

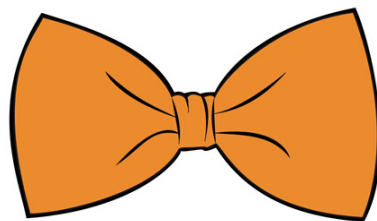
BOOK I

THE STORY OF

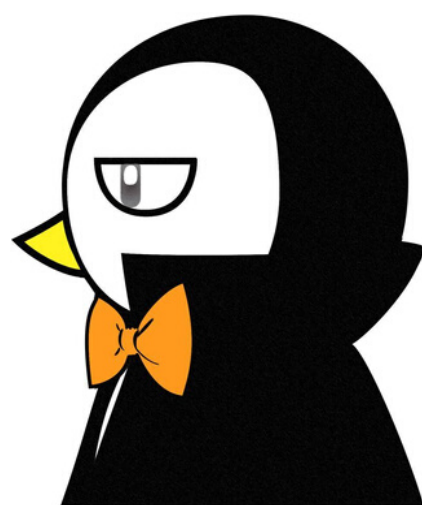


VAMPIRE PENGUIN

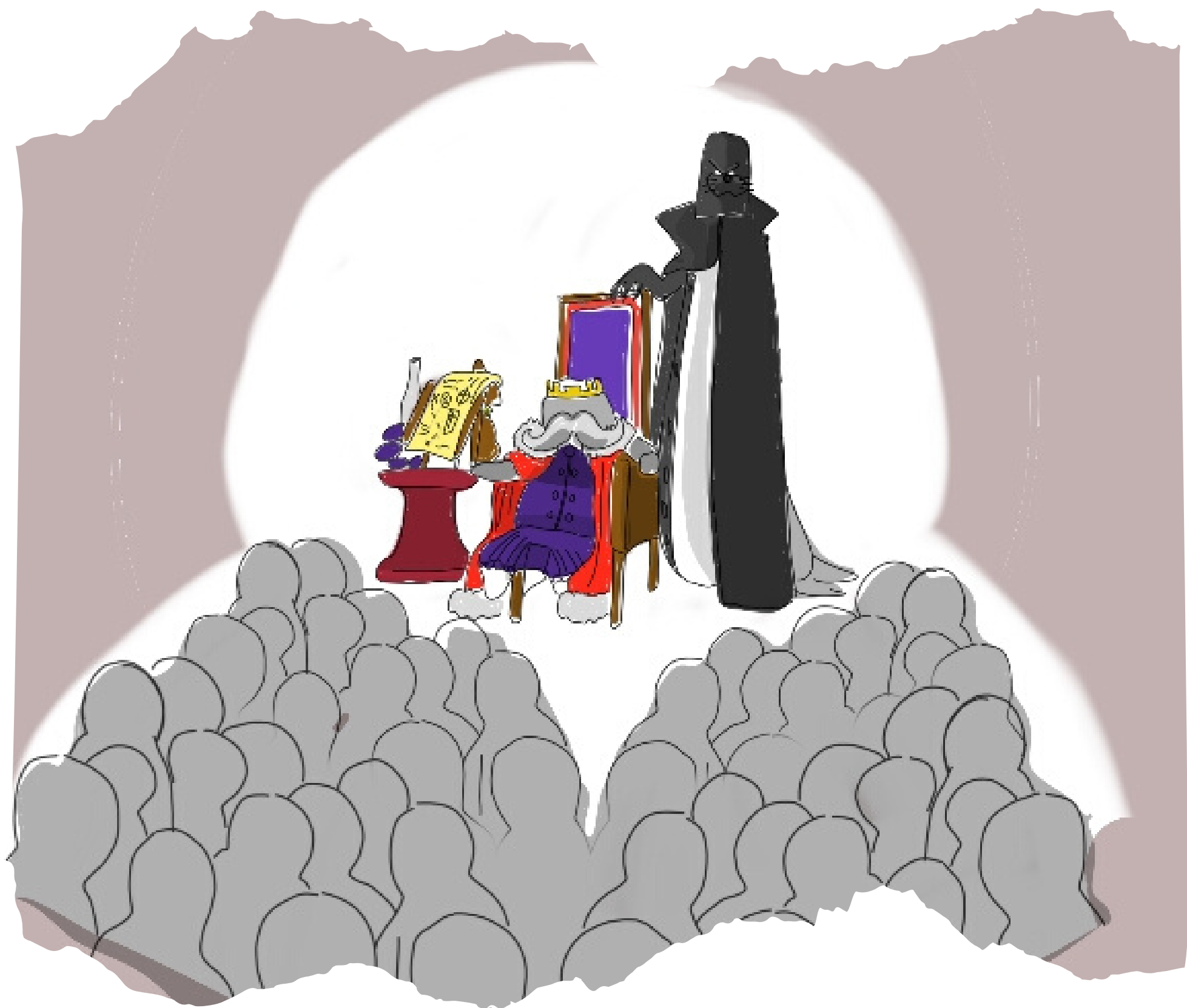
PAOLO SAN LUIS



LEO SAN LUIS



"This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental."



Prologue:

Legend has it that a long long time ago, a just and upright king ruled the North Pole.

Life was good and bountiful.

But his trusted advisor harbored a deep jealousy for the king and devised a plan to usurp the kingdom:

Obtain the Potion of Snow, a god-like artifact that grants its user one wish.

Knowing that the king's influence on his people goes beyond his comprehension, his wish was simple.

To make the king and his memories disappear.

By following an ancient map detailing the fabled potion's whereabouts, the shady character manipulates the brave and compassionate king into helping him discover the mythical item.

Upon realizing the true nature of the enigmatic potion, the king attempted to destroy it, understanding that it was the only way to maintain balance and order.

But the devious individual already planned for this moment, snatching the potion from the king and drinking it with reckless abandon.

His wish came true.

The Potion of Snow then exploded into an infinite amount of coins, fragments, that if all collected, can produce the legendary potion once again.

Chapter I



It was graduation day in penguin school, a monumental ceremony recognizing the next generation of uncanny penguinity. One by one, the tiny penguins waddled to the stage to receive their diplomas, a symbol of hard work and dedication, but most importantly, the scroll will deem the specialty of each student and their ultimate purpose in the Colony. Proud parents cheered and clapped their flippers, excited to see how their nestlings fair in the standardized testing curriculum that they too once had to go through.

“Blue.” The head master announced, describing one of the three chromatic blessings bestowed upon the degrees. “Congratulations,” the scholarly penguin said, “you are a Belly Flopper.” He continued, referring to the classifications of penguins that travel in great speeds on their bellies, transporting valuable items and information for the Colony. The student took a bow and belly flopped off stage while another approached the pew. The head master ceremoniously handed another diploma to the next graduate and as the nestling opened the award, a yellow light reflected off the young avian’s eyes. “Yellow, you are a Waddler.” A thunderous applause came from the crowd, majority of the adults were Waddlers themselves, and they are glad to see more young ones being granted the great responsibility of marching the vast Antarctic plains. Waddlers ensure the sovereignty of the Colony by protecting its territory and upholding its laws and regulations. The student gave the head master, a fellow Waddler himself, the Waddler’s salute, holding the gesture for a good moment before joining the rest of the graduates on the other side of the stage. With a feeling of great accomplishment, the headmaster continued, “Okay, who’s next?”



"Me!" A bright-eyed penguin gleefully proclaimed, jumping on the platform with exuberant excitement. "I wonder what color mine will be?" The student murmured to himself as he approached the headmaster. "Will it be yellow, blue," He paused for a moment, "or red?" The latter representing the best swimmers of the Colony. Swimmers specialize in hunting and gathering food in the treacherous oceans. They are also adept at evading predators underwater, generating bubble trails that confuse and displace their attackers. "Or what if it's a color we have never seen, a combination of all of them!" The student's eyes sparkled at the unconventional thought, delaying the ceremony while he pondered in the middle of the stage.

"Hurry up!" A student behind him complained, "Stop talking to yourself and get your diploma. Plus there are only three colors and that's it." The student was right, since the beginning of time, there has only been three colors of light that miraculously radiate from the scrolls, and under no circumstances that the colors have ever combined to produce a different hue.

"But I'm good at everything." The brash avian replied, truly believing that he aced every test in the final classifications.

The group of graduates laughed at the ridiculous statement. "You weren't good at one thing at all!" One of the students in line bellowed. "Yeah you don't follow instructions. You build these wacky inventions that don't work!" Another added, talking about the gadgets their classmate has created throughout the year. These gizmos promised a variety of functions such as suspension for the Belly Floppers, webbed feet support for the Waddlers, and torpedo turbines for the Swimmers. "You're lucky you even graduated, so you should just follow the rules and stop being weird."

"Yes they do work," the young penguin retorted, "for a little bit." He ultimately confessed, knowing that none of his current inventions actually made it through the exams without failing, causing mishaps to the teachers supervising the tests. "I just needed a little more time to recalibrate some specs."

"More time to throw them in the garbage!" The students teased.

"Enough." The headmaster commanded, urging the young penguin to get his degree and respect the schedule of the ceremony. But beneath his authoritative persona, he too was curious on what color will illuminate from the trouble-some student's diploma. Yes it's true, this particular student improvised and created his own way of belly flopping, waddling, and swimming, modifying the tried and true techniques of each specialty with eccentric contraptions, and no one in the academy can predict or determine what role the student will be given. He let out a quiet chuckle, thinking about yesterday, the final swimming test. The impetuous student showed up with an odd mechanical belt made up of twigs, rocks, and a propeller carved from ice. According to the young penguin, the girdle was designed to help him reach maximum aquadynamics, a term he coined to describe the efficiency of one's body underwater. Despite the protests and ridicule by his peers, the young penguin persisted and was allowed to take the test with his gadget.



