

TALES OF EILU | A FANTASY AUDIO DRAMA

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English**

In the College of Arts and Sciences
at Salem State University

By

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Tales of Eilu | A Fantasy Audio Drama

Transmission I: I Know The End

Storytelling is about building on the canon of humanity and expanding the scope of what we can achieve through the power of words. In recent years, fantasy storytelling and audio storytelling have seen massive growth in terms of popularity in mainstream culture -- allowing for stories that are not confined by societal norms. During such turbulent years of my life, these modes of telling a story have been a haven for me as a creator. When we take various topics we are passionate about and put them together into one project, we can make something that is fueled by true magic.

With *Tales of Eilu*, I hope to accomplish several things, but mainly I will be pushing myself to branch out as a storyteller. My primary goal was to complete the first extremely-polished episode of this series and build skills that will be able to help me to keep producing episodes after graduation. With the help of sound design and voice acting, I hope to capture the hearts and minds of those listening in this new world. I really want this project to be in an audio format because it will be more accessible to those that are interested in fantasy stories without having to sit down and face the daunting task of completing large volumes of them. Along with that, the flexibility of fantasy storytelling allows me to create a world for queer characters to learn and grow without the overbearing weight of societal norms and expectations. As a queer person, I want to give myself, and fellow people in my community, a world that truly sees love as simply love and does not define queerness by struggles of existing as queer. This piece is available on several podcasting platforms, but its most prominent home is on Spotify. This audio piece is a culmination of my experiences as a storyteller thus far, but it is only the beginning for this fantastical world -- a springboard for a whole series set in the world of *Eilu*.

Acknowledgements

Ambitious projects like this do not happen alone. There are many people to whom I must extend my appreciation, love, and admiration for in creating this piece.

First and perhaps most obvious, thank you to my parents, **John and Nicole Bova**, for raising me and encouraging me to follow my dreams, especially in the face of all the difficulties. Thank you for accepting me for me, helping me to forge this creative path, and taking the road not taken.

To my partner, **Em Blackwelder**, for being there for every single step of this process, for reassuring me that my creative vision could come true, for loving me, for creating with me, for being an amazing partner, and for baring with me through many long nights of staring at my computer screen.

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To **Jake Laquidara**, for listening to my rambles on Facetime, for nerding out with me, and for an amazing voice acting debut.

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And to **Salem State University and the city of Salem**, for giving me a place to find myself and a place to call home.

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Departure from Normality

Genre serves as a way of categorizing things to make them easily definable, but what would happen if you took a ton of elements from different genres across creative mediums and mixed them all together. The way that I briefly describe Tales of Eilu to people is “an original fantasy audio drama,” but it is most definitely not limited to those genres. If we were to define it by genres, it would be an original fantasy, sci-fi, musical, mystery, romance, folktale, epic poetry, short story, anthology series, audio drama, radiocast with hint of soundscapes -- a mouthful to say the least. From the moment I decided on an audio piece for this project, I knew that genre was going to be complicated for me to navigate.

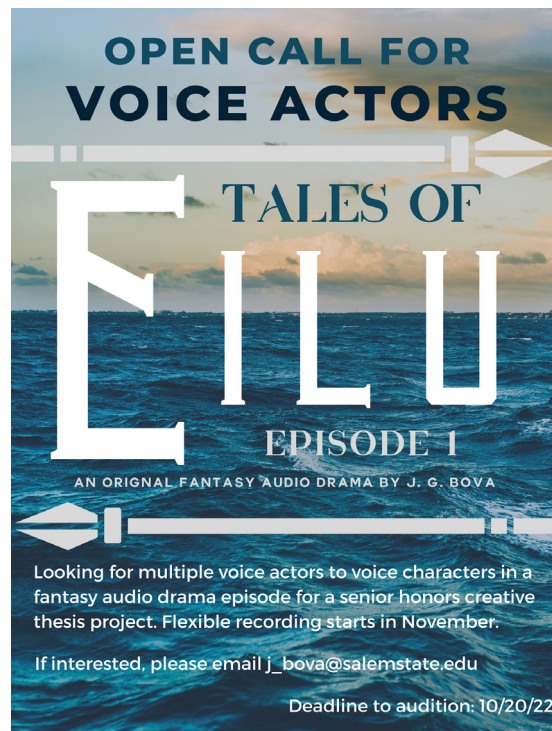
Professor Tanya Rodrigue came to Honors Seminar I with a presentation about alternate modes of communicating an honors thesis project. I had come into the semester so stubborn that I was going to write a chapbook of fantasy short stories, but that all changed with this presentation. Being in the beautiful Salem State University library, I took full advantage of the whiteboard walls and frantically scribbled notes on how to adapt my short stories into audio pieces. Unconventional though it may be, I decided to keep my short stories as is for the “scripts” to send to my voice actors later on. Blending together my love of short-form storytelling with audio was honestly a perfect match. Of course, making a fantasy movie was out of the question for me in terms of resources, but an audio piece was a perfect way to reach out to a large audience that might not otherwise read my short stories.

I had never done such an ambitious project prior to Tales of Eilu, but I knew that Professor Rodrigue would be the perfect mentor for such a tall task. Through Professor Rodrigue’s *Audio Storytelling* course in Fall 2022, I had been fine-tuning skills that were needed for completing a high-quality audio project, including communicating with my voice actors, finding sounds to fit my piece, and transcribing audio so that it can be accessible for anyone. I learned the basics of Audacity and how to search for audios clips to utilize in my work.

It has been a long and hard process of learning all of these huge new concepts for creating this episode, but it has been one that I will keep on building on as the series grows and evolves through time itself. I can proudly say that I produced a well-polished first episode with a 35-minute runtime, which is home to six wonderful voice actors, hundreds of bits of audio, countless hours of editing, and many, many lessons learned about audio storytelling, time management, storytelling as a whole, and myself.

Recruiting Party Members

Compared to what many might think, finding people to help with this ambitious project was not that hard because of the amazing arts community here at SSU. I posted these open call posters around campus and social media throughout the month of October 2022. From these casting posters, I received many emails of voice recordings for the audition. Then, I casted all four major characters in voice roles: Michael Poliquin as Gregory, Jacob Laquidara as Rizon, Bridget Saunders as Athanasia Bishop, and Em Blackwelder as Val the Bard. I, Joseph Bova, served as the narrator for the story in hopes to maintain consistency in the narration and development of further episodes. My friends and graduates of SSU, Amber Cokash and Christopher Parisi, helped me with the music for the piece -- finding and co-creating original pieces that enhanced the fantastical feel of the story. Together, we hit the ground running in November, though scheduling the recording sessions was a whole different story because all of us are doing a lot of different and cool projects. Nonetheless, the initial recording for all of the voice work by my actors were done by the end of January 2023 (with my narration being recorded and recorded up until the April 6, 2023 release date).



Acquiring Audio Equipment

One of the most confusing things to figure out with this project was how I was going to record high-quality audio with a college student's budget; luckily, the Salem State University Commonwealth Honors Program offers grants for just such kind of projects. With the help of Scott Nowka and Tanya Rodrigue, I completed a grant request form to be used for obtaining audio equipment to really enhance what this project could be. The honors program gave me the full amount of \$500 that I requested to purchase audio equipment for completing audio piece to a high-quality. I ordered a Blue Yeti X microphone, pop filter, and soundproof screen for the myself to use to record narration, as well as the voice actors when they came in for their recording session; I also acquired field recorder and SD card to record atmospheric noise around Salem to transition into fantastical elements of the story. Both kinds of microphones allowed me to really amp-up the quality of the final product. Without the financial help of the honors program, this project would not be as well-polished as it stand today.

Initiation into the Other Realms of Creativity

Many may think that creating this audio piece is simply a matter of recording and editing the piece together, but that is not the case. I wanted to use this project as a way of introducing myself to concepts, mediums, and programs that I had always dreamed of working with, but never quite had the time to do so. In my exploration of this piece, I found myself experimenting with a wide variety of creative modes: Adobe Photoshop, Canva, Audacity, BandLab, Adobe Audition, basic music theory, Anchor.fm, Spotify for Podcasters, and lots of Youtube videos to support my learning of all these things.

