

RYZ

By

Collin Gossel

v. 2

Collin Gossel  
(937)545-5331  
collingossel@gmail.com

77 Sullivan Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11225

EXT. QUAIN T LITTLE PORCH - PLEASANT MORNING

Crops stretch into the distance. The only sign of civilization is a quaint little farmhouse sitting in the middle of the field.

REYNOLD and DEBRA ITCHUM are on the front porch. Reynold, his hair ruffled into place, hangs a ceramic LANTERN (grey, just like his hair) from the roof, while Debra sits across the way, sewing in a CHAIR which gently SQUEAKS up and down, affixed to the floor by screws.

Without warning, a full-sized BATTLE-AXE CRASHES through the roof, splintering the porch awning and burying itself a foot into the floor. Reynold and Debra JUMP in surprise, then settle back into their malaise.

REYNOLD

Hmph.

DEBRA

For heaven's sake, Reynold, just say it.

REYNOLD

Oh it's nothing. Just that one of us thought we should reinforce the roof with steel plating after the first battle-axe. Would have been handy, don't you think?

DEBRA

(thousandth time)

Yes, dear.

We start floating upwards, drifting past the HOLE in the roof as Reynold's voice fades away.

REYNOLD (O.S.)

You have to plan for these battle-axes falling out of nowhere. They'll try to get you when you least expect it - there's no escape!

Above the house, a flock of SNEAK BIRDS fly by, their camouflage causing them to disappear and re-appear as the flock changes direction.

Above the birds, a BROWN FLYING MACHINE drifts lazily across the sky with two WINGS on either side of it's frame and a THIRD WHITE ONE sticking straight up through the middle. A YOUNG MAN stands on deck rubbing his chin.

## YOUNG MAN

Hey, Terry, I think we have an extra wing.

Above them, a MAN in what looks like a WOODEN DIVING SUIT drifts through the air with a BUTTERFLY NET. A hermit-crab like creature, most of it's body hidden within a wooden shell, scrambles through the air nearby. The man swings his net to capture the WIND-CRAB, but, to his surprise, the creature passes through unphased. He looks down and notices a giant hole in his netting. With frustration, he begins cursing inside the helmet, and throws the net towards the ground. It floats gently upward.

Above the man in the wooden suit, a WHITE FLYING MACHINE careens by, MISSING A WING and spinning out of control. THE SCREAMING DRIVER gets knocked in the head by the butterfly net.

Above all of that, we pass through wood, porus and hissing as gases strain under a great pressure, before emerging onto a massive floating tower with many shops lining the core cylinder and countless docks stretching out away from it. This is THE BRUSH (so named by its residents).

FLYING MACHINES BUZZ around the structure, and many colorful vehicles are already tied to the docks. PEOPLE of all shapes and sizes mill about, laughing and bartering and running every which way. Over the clamor:

MAIN TITLE: RYZ

As the title fades, we float up through the docks, passing groups of strong men and women repairing flying machines and unloading CARGO from their holds. MS. SAMPSON, a pencil-thin old woman, wrapped in a shawl stands just in front of a large hole in the dock. She glances up and smiles then turns back towards the elevators, carrying a small parcel under her arm.

We finally rise over the edge of a dock. The massive hull of a ship is tethered to the far side, with a gangway reaching down onto the platform.

EXT. DOCK - PLEASANT MORNING

A girl, 16 with wide eyes, leans over the railing with concern. Her frizzy hair is tied behind her in a pony-tail. She's wearing a simple button-up shirt, loose pants, and moccasins perfect for climbing. This is CECILIA.

Ms. Sampson appears around a large bulletin board. Weather-worn men and women occasionally pass by traveling to and from their ships.

MS. SAMPSON  
Pardon me, I was looking for the  
Captain of this ship.

CECILIA  
Ma'am, I was the one who dropped  
that axe that almost hit you!

MS. SAMPSON  
Oh, that's alright dear. I'm  
searching for the Captain...

CECILIA  
I was just swinging it around,  
being stupid like a pile of junk!

MS. SAMPSON  
Oh, we've all been there. I have  
this package-

CECILIA  
Ma'am...

Cecilia goes down on one knee.

CECILIA  
I offer my humblest apologies.  
Through my carelessness, I put you  
in danger. The next time I play  
with a battle-axe, I will be more  
careful.

MS. SAMPSON  
Hmm.

Ms. Sampson rubs her chin and looks down at Cecilia's  
earnest, apologetic eyes.

MS. SAMPSON  
I accept your apology on one  
condition, young girl. You see, I  
have this delivery-

Cecilia LEAPS to her feet.

CECILIA  
I will make it.

MS. SAMPSON  
Now, hold on-

CECILIA  
I will make the delivery.

MS. SAMPSON  
Well, it's a bit dangerous-

CECILIA  
Give me the package.

MS. SAMPSON  
Could very well be some sort of  
inciting incident-

Cecilia falls back to her knee.

CECILIA  
Ma'am, I swear, on all that is pure  
and joyful in this world, I will  
deliver your package.

MS. SAMPSON  
Oh for heaven's sake, dear, stop  
kneeling, you'll ruin your pants.  
This ship is bound for the ladder  
tree forest, correct?

CECILIA  
Mmhmm.

MS. SAMPSON  
Good. This parcel is for my son,  
Timmy. He's a star-studier who  
lives at the top. Do you think you  
could take it to him?

Ms. Sampson proffers a small cubic BOX, about a foot in  
length, wrapped in brown paper with a small handle sticking  
out of the top.

Cecilia, eyes set, stands and takes it.

CECILIA  
I swear it.

MS. SAMPSON  
Well that's nice.

BARON (O.S.)  
(booming)  
Toot toot! The horn is broken and  
we're leaving!

Cecilia begins running back up the gangway.

CECILIA  
 (calling back)  
 Don't worry, ma'am, I'll get this  
 to your son!

MS. SAMPSON  
 Thank you so much, teenage girl! Oh  
 and make sure Timmy gets that  
 package by tonight or he may die!

Cecilia turns back around at the top of the gangway.

CECILIA  
 What?!

MS. SAMPSON  
 That's right! Bye!

Ms. Sampson walks back towards the central hub. Cecilia, befuddled, ties the package to her belt and turns onto the deck.