When it was the student's turn, the young penguin activated his invention and accelerated at an incredible unprecedented speed, shocking everyone, especially the head master. The student was equally surprised as the rest of the class, obviously not expecting his device to work so perfectly, gliding through water with little resistance. It was short lived however when the belt started breaking apart, causing the student to spin in circles. One of the supervisors rushed to the student's aid by taking the mechanical girdle from the nestling, only to be carried away by the contraption to the far depths of the ocean. Laughing internally, he quickly glanced at the poor supervisor sitting behind the pulpit, haggard and too exhausted to even be furious at the young avian that caused him such demise.

"Hi Dad." The young penguin proudly greeted, instantly gaining a corrective glare from the elderly scholar. "Oops, I mean Mr. Principal." He amended, well aware of his dad's rules of observing titles in school. His dad didn't want his peers to treat him differently just because he was the head master's son. His dad just wanted him to have a regular chickhood, free of judgements and criticisms, to conform to the norms of the Colony. But the unorthodox student was not about that life. "All the colors, all the colors." The nestling chanted to himself, eyes glittering

The head master shook his head at the brazen chick, internally asking the gods why was he blessed with such an eccentric nestling. "Son," He called, "the gods don't chromatically bless us according to what we want to be, it is deeper than that."

“Uh huh.” The young penguin replied, his dad’s words evidently going over his head as he went on one knee to dramatically await his diploma, both flippers held up high.

The head master sighed in defeat and handed his son the scroll. With his eyes closed, the young penguin opened his long-awaited diploma in unnecessary slow motion, savoring every thrilling moment of the unveiling of the outcome. When the scroll was completely revealed, every penguin in the ceremony gasped.

No color.

The crowd started to murmur. Every penguin in history has received a chromatic blessing, it was the only way for them to know their role in the Colony, their purpose. “Impossible, how? That is unheard of, what do we make of this?”

Opening his eyes, the young penguin quizzically stared at the colorless diploma. This is weird, he told himself, this can’t be right, shaking the piece of paper as to somehow activate its light. Maybe it’s broken? The young penguin helplessly looked to his father, trying to find answers in his father’s eyes, but sadly, his dad was equally confused at the impossible revelation. “Let’s try giving them theirs, maybe it’s a malfunction.” The young penguin said, pointing to a classmate behind him with new found hope.

The faculty agreed, it could be a hiccup, maybe the rest of the diplomas did not carry chromatic blessings as well. Reluctantly, the student waddled up to the pew. To everyone’s surprise and relief, a yellow light quickly emanated from the opened page. Wooo! The student exclaimed. “Let me, let me.” Another nestling volunteered, waddling to the stage and instantly being granted a color. “Red! Yeah!”

The achromatic penguin witnessed more of his classmates receive their diplomas imbued with color, and after a few dreadful minutes, the final diploma was awarded. “Blue.” He hopelessly said in defeat. “Okay, maybe give me another diploma?” The young penguin suggested.

“No son, these diplomas are given by the gods, a symbol of your hard work and dedication, there is only one scroll for you.” The head master replied.

“Wha...what does this mean, dad?” The nestling quietly asked. The head master compassionately put his flipper on his son’s shoulder. “Son, I don’t know. This has never happened before. But having no chromatic blessing,” he paused trying to logically make sense of the situation, “means...”

“He has no purpose!” One of the students yelled, “I told you he wasn’t good at anything.”

“Haha yeah, he is always so sure of himself, now he’s a nobody, a nothing, a nothing, a nothing.” The nestlings chanted.

The young penguin locked his watery gaze at the dull page clenched within his flippers, desperately trying to hold his ground. This is not the first time they laughed at me, the young penguin thought to himself, but why am I so sad?

“Nestlings!” The head master silenced the rowdy adolescents. “This is not uncanny penguinity, this is not what we teach in this academy.” The

students immediately mellowed down, respecting the authority of their head master.

“We do need to figure out what we are going to do.” One of the faculty members said to the scholarly penguin. “Especially tonite.” The rest of the teachers agreed, reminding all penguins of the significance of the Crèche, the final part of the ceremony where the nestlings are marooned in Dark Moon Island. The remote isle is mathematically aligned with the darkest moon of the year, its unique position creates a geothermal magnet for super natural affinity. It is believed that the magical conditions of the Crèche immortalizes the bond between graduates, a key role in ensuring the success and the future of the Colony. It is also known that the nestling’s chromatic blessing plays a major role in the ceremonial night, but no penguin is exactly sure how. “All nestlings must be sent to the island, we cannot break our own laws.”

“But he has no chromatic blessing,” The haggard teacher behind the pulpit stated, “he did not technically graduate.”

“I received a diploma.” The young penguin protested. “According to our rules, I graduated.” He continued, tears rolling down his cheeks.

“Now you follow the rules.” The bitter teacher said under his breath.

“The chick is right head master,” one of the teachers called, “he did graduate, but we don’t know how his colorlessness will affect the rest of the nestlings’ synergy under the darkest moon of the year. This has never happened before.”

“Yeah, bad things might happen to him, and to our chickdren.” Some parents from the crowd stated, “He can sit the Crèche out.” Another suggested.

“But I graduated.” The young penguin held his diploma up high, opposing the the idea of missing the important ceremony. His curriculum, aside from the challenging tests, largely consisted of lessons in uncanny penguinity, and being left out of the Crèche is exponentially worse than his achromatic predicament.

“Boo! We don’t want you there anyway!” One of his classmates bluntly heckled only to be scolded by their parents.

“We must hurry, the time for the Crèche is upon us.” A teacher stated, observing the sun setting from the eventful stage, “We need to decide now.” The crowd erupted in debate, opinions from parents and teachers were expressed in varying concerns. “It’s important for our nestlings to solidify their bond, this is for the future of our Colony.” Some of the penguins proclaimed, “No, he has no color, it’s an omen of bad thing to come, he can stay here with us.”

The head master listened to the words of his peers and fellow penguins, torn between keeping his son safe at home or sending him out to the Crèche under uncertain circumstances. But he has to make a decision, now. “Penguins, penguins,” he interrupted the noisy crowd, “I understand and value all of your concerns,” the wise penguin continued, gaining full command of the stage, “but tradition is tradition,” he paused and specifically addressed all of the Waddlers, “and our Colony will, always and forever, conform to our laws.” The

head master looked and smiled at his son, seeing his young self in his son's bright watery eyes, "Being colorless is a color in its own way, there are no mistakes." With a heavy heart, he decided, "He must go." A decision he would soon regret.

Chapter II



The gigantic waves crashing against the jagged cliffs of the titular isle sounded like a symphony of thunder and rain to the young penguin. A fitting sound he thought, for witnessing the dark moon appear closer and closer in starless sky. He has never seen a spectacle so poetic, just in time, he said, for his latest invention. Huddled with his peers, the student peered into a telescopic gadget made of wood and ice carved into lenses. It worked, the ice lenses arranged within the wooden tube magnified the image of the celestial body. “This is awesome guys! Come take a look at this! Wait, actually, never mind.” The young penguin said, seeing how the ice lenses started to melt, blurring the image produced by the gizmo. It’s always the ice. The penguin disappointedly concluded, well aware of the main cause of his inventions failing. To his surprise, he didn’t hear any teasing, no heckling. Hmm, that’s weird. Maybe they got tired of making fun of me? Taking his attention away from the gadget, he noticed his classmates moving in synchronized timing, perfectly alternating their footing and position within the huddle. A dance? Did they practice this without me? He asked himself as he incorrectly followed their coordinated movements, there is no way, I never miss school. He squeezed and maneuvered his way around the huddle, trying to find his place in the group. “Hey guys, what is going on?” But he got no response. “Hey, hey.” He looked into one of his classmates’s eyes, trying to find evidence of his existence. “Can you hear...” A flash of light interrupted his question. Red. The young penguin said to himself, describing the chromatic blessing illuminating from his classmate’s pupils. He looked around and saw how every nestling’s eyes glowed as well, their gaze fixated on the dark moon. It was as if the lunar orb was orchestrating the ancestral-like dance, guiding the nestlings’ movements with their gods-given light. This is amazing, he thought, how his classmates moved as one with such grace and instinct, a deep connection symbolic of true uncanny penguinity. So this is how our bonds are immortalized, the young penguin realized. He strived to synchronize with the group, pledging to be a part of the Crèche and get the answers he was looking for, but his last abortive attempt somehow landed him outside of the huddle. Exhausted and failing to find an opening, the young penguin decided to take a little break.

“How interesting.” A mysterious figure called, its deep silvery voice startling the young penguin. “A colorless, uncoordinated nestling.” It easily glided across the rocky terrain, athirst to have a closer look at the source of its curiosity.

“Eeek!” The young penguin panicked, frightened by the imposing shadow, and tried to squeeze back in the tight huddle. But his classmates

continued their ritualistic dance, unaware of the enigmatic presence lurking in the darkness. "Stay back!" He demanded, waving the telescopic device like a weapon.

"And disenchanted I see." It continued, intrigued by the nestling uninfluenced by the dark moon.

"Who...who are you?" The young penguin managed to asked.

The shadowy creature let out a laugh, it has been lifetimes since it was asked such a mundane question, "I have many names, harbinger of night, undying," the ancient creature grinned, revealing fangs, "vampyre." It unfolded its massive wings, and with a forceful flap, it extinguished the lights glowing from all the nestlings' eyes, putting them to sleep. "And tonite, after all of these years," it took a gander at the dark moon passing, "the colorless penguin is finally before me."

Tremulous flippers held the telescopic gadget at the ready, the young penguin equivocally terrified and amazed at the vampyre's display of power.

"What do you want from me?"

"There are more important questions you should be asking, young penguin." The dark figure replied, insinuating knowledge of the nestling's afflictions. "Like why are you colorless, misplaced," it motioned the penguin to take notice of the dark moon's absence in the sky, "and failed to immortalize your bond."