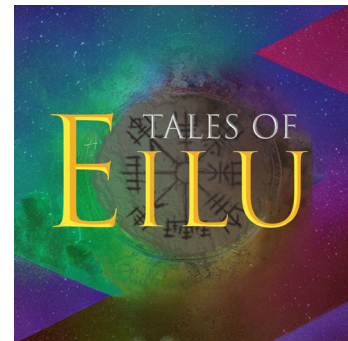
Audacity was the easiest for me because that is my advisor's speciality. I had made Youtube video in a past life, so I was moderately familiar with the complexities of editing in the dark cavern known as tracks. Without this foundation, I do not feel like the piece would have been possible, let alone possible.

I taught myself quite a lot on this project, most of which was figuring out how to make some of visions come true. Being a writer, I do not have much experience at all with creating music, but I really wanted the opening theme song of *Tales of Eilu* to be my own creation. After hours of Youtube lessons about music theory and figuring out how to use BandLab, I was satisfied with a theme song that combined elements of some of my favorite songs in fantasy/sci-fi media (even with a direct reference to a bit from *Legend of Zelda*); the bit of song was then transferred into Audacity for some final effects before becoming the true theme song for the series.

For the visual presentation of the piece, I taught myself the basics of Canva and Adobe Photoshop, the later of which caused me hours of fine-tuning my design for the logo of the series (discussed in a later section). It was absolutely an amazing time to utilize these programs to their fullest potentials and experiment with design elements.

The most gratifying platforms to use were Anchor.fm and Spotify for Podcasters (which was made from Anchor.fm about halfway through this creation process). These platforms allowed me to easily set-up the audio piece to be distributed on any podcast platforms that I wanted it to appear on. It was so exciting to see my podcast searchable on my favorite music-streaming platform, Spotify.

Constructing the Logo



Though audio storytelling is largely an auditory media, there are some visual aspects that matter a lot to the creation, and later marketing, of a piece -- namely the podcast logo. The logo was honestly one of the most challenging parts of this process because I am certainly not adept in the visual arts, nor do I understand the complexities of Adobe Photoshop. Regardless, I made it my mission to ensure that my podcast had a good visual identity so that it would be both easily identifiable in the seas of content of audio streaming platforms and so that it can be taken as a serious work of fantasy, audio storytelling, and art.

I found that making the logo was difficult because it is not a medium that I explore in my day-to-day, but I was already tackling a full-on audio project with little experience, so I tacked graphic design onto my resume. The earliest design of the logo was done via Canva with my basic knowledge of laying out designs and trying to go along with the fantastical ocean-related themes of my first episode. The second design was also made on Canva and was used to debut alongside the teaser trailer for the series, giving *Tales of Eilu* its first online experience. My proudest design, as well as the current logo, is the third image featured, which was made on Adobe Photoshop. With little knowledge of Photoshop and its many, many design options, YouTube tutorials were my primary aid. I have always envisioned *Tales of Eilu* as being a bright and colorful world that combines my love of traditional fantasy elements with more multiversal, cosmic ones. By setting out to create such a logo, I decided to create a stone compass in the middle with Nordic runes, surrounded by a galaxy. After hours of fiddling with some design options (and a bit of help from my partner), I finally got the background to be exactly what I envisioned in the first place. Then, the true test came when I was selecting a font and attempted to design the words for the logo. After several failed attempts at compiling a title design, I decided on a font that is reminiscent of the *Lord of the Rings* film logo, which is credited as a huge inspiration for this project. Though I am not a graphic design artist in the slightest, it was a great feeling to create my own logo for the series in the way that I envisioned.


The Journey of Storytelling

Just when I thought that writing, casting, and editing this piece would be hard, I really struggled with getting through my role of the narrator in the series. The narrator in the piece is the former Royal Storyteller of Eilu -- a person that is deeply confused and trying to figure things out again. It is cliché to say that the narrator is a bit of a self-insert, but that feels very true for this project. As I began recording the lines of the narrator, I realized more and more how much of myself I wrote into that role, even without meaning to. Finishing up college in the midst of this project made me realize that there is so much of the world that I have yet to experience. For a long time I felt trapped and now I am figuring it all out again and again -- just like my narrator. It was an emotional journey to say the least, but this role showed me the best, the worst, and the in-between's of myself in ways that I had never experienced before. Telling this story has been so deeply personal for me and I hope that people feel that connection I have with the material.

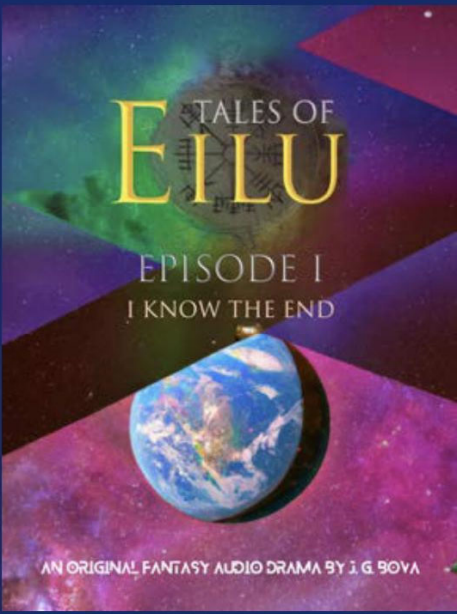
Though this story is fantasy, there are so many parts of me and my experiences in it. I feel that the first episode is set in Salem and I am the characters figuring out what to do next. There are musical cues that are from things that I listen to basically every single day; the title of the first episode, "I Know the End," is a direct reference to a Phoebe Bridgers song of the very same name. Of course, storytelling is all about the journey, but my personal journey with this piece was so very special.

The Marketing Ordeal

In early 2023, as I rapidly approached the finishing of my audio piece, I decided that it would be a great idea to begin marketing the piece and really driving up interest. I wanted to make sure that, when the piece released on audio-streaming platforms, it was met with a warm reception. With the help of the SSU Center for Creative and Performing Arts, I was able to get some posters made to put around campus and show on social media (as shown below) and catering for the event. Leading up to the April 6 release date, I also created a *Tales of Eilu* Tiktok profile to make posts about my experiences making the piece. All of these opportunities set me up for a spectacular day of release and release party.

 Salem | STATE UNIVERSITY

Tales of Eilu Release Party



AN ORIGINAL FANTASY AUDIO DRAMA BY J.G. BOVA

April 6 at 6 pm

Petrowski Room at Marsh Hall
Salem State University

Tales of Eilu

A Fantasy Audio Drama
Episode I: I Know The End

An Honors Thesis Project
by j.g. bova

Starring

Mike Poliquin
Bridget Saunders
Jake Laquidara
Em Blackwelder
and j.g. bova as the Narrator

Come join us for the **WORLD PREMIERE** of a new audio journey into a fantastical world. A celebration for the first episode of *Tales of Eilu*, which serves as j.g. bova's Honors Thesis Project. There will be refreshments, a behind-the-scenes presentation, a listening party, and a Q and A with the writer, producer, editor, and narrator of the piece, j.g. bova! Following the party, the first episode will be available on all major podcast platforms.

For accommodations and access information, visit salemstate.edu/access or email access@salemstate.edu.

Returning for Release

When April 6 arrived, I was a flurry of emotions: happiness, anxiety, sadness, exhaustion; however, all of the melted away when I got to the Petrowski Room to prep for the release party that night. I made a simple presentation to show off all of the work that went into the piece, and the audience showed up to fill the seats. When the piece released in front of this audience filled with family, friends, faculty, and students, I knew that the piece was working for them. I watched from the front of the room as their faces emoted with all sorts of feelings throughout the piece. At the conclusion of the piece, there was a standing ovation. We held a short Q&A for the piece, but that was it -- *Tales of Eilu* was out there for the world to listen to.

Now that it was out on Spotify and other platforms, I sent it out and saw the listens go up in real time. People were reposting it on their Instagram stories and texting me about how much they loved it. It was a beautiful couple of days to be honest.

Tales of Eilu has been a work of passion, pain, and pleasure for me to produce. I cannot wait to see what is in store for me as I continue work on the incoming Transmission II.