EXT. DECK - S.S. GERTRUDE - NOON

Shining with grandeur in the midday sun, THE S.S. GERTRUDE is large and vaguely boatish - about 50 yards long and 20 wide. In place of typical masts, however, 5 ARCHES, spread evenly from bow to stern, stretch the width of the ship, tallest in the middle and shortest at the front and back. They form an aerodynamic oval from the front and the side. This is a machine built for a singular purpose - to destroy the final boundaries between the heavens and mankind. Cecilia can't help but smile at the sight.

BARON, a 7-foot hulk of a man with rosy cheeks and fluffy hair, strides by carrying two Cecilia-sized crates.

CECILIA  
 Hi, Dad!

BARON  
 Cecilia! Is this dilly-dallying I see?! Where have you been while you should have been tamping down cargo?

CECILIA  
 I dropped an axe off the docks and swore an oath to an old lady.

BARON  
 Well, that is awesome. But no excuse for slacking off! Now go and  
 (MORE)

BARON (cont'd)  
help Raymond before he does it all  
himself!

Cecilia snaps a quick salute in response and, satisfied, Baron lumbers off. Looking around, Cecilia wanders over to a large pile of partially tied down crates.

She scans the deck but doesn't seem to find what she's looking for.

CECILIA  
(calling out)  
Raymond?

RAYMOND  
(muffled)  
Help.

Following the sound of his voice, Cecilia looks beneath the pile of crates to find Raymond, a small, nervous looking boy with straight, black hair and an endless supply of dirty smudges, wedged beneath.

CECILIA  
(genuine)  
Well, look at this pile! You did a  
great job!

RAYMOND  
Help.

Cecilia grabs Raymond by the arms and yanks him out of the hole.

RAYMOND  
Oh, thank you Cecilia! I was under  
there for nearly an hour. It was  
like a waking nightmare - one I  
couldn't escape from despite my  
tears.

CECILIA  
(laughing)  
Raymond, you're such a crazy!

RAYMOND  
Haha...sure.

CECILIA  
Thanks for covering for me.

RAYMOND

Not at all - a good General isn't  
above any division of labor.

CECILIA

Where'd you learn that?

BARON (O.S.)

Captain on deck!

Conversation over. The pair drop everything and bolt to  
their places.

Baron, Cecilia, and Raymond fall in (military-style) with  
perfect posture just outside a pair of closed double doors  
which, after a silent beat, SLAM open.

A lean woman in her mid-forties with arms clasped behind her  
back (almost mimicking the tight bun at the back of her  
scalp) and eyebrows set into what seems a permanently  
furrowed position prowls past her small but respectful crew.  
She makes purposeful eye contact with each of them. This is  
VALERIE.

VALERIE

Wood-wolves.

The crew GASPS softly in fear.

VALERIE

Relax, nothing to worry about yet.

The crew relaxes a bit.

VALERIE

As I was saying: Wood-wolves. We  
are in extreme danger of being  
attacked by Wood-wolves during this  
voyage.

The crew GASPS again, exactly the same.

VALERIE

Yes, that is now an appropriate  
response. As you all know, the  
largest pack of Wood-wolves in RYZ  
makes it's home in the depths of  
the Ladder-Tree forest.

Cecilia GASPS once more, exactly the same. Valerie looks at  
her confusedly. The crew shoots her sidelong glances.



CECILIA  
I didn't know that.

Valerie shakes her head lightly and continues.

VALERIE  
Until recently, the village at the edge of the forest has been safe as long as they treated wolves' boundaries with respect. Now, however, we've been asked to deliver additional weapons to the town-folk. It would seem the wolves are outgrowing the forest and the village needs assistance. I'm nothing if not honest with my crew: the job is a treacherous one and the pay negligible. But in today's sky, though these may seem the responsibilities of another station, it seems we are in the best position to lend our countrymen aid. We will give it to them.

CREW  
Aye!

MAJOR BARKER (O.S.)  
Good speeching, Valerie.

The crew swing around to see MAJOR BARKER and several GRUNTS (all in light blue military uniforms), standing at the top of the gangway. Major Barker, perfectly groomed hair outdone only by his immaculate clothing, looks on with perfect posture and a smarmy grin.

VALERIE  
How do you do, Major Barker?

MAJOR BARKER  
(to his men)  
Search the ship.

The uniformed grunts spread out and begin riffling through everything they can find, from the pile of crates to a large tub of apples. One of them throws open the double doors and descends down a winding staircase.

VALERIE  
On what grounds are we being searched?

MAJOR BARKER

Well, the grounds that we wanted too I suppose. As you know, the government regulates the distribution of goods and information throughout RYZ. This is simply routine protocol to ensure no unlicensed contraband is being transported on this vessel. Completely random, I assure you.

Major Barker looks at each furious crew-member with a smile.

MAJOR BARKER

No, I'm sure there's nothing amiss among a crew of this caliber.

He looks at Baron (hands clenched at his sides, eyes forced several paces above Major Barker).

MAJOR BARKER

Our first mate, a "retired" career-criminal.

He looks at Raymond (frustrated, but avoiding eye-contact).

MAJOR BARKER

The spoiled son of a nobleman, slumming it in the wild skies.

He looks at Cecilia (defiant, meeting his eyes with a set jaw).

MAJOR BARKER

The orphan, raised into a life of squalor.

He finally returns to Valerie.

MAJOR BARKER

And of course, their Captain: a disgraced military officer, dishonorably discharged from her position.

CECILIA

Be quiet!

The whole crew looks to Cecilia (who happens to have daggers in her eyes). Major Barker's eyes drift and he notices the small package hanging from her belt.

MAJOR BARKER

Young lady, what is that hanging  
from your belt?

Cecilia is taken aback. She instinctively grasps the  
package.

CECILIA

It's nothing.

MAJOR BARKER

Give it to me.

CECILIA

It's just a good luck charm.

MAJOR BARKER

Not an unregistered delivery? Then  
you'll have no problem letting me  
see it.

Major barker reaches for the package just as a soldier peaks  
his head back out of the double doors.

SOLDIER

Sir, I've found a large number of  
books in a storage room below.

Valerie's eyes narrow. Major barker breaks into a wide  
smile.

MAJOR BARKER

Oh my, the surprise! Illegal  
activity on Captain Valerie Spick's  
airship?! Why I never could have  
guessed! You should know better  
than anyone, the distribution of  
knowledge is monitored by Central  
Forces for our own safety. Why,  
whatever would happen if some of  
that fell into the enemy's hands?!  
Is there anything else we should be  
made aware of, Captain?