The cryptic entity was right, the young penguin thought, those questions have been troubling him since graduation. He was hoping to find answers during the Crèche, but the events of the night only made him more confused, more disconnected. "Why didn't I get a color, what is my purpose?" The young penguin involuntarily blurted out as tears started running down his cheeks, struck with sudden grief.

"The gods have forsaken you, young penguin." The ancient creature mused, finding the nestling's anguish particularly delectable.

"Stop it!" He covered his ears with his flippers. "You're lying!"

"Foolish chick." The vampyre retorted, its deep voice causing the ground to rumble beneath the nestling's webbed feet, "Face it, nestling, you are chromatically unblessed and withheld of purpose."

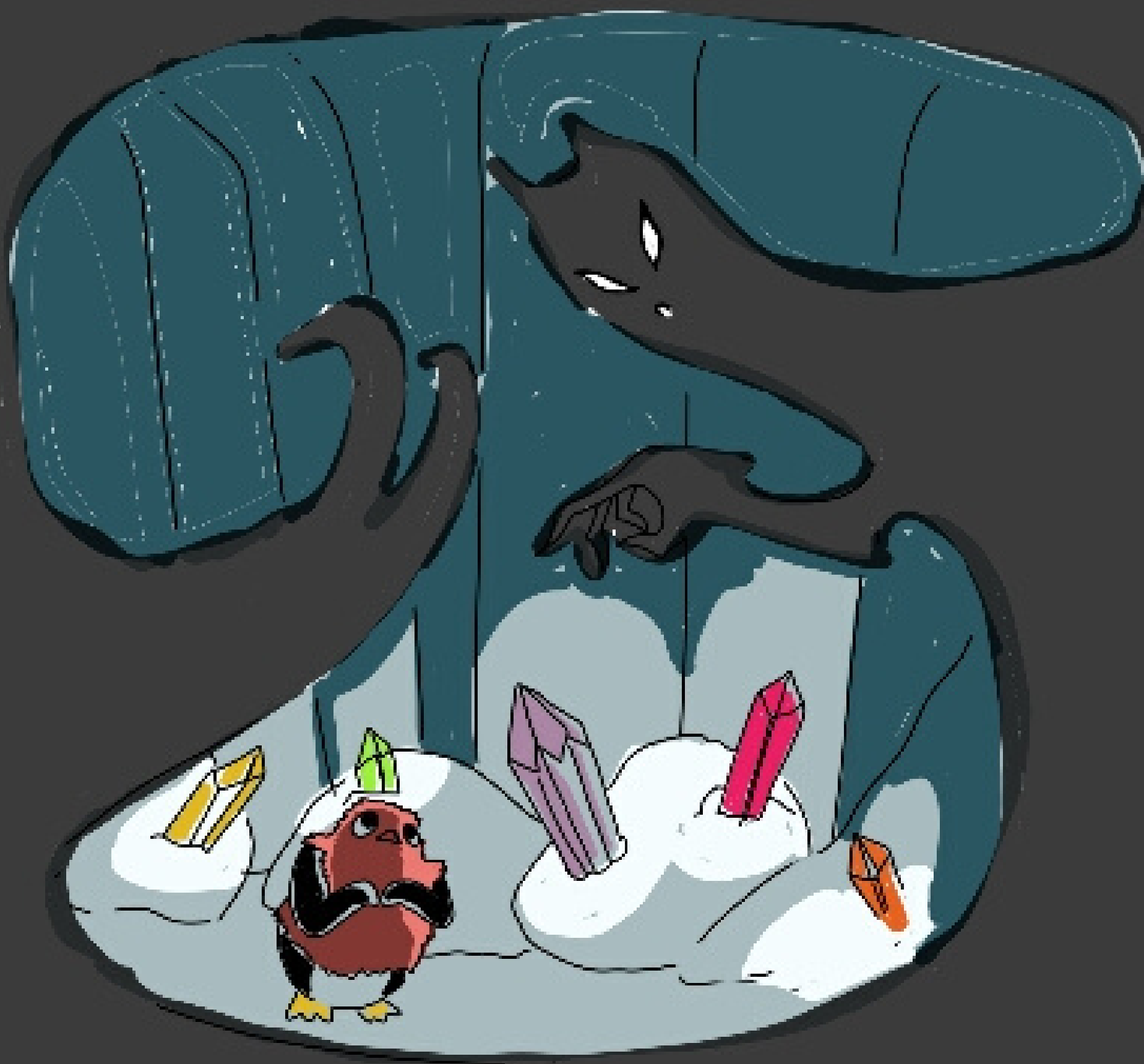
Hearing the incendiary narrative foisted on him by the ancient creature, the young penguin collapsed to his knees and grabbed at his chest, wishing that the gesture would somehow prevent his heart from breaking.

"But that's why I am here," The shadowy figure announced as it veered towards the crestfallen nestling, incipiently surrounding the young penguin with its wings, "to give you purpose."



he young penguin did not know what to make of the shadowy figure's offer, never expecting to find hope amidst the embrace of sweeping darkness. Does the ancient creature truly hold the answer to his prayers? His crepuscular kingdom come?

“But tell me young nestling, what are you willing to sacrifice for this gift?”



Everything. The young penguin silently answered to himself, but he quickly retracted the selfish and reckless notion. Unable to find the courage to speak his mind, the young penguin instead closed his eyes and prayed to awaken from the terrible nightmare.

“Regardless of your answer, little chick, our fated encounter has only one outcome.” The shadowy creature professed. In a split second, it appeared behind the young penguin, its hypnotic presence gripping the nestling’s resolve. With a mesmeric voice, it whispered, “There are no mistakes.”

The young penguin opened his eyes to a diploma in his flippers. Open it, son. He heard his father say, beseeching him to uncover the chromatic blessing imbued in the degree. Every penguin is waiting. Following his father’s instructions, the graduate pulled the scroll apart, revealing three beams of light emanating from its pages. Blue, yellow, and red. His classmates cheered and praised him for his insurmountable achievement, apologizing for all the times they made fun of him and his wacky inventions. Congratulations, son, I knew you were destined to do great things, I am proud of you, he heard his father say, filling his heart with illimitable joy. So it was a dream after all, the young penguin said to himself, breathing a sigh of relief.

And then he felt a bite.

Chapter III



It was a busy night at the Drinkery, hustling and bustling with North Polians taking refuge from the brewing snow storm. Chandeliers swayed and flickered along with the melodies played by string instruments as the diverse group of patrons drank fizzy drinks from hefty mugs, sharing tall tales of adventure and venting their frustrations to those willing to listen. In one of the loud tables, a group of thin-horned sheep was about to finish their fifth round of drinks.

“Best beer in the North! Hic.” One of them exclaimed, pounding the empty mug on the counter, “It never fails to alleviate my sorrows.”

“Yes, Paula’s bearberry brew never disappoints, it makes slaving away at the mines worth it. Hic.” Another sheep added, gaining nods of approval from the group.

“It’s getting hic, harder and harder to hic, mine those coins. But as long as we have hic, Paula and the Drinkery, I am hic, happy.”

“Yes, and she is beautiful!”

“Yeah! She’s an angel.”

“Hic. Another round!”

“Guys, stop it.” The young polar bear replied as she cleared the empty mugs from the table. “I think you guys had enough.” She continued with a little sass.

The flock of sheep couldn’t help but gawk at the beautiful bear with an orange bow adorning her hair. “Come on Paula, one more round, plus you really are the prettiest lady in all the tundras. Hic.” The group pleaded concomitantly.

Paula responded with unblinking blue eyes, immune to the wheedling of her patrons. Nothing will distract her from running her business orderly and up to code. “Ok fine, another round.”

“Yay!” The group rejoiced, getting up from their seats.

“Of water.” She continued, getting groans and complaints from the flock. She charmingly turned her shoulders and walked back to the bar, unimpressed at how grown males could act like offsprings. “Hey Paula!” She heard her name called from across the room, “Walter is about to hit a north record!” Oh great. She sighed to herself as she dropped off her tray, determined to put an end to the childish commotion. “Oh my, Walter! What are you doing?!”

“Whooooo!” A diverse group of patrons cheered for the walrus chugging mug after mug of bearberry beer. The big creature must have drank more than ten already, one mug short of the north record.

“Burrrrrp.” Walter belched, wobbling side to side, his protruding stomach drenched in the amber liquid. He wiped the foam off his whiskers and prepared himself to break the record. “Okay, hic, I’m ready!” The crowd cheered and handed him another drink. In a bumbling motion, he brought the

mug to his muzzle, but Paula grabbed the drink from his flippers. "Hey!"

"Hey to you!" She retorted, one paw on her waste, leaning to one side. "I hired you for security, not to drink the product and fool around with the customers."

"Aww boo! He was about to break the north record!" The crowd whined, receiving a cold stare from the polar bear.

The walrus quickly tried to straighten up, scared of the polar bear's fury. It's true, he was hired as security and to help Paula with daily operations, but hanging out with the patrons was just too fun. "Just, hic, put it on my tab."

"Your tab? You have no more room in your tab!" She lividly replied. "I told you the last time, no more screw ups."

"Okay, hic, I'm sorry. I will be better, please don't fire me." Walter begged, groveling at the polar bear's feet, not wanting to lose his job. He has always loved and supported the Drinkery, and working here was a dream come true for the walrus.

Paula sighed in defeat, letting go of expectations has always been a challenge. But aside from the occasional buffoonery, hiring the walrus did have its upside. Walter's outgoing and sociable personality has livened up the place and has brought in a lot of new customers, making business overall better.

"One more chance, Walter, but this is really it, I need you to focus." Walter thanked the gracious polar bear and tried to compose himself, puffing up his chest. "Okay guys, show is over. I have to, hic, guard the place, hic. Any creature fooling around will be kicked out. Hic." He squinted his eyes in an attempt to show he meant business. "And I mean it. I'm going outside to make my rounds." The walrus announced.