Original Short Story

Below here is the text of the original short story that I wrote for my original thesis idea. Of course, this project ended up being the first episode of the audio series, so I used this text as a script for my voice actors throughout the production of the piece. To me, writing my scripts as short stories gave me some comfort because it allowed me to give the voice actors a better idea of my vision, while also providing a basis for my narration in the final piece. My narration is largely based off of this script, but was modified with some of my notes from other documents and ad-libbed as well.

Tales of Eilu: I Know the End

by j. g. bova

CHARACTER LIST

* * *

MIKE AS GREGORY

JACOB AS RIZON

BRIDGET AS ATHANASIA

EM AS VAL

JOSEPH AS GUARDS AND OTHER CHARACTERS

From the weathered dock, you could see all the way to the Titan of Estuary and beyond into the Darling Sea until it ended at the Southern Edge. By day, ships of all shapes and sizes flooded into the bay to distribute goods to the market as the guards used their spears as pointers to track all of the supplies. By night, most kept to their homes. This morning was another shipment of resources to build onto their community that sat atop a small marshy bit of land.

The ground rumbled and swayed the village on its Higish wood poles and the Sun replaced the Moon in a blink. After the quake, lights came on within the cabins and the sound of muffled shuffles could be heard. It was as if someone flipped a switch in their world. Earthquakes were normal for the people of Soledelta, as they meant the day-night cycle was happening. The whole village was placed upon a massive Boardwalk like every other landmark area in the world. With water as far as the eye could see in this world, there were only a few unstable bits of marshy land that broke the surface of the constantly moving water.

Gregory's eyes were set upon the sea and he had watched the water go from dark to light in an instant, the glare from the reflection briefly blinding him. Two guards stood by the builder's shop as they awaited the day's shipment of wood, metal, and food. And here he sat, on the closing end of the Nightwatch shift, readying himself to board the massive vessel that bobbed on the water.

“See anything, my shore?” said a familiar voice from behind him, but he couldn’t seem to identify it. He was still glazed over a bit from the sudden contrast of the skies. Turning with a bit of a start, his bewildered look transformed into a smile at the sight of Rizon.

“Oh, no, a quiet night again, Riz” he said with a gentle sigh. He withdrew a small dagger and whittled away at the pole he had been leaning on. Chipping away bit-by-bit trying to make it slightly sharper for some Gods forsaken reason.

The sea's waves calmed a bit, simmering down to a low ripple. A low-hanging fog gathered over the waters and slowly took hold of the region. Gregory and Rizon exchanged annoyed looks as they began to prepare for another day in the bay: supplying their ship, lighting some lanterns, and readying their weapons. Visibility was as far as a handful of a giant toad’s hops. A giant toad was the prime catch of Soledelta -- tricky to catch because they could hop on the water, but if you got a net around those legs, you were golden. Sure, fish were around, but they did not fetch as many rations on the market.

“Ah damn, looks like a bad day for huntin’, you can’t even see the Southern Edge from here!” said Rizon.

“Right as ever,” Gregory said, unable to hide his exasperation at the sight of another foggy day on the ship.

“Chin up, Gregory,” said Val, seeming out of nowhere, startling both Gregory and Rizon, “Don’t you have a quota to catch?”

“Yea, and what of you, Val? Warming up your voice all day to cash in on the sorrowful souls in the tavern later?”

“All in a bard’s work, right? Charming people, singing, but I do more than that, and you’ll appreciate me more in time, I bet! Have fun out there!” they said with a slight smile.

“Yikes... But seriously, how do they do that? At least I know where you come from when you show up! It’s creepy that Val just seems to appear out of thin air.”

“Thick air you mean, ya know, cause of the fog” Rizon winked.

“Damn you and that charm, but wit doesn’t win us money here,” Gregory said sarcastically.

“Not unless you’re Val, I guess. How do they make all of their rations from the tavern alone?”

“I dunno... anyway, we have our own rations to worry about.”

“Right as ever,” Rizon said with newfound hope.

The duo continued on with their day and raised the mast together to set out on their adventure of the day. Equipped with woven nets and Higish wood spears, they hoped to catch some Giant Toads or anything else that might be eligible for rations. The seas were a dreadful place, but their town that swayed on poles was at least something to look forward to at the end of days.

On a clear day, the Southern Edge of the world was visible from the village. It was the limitations of all maps, bounding them within a small square realm for their entire existence. Water was the sole defining feature of the world, so there was not much to look at other than the seas, rivers, deltas, and small patches of marshland with Higish trees -- a sturdy resource that was used for most everything in the villages. All of Gregory's understanding of life was housed in four Edges that marked the ends of the world.

* * *

Water sloshed and turned in the marsh by Soledelta. After a long day of fishing and collecting specimen in the bay, the ground shook again, and the moon pierced the newborn night sky. Darkness hung over the village like a shroud of mirrored seafloor. The wave calmed to a gentle ripple after a few minutes. Boats, tasseled by the houses, bobbed gleefully on the water -- resting for a night; meanwhile, the air howled a gloomy song in the sound. Then came the drips from the far end of town.

“Come on, this way, this way!” said a whisper in the night. [Groans quietly]

* * *

Hand-in-hand, Gregory and Rizon walked down the town passing by two guards that were fully clad in armor from head to toe. They approached a small tavern located at the end of the village. The building itself seemed to cause the whole town to shake slightly on its poles. Light poured out of the doorway as people could be heard chirping merrily from within. As was a custom among townsfolk, a celebration of another day afloat was rather necessary.

As they approached the doorway, Gregory raised their hands and shook them wildly, shouting, “Pour another round!” to the silence of the whole tavern.

“Ah piss off, Gregory!”

“Tough crowd,” Rizon muttered as they found their seats at the booth in the back left of the tavern.

“To be fair, the catch wasn't good today, nor the past handful of rotations,” Gregory said as he began to lean back in his chair.

“Ah well, we'll live,” said Rizon with a small smile.

“Right as ever, my dear,” he said with a sudden hope.

They surveyed the tavern to see if they could spot any new sights to see. Soledelta was a relatively small village comprised of around 50 houses, a supply distribution shed, a guard outpost, a few shops, several restaurants, and one, beautiful, glowing tavern on the edge of the wooden structure: their crowning jewel.

Gregory's eyes sparkled with the flame of the table lantern as Rizon gently kissed his cheek. Both watched on as Val cleared their throat, silencing the crowd almost immediately.

"The hunt's harvest has been, how should I say, lackluster lately," the audience groaned in mournful unison, "But tonight we forget about that and turn our praises towards a plentiful tomorrow!" The tavern erupted with cheers before Val their throat to silence them again.

As Val began, many sang along to the old tune:

*Winds whistle soft songs as
Waves meet the Boardwalk like
An old friend and the calm warmth
Of the tavern beckons me with tales
Of fierce magic and faeries
I reckon I even saw one once
And so the bard plays on
Merry as can be recounting
Legends of these hallowed lands
Lively is the room of laughter and
Light shining as these people
Trade stories of their travels
For life rages on beyond these walls
But here we raise a glass to it all.*

When the song ended, the whole tavern rang with applause and rocked from dancing townspeople. Laughter broke out from the sheer glee that came about. Sure, life in Soledelta had been tough lately, but moments like this made all of the endless sailing, gathering, and restoration worth it.

"Aha! See what I mean! Thank you! Thank you!" said Val.

Gregory's cheeks were hot with happiness as he turned to Rizon. His smile quickly faded from view as he saw that Rizon's face was deep in thought -- staring intently at the doorway.

"What's goin' on, Riz?"

"I thought I saw something out on the sea, but maybe it's just the drink getting to me a bit," Rizon said with a small laugh as his lips morphed back into a smile.

"Our seas? You've got to be kidding me! We can barely make our quota of collecting, I doubt anything is out there now."

"Right as ever," they said in sync as they pointed at each other and carried on with their night.

* * *

Out on the Boardwalk, faint sounds of water rippling and merry singing filled the air in the village center that was otherwise barren. Two guards continued their patrol around the town.

“These people and their sing-song nights.”

“Tell me about it.”

“We’re literally always together.”

A ripple.

“What was that?”

Silence.