Valerie, fuming, shoots a glance at Baron, then sighs.

VALERIE

No use putting it off any longer.  
Major Barker, if you'll follow me  
to our hold, you'll find everything  
you're looking for there.

As she says the word hold, the crew watches Valerie twirl  
her finger in a circle at her side.

MAJOR BARKER

Thank you for your cooperation,  
Captain. I'll be sure to mention it  
at your hearing.

Valerie leads the men towards the double doors. Baron turns towards Raymond and Cecilia.

BARON

Prepare to cast off.

Cecilia and Raymond scramble away. Baron tensely watches Valerie open the double door for the soldiers. He then yanks open the lattice-work to the engine room below-deck and lowers himself in.

As Major Barker steps onto the staircase, Valerie slams the door behind him and lowers a wooden brace, locking it.

Inside, Major Barker and company, realizing they are in some sort of danger, begin pounding on the door.

MAJOR BARKER (O.S.)

Hey! What's going on? You are  
holding a government official  
hostage, release us at once!

The major continues screaming in the background.

Cecilia approaches Valerie as she climbs up a set of stairs to the Captain's controls. The main instrument used to pilot the ship is a large control column (or yolk), used like a joystick while standing to maneuver the Gertrude in any direction. There is also a panel on one side covered in other levers and switches.

CECILIA

Hey Mom?

VALERIE

You have 30 seconds, dear one.

CECILIA

I made an oath to an old lady to  
deliver this package to her  
grandson on top of The Ladder Tree  
forest by tonight.

MAJOR BARKER (O.S.)

I'm going to break down the door!

VALERIE

Does he need it by tonight or he may die?

CECILIA

Yes.

VALERIE

Very well. We can drop the parcel off before we deliver the rest of our cargo. Now prepare for takeoff, the skies await!

CECILIA

Neat, thanks Mom!

Cecilia runs back down onto deck, where Raymond has tied himself to the railing near a large lever. The sound of an engine purring begins to vibrate through the airship. We can hear the Major and his soldiers attempting to knock down the door.

VALERIE (O.S.)

10 seconds to release!

RAYMOND

Other ships calmly pull out of port with quiet dignity.

CECILIA

Where's the fun in that?

Cecilia scampers up into the rigging.

VALERIE

Sound off!

Baron is standing below deck, beneath a lattice of wooden supports, turning knobs and pulling levers on a large engine.

BARON

Engine ready!

RAYMOND

Release ready.

CECILIA

Rigging ready!

Valerie calmly takes a POCKETWATCH from her breast pocket, glances at it and slips it back.

VALERIE

Let go!

From his station on deck, Raymond CRANKS the lever. The Major and his cronies FALL into the darkness as the spiral staircase suddenly folds into a slide.

The two large CLAMPS which had grasped the side of the dock RELEASE and fold into the ships hull

Screaming, the soldiers fall through the ship. They try to grasp the sides of the shoot to no avail. At the bottom, a TRAP DOOR releases and they tumble into DAYLIGHT - right towards the SHIP docked below.

In the engine-room, Baron SLAMS several levers into place and STRIKES a large metal wrench against the mechanism of the machine. He then, ever so delicately, FLIPS a small switch.

The Gertrude surges upward into a loop. Raymond leaves NAIL-MARKS in the railing. Cecilia, lightly holding several ropes from high in the canopy of the airship, smiles as her ponytail and loose clothes SWING towards the earth.

The ship rolls right side up. Valerie is standing at the wheel, expertly maneuvering.

BARON

Another perfect take-off, Captain!

VALERIE

Baron, you're just a sentimental old flatterer.

BARON

Not at all! If it was any less than perfect, I surely only missed it because I was distracted by your perfection, Captain Ma'am!

VALERIE

Well, I suppose that makes sense. Full forward thrust, bunny. Let go the cross-arch sails - we've got the wind at our backs!

Cecilia climbs to across an arch and releases several cords. As she does so, a large maroon sail, framed perfectly by the archway, falls into place.

EXT. DECK - A DIFFERENT SHIP - THE BRUSH - NOON

A captain emerges from below deck.

CAPTAIN

What's all the commotion up here?

The deck hands are gathered around a large sail which seems to have something caught in it.

DECKHAND

We seem to have caught some sort of animal, sir!

CAPTAIN

Is that true? Are you some sort of animal?

MAJOR BARKER

Please let us down.

EXT. DECK - S.S. GERTRUDE - NOON

VALERIE

Cecilia!

CECILIA

Aye, Captain!

VALERIE

Come down here.

Cecilia swings down to where the Captain is piloting the ship.

VALERIE

Take the helm.

Valerie pulls Cecilia into her position and lays her hands on the controls.

CECILIA

(scared)

Captain?

VALERIE

Just hold her steady. I need to make sure we aren't being followed.

Valerie opens up a SPYGLASS and looks back in the direction they came from.

VALERIE

If the government had their way,  
nobody would have anything they  
needed and wouldn't know enough to  
ask for it.

Cecilia, now alone at the controls, looks ahead at the horizon, vast and all-encompassing. A whole world open to explore. She warmly grasps the controls with a smile and, for just a second, closes her eyes.

CECILIA

(to herself)

Captain...

She opens her eyes once more and looks forward.

Time speeds up. The ground blurs. The sun arcs floats towards the horizon. The light changes from the bright blue of day to the orange of evening.

EXT. DECK - S.S. GERTRUDE - LATE AFTERNOON

Valerie is back at the controls.

VALERIE

Cecilia, go check on the "books"  
would you. I'd like to consult them  
before we make it to port.

CECILIA

Aye, Captain!

INT. DIM PASSAGE-WAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Cecilia, clothes rumpled and sweaty, stomps down the SPIRAL STAIRCASE into the passageway. The yellowy glow of evening spills into the corridor from above.

She walks casually through the shadowy space to the last door in the hall and KNOCKS on it.

CECILIA

The Captain wants to talk to you!

HUGH (O.S.)

(giggling)

I know, I know! Come in here!

Slightly annoyed, Cecilia takes a deep breath and enters.