"But there's a blizzard coming...you know what, never mind." Paula, with all of her will, walked away from the conversation, trusting that everything will be okay. She took a few more orders and continued to perform her barkeep duties. The tavern was doing well, sales have increased steadily in the last few winters. I hope you are smiling down on me, mom and dad. She said to herself. The Drinkery was her parents' business, and ever since their unfortunate passing a couple years ago, she inherited the tavern along with their debts. Amidst the devastating heartbreak, she fought on and re-built the business, determined to redeem her parents' legacy and honor. I miss you guys.

Outside of the Drinkery, Walter enjoyed the cold wind cooling his red cheeks. "I am security, no one gets in without my permission. Secure the Drinkery, hic, that is my job. Mmhmm, I'm gonna guard this door like no one has ever guarded it before." He said out loud to the empty streets. The walrus continued to talk to himself, pretending to have multiple conversations with make-believe patrons, rejecting them or letting them in according to the whim of his imagination. In the middle of his ridiculous charade, he noticed a peculiar creature slowly skate pass the tavern, a hooded avian carrying a large sack. "Hey you!" He called, leaving his post, determined to talk to the strange

individual easily gliding through the icy trails. “Uhhh sir, hic you can’t come in the Drinkery.” The walrus held his flipper in front of the newcomer until the hooded avian’s nonchalant stare made him realize the foolishness of his declaration. “Yeah you’re right, you weren’t trying to come in, you were just sliding by.” Walter continued, struck by epiphany, “I’ve never seen you before. And I know everyone in this city. Ooo, what are those?” He asked pointing at the avian’s webbed feet outfitted with a skating apparatus. “Wow!” The walrus exclaimed, “is everything in your back pack full of amazing inventions like that? Never mind, one question at a time, Walter.” He said to himself, trying to contain his excitement. “Good most intriguing sir, I grant you permission to enter the Drinkery.” The walrus declared, receiving another apathetic glare from the shadowy avian. “Go on, that way.” He motioned the mysterious figure to the door. “Okay, fine, not tonite, you just got into the city, of course, hic. And you must be looking for a home!” The walrus concluded, seeing how the newcomer lugging a sizable luggage must be prioritizing seeking shelter in the brewing snow storm. “I know all the great spots too. Hmm, but judging from your demeanor,” he goggled at the uncaring avian, “you look like you like being alone, like, alone alone.” Walter tapped his flipper to his temple, contemplating where to recommend the outsider to go. It was impossible to find isolated shelters in the city nowadays, and there was only one place the walrus can think of that will satisfy the unknown figure’s unuttered requirements. “Uhhh, there’s an abandoned castle just outside of town! That way!” He pointed towards the distant snowy mountain tops. “It really is the only place where no one roams, you can be alone there.



But,” Walter continued, bringing his voice to a whisper, “it’s haunted.” The animated walrus trumpeted, his flippers undulating to emphasize the spookiness of the dilapidated fortress. As long as every North Polian can remember, the decrepit castle has always been known as a place to stay away from. Merely being near its shadow is believed to be taboo, and no practical creature would dare go near the foreboding estate. “So if you don’t mind…wait, hic, of course you don’t mind. You will love it there!” He said in ecstatic revelation, clapping his flippers together, “And maybe I can visit you sometime? And and, maybe we can be friends? Best, friends?” Walter let the hopeful question trail off to a higher note with sparkling eyes. The walrus rambled on, chatting up the avian, and completely and utterly failed to notice the gang of seals that were about to kick in the Drinkery’s door, trouble on their minds.

A loud sound pulled everyone’s attention to the entrance, abruptly silencing the room as a band of thuggish seals barged in, stone batons in their flippers. One by one they filled the place, taking multiple positions in the silent crowd.

“Well, well, well.” The last seal entering the door barked. “Looks like the Drinkery is doing well.” He looked around the tavern and walked towards the barkeep, “Hello, Miss, hope you are having a good evening.” The ringed seal continued, tipping his hat to the young polar bear.

Paula immediately tensed up in the unwarranted encounter, she was not expecting the landlord’s henchseals to be coming around so soon. Damn it Walter, where are you? She took a deep breath and mustered the courage to get to the bottom of the unexpected visit. “I thought my evening couldn’t get any worse, Armand,” She pointed at the busted door, “but you definitely proved me wrong. Rent is not due for another month. So I’m going to need you and your goons to get out, now.” She demanded.

“Calm down little lady.” The ringed seal replied, “We are only here for a little check in. A public service announcement for the upcoming blizzard.” He continued, rubbing his silver belly. The rest of the seals laughed and agreed with Armand, imposing crowd control in their designated positions.

“Okay, now that you have kicked in the door and have made us all aware of the storm,” The polar bear sassed as the snowy wind blew through the opening, “please remove your presence from the premises.”

“Charming as always aren’t you?” The seal let out a chuckle.

“And you are uncharming as always.” The young polar bear crossed her arms, trying to appear unintimidated by the gang of ringed seals. “Now please, leave.”

Armand tipped his hat to the polar bear, unable to clap back at the feisty lady. “Okay listen up.” The seal announced, addressing everyone in the tavern. “There’s a rumor going around that the Drinkery is housing criminals, a safe haven for rebels to recruit and conduct secret meetings.”

“This is a tavern, Armand, nothing else.” Paula responded.

“Yeah you say that, but why is your business doing so well all of a sudden? The boss is suspicious. Plus,” he snorted, “creatures talk under the right motivation.”

Paula raised her eyebrow at the ludicrous statement.

“And you know how the landlord despises any form of rebellion.” The ringed seal continued, “So, it is our civic duty to quash any potential uprising at its infancy.” With a swift nod, Armand signaled the henchseals to start flipping the tavern’s tables, causing all the patrons to cower in fear as mugs and bearberry brew spilled all over the floor. The henchseals then demanded the creatures to empty their pockets, threatening to hit them with stone batons if they didn’t comply. “Members of the rebellion should speak up right now and stop us. Haha.” The ringed seal howled, taunting any creature that might be in cahoots with the rebels, proving the boss’ suspicion. “Now for the main bounty.” Armand said to the polar bear, pointing at the stash of coins kept behind the bar.

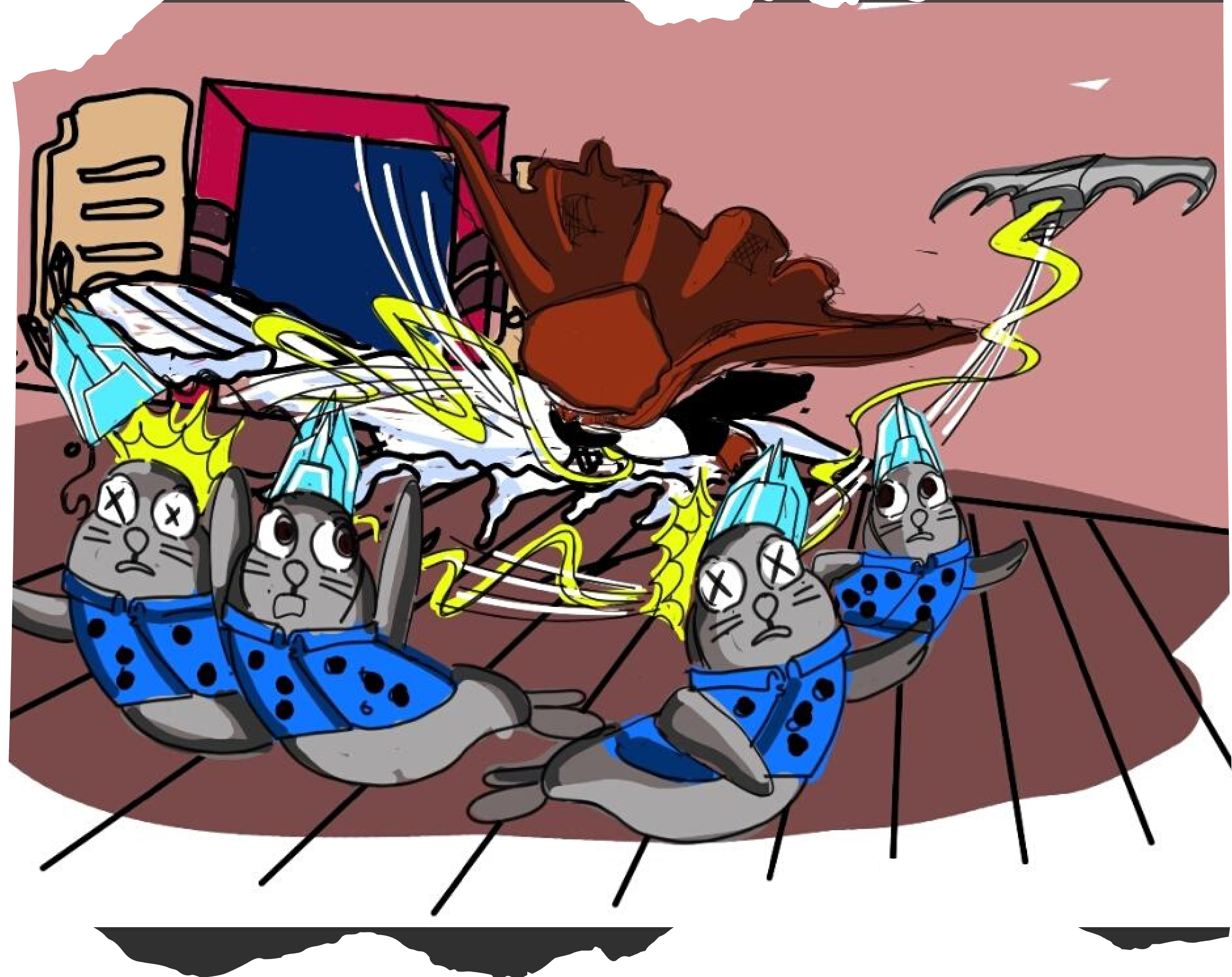
Paula stood her ground, fighting not to show any emotion to the thuggish seal. “How does stealing from helpless citizens prove the landlord’s theory, Armand?” She asked as a couple of seals extract a heavy coin chest in the back of the counter.