The masses of armor stopped in their tracks as if betrayed by their own ears. One of them reached for their spear and poked at the marsh underneath the stilted village: nothing. They spun around on their heels. All of the sounds came flooding into their heads again, beating at their eardrums in a deafening fashion. One loud thud and a splat. Static noise scratched the ears of the air. Moments later, the water rippled again on cue, but the singing had never wavered.

“Go. Go. Go,” a commanding voice whispered in the night.

* * *

As the numbers dwindled in the tavern, Rizon let out a rather loud yawn.

“Sleepy?!” Gregory said with a sarcastic shock.

“Mhmm.”

“Let’s get out of here,” he said, taking Rizon’s hand and dragging him out of the booth. Hands intertwined, they half-ran back to their small cabin at the other end of the town. Lanterns were already out in most of the houses, but the darkness did not put a damper on things.

“Hey, hey, stop for a sec,” Rizon said as he took a deep breath of sea air, “listen.” The world was quiet and the water gently beckoned to them, calling them in yet again. Being so late in the night, it was wiser to refuse the summons until morning when they were all geared up for the day.

“Never gets old,” Gregory said as his cheeks still sizzled in spite of the cool breeze.

“Greg, why don’t we go beyond the bay tomorrow? Surely we cou-”

“No. We can’t risk our ship again.”

“But we need to make our quota, you know as well as I do that it would work -- plus the boat can take it, we reinforced it and everything,” he said with a pleading smile, “c’mon, any repairs will come out of my supply ration, I promise.”

“Okay, fine, you win. But only because doing that means actual ship repairs and less of your ‘experimental boat chair’ projects,” Gregory said trying to hold in a laugh.

“Oh you know they are cool!”

“Yea, a cool way to waste supplies. Imagine how your chairs would fair beyond the bay”

he said as they both bent over laughing. Rizon was always going on and on trying to innovate daily products, his latest fixation was trying to construct a chair that could roll around a boat and be secured in any given spot. His theory was that it would increase the likelihood of a successful giant toad catch, but Gregory had not yet been convinced of that.

“Oh c’mon, you,” Rizon said as Gregory was sniffling a bit from laughter. The couple made their way back home at last and got some rest for another great adventure out of their dear bay, through the legs of the statue, and out to the Darling Sea in hopes of reaching their quota.

* * *

“Got everything? C’mon, load up the boat,” the commanding voice whispered urgently.

Metal clanged on the dock as a Higish wood dinghy bobbed on the water.

Her hands were shaking as she wiped away a dark liquid from her palms.

“Still wonder what caused this all,” she said under her breath, disgusted.

She looked upon her two fellows as if to say that they had no time to waste. They flung crates into the dingy, which rocked a bit more rapidly. They were mere shadows in the darkness, only illuminated by the moon to see their path forward.

“Oh lovely night, may these people understand soon...onward now,” said the girl from the sea.

They rowed out through the bay and toward the Titan of Estuary and the Darling Sea.

* * *

Rizon and Gregory awoke with a start but immediately calmed down after the earthquake -- just as they did most mornings when one of them wasn’t on Nightwatch. With a new day on the horizon, they quickly gathered breakfast materials, supplies, and nets before hopping out the door to run to their ship.

“You know, I have a good feeling about this,” Gregory said, grinning.

“Famous last words, but hey, I knew you would come around to it,” said Rizon.

After quite some time of going through checks and getting the boat in tip-top shape, they kissed for good luck and raised the mast for their journey ahead.

“Ease off the wheel, I’ll steer today,” said Rizon, grabbing hold of the massive wooden wheel.

“Okay, but only smooth sailing from here on out, got it?” Gregory said.

The turquoise sea shined as the sunshine glistened on the surface; waves were almost nonexistent, the calmest that had been in weeks. As they got about halfway through the bay, they stopped to have breakfast together.

Bellies all full, they continued on their way, looking over the edges of the ship as they went. They had hoped to see a giant toad swimming along, but none had been spotted yet this morning. Gregory couldn't help but daydream at the idea of all the toads that might be off in the Darling Sea. Sure, the waters were rough out there, but the rations would be plentiful if they were able to catch a lot of these toads. Without realizing how far they had gone already, Gregory snapped out of it and gasped at the sight of being so close to the Titan of Estuary yet again.

The Titan of Estuary was a statue that was erected as a memorial to the fallen townsfolk of Soledelta. Many rotations ago, they had all cobbled together their resource rations to build a colossal fisherperson to keep watch over those that dared sail in the Darling Sea. Rizon smiled at Gregory, but then it leaped from his face as quickly as it had gotten there. He finally spotted one: a coveted giant toad.

"TOAD STARBOARD!" he shouted. They went into action and sailed full speed ahead toward the giant toad. Gregory unhooked their biggest net and attached it to the homemade launcher.

"GET ME A CLEAR SHOT!" he exclaimed as Rizon steered the ship toward the now frantically hopping toad.

Giant toads were known for being exceptionally evasive, but it was possible to slow them down if they ran out of sea to hop on.

"I'm gonna try to get them over to that marshy area over there," said Rizon as he pointed to a clump of mud and sand that popped out through the water in the distance. Quick as could be, the toad and the ship raced toward the small strip of land.

"RIZ, WE'RE GONNA CRASH, SLOW DOWN!"

"We can take it, don't you worry."

"It's not worth it, we're gonna die!" said Gregory as he dropped the net and ran to the wheel to try to pry it from Rizon's death grip.

"Think of the rati--"

"THINK OF OUR LIVES."

"LAND!"

Bang.

The ship hit a small bit of marsh with such force that it sent both Gregory and Rizon out of the boat and straight into a muddy sinkhole.

They screamed and thrashed in the water as the hole rapidly filled. Precious breaths turned into muddled gasps as the water began to seep into their mouths.

* * *

“Quiet everyone, QUIET!” she said, but everyone in the cave was already completely silent after the explosion of sound that happened right above them. She donned her new armor and drew her bow at the door of Higish wood that showed the entrance to their cave.

“Please, go fetch our catch,” she said, excited at the prospect of even more giant toads to steal away from wherever those damn guards would ship them off to. Giant toads were worth the most in terms of rations, but the people of Soledelta did not question why. Perhaps it was their hopping ability or perhaps it was because they were so out of the ordinary compared to the other catches of the world; nonetheless, Athanasia saw it better to keep them out of the hands of the guards.

Her people dragged in two lumps of flesh and fabric that were dripping all over the entrance of the cave. They gasped for air and wiped their eyes desperately. They took in the dark cavern and looked as though they had seen a ghost, or even felt what it was like to be one. Their chains were fascinated by a person with a solemn face.

“Why are *you* here?” she said with the slime of a toad oozing through her speech.

* * *

Gregory and Rizon could not believe their eyes. Whatever this cavern was was full of dead giant toads, weapons, Higish wood, and pieces of armor sets. Regardless, their eyes were still drawn to the person standing in the center of the room. She walked toward them slowly, bow drawn.

“Two options for you: stay and hear me out or run back to your village and never speak of this again.”

They could hear the faint sounds of water rippling in the ocean above them, and they knew their ship had already begun to sink deeper into the quicksand sea floor, like a predator demolishing their prey. They looked at each other and gulped before their eyes darted back to the pile of giant toads in the corner.

“It’s been you all along -- you’re the reason why our village suffers.” Rizon shrieked before Gregory bumped him for his rashness, chains shaking.

“I’m doing this *for* your villages, and for all villages everywhere. And trust me, I mean *everywhere*. Have you ever wondered why our world simply ends? Or did you just accept that like everyone else? There is more out there, beyond the Edges, yes, more! I can show you, but I need you to trust me. Gregory. Please.”

“How could I ever trust you again, Athanasia?!” Gregory screamed with waves of anger floating in his pupils, rattling their chains.

“Wait WHAT?” Rizon chimed in as Gregory bumped him again.

“I left to protect your village, you knew that. Look at me now. I have been keeping tabs on your village through my partner, but they can only do so much in their position. I can

show you all what lies beyond but you have to bear with me here,” said Athanasia with her head falling into her hands as if it weren’t in her control.

“You never protected me, you never protected anyone but yourself, and now you lie again,” said Gregory with blue glowing in his eyes now and radiating from his skin, through his veins like rushing streams of water. He lit up a faint sky blue and everyone in the room gawked.