INT. HUGH'S ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Cecilia rambles in, rolling her eyes. The perimeter of the room is lined with stacks of square CABINETS. Two small PORTHOLES shine a dim light on a large TABLE in the center of the room, only a few feet off the ground, on which a giant MAP of RYZ is unfurled and marked excessively upon. Above the table swings an empty HAMMOCK and surrounding it are seemingly random PILES of nonsense.

Cecilia looks around tiredly.

CECILIA

Hugh?

An OLD MAN darts between two of the piles.

HUGH

You can't catch me!

CECILIA

(tiredly)

I know, Hugh, you're the sneakiest.

The old man jumps beneath the table from behind a third pile.

HUGH

The sneakiest by far!

CECILIA

Hugh, listen, the Captain wants to talk with you.

HUGH peaks out from behind a cabinet. Cecilia is slightly surprised.

HUGH

What's that on your belt?

Hugh disappears once more.

CECILIA

I'm making a delivery at the forest. We're almost there.

HUGH (O.S.)

The ladder-tree forest?

CECILIA

Yeah.

Hugh enters from outside the room, stroking his chin thoughtfully. Cecilia is visibly confused. Now that he's in full view, we can see HUGH is a very small, very old man with a curly U of hair surrounding his shiny dome. He is wearing a random assortment of mismatched rags which seem to compliment the impish smirk tugging always at his lips.

HUGH

It's gonna be cold in the ladder-tree forest. I've got something for you!

CECILIA

We're not going into the forest, just flying by the side.

HUGH

Hold on, I know I've got it around here somewhere!

Hugh shuffles through several of his nonsense piles, throwing strange ornaments and papers all across the room. Cecilia rolls her eyes once more. Hugh makes his way over to a cabinet and opens it. Several BOOKS float out, knocking each other around. Cecilia dodges them carefully.

HUGH

aHA! Here it is!

Hugh whips around with a long royal-blue COAT, as old as Hugh himself, beat-up and weather-worn. Cecilia grimaces.

HUGH

This is for you!

CECILIA

Oh, Hugh, I don't know if I can...accept such a generous gift.

HUGH

Nonsense, it's a piece of garbage! Smells bad, too! Put it on!

Murmuring her uncomfot, Cecilia allows Hugh to put the coat on her. It's a little too large, with the sleeves hanging down onto her hands and the tails hanging well onto her shins, almost like a cloak.

HUGH

Hmmm....it's a little bit big. You'll have to roll up the sleeves.

CECILIA  
Hugh, really this is too...

BARON (O.S.)  
Toot toot Forest-ho Toot toot!

HUGH  
No time for thanks, Cici, we've got  
work to do! Quit your slacking and  
lets go!

Hugh barrels out the door, followed by a frustrated Cecilia.

EXT. DECK - S.S. GERTRUDE - LATE AFTERNOON

Hugh burst on the deck and immediately makes his way to the  
Captain. Cecilia wanders out behind him and gasps.

Though still miles away, it looks like a giant tower  
reaching into the sky. The LADDER-TREE FOREST is a circular  
series of terraces, stacked on top of each other and held  
aloft by large trees, 25-30 feet tall, with root-like  
branches on both their tops and bottoms which hold layers of  
soil in place. From a distance, it looks almost like an  
insanely tall cake, or perhaps an ancient Greek structure  
taken way too far. Valerie shouts over the rushing wind:

VALERIE  
Cecilia, come up here!

Cecilia, still staring at the tower of trees reaching into  
the sky, makes her way up to The Captain.

When she arrives, Valerie hands her the spyglass.

VALERIE  
Look to the top. I believe that's  
where you'll be making your  
delivery.

Cecilia looks up. Through the circular hole, we see what  
could be a tiny HOUSE at the top of the tower, far away even  
with the aid of the lens.

CECILIA  
Wow.

VALERIE  
(shouted)  
Baron, weaken forward thrust! We're  
going to ride the updraft on the  
West side of the forest!

BARON

Aye, Captain!

The ship swings in towards the column of trees. Without being told, Cecilia climbs up into the rigging and raises the sail back into place. Raymond is doing the same nearby. She then tosses a rope over to Raymond and, together, they pull a sail across two of the arches. It SWELLS as it catches the updraft and the pair hold on tight so they aren't swept away.

The ship rises quickly, Valerie carefully keeping it from drifting into the forest.

VALERIE

Well done! Keep a weather eye out for overhanging roots - I don't want any of my sails ripped when we dock.

Cecilia looks up. Though still a ways off, they are rapidly approaching her destination. Raymond glances into the forest and his eyes widen.

RAYMOND

Cecilia...

Cecilia follows his gaze. The head of a wood-wolf is peaking out of the shadows.

CECILIA

Don't worry, Raymond: we stay out of it's way, it'll stay out of ours.

In the darkness of the forest, countless other wood-wolf eyes blink open in the shadows all around the first. Cecilia's eyes widen.

CECILIA

But also, like how should I know, right?

With a snarl, unseen by the crew on deck, the first wood-wolf coils itself into striking position, then SHOOTs out of the forest towards the pair. Though it's head looks like a normal wolf, it's body is long (just a bit shorter than the ship) and legless, like a furry snake with a wolf-head.

Grimacing in surprise and fear, Cecilia grabs Raymond and jumps off the arch, catching a rope in her hand to steady her fall just as wood-wolf tangles itself in the sails right where they were perched moments before.

CECILIA  
 Captain, big news from the rigging!

CAPTAIN  
 What's that?

The wood-wolf RIPS its way straight through the sail, HOWLING wildly as it slithers through the rigging. From across the gap, several other wood-wolves shoot towards the ship, twirling themselves around the archways and attacking supplies on deck.

The Captain bursts into action as Cecilia finishes lowering Raymond and herself onto the ground:

CAPTAIN  
 All crew, defensive stations! Do not provoke the wood-wolves, we don't want a battle! Baron, where are-

AXES in hand, Baron BURSTS out of the hold screaming!

BARON  
 (shouted)  
 Unhand my ship, malignant beasts!  
 You shall not harm my family!

Baron throws himself into the fray with a wolf, punching them repeatedly wherever he can lay a hand on them. Cecilia, inspired, YELLS and dives into action. Raymond, fear in his eyes, follows suit.

Valerie sits, frustrated, at the pilot's panel, face in hand.

BARON (O.S.)  
 When I'm done with you I'll find  
 your wolfy brother and give him a  
 swogging!