The ringed seal watched the abundant loot get carried away and shrugged his shoulders, “I guess I don’t really know.” He snickered, “But the boss will be very happy to know there are no signs of resistance here at all, haha.” Armand tipped his hat to the polar bear, motioning the henchseals to start exiting the Drinkery.

“Must be nice not having a mind of your own.” The polar bear blurted out, unintentionally letting the cheap shot slip out. She immediately covered her mouth in disbelief.

The insult got under Armand’s skin, triggering deep insecurities within the ringed seal’s psyche. He reactively raised his stone baton in seething rage and committed to strike her. Crack! The stone baton was deflected mid swing, parried by an ice projectile: an ice-a-rang. “What the..?” The momentum staggered the seal, causing him to fall to his side and hitting his snout on a table as the wing-like projectile boomeranged back to the ingress.

Caught by surprise, the henchseals scrambled to compose themselves, setting their eyes on the dark entrance to confront the mysterious attacker.



Through the open door, a hooded avian skated on an ice path it instantaneously created. The agile creature then angled its trajectory upwards and suspended itself in midair, launching a barrage of wing-like ice projectiles, accurately hitting the henchseals occupying the tavern. In an instant, all the seals concertedly hit the floor, kayo'd by the hooded avian landing softly in a low stance, the ice around him sublimating into sparkling molecules.

"Security is here!" Walter drummed as he rushed through the door, slipping on the amber liquid he loved to drink so much. Falling on his bottom, he looked around and saw the gang of unconscious seals scattered across the tavern. "Uhhh, what happened?"

Paula could not even scream at the walrus, ineffably at a loss for words.

"Oh I see you've met my best friend!" The walrus exclaimed as the hooded avian slowly stood up after catching the return of his ice-a-rangs. "How did you get in here so fast?"

"Show yourself, criminal!" The dazed seal interjected, stumbling to get on his hind flipper. Armand wiped the blood off his snout and yelled, "Rebel magic! You are all rebels, the boss was right! Now show your face, you coward!"

At that moment, a strong gust of wind blew the avian's hood off, revealing a penguin with nonchalant eyes. And on his neck, an evident bite mark.

"Vampire!" One of the customers shouted in horror, causing every creature in the Drinkery to panic. They scattered and jumped out the windows and stampeded through the front door, Armand being the first one out.

Every nerve in Paula's constitution instinctively told her to flee from the vampire, to run from a monster she was taught to loath and fear. The avian's apathetic eyes confirmed that he was used to such expectations, but there was something about the mysterious newcomer that made the polar bear stay.

"Oh, my, goodness!" Walter proclaimed with eyes glittering. "So you're a vampire too! So am I!" He declared, grabbing at his prominent tusks. "Me and my best friend are vampires! Vampire buddies!"

The avian uncaringly stared at Walter and showed no reaction to his laughable statement. It was the best he can do to subtly avert the beautiful polar bear's gaze. He began to conjure another ice path under his webbed feet, getting ready to skate off the scene.

"Wait." Paula called, taking the orange bow from her hair. She handed it to the stranger and said, "This should help you cause less of a ruckus. I'm sure you don't like creatures running away from you all the time."

The avian was instantly magnetized to the bow, an unspoken affinity to its orange color. He began to wrap it around his neck, concealing the evident bite mark. As the ice path manifesting under him started to intensify, counting down for a swift exit, he heard the polar bear ask, "What do we call you?" He pulled the orange bow tie tight and finally looked at Paula. In her blue eyes, he witnessed a genuine kindness he has not seen in years, sparking feelings of joy he has long banished in his dark soul. He quickly dismissed the notion however, and reminded himself of what he was.

A monster.

With a cold and smooth disposition, the avian replied, "Call me Vampire Penguin."

Chapter IV



A stygian fog shrouded the snaking pathway to the decrepit castle sitting on the mountaintop, allowing no light to pass through its massive stained glass windows. Heavy snow rest undisturbed on the fortress' pointed arches and flying buttresses, its gothic architecture looking ominous in the perpetual darkness. For centuries, its tall intimidating doors guarded by stone gargoyles deterred any creature from entering the stronghold.

But not tonite.

All it took was a simple push, an effortless nudge of his flipper for the old doors to open ever so slowly. The loud creaking noise reverberated off the towering walls and vaulted ceilings, causing the inhabitants of dense cobwebs scattering as the wind howling through cracks sounded like ghosts endlessly haunting. When the doors fully opened, he waddled in, the crumbling pillars leading him to a throne at the end of the cavernous hallway. Behind the empty cathedra, a gigantic painting faced the ingress, an oil-based work of art depicting a faceless king loved by his subjects. It was stylishly eerie, a place that could never be called a home, unless you were a vampire.

The penguin set his pack down, removed his hooded fabric, and approached the frozen throne that seemed to be calling his name. He ran his flippers on its intricate details and appreciated the permafrost it was encased in. Taking a seat, he immediately resonated with the throne, like it somehow belonged to him, waiting for him. He looked across the throne room as the oaken doors slowly closed, leaving him in the cold embrace of darkness.

Thud.

This was perfect, he thought, he can sit here in isolation for all of eternity. To live the rest of his immortal life in infinite void. As he meditated in his pitch black domain, he unconsciously reminisced life with his father, his family, and his colony. How life used to be so simple and happiness was not an evanescent concept. But it was immediately taken over by a horrific scene, the only outcome if he decided to stay. He could only imagine his father's sadness, but any sense of belonging and love was worth sacrificing for everyone's safety.

"How amusing, newborn," He heard it say, his creator, the harbinger of night, "you believe severance from the world is your purpose. But you are withering, young vampire. How long can you really run away from who you are? How long can you fight...the thirst?"

The penguin let the chatter in his head continue for a little longer, all too used to the susurrations of the ancient creature he unfortunately met that fateful night. It was a part of him, forever. He adjusted his newly acquired bow tie, confident that the feared citadel can imprison his temptations, the warden of his desires. It's true, he can feel himself weakening. Conjuring ice and manipulating its atomic structure to fuel his inventions was beginning to take a toll on his life force. And every time he uses his abilities, he can feel himself fading, a macabre ending he cannot wait to welcome.

But he was immortal.

He will permanently suffer and never die, no hope, no sunrise.

"So you have finally arrived." An anomalous voice whispered in his head, directing his attention to the painting behind the royal seat. "I have been waiting for you."

He looked up at the operose masterpiece, its colorful pigments glowing delicately in the darkness. North Polian creatures confided in a faceless leader, the vestige of a noble king. "Who are you?"

"I am no one. A long forgotten memory."

"Why have you been waiting for me?" The avian inquired.

"To free me."

The penguin pondered the fathomless proclamation. "How do I free a figment of my imagination?"

"Simple." The voice in the inner recesses of his mind replied as a beam of light shined above the avian.

Is this a chromatic blessing? He asked, basking in the warm tangerine hue. The feeling reminded him of the last part of his graduation ceremony, and how his fellow penguins danced under the dark moon. From the source of illumination, a rolling black cape descended towards him, wrapping the

penguin in its silken lining.

“This is how I free you?” The penguin asked, “I traveled all this way to be alone, not to immortalize my bond with you.”



“Not with me, with yourself. This is your Crèche, king of the North Pole.” He shook his head, struck by everything that has happened since that day. The avian replayed scenarios of him graduating with no chromatic blessing, encountering the ancient being at the ceremonial Crèche, and leaving his family to live a life of isolation. “You are mistaken.” he concluded.

“There are no mistakes.”

Hearing those familiar words provoked the penguin to jump off the throne and set himself in a defensive stance. “I am a cursed creature of the night! Nothing else!” He eyed the painting as if to physically confront the voice ringing in his head. “Show yourself!” The avian demanded, grabbing at the flowing cape on his shoulders. He attempted to remove the ebony fabric, but stopped when he witnessed the beam of light disperse and ignite all of the

candles in the castle, giving life to the shadows. He continued to glare at the faceless portrait, searching for answers, for any sign of consciousness. What he got was a manifestation of nonchalant eyes staring back at him.

A mirror.



He immediately shut his eyes, gripped by the materialization of self-reflection. It's ironic, he thought, how one can be so powerful yet powerless at the same time. A vampire sublimed by fate. "Are you free?" The penguin asked, knowing deep in his soul that he will never hear an answer. He opened his eyes and faced himself, light and shadow played a tug of war on the crevices of the detailed brush strokes of his portrait. It was poetic, he thought, if the haunted castle didn't feel like home the first time he waddled in, witnessing the artistic revelation definitely did. But he was no king.

The avian eased up and dispelled the internal conversation. He sat on the throne with a sense of momentary peace, understanding that he has all the time in world to cerebrate. For the first time in a long time, no existential questions disturbed his silence, just the soft echoing sound of the inscription etched on the newly finished painting.

Long live Vampire Penguin.