“Hey, hey, easy there Ocean Man, what’s up with you glowing blue like that?!”

“He has it too! This further proves my theory! You must stay, we need your power!”

Gregory looked to his veins and felt the power rushing through his body -- he took a breath and calmed to ripples until the blue light dimmed to normal.

“What the hell are you -- What was that?” he said sweating.

“Your power goes beyond these walls. You are connected to this world and others in ways that the Majesty of Eilu could never even dream of. He keeps us all here, for what I do not know. If you both come with me, I will tell you everything. There is more to this world than just some marshy seas. We have to go! We can’t stay here, our base is compromised,” she motioned to the holes that were still leaking because of the impact of their crash.

“Well I’ll be damned,” Rizon said, staring at Gregory with a grin.

“And we’ll all be damned to a watery grave if we don’t hurry. Everyone, grab what you can and move to the submarine, we’re going to find a new base of operations.” She turned to Gregory, “And Greg, let’s try not to get ourselves almost killed this time, okay?” Athanasia laughed.

“Greg? I thought you hated being called that?” Rizon said.

“Well, now you know why. But I believe there are more pressing matters,” Gregory scoffed.

“What should we do?”

“Athanasia, if you can promise that our village can be saved, we’re in.”

“I promise you that we can save *our* village and all the others out there. Just trust me.”

Water flooded into the cavern through every open orifice. Chains clattered to the ground.

* * *

[Ominous music and ambience]

“We can’t let news of this get out.”

“I understand.”

“Get in there and get things under control.”

“Yes, your majesty.”

Audio Transcript

Because one of my goals with this piece was to make it accessible for piece, I really wanted to include an audio transcript for those that might have trouble following along with the piece for any reason. The following transcript captures the dialogue of the whole first episode and was featured alongside the release party and in the description of the episode on the podcast platforms.

00:00:22 Storyteller

Hello hello testing testing. Oh boy. Hello there, traveler...if you're hearing this.

00:00:33 Storyteller

Uh, you see, Interdimensional Transmissions aren't exactly my strong suit, and I think I might have just invented it. I'll get back to you on that. I believe this is transmitting to a realm called Earth. And if it is, hello there! I am the formal- former Royal Storyteller of Eilu.

00:01:03 Storyteller

Now I know that doesn't mean much to you, but it was quite a prestigious position at the time -- you know, before the fall of Eilu. But that matters not now. What matters is that you get these transmissions.

00:01:24 Storyteller

Try to imagine a world where storytelling is suppressed. I know it might be...tough for you. And without storytelling, where do we find our histories? Where do we find our enjoyment? Where do we find our entertainment? Where do we find our knowledge without stories? Well, that was Eliu for you. You see what happened to Eliu was tragic, in a way. But all things have an end, right?

00:02:02 Storyteller

Now my job as storyteller is to tell you what happened there. There was this whole thing with the majesty of Eliu, and he ruled over all of it. I was his...puppet. But I'll get to that.

00:02:28 Storyteller

Basically all you need to know about Eilu right now is that it was a world divided into 9 sections, one of them being the capital, where the majesty of Eliu...resided, ruled, tortured, tormented -- whatever you wanna say about it.

00:02:50 Storyteller

The other eight were these square shaped worlds. And yes, I mean they were literally square shaped. They had invisible wall border things. It's it's quite complicated, but all you need to know about these worlds is that all of them exist as their own biomes, as you would call them. You see, we are going to start by talking about a world that was completely made of water. Like one of your oceans, but if the ocean was a whole world that was inside of 1 square, one of eight.

00:03:31 Storyteller

It's complicated, but...all you need to know is that the people in this world were bound to just what their world had... water, small bits of marshy land, a few Higish wood trees,

which will be important to you later on... and whatever grit they could come up with, you know, with the conditions of living in an only water world being a land inhabitant. But yeah...that's all you got to know for now.

00:04:06 Storyteller

And the two people will be focusing on are known as Gregory and Rizon: two of my favourites to spectate. And basically, I've gathered memories from times before Eliu fell - as much as I could. And these memories are full recounts of what happened in those moments. You'll hear all that they heard in those moments.

00:04:37 Storyteller

And you know, as the Storyteller of Eliu, I gotta mix it up a bit. You might have some other plot lines coming in, from my other characters as I would like to call them.

00:04:59 Storyteller

I hope that there's not too much...interference. I know that Interdimensional Transmissions are a new thing, so if there is some static, if there's some interference from some of your earthly audio pieces, try your best to ignore them. But no guarantees that we'll get by without such interruptions.

00:05:31 Storyteller

Well, without further ado. I present to you Tales of Eilu.

00:05:50 Storyteller

Our story begins here on a small, weathered dock, in the town known as Soledelta. You see from Soledelta you could see all the way out to the Titan of Estuary in the Bay and beyond into the Darling Sea until it ended at the Southern Edge. Here ships of all shapes and sizes flooded into the Bay to distribute goods to the market as the guards use their spears like pointers to keep track of all the supplies.

By night, most kept to their homes. This morning was another shipment of resources to build on to their community that sat atop a small, marshy bit of land.

The ground rumbled and swayed on its Higish wood poles and the sun replaced the moon in a blink.

00:06:42 Storyteller

After the quake, the lights came on within the cabin. It was as if someone flipped a switch on their world. You see, earthquakes were normal for the people of Soledelta as it meant the day-night cycle was happening.

The whole village was placed upon a massive boardwalk like every other landmark in their whole world.

With water as far as the eye could see in this...realm. There were only a few bits of unstable, marshy land that broke the surface of the constantly moving water.

00:07:16 Storyteller

Ah, there he is, Gregory. His eyes were perched upon the sea, and he watched the water go from dark to light in an instant -- the glare from the reflection of briefly blinding him.

Two guards stood by the builder shop as they awaited the day's shipment of wood, metal, and food.

And here Gregory sat on the closing end of the Nightwatch shift, readying himself to board the massive vessel that bobbed on the water.

00:07:44 Storyteller

And as he dangled his feet over the side of the boardwalk, his partner, Rizon, approached from behind him.

00:07:51 Rizon

See anything, my shore?

00:07:53 Gregory

Oh no, a quiet night again, Riz.

00:07:59 Storyteller

Then Gregory withdrew a small dagger from his pocket and whittled away at the pole he'd been leaning on. Chipping away bit by bit, trying to make it slightly sharper, for some gods-for-saken reason.

Just then, a low hanging fog gathered over the waters and slowly took hold of the region. Gregory and Rizon exchanged annoyed looks as they began to prepare for their another day in the Bay: supplying their ship, lighting some lanterns, and readying their weapons. Visibility was about as far as a handful of Giant Toad's hops in their eyes. You see, a Giant Toad was the prime catch of Soledelta. Tricky to catch because they could hop over the water, you know. But if you got a net over those legs, you were golden! Sure, there were some fish around, but they would not fetch as many rations on the market.

00:08:53 Storyteller

But yeah, fog was not good. And it looked like a bad day for hunting.

00:09:01 Rizon

Ah, damn, looks like a bad day for hunting!

00:09:05 Storyteller

I just said that!

00:09:07 Rizon

You can't even see the Southern Edge from here.

00:09:08 Gregory

Right as ever.

00:09:11 Val the Bard

Chin up Gregory, don't you have a quota to catch?

00:09:15 Gregory

Yeah, and what of you, Val? Warming up your voice all day to cash in on the sorrowful souls in the Tavern later?

00:09:20 Val the Bard

All in a bard's work right? Charming people, singing, but I do more than that and I bet you'll appreciate me more in time.

00:09:28 Storyteller

Oh, foreshadowing.

00:09:29 Val the Bard

Have fun out there.

00:09:32 Gregory

Seriously, how do they do that? At least I know where you come from when you show up. It's creepy that Val just seems to appear out of thin.

00:09:39 Rizon

Thick air you mean...you know, because of the fog.

00:09:44 Gregory

Damn you and that charm, but wit doesn't win us money here.

00:09:48 Rizon

Not unless you're Val, I guess. How do they make all their rations from the Tavern alone?

00:09:55 Gregory

I don't know. Anyways, we have our own rations to worry about

00:09:58 Rizon

I hear ya, right as ever.