Baron continues to fight in the background. Cecilia, armed with a long STICK, is sneaking up behind a wood-wolf who is gnawing at a pile of cargo containers. Just as she's about to bonk him, however, he grabs her around the middle with his tail, pinning her arms to her sides and lifting her off the ground. Only then, with Cecilia completely helpless, does the wood-wolf turn his head and bear his razor sharp FANGS with a rumbling GROWL.

The wolf edges closer, licking its lips. Cecilia struggles to escape the wolf's grip, but is clearly not strong enough. Finally, when the wood-wolf is so close Cecilia's hair sways

in its hot breath, Cecilia KICKS her leg out and jams the wolf's nose. With a YELP, the wolf releases its grip for just a moment and Cecilia slithers back onto the ground.

On the other side of the deck, Baron, back against the ground, is holding the the wolf's open jaw with his bare hands.

BARON

Ahhhhh!!

Neck BULGING with effort, Baron throws the wood-wolf against the ground on his side, then swings it around and slams it against the ground on his other side. He then stands and throws it towards the railing. WHIMPERING, the Wood-wolf attempts to slither up a nearby archway in fear.

BARON

You won't escape so easy, little doggy!

Baron, SCREAMING WITH RAGE, grabs onto the back of the wood-wolf and it drags him up into the rigging.

Nearby, Raymond is hiding behind the pile of boxes he was earlier trapped under, sweat dripping down his face. A wood-wolf slithers around the pile sniffing the air inquisitively. As the wood-wolf turns around the corner, Raymond silently pulls himself up onto the first ledge of the boxes, and turns back around the corner when the wood-wolf looks up.

He runs to the other side of the pile and is about to escape, but trips over a piece of wood and falls flat on his face in front of the Raymond-sized hole. The wood-wolf immediately rears up, foaming at the mouth, and spots him.

With a look of pure terror, Raymond crawls into the tunnel and desperately tries to push himself through - it's barely big enough to allow him passage. In a flash, the wolf is at the opening, nearly chomping off his feet. For just a moment, Raymond panics as he gets stuck in an especially tight spot.

RAYMOND

Oh no no no please!

Suddenly, however, the wood-wolf jams itself into the hole, pushing Raymond out. Raymond flies out the other side of the pile and immediately cowers on the deck. When nothing happens, he peeks through his fingers to see the wood-wolf, snarling and howling wildly, is stuck in the hole. His head is sticking out the front, too big to go forward and too big to go back.

RAYMOND

I understand your plight. In this moment, I almost feel we are brothers.

Just then, Baron falls from the rigging, wolf in arms, CRUSHING the boxes and sending up a cloud of dust.

BARON

AHA!

When the dust clear, Baron holds a wolf in each hand. He throws them like footballs back towards the forest.

BARON

Enough of you!

The other wolves on deck, seeing this isn't worth the fight, begin flinging themselves back towards the forest. Across the deck, Cecilia's wolf, gnawing on her stick as she pushes him away, notices the other two have been thrown overboard, and, with a last snarl, disengages.

As it pulls away, however, Cecilia notices the package caught on its fur! She checks her belt and realizes it must have gotten snagged there during their fight.

The wolf is coiling to shoot over the gap! Cecilia grabs a nearby piece of rope.

Just as the wolf lets fly off the ship, she leaps onto its back.

BARON

Yes! Ride the wolf!

VALERIE

Cecilia, jump off that wolf!

BARON

Honey, I thought we were going to try and present a united front for the children.

Hugh wanders up to Raymond eating a SANDWICH.

RAYMOND

Where have you been?

HUGH

I made this sandwich.

RAYMOND  
 (After a beat)  
 You are the sneakiest by far.

HUGH  
 (mouth full)  
 Mmmhmm.

In mid-air, Cecilia wrestles the package free of the wolf's matted HAIR just as they enter the shadows of the forest. The rope, tied to the ship, unspools behind her.

INT. LADDER-TREE FOREST - LATE AFTERNOON

CECILIA  
 Yes!

The wolf whimpers and trembles as it comes to a rest among the edge of the shadowy roots. Cecilia, taken aback by the its scared demeanor, looks to it's wide-eyed face and follow it's eyes. Way up there, just beyond the shadows, looms a BLACK WOOD-WOLF at least twice as large as any of the others. It stares down at her with hateful yellow eyes.

CECILIA  
 Oh dear.

Cecilia casually jumps back off the ledge. Her rope pulls taut.

EXT. DECK - S.S. GERTRUDE - LATE AFTERNOON

BARON  
 It's not a question of right or wrong, we just have to act as a single unit-

Valerie looks towards the forest. Baron follows her gaze.

VALERIE  
 What in heaven's name is that?

BARON  
 Take cover!

From the forest, a massive black tail whips out and strikes the Gertrude across the bow with a huge CRASH, destroying the first arch and causing significant damage to the hull. A deafening HISS begins.

Amidst the surprise of the crew, the ship begins to spin and fall towards the ground. Cecilia tries desperately to pull herself over the banister with the aid of her rope, but is



being thrown around by the ship's erratic movements! She barely manages to duck in time as a SUPPORT BEAM from one of the arches breaks off and flies right past her towards the forest. She watches it fall out of sight.

VALERIE  
We're leaking Hydrogen! Secure yourselves!

The ship corkscrews out of the sky. The black wood-wolf looks on as it falls out of sight.

VALERIE  
(shouted over the wind)  
Baron, vertical thrust!

Baron, who's just finished tying Raymond to one of the archways:

BARON  
Aye, Captain!

RAYMOND  
Help.

Baron, rope tied around his waist, drops down into the hold and begins manipulating the engine. Cecilia, sliding uncontrollably across deck, grabs a railing just next to Hugh with relief. They smile at each other. Then her railing breaks and she falls back across the deck. Hugh continues smiling.

The Gertrude is falling out of the sky at an alarming rate, headed straight towards a small group of buildings on the ground.

VALERIE  
We're headed straight for the village, Baron!

BARON  
There's simply no power, my beautiful darling! But I thank whatever Lord watches over us that your beautiful, terrified scream will be the last thing I hear before our demise.

VALERIE  
Weird, honey!

Cecilia flies by, knocking into a crate and spilling a battle-axe over the side of the ship.