Chapter V

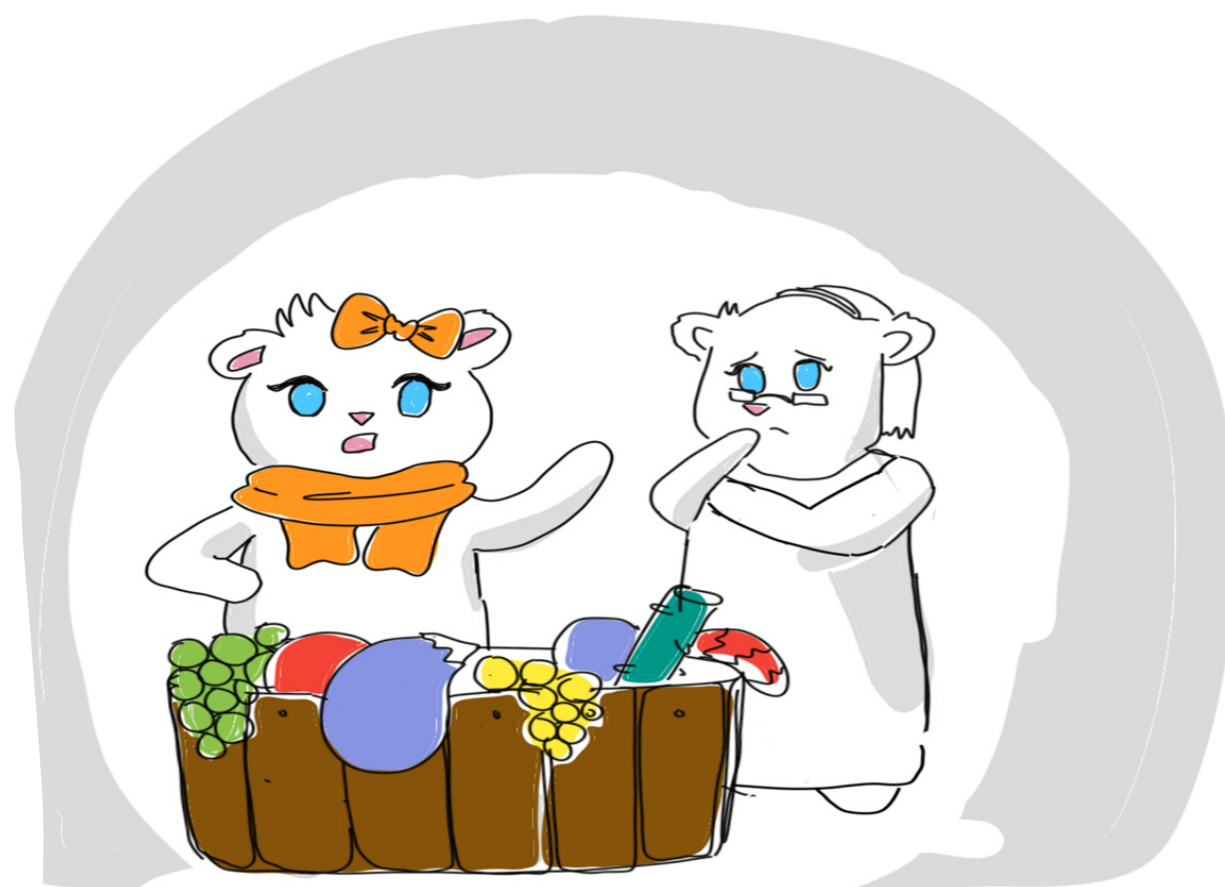


Fortune has come to Paula and the Drinkery. First, the landlord visited the tavern and apologized for his henchseals' rogue behavior, professing that Armand and his goons acted behind his back. Apparently, the thuggish seals interrogated one of her patrons and forced confessions of rebel activity to rob the profitable tavern. He also claimed that he had no suspicions of Paula or her business and made the henchseals repair damages to the Drinkery, reassuring her that they will not be harassing her and her patrons again, so long as she continue to pay her late parents' debts. Second, news of the dramatic event increased the business' notoriety as North Polian creatures' varying recollections of the story became the talk of the town. Their evenings have been jam packed, and Walter has had no time to fool around. And lastly, the small rebel group she was secretly leading remained unrevealed.

"That was too close, Paula." An older polar bear said to her as she proceeded to stomp on bearberries. "If you and your little band of criminals get discovered, all of your hard work would be for nothing." They continued to tread on the fruit, pushing it down with their hind paws as part of the fermenting process. "Take this as a sign and forget about these dangerous antics, please." She lectured, truly concerned about Paula and her safety.

The blue-eyed polar bear kept quiet, not wanting to argue with her protective aunt about the importance of revolting against the landlord's regime so early in the morning.

"And what did I tell you about speaking your mind?" The older bear asked rhetorically, having warned the young lady multiple times of the danger of vocalizing her strong sense of justice and equality. "By the gods, you almost got hurt." She looked at her niece and let out a long sigh, "I wish I can change things too, Paula. It's not right that all of us are forever indebted to the landlord for living on his lands, but that's how it's always been. He is rich, and we are not. We just have to know our place and obey the rules. I can't lose you too, my dear."



Paula smiled and leaned her head on her aunt's shoulder, emphatic to her perspective. She didn't want to stress her out with her point of view, understanding that revolution has to come from one's heart. "Don't worry auntie, I'm not going anywhere, okay?"

"Your parents would be very proud of you, my child." She said, kissing Paula's head. "Where is the pretty bow you made?"

"I gave it to him."

"The so-called vampire?" She asked, having heard multiple versions of the narrative. "The paper said he works for the landlord. He makes sure no illegal activities happen in the dark, including his henchseals. So the landlord sent him to stop Armand and his goons. Now that is the most believable story."

Paula let out a sarcastic laugh, knowing that report was a complete and utter lie for the benefit of the landlord's public image. She recalled the landlord bringing the town journalist on his visit, making sure he influenced the story in his favor. But she knows what she saw, a stranger who valiantly stood up against injustice, a rebel in the open. "I don't know auntie, I doubt Armand has the courage to ever act behind his master's back. That's unbecoming of that loyal scum."

"Paula! That's not ladylike. Either way, it's more of a reason to stop any more mischief. Wether that newcomer works for the landlord or not, that's another creature we all need to stay away from."

He's been observing him every morning since their meeting, his wonder dispelling fears a normal creature would have when in the presence of a monster. He gawked at the amazing contraptions of his anointed best friend, particularly loving the chutes that connected every part of the castle, easily navigating the penguin's way through its maze-like corridors. He watched him restore the foundations and furnitures of the gothic citadel, utilizing autonomous mechanisms magically powered by ice. The walrus was also astonished of how the avian seemed to have read and organized the towering piles of old books in his repository, when he hasn't even begun to read one in his lifetime. Walter dreamed of hanging out with his best friend and play with his amazing inventions, but he promised Paula to stay away from the avian and the haunted stronghold. She said that he should respect the penguin's unspoken wishes of isolation, and if he really was his best friend, then he should leave the avian alone. Walter, for the most part, have kept his promise.

But this morning was different.

Through the stained glass windows and small cracks he could find, Walter witnessed the penguin having a conversation with an ice sculpture of an older penguin. He appeared to be scolding himself, voicing the inanimate object. The avian tried apologizing to the older penguin, explaining reasons why he had to leave the Colony. After a few moments of silence, the penguin cried.

Seeing his best friend's tears broke the walrus' heart, compelling him to break his promise. He busted in the vampire's home to comfort his best friend.

The avian was too caught up in his self-created conversation to notice the walrus barging in. He was embraced so tightly that he couldn't breathe, even though he didn't need to.

"Don't cry my best friend, I'm here for you!" The walrus declared as he hugged the avian. "I will always be here for you!" He cried.

Using his vampiric powers, the penguin vaporized himself into a black mist to escape the walrus-hug. He reappeared in front of the sobbing creature and in an instant, sublimated the ice sculptor he created into sparkling molecules, including the tears he had shed.

"Uhhh, hello fellow vampire." Walter said after realizing the penguin was out of his flippers. "Sorry." He rubbed his head, "I didn't mean to hug you so tight. But it's just that I saw you so sad."

The penguin stared at the walrus with nonchalant eyes.

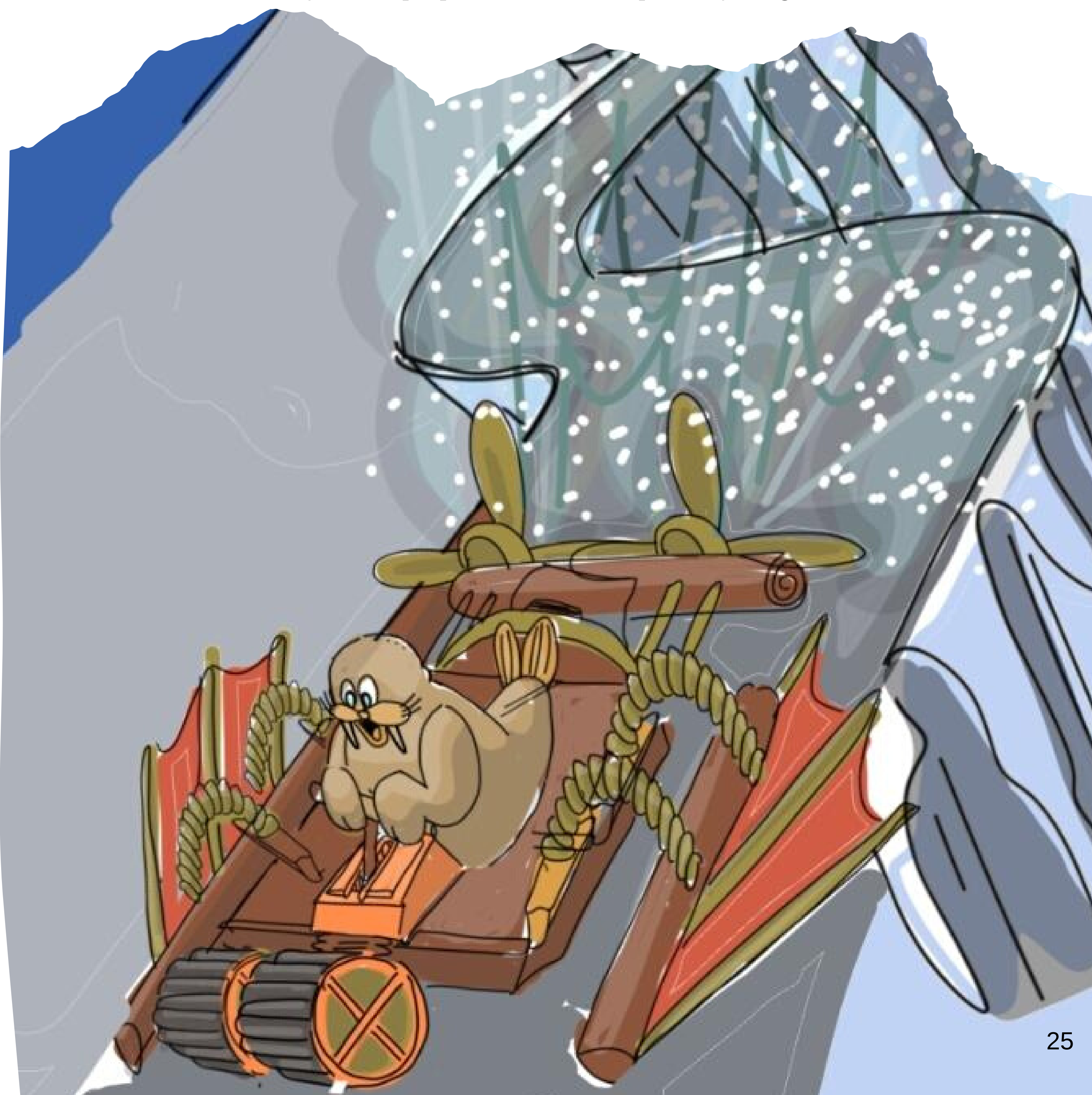
"Oh right, you're not sad. You can't get sad because you are a vampire. I don't get sad either, because I'm a vampire also." He proclaimed, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Oh wow, looks like you really made a home out of this place." The walrus said as he looked around the castle, pretending to see the avian's amazing inventions for the first time. With glittering eyes he confessed, "Paula made me promise to leave you alone, but you're my best friend. And best friends need to stick together."