00:10:02 Storyteller

Alright, I mean, the "right as ever" was endearing at first, but come on two times in the same like 2 minutes?

00:10:10 Storyteller

Anyways, the duo continued on with their day and raised the mast together to set out on their adventure. Equipped with woven nets and Higish wood spears, they hoped to catch some Giant Toads -- or honestly, anything else that might be eligible for rations. The seas were a dreadful place, but their town that swayed on poles was at least something to look forward to at the end of the day.

On a clear day, the Southern Edge of the world was visible from the village. It was the limitation of all maps bounding them within the small square realm for their entire existence. Water was the defining feature of Soledelta. So, you know, there wasn't much to look at other than seas, deltas, small patches of marshland with biggish trees.

But the people's understanding of life was housed in these four edges that mark the ends of the world.

00:11:07 Storyteller

So then Gregory and Rizon set out on another adventure of the day. You know, out on the sea, catching some Giant Toads, and doing whatever else they do on their little boats when they're out.

Honestly, I don't really care. What's important here is what happens later that night. And you see, I don't only have this one memory from Gregory and Rizon. You see, I have another memory from another important person in the great downfall of Eliu.

But their identity can remain anonymous for now. It'll be more entertaining that way.

00:12:00 Storyteller

After the ground rumbled and after a long day of fishing and collecting specimen in the Bay, the moon pierced the newborn night sky and darkness hung over the village. Like a shroud of mirrored sea floor.

The waves began to calm a bit, but, on the other side of the boardwalk, far from where Gregory and Rizon docked their boat.

00:12:26 Storyteller

There was movement, drips, as someone made their way through the shadows.

Away from the sight of guards and away from the sight of the townsfolk.

00:12:49 Storyteller

That's a bit dark, right?

Anyways, at the other side of town, Gregory and Rizon were done with the day's work, and were now walking hand-in-hand, passing two guards that were fully clad in armor from head to toe.

They approached the small Tavern at the end of the village. The building itself seemed to cause the whole town to shake slightly on its poles. Light poured out of the doorway, and as was common amongst town folk, a celebration of another day afloat was rather necessary.

And I believe we're coming up on one of my favorite parts of this year's story.

00:13:40 Gregory

Pour another round!

00:13:46 Tavern Heckler

Piss off, Gregory!

00:13:52 Gregory

Yikes.

00:13:53 Rizon

Hm... Tough crowd.

00:13:53 Gregory

To be fair, the catch wasn't good today, nor the past handful of rotations.

00:14:00 Rizon

Ah, well, we'll live.

00:14:02 Gregory

Right as ever, my dear.

00:14:11 Storyteller

A bit loud here, but ah well.

Then Gregory and Rizon surveyed the Tavern to see if there were any new sights to see, but Soledelta was a relatively small village comprised of around 50 houses, a supply distribution shed, a guard outpost, small shops, several restaurants, and this beautiful glowing Tavern. At the edge of their wooden structure, which I would call their crowning jewel.

Then Gregory's eyes sparkled with the flame of the table lantern, and he gently kissed Rizon on the cheek. I'll save you from the audio of that. It would just sound like lip smacking.

But then Val the Bard made their way out.

00:14:54 Val the Bard

The hunt's harvest has been, how should I say, lackluster lately?

But tonight we forget about that and turn our praises towards a plentiful tomorrow.

00:15:09 Val the Bard and Megara

Winds whistle soft songs, as the waves meet the boardwalk, like an old friend. And the calm warmth of the Tavern beckons me with tales of fierce magic and faeries -- I reckon I even saw one once. And so the bard plays on, merry as can be recounting legends of these hallowed lands. Lively is the room of laughter and light as people trade stories of their travels. For life rages on beyond these walls, but here we raise a glass to it all!

00:16:16 Val the Bard

See what I mean? Thank you. Thank you... Thank you.

00:16:22 Storyteller

I mean, sure, life in Soledelta was kind of shitty, like they had to go out work every single day until the nightfall and go and try to risk their lives to catch these Giant Toads to get the most rations and you know, try to stay afloat in a world that was only water... But it was moments like this that made everything worth it, you know... gathering, listening to something altogether.

Okat, I know that's a little... much, but you get the point.

It was a nice time in the Tavern that night... Anyways, just keep, just keep listening.

00:17:09 Storyteller

So anyways, after that, Gregory turned to Rizon with a huge smile on his face, but it quickly faded as he saw Rizon's face was deep in thought -- staring intently at the doorway.

00:17:24 Gregory

What's going on?

00:17:25 Rizon

I thought I saw something out on the sea. but maybe it's just the drink getting to me a bit.

00:17:31 Gregory

Our seas? You got to be kidding me.

We can barely make our quota of collecting, I doubt anything is out there now.

00:17:38 Rizon

Right as ever.

00:17:40 Storyteller

Perhaps Rizon was right, maybe there was something going on.

Oh, what am I saying? I know Rizon was right.

And I'll show you what happens that night when Rizon thought his eyes betrayed him.

They didn't. But he didn't see everything.

00:18:06 Storyteller

Outside of the Tavern at that very moment, the boardwalk was pretty barren.

Most of the people had gathered there in the Tavern that night, but two guards were out patrolling, fully clad in armor and a little exacerbated.

00:18:25 Guard 1

Oy these people and their sing-song nights, right?

00:18:28 Guard 2

Tell me about it, mate.

00:18:30 Guard 1

Well, you see, I would, but we're literally always together, mate. You know, there's nothing to talk about anymore.

00:18:38 Guard 2

Okay, okay, someone's a little touchy

00:18:39 Guard 1

I'm just trying to make some conversation.

00:18:42 Guard 2

What was that?

00:19:00 Unidentified Voice

Go...go...go!

00:19:21 Storyteller

Well uh, there's no great way to segue back to Gregory and Rizon's storyline, so.

Back in the Tavern, things were quite different. Gregory and Rizon had stayed and listened to music, and now they were winding down for the night.

00:19:26 Rizon

(Yawns)

00:19:30 Gregory

Sleepy?

00:19:44

Mhmm.

00:19:47 Gregory

Let's get out of here.

00:19:50 Storyteller

Gregory grabbed Rizon's hand, dragging him out of the booth. With their hands intertwined, they went and stood in the doorway of the Tavern. They looked out upon the boardwalk and all of the lanterns were already out for the night.

But with the lanterns out, the sky was illuminated by all of the stars and, as the music was winding down in the Tavern, you could really hear all that Soledelta had to offer in terms of the natural world.

00:20:25 Rizon

Hey, hey, stop for a sec, listen.

00:20:32 Gregory

Never gets old.

00:21:09

Greg, why don't we go beyond the Bay tomorrow. Surely we could-

00:21:12 Gregory

No, we can't risk our ship again.

00:21:14 Rizon

But we need to make our quota. You know as well as I do that it would work.

Plus the boat can take it. We reinforced it and everything. Come on.

Any repairs will come out of my supply ration, I promise.

00:21:27 Gregory

Okay, fine, you win. but only because doing that means actual ship repairs and less of your "boat projects".

00:21:35 Rizon

Oh, you know, they're cool.

00:21:38 Gregory

Yeah, a cool way to waste supplies. Imagine how your chairs would fare beyond the Bay.

00:21:49 Storyteller

If there was one thing about Rizon, there was that he loved to innovate daily products. His latest fixation was trying to construct a chair that could roll around a whole boat deck, but be secured in any given spot. His theory was that it would increase the likelihood of a successful Giant Toad catch, but Gregory had not been convinced of that yet.

Anyways, the couple made their way back home at last and got some rest for another great adventure out of their dear Bay, through the legs of the Titan of Estuary, and out into the Darling Sea in hopes of reaching their quota.

But little did they know that on the other side of the boardwalk, their true reason for not reaching their quota was lingering in the shadows.

00:22:44 Unidentified Voice

Got everything?

Come on, load the boat.

00:22:49 Storyteller

Her hands were shaking as she wiped away a dark liquid from her palms

00:22:55 Unidentified Voice

Still wonder what caused this all...

00:23:00 Storyteller

Illuminated by the moon, she looked upon her two fellows, as if to say there was no time to waste.