EXT. TOM'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

A simply dressed young man, TOM, exits his house and, with a deep breath, puts his hands on his hips to admire the day. CHILDREN are running in the town square, OLD MEN play cards nearby, a small group of MUSICIANS rambles through a jaunty tune on the TOWN HALL steps, the 10-foot wall of knives and torches is secure on the perimeter keeping them safe - all is well with the world.

Without warning, a full-sized BATTLE-AXE CRASHES through the roof, splintering the porch awning and burying itself a foot into the floor. Tom is not surprised. He looks up to see the S.S. Gertrude barreling straight towards him. He sips his lemonade.

EXT. DECK - S.S. GERTRUDE - LATE AFTERNOON

RAYMOND

AHHHH!

CECILIA

AHHHH!

VALERIE

BARON!

Hugh, perturbed, lets go of the railing and slides over to the lattice-opening of the engine room. He pulls a small vial of liquid out of his makeshift jacket and drops it through. Baron, with a massive grunt, throws a lever into place. He doesn't notice the vial fall into the fuel tank. Inside the engine, the fires burst into an inferno.

The Gertrude YANKS to a halt right above Tom's house. Tom looks on with mild interest. It hovers nonchalantly for several seconds before abruptly falling over into the empty yard.

Dust settles around the wreck. The crew, rubbing their heads wearily, are hanging off various outcroppings on deck.

TOM

Well, hello there! You must have our weapons! Any interest in dinner? It's Potato Thursday, you know!

Valerie groans. Raymond is still hanging onto the archway with pure fear.

CECILIA  
I do like potatoes.

Baron pokes his head excitedly out of the hold.

BARON  
Are we having potatoes?

EXT. TOM'S HOUSE - EVENING

The sun is setting on the distant horizon. Hugh reads a book on the porch. Baron and Raymond are already sitting on the overturned hull of the Gertrude with their tools as Tom leads Cecilia and Valerie out of his house. We hear the tools CLATTER to the ground.

BARON (O.S.)  
This is pointless!

RAYMOND (O.S.)  
Here, let me do it.

BARON (O.S.)  
Curse these giant meat-hands!

VALERIE  
Thank you for your hospitality, Mr. Tom.

TOM  
Oh please! My dad's name is Tom. Just call me Mister. And it's the least I could do after you brought along our new weapons. By the look of things, you barely survived the trip.

VALERIE  
The wood-wolves are vicious creatures.

TOM  
Ha! So are government officers.

VALERIE  
Oh that. Not a problem.

CECILIA  
You must be worried about the wolves though, right?

TOM

Oh yes, but we've gotten used to it. Used to be we kept to ourselves and that was just that. Now, I go to sleep at night cuddling an axe for fear of night-raids. The more things change...

CECILIA

Maybe it's that big black one ordering them around.

For the first time, Tom seems taken aback.

TOM

What? A black one? Who told you that?

CECILIA

I saw it.

TOM

Oh no, you must have been mistaken. The forest can be shadowy, it plays tricks on the eyes. You couldn't have seen that.

CECILIA

No, I-

VALERIE

(cutting Cecilia off)

Of course not. Like you said, it was probably a trick of the light. Right, Cecilia?

CECILIA

(following along)

Yeah, I guess.

VALERIE

Anyways, I'm sure we'll be out of your hair in no time. Baron, how long until we're sky worthy?

More tools CLATTER accompanied by the sound of cursing.

RAYMOND

Stop trying to use the screwdriver!

BARON

Ahh it looks like the damages are fairly substantial. I don't expect

(MORE)

BARON (cont'd)  
we'll be able to raise her until  
tomorrow evening.

CECILIA  
What?! But I have to get this to  
the star-studier at the top of the  
forest by tonight!

TOM  
Or he may die?

CECILIA  
Yes!

Tom glances towards the horizon.

TOM  
Well, there is a path, but it's far  
too long. There's no way you'd make  
it all the way up in time.

Tom looks back. Cecilia is gone.

TOM  
Where's she gone?

Valerie doesn't take her eyes off the ship.

VALERIE  
Hmm? Oh, she set off as soon as you  
mentioned the path.

Tom turns to see Cecilia marching across the town square,  
straight towards the forest.

TOM  
Oh, jeez louse!

Tom runs after her.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - EVENING

TOM  
Little lady, you can't go into the  
forest at night.

CECILIA  
Why not?

TOM  
Well, there's creatures and  
sink-pits and it's easy to get lost  
(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)  
and the pack of wood-wolves, not to mention the forest is thousands of feet high - climbing it straight up without stopping would take the entire night and then some! It's insanity!

CECILIA  
Well, no choice now.

Valerie has casually walked up alongside them.

TOM  
Ma'am please, I would highly recommend keeping your daughter away from the forest!

VALERIE  
As Captain that is my prerogative.

Cecilia stops and looks at Valerie.

VALERIE  
The trip is not without risks. But, you've sworn an oath, correct?

Cecilia nods.

VALERIE  
Then I won't hold her back. She can take care of herself.

Cecilia smiles gratefully. Valerie smirks.

TOM  
Whelp, I've said my peace. Y'all want to be a crazy oath-making family, walkin' off to certain death, that's on you. If you make it out alive, come on by for another visit, we've got leftovers!

Tom, hands in pockets, heads back to his house, leaving Valerie and Cecilia alone.

VALERIE  
Once you reach the house, remain there and we will pick you up tomorrow evening.

CECILIA

Aye, Captain.

VALERIE

If you're not waiting for us there,  
I'm sending your father in to  
retrieve you. We both know the  
negative effect that would have on  
the environment.

BARON (O.S.)

Curse these tiny screws!

The sound of wood TEARING in the distance.

RAYMOND (O.S.)

The Stern!

Valerie smiles at Cecilia, turns on her heel, and walks away. The light is fading fast, and what was a calm, pastoral evening is quickly turning into a dim, chilling night.

Setting her brow, Cecilia turns to look at the never-ending column of trees. It rises far higher than she can see from the ground. Children, playing in the square around her, are shepherded into their homes.

A gust of wind blows from the trees, and Cecilia shudders. She remembers the coat she is wearing, and, with determination, pulls it tighter around her.

Then, without looking back, Cecilia struts forward through a small opening in the 10-foot wall of knives and torches (grabbing a torch as she goes) and is quickly swallowed by the impregnable shadows of The Ladder-Tree forest.

