:**

- Boofalos – This is the land they have always occupied
- Moocows – Migrants from various realms

## **Native Folks:**

- Bosslike Challengers
- Inbound Excavators
- Secretive Operators

## **Interviewees:**

- – Big Boss
- – Major Depthsman
- – Occult Veilbreaker
- Elder Börghaush the Radical – Boofalo Kingpin

## **Project Advise:**

- –
- –
- –

## **Literature:**

- Symbol: Lightning
- Aphorism:
- Poem:

- Challenge: Electro-Storm
- Best Story:

## Heatlands

### Regions:

- —
- —
- —

### Landscape:

- —
- —
- —

### Animals:

- —
- —

### Interesting Places:

- Industrial Complexes

- The Great Laboratorium
- Sir Corrector Bootcamp

### Resident Tribes:

- Moocows – Specialists from various realms
- ? – Native inhabitants

### Native Folks:

- Revamping Engineers
- Vanguard Warriors
- Scientific Alchemists

### Interviewees:

- – Chief Overhauler
- – Tactical Rectifier
- – Master Synthesizer
- Elder Pyrogebrius Münsterberg – Grand Meister

### Project Advise:

- –

■ —

■ —

## **Literature:**

- Symbol: Flames
- Aphorism:
- Poem:
- Challenge: Wildfire
- Best Story:

## **Deeplands**

## **Regions:**

- Ancient Caldera
- Coastal Reefland
- Central Ocean

## **Landscape:**

■ —

■ —

■ —

## **Animals:**

- —
- —

## **Interesting Places:**

- Coral Pinnacles
- Essence Islands
- Island of Mū

## **Resident Tribes:**

- Moocows – Setlers from various realms
- Moophins – Native aquatic civilization

## **Native Folks:**

- Deepy Divers
- Essence Archivists (Librarians, Harvesters)
- Moonks (Philosophers, Wizards)

## **Interviewees:**

- — Arcane Abbot

- – Cardinal Conservator
- – Profound Aquanaut
- Elder Mumphis Unfathom – Integrator Incarnate

### **Project Advise:**

- –
- –
- –

### **Literature:**

- Symbol: Ocean
- Aphorism:
- Poem:
- Challenge: Whirlpool
- Best Story:

### **Rainbow Spire**

### **Regions:**

- –

- —
- —

## **Landscape:**

- —
- —
- —

## **Animals:**

- —
- —

## **Interesting Places:**

- Zenith Crown – Rainbow Bridges
- Interplanetary Embassies
- Triple Conduit – Secret Sphere of Mū

## **Resident Tribes:**

- Ambassadors – From other Doughland Planets
- Natives – From each Mooland tribe

## **Native Folks:**

- Rainbow Regulators
- Doughland Ambassadors
- Harmonic Orchestrators

## **Interviewees:**

- – Chromatic Warden
- – Intermediary Liaison
- – Triune Moderator
- Elder Anonymous – Guardian of the Gateway

## **Project Advise:**

- –
- –
- –

## **Literature:**

- Symbol: Heaven
- Aphorism:

- Poem:
- Challenge: Mesmerization
- Best Story: Birth of the Rainbow Sphere

## **Moopetals – Mooland Capital**

### **Regions:**

- —
- —
- —

### **Landscape:**

- —
- —
- —

### **Animals:**

- —
- —

### **Interesting Places:**

- Ministerial Petals
- Chamber of Balance
- Radar of the Realms

### **Resident Tribes:**

- Ambassadors – From other Doughland Planets
- Natives – From each Mooland tribe

### **Native Folks:**

- Four Mighty Ministers (Plus One)
- Associate Assemblies
- Watchers of Dynamism

### **Interviewees:**

- – Ministerial Meister
- – Association Assembler
- – Harbinger of Purity
- Elder –

### **Literature:**

- Symbol: Compass
- Aphorism:
- Poem:
- Challenge: Infiltration
- Best Story:

### **Project Advise:**

- —
- —
- —

## **Bonus 4: Mooland Friends – Character Profiles**

Who's who at Mooland? Who would ever wish to forget Izzy, Manny, or any of their companions and mentors. Here, we'll help you remember. This is our cast of Moolanders, listed in order of appearance. A brief profile has been prepped foron every one of them – to help you double-check who they are, where they come from, and what they're all about. The countless folks Izzy and Manny met and interviewed are listed separately in the Realms Summary (*Bonus 3*) they took the time to prepare for you.

**Izzy – "Dizzy Izzy" – Izabella**

**Manny – "Spinny Manny" – Mandalika**

**Moopheus – Deeplands Essence Harvester**

**Ammoolia – "Ammy" – Izzy's Grandma**

**Buffy Smokarus – Strangelands Buffalo**

**Mantrana – Manny's Academic Uncle**

**Elder Muum – Grasslands Pastoral  
Custodian**

**Elder Mandakini – Mantisian Sage  
Ascendant**

**Elder Matirtha Emmoo – Riverlands Sweet  
Mediatrix**

**Elder Ammoolia Amegha – Highlands  
Mistress of Clouds**

It turns out that Izzy's grandmother Ammoolia was, unbeknownst to most Moolandians, also the veiled Highlands Elder. The title "Mistress of Clouds" is conferred by the Assembly of Elder Oracles to whoever among them is eminent in extracting foresight and wisdom from the multicolored clouds. This nomination is kept in secret to avoid needless crowding at the elder's dwelling, when for most purposes any one of the Oracles will be able to guide the folks seeking for heavenly insight.

**Elder Börghaush the Radical – Strangelands  
Boofalo Kingpin**

**Elder Pyrogebrius Münsterberg – Heatlands  
Grand Meister**

**Elder Mumphis Unfathom – Deeplands  
Integrator Incarnate**

**Guardian of the Gateway**

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### **Historical**

**Mooeses**

**Mootron**

**Mauha**

**Manisee**

## **Bonus 5: Compendium of Teachings and Symbols**

**Scrolls of Mū**

**Genesis of Mū**

**Mūltifold Ancient Elements**

**Tunings of the Mū**

**Mirror of Empathy**

**Grand Prism of Inner Mū**

**Sacred Heart of Mū**

### **Mooditation**

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A type of meditation practiced by the Moocows of Highlands and Deeplands.

**Mantisian Cultural Tradition**

**Spiritual Mantigels**

## **Adamantition**

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A type of meditation practiced in the Mantisian Cultural Tradition.

## **Maniseean Compendium**

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### **Occult Generative Engine**