They pushed away from the dock.

00:23:14 Unidentified Voice

Oh, lovely night, may these people understand soon.

Onward now.

00:23:21 Storyteller

She tore her gaze from the town and then looked out on the sea into the Bay, at the Titan of Estuary, and beyond to the Southern Edge.

00:23:40 Storyteller

The earth shook again to signal a new morning. Gregory and Rizon awoke with a start, but immediately calmed down after the earthquake. Just as they did most mornings when one of them wasn't on Nightwatch.

You never quite get used to the earthquakes.

00:23:59 Storyteller

With a new day on the horizon, they quickly gathered up breakfast materials, supplies, and nets before hopping out the door to run to their ship.

00:24:13 Gregory

You know, I have a good feeling about this.

00:24:16 Rizon

Famous last words, but hey, I knew you would come around to it.

00:24:22 Storyteller

Rizon's probably right. And with that and a lot of time of going through checks, getting the boat in tip-top shape. They kissed for good luck and raised the mast for their journey ahead.

00:24:40 Rizon

Ease of the wheel. I'll steer today.

00:24:43 Gregory

Okay, but only smooth sailing from here on out, got it?

00:24:47 Storyteller

Smooth sailing, he says...Funny, Gregory...Real funny.

The turquoise sea shined as the sunshine glistened on the surface. Waves were about nonexistent. I mean, the calmest that Soledelta had seen in weeks.

As they got about halfway through the Bay, they stopped for a moment to have breakfast together. Bellies all full, they continued on their way, with Gregory looking over the edges of the ship as they went.

They hoped to see a Giant Toad swimming along, but none had been spotted yet this morning. Gregory, couldn't help but daydream of the idea of all the Toads that might be off in the Darling Sea.

Sure, the waters were rough out there, but the rations would be plentiful if they were able to catch a lot of these toads.

Without realizing how far they've gone, Gregory snapped out of it and marveled at the sight of being so close to the Titan of Estuary yet again. The Titan was a statue that was

erected as a memorial to the fallen townsfolk of Soledelta. Many rotations ago they had all cobbled together their resource rations and built a colossal Fisher person to keep watch over those that dared sail into the Darling Sea.

00:26:09 Storyteller

As they finally left the safety of the Bay, Rizon smiled at Gregory, but his eyes darted to the sea. He spotted one: the coveted Giant Toad.

00:26:28 Rizon

TOAD STARBOARD!

00:26:31 Storyteller

Both men sprung into action and they headed full speed towards the Giant Toad. Gregory unhooked their biggest net and attached it to their homemade launcher.

00:26:40 Gregory

Get me a clear shot.

00:26:42 Storyteller

But the toad was now frantically hopping across the water. Giant toads were known to be exceptionally evasive, but it was possible to slow them down if they ran out of sea to hop on.

00:26:52 Rizon

I'm gonna try to get 'em over to that. marshy area over there.

00:26:56 Storyteller

Just as I said. and Rizon pointed out a small clump of mud and sand that popped out of the water in the distance. Quick as could be the toad and the ship raced towards the small strip of land.

00:27:06 Gregory

Riz, we're gonna crash!

Slow down!

00:27:08 Rizon

Oh, we can take it. Don't you worry.

00:27:10 Gregory

It's not worth it, we're going to crash!

00:27:11 Rizon

Think of the rations!

00:27:13 Gregory

Think of our lives!

00:27:16 Rizon

LAND!

00:27:20 Storyteller

Gregory and Rizon were flung from their boat and straight into a muddy sinkhole. They thrashed in the water as a hole rapidly filled. Precious breaths turned into muddled gasps as the water began to seep into their mouths.

00:27:44 Unidentified Voice

Quiet everyone! Quiet!

00:27:49 Storyteller

But everyone in the Cave was already silent. And I don't blame them. The sound that they heard echoed through the Cave and was unlike anything they had ever heard before.

Athanasia donned her new armour and drew her bow towards one of the entrances of the Cave where the noise had come from.

00:28:11 Athanasia

Please go fetch our catch.

00:28:15 Storyteller

Whatever she thought her catch was, it wasn't. Maybe she was excited for more Giant Toads -- she loved stealing those away from the grasp of the guards. And she always wondered where they shipped them off to.

Giant toads were worth the most in terms of rations, but the people of Soledelta never questioned why. Perhaps it was their hopping ability, or perhaps it was because they were so out of the ordinary compared to the other catches of the world. Nevertheless, Athanasia saw it better to keep them out of the hands of the guards.

Her people dragged in two lumps of flesh and fabric that were dripping all over the entrance of the Cave. They gasp for air and wipe their eyes desperately. They looked around wildly in the dark cavern. As if they had seen some kind of ghost -- or even what it felt like to be one.

Then they felt the cold embrace of chains around their wrists.

00:29:20 Athanasia

Why are you here?

00:29:23 Storyteller

But Gregory and Rizon could not respond. They could not believe their eyes, whatever this cave was, was full of dead Giant Toads, Higinish wood, and pieces of armor sets that looked all too familiar.

Regardless, their eyes were still drawn to the person standing in the center of the room. She walked towards them slowly.

Bow drawn.

00:29:51 Athanasia

Two options for you: stay and hear me out or run back to your village and never speak of this again.

00:29:57 Rizon

It's been you all along. You're the reason why our village suffers.

00:30:02 Athanasia

I'm doing this for your village and for all villages everywhere. And trust me, I mean everywhere.

Have you ever wondered why our world simply ends? Or did you just accept that like everyone else?

00:30:18 Storyteller

I mean, she's got a point.

00:30:21 Athanasia

There is more out there beyond the Edges. Yes, more! I can show you, but I need you to trust me. Gregory, please

00:30:28 Gregory

How could I ever trust you again, Athanasia?

00:30:33 Rizon

Wait, what?

00:30:35 Athanasia

I left to protect your village, you knew that.

Look at me now. I have been keeping tabs in your village through my partner, but they can only do so much in their position. I can show you all what lies beyond, but you have to bear with me here.

00:30:51 Gregory

You never protected me, you never protected anyone but yourself.

And now you lie again.

00:30:57 Storyteller

His veins popped and began to glow blue, like the sky.

00:31:00 Rizon

Hey, hey, easy there, Ocean Man. What the what is up with you glowing blue like that?

00:31:07 Athanasia

He has it too. This further proves my theory. You must stay. We need your power.

00:31:14 Gregory

What was that?

00:31:15 Athanasia

You would pull what goes beyond these walls. You are connected to this world and others in ways that the Majesty of Eilu could never even dream of.

00:31:24 Gregory

What the hell are you?

00:31:25 Athanasia

He keeps us all here for what I do not know. If you both come with me, I will tell you everything. There is more to this world than just some marshy seas.

We have to go. We can't stay here. Our base is compromised.

00:31:44 Rizon

Well, I'll be damned.

00:31:45 Athanasia

And we'll all be damned to a watery grave if we don't hurry.

Everyone grab what you can and move to the submarine. We're going to find a new base of operations.

00:31:56 Athanasia

And Greg, let's try not to get ourselves almost killed this time, okay?

00:32:02 Rizon

Greg? I thought you hated being called.

00:32:04 Gregory

That well, now you know why, but I believe there are more pressing matters.

00:32:09 Rizon

What shall we do?

00:32:11 Gregory

Athanasia, if you can promise our village can be saved, we're in.

00:32:16 Athanasia

I promise you that we can save our village and all the others out there.

Just trust me.

00:32:43 Storyteller

I wish I could tell you that this was the end.

That Gregory, Rizon, Athanasia, and her crew all left, got out of the water realm, escaped through the Southern Edge, and went on to live a peaceful life.

But I can't tell you that because that wouldn't be true.

You see, this is only the beginning. The beginning of an end for Eilu. And I'm not proud to say that I played a part in it that day as well.

Before we end this transmission, I need you to know that I didn't mean to get involved that day.

I didn't want to get involved that day and I hope you don't hold that against me.

This memory I'm going to show you is all mine, and I own that.

Please forgive me.

00:34:02 Whisper

My dear Storyteller, you told me you were going to get this under control.

00:34:08 Storyteller

Well, yes, your Majesty, but I- I don't know how to.