INT. THE LADDER TREE FOREST - NIGHT

The Ladder Tree forest is made of Ladder-Trees. They have ROOTS on both the top and bottom with no branches in between, trapping layers of soil in at the place where two levels meet. Roots huge and tiny jut out of the ground and hang from the ceilings of each level like tentacles and claws, covered in grotesque knots and bumps, reaching out of the darkness to pull you into the shadows. Small pools of water collect in divots amongst the unpredictable terrain.

Cecilia, her dirty frame only visible by the light of the torch she carries, wanders along the thin path. The orange glow extends only a few feet in each direction before succumbing to the faintest of shapes and shadows.

It's so dark that she doesn't notice a rope ladder, hanging from an upper level, until she's walked into it. With a start, Cecilia realizes the path now leads upwards. She begins climbing.

We float upwards and see:

INT. THE LADDER TREE FOREST - ONE LAYER UP - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Cecilia climbs up the ladder which hangs straight between several layers.

INT. THE LADDER TREE FOREST - NIGHT - SEVERAL LAYERS UP - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Black. Then, the faintest glow from a small circle in the ground.

Cecilia's torch emerges from the hole, followed by the rest of her body as she pulls herself on to the next level, and falls to the ground, panting for breath.

CECILIA  
(exhausted)  
Floor ten. So I'm like halfway. To death.

With a groan, she stands up once more and begins to walk. As she takes a step, we hear a faint RUMBLE. Cecilia stops and looks around.

Nothing. She takes another step - RUMBLE. This time, she looks down at her foot. She gently puts the toe of her shoe forward to prod at the ground.

CECILIA  
Are you hungry, dirt?

WHOOSH! The ground she's standing on gives way without warning, the soil straining through the roots like sand through an hourglass.

Cecilia grabs at the soil frantically, trying to save herself. She's being pulled down as if by quicksand!

In the last moment before she falls, she manages to get hold of a root. Just as she thinks she's safe, however, it GIVES WAY slightly, jerking her body. In her surprise, Cecilia drops her torch, which falls into a PUDDLE on the floor below her and SIZZLES OUT.

Everything goes BLACK.



CECILIA  
 (panting)  
 Lots of dangling today.

In complete darkness, Cecilia pulls herself back up onto the ground. An animalistic CHATTERING can be heard in the distance. Blind, Cecilia reaches out to steady herself. Panicking, she finds a root, about 6 feet tall, and holds onto it for dear life. The chattering gets a little closer.

CECILIA  
 (to herself)  
 This must be the part of the story  
 where the hero tries not to cry.

Cecilia stands motionless. CRACK. HISS. Not so distant CHATTERING.

She spins around in response to every bump in the night. Hands trembling, Cecilia slowly slides down the root she's been grasping, and sits on the ground, holding it like a toddler at her mother's leg.

CRICK. RUMBLE. She buries her head in her arm.

So slowly it's almost unnoticeable, a faint turquoise glow begins to appear around Cecilia. She doesn't notice it at first. Then, as she peaks out in response to a distant animal call, she glances around in surprise. The light leads her eyes up to where, on the roots hanging from the ceiling, the bulbous bumps are beginning to glow.

Within moments, the glowing bulbs provide enough light to walk by. Cecilia smiles with wonder. The chattering which had been distant until this very second, however, overtakes her.

Ignoring Cecilia, a flock of CHEEKS swings into the area and begins feasting on the bulbs. Cecilia takes a moment to breath deeply, leaning against the root. The cheeks are small primates, 1-2 feet in height, with sharp beaks and huge, avian eyes.

CECILIA  
 Ripe for the pickin'.

As the creatures eat, they CRACK open the bulbs for the meaty flesh on the inside, releasing small SPLASHES of watery juice, some of which falls on Cecilia. She disgustedly wipes it off while watching several puddles of this juice collect into a divot similar to the countless others she's seen on her way up here.

Struck by an idea, Cecilia clambers up a nearby tree and grabs at one of the bulbs. Taking notice of her for the first time, one of the cheeks pecks gently at her hand, annoyed.

CECILIA

Sorry, is that one yours? That's ok, I'll take this one.

The cheek contentedly eats his bulb, while Cecilia yanks out another with a satisfying SHLUP! She then slides the tree back down to the ground, fire-pole style and takes a few seconds to slap her thighs, regretting that decision, before setting off once more.

She walks cheerfully, the glowing BULB in hand. As she does so, Cheeks begin popping up around her, following her along, hoping to get their beaks on the tasty food. As they gather, the Cheeks begin to CHATTER incessantly. Coming to a stop when it's clear she's being followed, Cecilia waits for a few moments then turns around quickly to look at them - only to watch them scurry desperately out of sight (not nearly quickly or quietly enough to go unnoticed). She chuckles to herself.

CECILIA

Alright, gang, if we're going together, we better get going.

Cecilia sets off once more into the darkness. After poking their heads out of the shadows, the cheeks eagerly follow behind like they've pulled off the perfect heist, CHATTERING with self-satisfaction.

As Cecilia walks away, the turquoise light from her fruit narrows to a pinprick.

Unheard, a deep GROWL rumbles in the black.

INT. THE LADDER TREE FOREST - ANOTHER LAYER UP - NIGHT

Cecilia stands above another hole, emerging from the bottom of a tree. The cheeks climb through the hole, still following her.

CECILIA

You all must love food. I get that. Everything's gotta eat.

Suddenly, every single Cheek looks into the shadows and goes stock still - the chattering completely gone. Cecilia looks on in confusion. Then, with equal silence, they dart away through the roots as fast as their legs can carry them.

Cecilia is left alone in the darkness once more. A bead of SWEAT quickly forms on her brow. In the silence, her quick BREATHING almost echoes.

Cecilia hears a GROWL from behind her. She slowly looks over her shoulder and makes eye contact with a brown wood-wolf slithering through the roots towards her. She prepares to run off in another direction, only to see them closing in from all directions - even slithering through the hanging roots above her. She's found herself in a nest of vipers.

Clenching her fists and taking a battle stance, Cecilia prepares herself. The Wolves come to a stop all around her. Cecilia spins every which way, making eye contact with the snarling beasts.

CECILIA

Alright. Come on! Let's go!

The wolves remain motionless. Cecilia is slightly confused.

CECILIA

So...are you gonna eat me or...what here?

The wolves snarl more - even lunge forward slightly - but won't attack.

CECILIA

(Thinking hard)

No. Why not? Why won't you eat me?