The avian replied to Walter's words with an apathetic glare and pointed to the open doors, motioning the walrus to get out of his castle.

"Aww ok." The big creature wistfully sighed. With his head down, he slowly dragged his large body towards the exit. "You know what?" He said, turning around, "I just want to be your friend. And if you deny me that, then, then," Walter paused to find the words to accurately express what he was feeling, "then you really are a monster!" He stomped out of the castle, and as the doors slowly closed behind him, Walter turned around again and stated, "And I'm only leaving because I'll be late for work! Not because you don't want to be my friend!"



The walrus began his trek down the snaking pathway, angrily muttering along the way. "I don't want to be your best friend anyway. I got lots of friends." He vented. But after all the huffing and puffing, he ultimately regretted his reaction, admitting that he didn't really mean what he said. Paula was right, it's not the vampire's fault he wanted to be alone, everyone has their reasons. And as his best friend, he needed to respect that. He concluded that he will visit the penguin again tomorrow and apologize for his actions, maybe even bring Paula along to help him make amends. When he reached the bottom of the mountain, a surprise was waiting for him. Walter's eyes immediately brightened when he saw a sled equipped with ice propellers. On the gadget, a small note was attached saying, "To Walter, from VampirePenguin. This will get you down the mountain faster next time." Overwhelming joy filled the walrus, hopping on the sled and failing to read the operating instructions listed on the rest of the note. He adored the craftsmanship of its design, and swore to love his present forever. Walter started to glide through the snowy terrain with ease, aided by the ice propellers and his ample body weight. "Wooooooh!"



The walrus shouted as he hit certain slopes that made the sled jump in the air. He made it to the Drinkery in no time, but didn't know how to stop the speeding apparatus. The walrus crashed through the tavern's front door and somehow ended up rolling in the kitchen where Paula and her aunt treaded bearberries. "Hey Paula! Can you please, please, please..."

"What is it, Walter?" The young polar bear interrupted, already getting a headache from the walrus' uncontrollable excitement.

"Can you please give me an orange bow tie too?"

Chapter VI



Walter the walrus has been living in heaven, spending time with his bestest friend for days on end. It's been weeks of constant marvel and adventure for the large pup-like creature, cherishing the precious moments with Vampire Penguin and his amazing inventions. They conversed endlessly about life, tirelessly sharing their thoughts and their innermost feelings - Walter doing all of the talking. The avian even allowed him to design accessories for the duo, one of them being magnifying ice goggles that increased one's depth of field, a gadget he wore daily. His punctuality and excellent performance at work eventually got Paula to make him an orange bow tie, his friendship with the penguin positively reflecting on his Drinkery duties. Though it was extremely obvious that he has been hanging out with the vampire in the haunted castle, Walter has been secretive of where he has been spending his mornings, not wanting to admit breaking his promise to the polar bear. But after seeing his best friend and his withering condition today, he had no choice but to come clean and beg Paula for help.

"What's wrong, Walter?" The polar bear asked, letting the walrus in her room above the tavern. She sensed a grave concern on the walrus' shoulders as he anxiously paced back and forth in her small living space.

After a few moments, Walter finally stopped, looked at the concerned polar bear and confessed, "Okay Paula, I admit, I broke my promise. I didn't stay away from my best friend and our awesome castle. We have been laughing, inventing, and hanging out everyday. I'm sorry."

The polar bear responded to the walrus rocking a black cape and orange bow tie, "Walter, I know. It's okay. But what's wrong?"

Walter started to wail uncontrollably, "My best friend," he cried, "he's dying!"

Paula was taken aback by the walrus' news as questions bombarded her mind. How can a vampire die? She asked herself. The polar bear tried to calm the weeping walrus, wanting to understand what was going on, "How do you know?"

"Because," He started to say, "I am selfish!" The walrus evinced, "I know he gets weaker every time we create a new invention, but I don't ever stop him because our gizmos are just the coolest." He pointed to his ice goggles, showing off the intricate design and function of the gadget. "And I keep telling him to eat. I bring food to cook but I always end up eating all of it. I don't know what to do."

Paula compassionately listened to Walter's words, her heart touched by his genuine care for the avian. But his dilemma only has one intelligible inquiry. "Walter, you do know what vampires eat right?"



“Uhhh, we vampires eat tasty mollusks.” He answered, referring to his favorite delicacy he has been persistently trying to give to the penguin.

Paula gave Walter a quizzical look. Does he really not know the stories? She thought to herself, any creature of sound mind would be fearful if they truly explore the answer to her question. Vampires have been long portrayed in history as monsters, powerful creatures that prey on a mortal’s life force. It is said that denying their existence is the only way to avoid being hunted, but witnessing Walter transform into a better version of himself over the past few weeks seem to prove that particular belief wrong. Was she believing a story without questioning its merit, an act antithetical to everything that she stands for? “Maybe he doesn’t like mollusks.” She emphatically suggested, continuing to learn to let go of her biases towards the so-called monster.

Walter’s eyes illuminated with realization, his tears and worry abating. He clapped his flippers and exclaimed, “Paula, you are a genius!” The walrus grabbed her paws and praised her, “He’s a fruitarian like you!” The walrus announced, describing her strict diet of Arctic fruits. Without permission, he

ransacked the polar bear's kitchen and filled a basket full of berries. As he finished gathering the colorful fruits, the walrus motioned her to follow him to his beloved sled, "Paula, come on! We have a penguin to feed!"

This is what he intended to do. To perish through famine. The final brush stroke of his art of war. He depleted his powers without sustenance, choosing his end rather than hurting his friend. Vampire Penguin didn't think it was possible, but as he sat on his throne, he felt his soul fading, dissipating into a dreamless abyss.

"This is how you claim ascendance over you thirst?" It asked in his dimming thoughts. "Foolish newborn. What do you think happens when you deny it to the brink of death?" He heard it whisper, insinuating doubt in the penguin's resolve. "The monster takes over." The avian tried to banish the insidious voice, but his ebbing strength failed him.