00:34:11 Majesty of Eilu

Now come close and hear this.

There were two more disappearances today by Soledelta. That is not acceptable.

00:34:23 Storyteller

I understand your Majesty--

00:34:25 Majesty of Eilu

I need you to get in there and figure out what's going on.

And don't come back until you've done so.

And do not, under any circumstance, let any of them see you for what you really are.

00:34:41 Storyteller

I understand.

00:34:46 Majesty of Eilu

Get in there and get things under control. That's it.

00:34:51 Storyteller

Yes, your majesty.

00:34:59 Storyteller

Forgive me.

Annotated Bibliography

Bardugo, Leigh. *Six of Crows*. Henry Holt and Company, 2015.

Six of Crows is a fantasy novel that follows Kaz Brekker and his gang as they prepare to pull off a heist in Ketterdam. This hugely successful book has gained the fascination of many in recent years, proving that there is still a huge market for new fantasy universes. Teamwork and trust are big hallmarks of this piece, especially within the uncertainty of their work. This is an important source for me because it has greatly inspired me to get into writing fantasy stories. To me, *Six of Crows* is one of the most influential fantasy stories in recent years. It shows me that I can have a story with more mature themes and ideas while still keeping it within the realm of young adult fiction. This book has gotten a lot of attention for its characters, something that I really want to focus on for an audio storytelling project. I think that it is vital for the success of an audio drama to have very vivid characters, which is something that I can learn from examining this piece.

Becker, Elayne Audrey. *Forestborn*. Tor Teen/Tom Doherty Associates, 2021.

Forestborn is a young adult fantasy novel in which Rora can shapeshift and does so even though a prediction says that these shifters will bring about death. This high fantasy does a lot with its world and setting, making it feel so alive. The story has deep lore revolving around the natural world. In my project, the fantasy setting, Eilu, is based around having a deep belief in the magic of nature. This source is a great inspiration to me because it takes into account how the natural world interacts with the social structures that are built in the world of the story. I think that it is important, as a writer of fantasy, to understand how to utilize worldbuilding in a way that lends itself to meaningful action in the plot without getting bogged down with long expositional setting details. *Forestborn* also includes queer relationships that are not discriminated against or treated as “other” -- which is a characteristic that I really want to have within my fantasy world. Queer storytelling is often portrayed around the struggles the partners face because of society; it is nice to see a fantasy world where identities and love simply are.

Coulthurst, Audrey. *Of Fire and Stars*. Balzer & Bray/Harperteen, 2016.

Of Fire and Stars is a young adult fantasy novel that features Princesses Denna and Mare as they fall in love and take their journey to the kingdom of Zumorda -- where Denna can learn to control her fire magic. In this world, the struggle in their relationship is not the fact that they are queer, it is the fact that they break a promise to the kingdom -- which is refreshing. I want to write stories in which the characters are not bound by gender stereotypes, societal norms, or who they love -- I want them to simply exist as they are and have everyone not even question it at all. I want to create a fantasy world where the relationships are whatever the characters want them to be. In this book, Coulthurst creates

a world where people simply love whoever they want to love and no one even thinks twice about it. As a queer person, I want queer representation that does not feel like it is conveyed through struggle as the central point. I also love this book because the magic in it feels like something that could genuinely occur. The author makes a point of constructing this world in a way that feels familiar yet completely original. I want to take inspiration from this piece because the relationships are well-written and the arc of the characters fit well with the more fantastical elements.

Dunlap, Thomas R. *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest*. University of Washington Press, 2005.

This book caught me by surprise. *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest* is a rather unassuming read that details how people have had a deep connection with the natural world. There is a specific section within this book titled “The Children of Emerson” which goes into detail about how the transcendental movement of the mid-1800s changed how people perceive their connection with nature and the material world. Nature has always been very prominent in my writing life and this audio project is following that trend. As a setting, Eilu is very much influenced by the natural world; it is a core aspect of each of the stories set in the world. Therefore, a lot of the characters have a very deep connection with nature, going to the point of almost being religious in many senses. *Faith in Nature* lays the groundwork for me to see how deeply nature can affect people. I hope to use this book to really hone in on my characters and construct a sort of religious following based around the natural world. It is also important to me that the audio aspect of this project has a lot of natural sounds throughout; this book helps me to focus on which aspects of the natural world should be more prominently featured in the plots of the stories that I will be bringing to life via the soundscape.

King, Stephen, et al. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Scribner, 2020.

This is certainly the source that is the most indirectly involved with my particular project upon first glance, but it is absolutely vital. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* is one of the most inspiring books I have ever read. King delivers a story about his journey with writing that is heartfelt and influential. In this story, he talks about his difficulties with getting places with pieces, conquering writer’s block, struggling to get published, and writing for the sake of writing. He talks vividly about getting around tropes and being engaging, all while telling a truly beautiful story about different parts of his life. This book is mostly a reminder to me that writers do not start out as bestsellers from the very beginning; writers keep building and going and telling their stories because that is what they do. Writers write. We tell stories because we love the craft of it all. I think that this is definitely a reminder that I will need to keep with me on the fateful journey of constructing this fantasy audio drama.

Mercer, Matthew, et al. "Critical Role." *Critical Role*, 2022, <https://critrole.com/>.

Perhaps the most influential piece on this list, *Critical Role* is a web series in which voice actors get together to play an intense game of Dungeons and Dragons set in the fantasy world of Exandria. The series is available on platforms such as Youtube (where you can see all of the actors as they go) and Spotify (in an exclusively audio format). The voice actors take on the personas of their characters as they battle, talk, and journey their way through a mostly improvised story. The world of Exandria was created by Matthew Mercer and the show boasts a large following. The fantasy world is so well-defined, and even aided, with the use of audio storytelling. This show will be a great influence on my fantasy audio drama because it is able to capture a fully-realized fantasy world through interactions between characters and vocal choices. I think that the voice acting in this show is truly aspirational and I am striving to capture audio with like-minded energy and impact.

"Queer Representation in the Media." *MediaSmarts*, 22 Aug. 2014, <https://mediasmarts.ca/diversity-media/queer-representation/queer-representation-media>.

This article focuses on how queer people are represented across different types of media. It goes into detail about how there are harmful stereotypes and tropes that are perpetuated by the industries that produce the media. This article is one of several that I hope to read on this website so that I can do queer representation in my stories to the very best of my abilities. I am just one queer person, but I want to create a story that feels truly welcoming to all identities and sexualities and is truly good representation.

Rodrigue, Tanya K. "Navigating the Soundscape, Composing with Audio." *Kairos*, *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, 15 Aug. 2016, <https://kairos.technorhetoric.net/21.1/praxis/rodrigue/index.html>.

Written by my thesis advisor, Tanya Rodrigue, and others in the audio storytelling field, this website goes into detail about all of the different aspects of audio storytelling that I need to consider in terms of my project. It talks about strategies for using different genres, voice, silence, sound effects, and more to create audio projects that are engaging for listeners. As I move through this project, Professor Rodrigue will be guiding me through the audio arts to produce a project that creates a truly vivid imagining of Eilu and all that it contains. To me, this is a very important documentation of these audio aspects. I want to learn more about the nuances of voice acting, sound editing, sound mixing, and music composition. This project is certainly ambitious, but detailed documents about the art of audio storytelling, along with the expertise of Professor Rodrigue, will be vital to the progression of making these fantasy stories into riveting audio dramas.

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit or, There and Back Again*. Ballantine Books, 1982.

Being a fantasy creative project, *The Hobbit or, There and Back Again* is a foundational piece for understanding where a lot of modern fantasy storytelling gets a lot of influence from. This literary classic follows Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit that is very much reluctant, as he journeys to win treasure from the grasps of Smaug, a dragon guardian. The storytelling in this piece is truly an inspiration to many fantasy writers. The quest follows Bilbo through the rich world of Middle Earth and every chapter is filled with lore and deeper meaning. Along with this, the story is greatly obsessed with detailing how nature plays a role in the story. I think that this piece will serve as a cornerstone for realizing how far fantasy storytelling has come and how I can try to subvert some of the tropes that were put into place by this novel. This also gives me some insight into what makes a truly successful fantasy story.