A distant RUMBLING GROWL. Cecilia gets it.

CECILIA

Oh. You're saving me for papa.

Out of the shadows slithers the giant, black, wood-wolf. As it passes, the smaller, brown wood-wolves fearfully part to form a path.

CECILIA

Ok. Ok.

As the black wolf edges nearer, Cecilia hears a familiar rumbling. The wolves, also aware of it, pause for just a second. Her eyes narrow.

CECILIA

Ok.

After only a split second to clench her fists and dig her feet into the ground, Cecilia BOLTS straight towards the black wood-wolf as if to attack it. The wolf, taken off guard, hesitates just long enough for Cecilia to leap up and STOMP on the ground directly beneath it.

She grabs a root just as the ground beneath them begins to fall away. With a ROAR amid RUSHING SOIL, the black wolf is sucked to the level below. The other wolves struggle to hold themselves aloft.

Taking advantage of the distraction, Cecilia climbs expertly from root to root between several confused wood-wolves until she reaches solid ground, then sprints into the dark woods.

Furious, the Black Wolf bursts back up through the soil. He can see the tiny light of Cecilia's bulb disappearing into the dark. As shadows overtake him, he howls and the entire pack lunges forward in pursuit.

Cecilia can hear the wolves howling behind her. She can't outrun them. She desperately looks around her as she runs.

CECILIA

Come on, come on!

The night sky suddenly becomes visible and Cecilia screeches to a halt just at the edge of the dizzying cliff. Looking back, she realizes there is no escaping the pack.

While she's looking, however, she notices something lying on the ground: the small SUPPORT BEAM that broke off The Gertrude when it was attacked earlier, lying lodged in the dirt not so far away. For all intents and purposes, it's basically a long STICK.

Thinking rapidly, she runs over to it, taking off her jacket. The shadows of the wolves can now be seen just on the edge of vision. Their howls are dangerously close.

Cecilia sticks one end of the crossbeam through the jacket and stuffs her glowing bulb into it's pocket. Without a moment to lose, she runs back into the shadows, pushing the entire apparatus in front of her like a lance.

The wood-wolves are on the hunt, their mouths foaming with excitement. They're mildly surprised to look down and see the girl running back towards them, glowing bulb dangling from her breast, but it's easy to get turned around in the forest and this will be the last mistake she ever makes. They dive in.

CECILIA

(murmured)

Yes!

The wolves are diving in to attack her decoy on the stick in front of her. As one wolf swoops past her, trying to get at her dummy, Cecilia leaps off a low-hanging root and jumps onto it's back.

The wolves go berserk. Their prey is now moving as fast as they are, and even leaping through the air in ways only they can. Wolves swirl through the air and BANG into each other trying to close their teeth around the girl who, again and again, SWIRLS out of reach just in the nick of time.

Cecilia holds on for dear life as the wood-wolves fly around her. Glancing at the package still strapped to her side, she makes a GRUNTING effort and manages, with one arm, to raise her decoy up towards the ceiling while her other arm maintains a death grip on the wolf's fur.

Her action has the desired effect: The wolf she is riding flies upwards in pursuit of its carrot. She hugs close to its body as it slithers through openings in the layer after layer of soil in pursuit of her decoy. The other wood-wolves dive in front of them, careen around them, and howl with frustration, none of them smart enough to realize what is happening.

Without warning, Cecilia is thrust into the clear moonlight. They've reached the top of the tower.

EXT. OUTSIDE TIMOTHY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The wood-wolf she is riding comes to a complete stop, causing her to lose her grip and fall onto the ground. In the clear moon-light, the wood-wolves (popping out of the ground like BEAUTIFUL DAISIES) can see they've been tricked and begin bearing down on her, SNARLING angrily.

CECILIA

Well, that was five minutes longer  
than I expected.

With a final GULP, Cecilia accepts her fate and sits up to meet it head-on.

Just as the nearest wood-wolf DIVES for the kill, an airborne BOULDER hits it right across the face.

With surprise, Cecilia looks to the boulder's point of origin and sees TIMOTHY, a heavily-scarred outdoorsman with a catapult, standing just outside the house she had glimpsed earlier from the deck of the Gertrude.

TIMOTHY  
Get over here, now!

Cecilia doesn't need telling twice. She runs over, grabbing her jacket as she goes, while Timothy loads and fires another boulder from the catapult.

TIMOTHY  
I assume you're here to make a delivery!

CECILIA  
That's right, how can I help?

TIMOTHY  
Give it to me!

Cecilia unties the package from her belt and hands it to the swarthy man.

TIMOTHY  
Oh thank heavens for that Mother of mine. You know what this is, don't you?

The wood wolves plunge towards the cabin.

TIMOTHY  
Wood-wolf repellent.

Timothy tears open the package to reveal a grey ceramic LANTERN identical to the one Reynold Itchum was hanging below The Brush.

As soon as he lifts it out of the box, the wood-wolves curl their noses in disgust and come to a halt. Timothy lifts the lantern in the air, waving it gently. The wood-wolves back away from the cabin as if they're about to throw up.

TIMOTHY  
That's right, slither away you furry pests! Don't let me catch sight of you again. This would have been useful on the way up here. But then, you probably should have flown up. That's what any logical person would do.

CECILIA  
...right.

EXT. TIMOTHY'S PORCH - NIGHT

Timothy hangs the ceramic lantern on the porch the same way the old couple did. Cecilia sits in a nearby chair, sipping an icy drink.

CECILIA

How does it work, anyway?

TIMOTHY

The lantern contains a tiny bit of the wood-wolves' natural predator. Though we can't, they smell it and can't stand to be nearby.

CECILIA

Something hunts wood-wolves?

Timothy sits down.

TIMOTHY

In Ryz, there's always a bigger fish. I'm sure you'll understand that the older you get, Miss...uh...I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name.

CECILIA

It's Cecilia. But, you know what? Call me Cici.

TIMOTHY

Well, Cici, thank you for this. You know, without it, I might have died.

CECILIA

Hmm.

A comfortable beat passes in silence.

Without warning, a full-sized BATTLE-AXE CRASHES through the roof, splintering the porch awning and burying itself a foot into the floor. Mildly surprised, Timothy and Cecilia look up. Floating above the ladder-tree forest is a beautiful floating city.

DISTANT VOICE (O.S.)

Sorry!