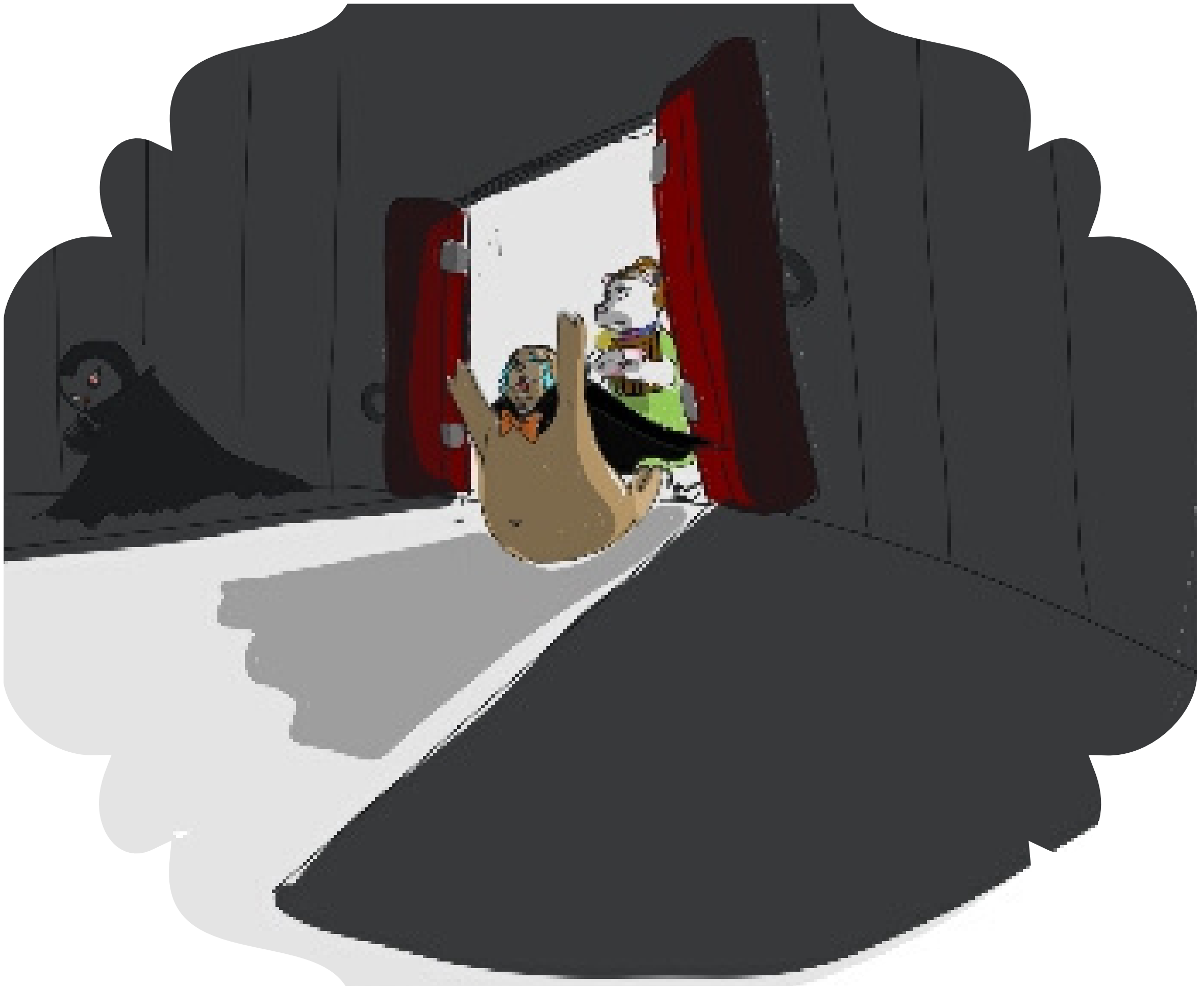
"You will hunt endlessly, a mindless beast in servitude to its thirst."

Is it true? He questioned himself. Is this the aftermath of my defiant actions? Is my purpose truly to hurt those around me? I have to run away. The penguin once again concluded. He conjured an ice path for an explosive launch, but as the intensity of the ice molecules reached its threshold, his weakened body collapsed, negating his magic.

"This is the end of the line, young vampire." The voice echoed in his dwindling consciousness, "There is no more running."



The old castle doors did not stand a chance against the indomitable will of the battering walrus determined to help his best friend. He barged in the throne room and called for the avian, but he got no answer. "Paula stay here!" The walrus proclaimed, "I'm gonna go look for him!" He headed towards a chute interconnected within the citadel."



"Walter, wait!" Paula called, carrying a basketful of fruits, "Don't leave me alone." She pleaded, but the walrus dived into the tubular highway already.

"It's going to be okay." The polar bear said out loud, attempting to calm herself down. She didn't want her fear to alter her reason of choosing to be here. Paula cautiously walked towards the cathedra and started to take notice of the castle's architecture, in contronym about feeling scared or fascinated of the vampire's home. That's too bad. Paula thought, imagining how beautiful it would be if sunlight could shine through the stained glass windows. As the polar bear approached the throne, she was blown away by the masterpiece behind the royal chair, admiring how it's colors gleamed softly in the darkness. Vampire Penguin? She asked, recognizing the center figure of the painting. Why would he be depicted as the king of the North Pole? The polar bear took a moment to decipher what the artwork was portraying, a venerable leader in harmony with North Polian creatures, and was reminded of the fairytales her parents used to tell her, sparking feelings of nostalgia. I need to help find him. She decided, intending to ask him questions later. When she turned around, the penguin was standing across from her.

“Hey.” She said, startled but ultimately relieved to see him. “Sorry for coming into your home uninvited. Walter said you needed help. And I never got to thank you for the other night. So here.” The polar bear presented the basket full of fruits, seeing if the avian was indeed a fruitarian like her, the outcome she was praying for. Her heart skipped a beat however, when the avian took a step closer, his eyes fixated on hers. “Umm, yeah, you seem to be okay though.” She stated, trying to diminish her brewing nervousness. “Can I ask you something?” Paula requested, “Why did you come here?” The vampire responded by taking another step, his shadow eerily enshrouding her. Paula’s instincts alarmed her of imminent danger, but she was magnetized by the penguin’s unwavering gaze, idling her judgement. “Say something. Please?”

There she was, the most delectable being he had ever laid eyes on, salvation in the flesh, heaven in his hell. She didn’t stand a chance against the vampire thirsting for her life. In an instant, he appeared behind his prey, her sweet scent invigorating his senses.

“Why won’t you run?” He whispered, his final stand against the monster within.

“I...I don’t know.” She managed to reply, helpless in the predator’s presence.

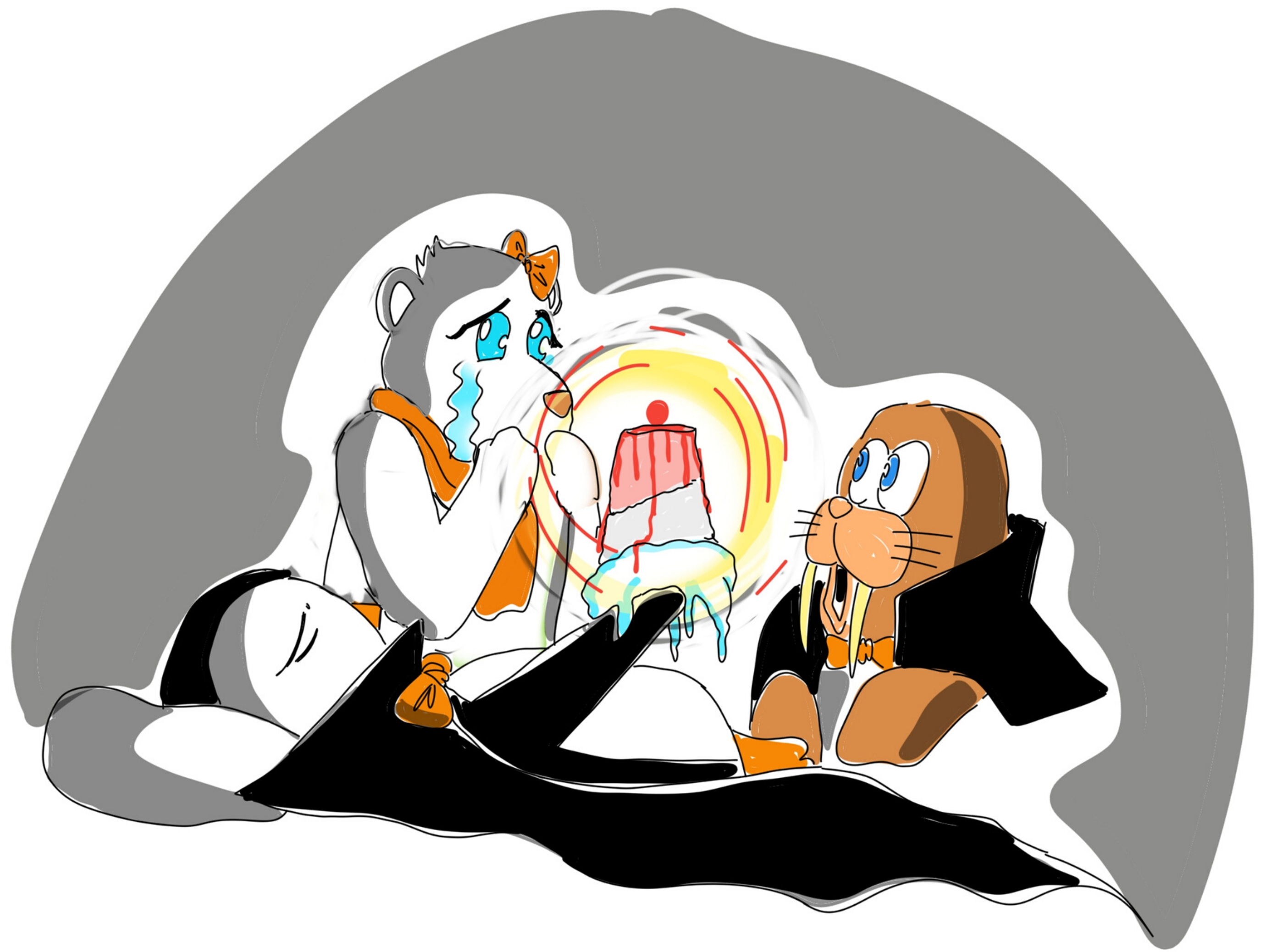
“I am a cursed creature of the night, all of you should’ve stayed away!” The avian shouted, momentarily breaking away from the clutches of the ravenous beast. He held himself against the throne, tears falling down his cheeks. “And now it’s too late!”

Paula faced the conflicted vampire, her heart breaking into a million pieces. “Hey.” She compassionately called. “It’s okay. I understand.”

The avian saw the beautiful polar bear close her eyes, an unspoken invitation for the hunter to end the hunt. “Why would you sacrifice yourself for a monster?”

“I don’t know.” She quietly repeated, welcoming the cold embrace of darkness. “But I know you are not a monster.”

With the last of his remaining powers, the avian levitated Paula’s gift from her paws. He manipulated the ice molecules to atomically compound itself with the colorful fruit, creating a giant ice block. When the creation finished its reaction, the avian raised his flipper and smashed it down against the other, causing the glacier to shatter. The luminous explosion drove out the stygian fog enveloping the castle, making way for the sunlight to shine through the stained glass windows. At the conclusion of his spell, he dropped to the floor, clinging on to the last seconds of his consciousness. Is this heaven? He asked himself as he watched the colorful snow delicately fall for the angel right in front of him, knowing deep in his heart that it was.



End of Book I



Insert Snow Coin to continue