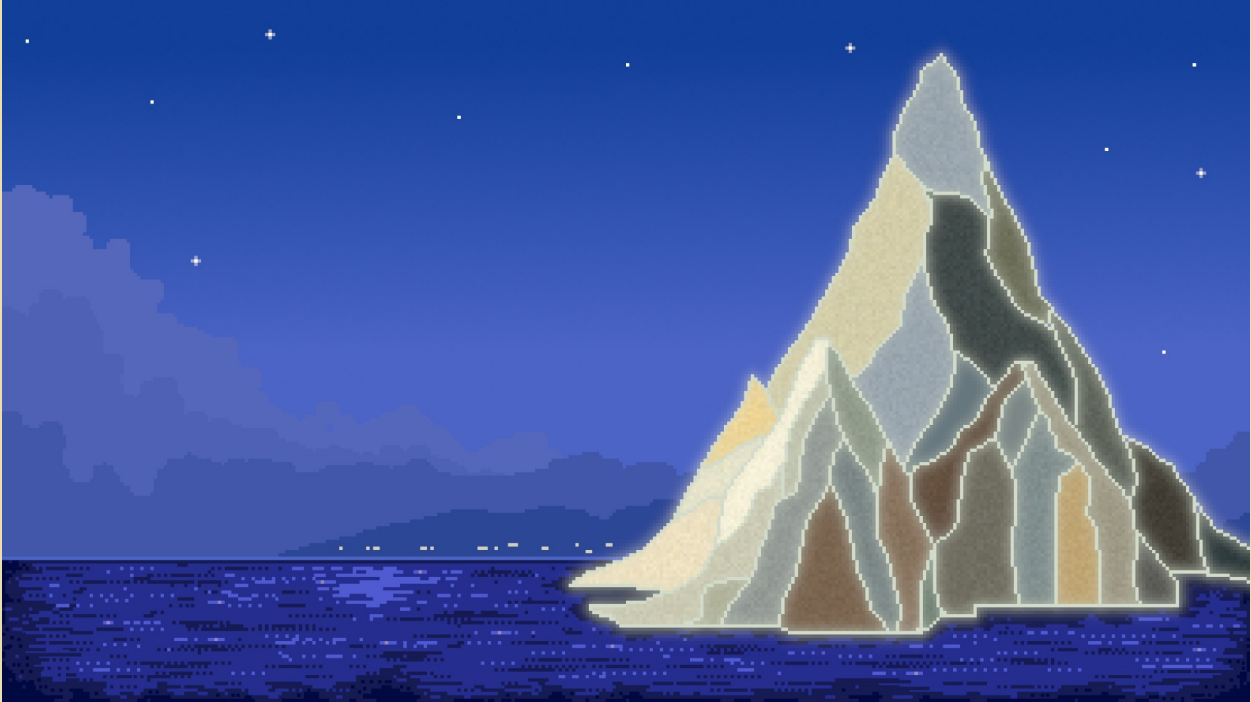


“The Isle of Elanor”



A Story of Midgard

Prologue

The people of Elanor had been stranded for longer than they could recall. Years of isolation had turned into decades and the decades into centuries. It was impossible to know the true number of years because on the day their ship ran aground and broke up, the sun disappeared from the sky and was not seen again for a very long time. Or at least that was how it was remembered.

They had been aboard the *Palarran*. The *Palarran* was a broad-beamed, triple masted ship, proud and tall, the largest ship of its age. It was the last ship to flee the war ravaged city of Gundabad. Amid the smoke and flames of battle, a band of survivors--artisans, nobles, sailors, soldiers and children--boarded the *Palarran* on an uncertain course. They only hoped to escape the ruins of their land. For Gundabad was the last stronghold of their land to fall to the enemy, and there was no friendly port within a hundred leagues.

Their plight was worsened by the winds of an immense storm fed by the waters of Belegaer, the world's Great Sea. The powerful winds of the storm stripped the sails from the *Palarran* and tossed the ship far from shore into unknown waters. Over time the winds blew out, and the sea was calm. For weeks the ship drifted aimlessly. So hurried had been the *Palarran's* escape that it had no stock of provisions for a long journey, and the people on board suffered greatly. If the winds had not returned one night, this story might have ended there, but the winds did return, and the ship blew again until it was driven onto Elanor's rocky shore.

Seventy-two of the refugees survived the journey and the wreck. On the first day ashore, they had set about building shelters from what they could salvage of the *Palarran*, when they heard the sound of an immense thunder from across the sea, and the island shook under them. A great cloud of ash and smoke, shaped like a mountain, rose up on the horizon and covered the sky until it blotted out the sun. On the next day the sun did not rise. It could not pierce the thick clouds of ash. At its highest hour, the sun provided no more than a grey dusk to the earth below. The next day and many days after were the same. The people spent long years in near darkness. All the green and growing plants on the island withered and died. Nearly every living creature--birds, beasts, plants and trees--on Elanor perished. The refugees were saved from starvation by a few skilled fishermen from among the ship's crew. There was sufficient life remaining in the sea

to feed them. It was a time of great despair. The people spoke of the doom of man. Many died, and others lost all hope and gave themselves to the sea. The land of Elanor was dark and desolate. Years passed before the sky began to clear. Gaps appeared in the clouds, and the people could once again see the sun climb across the sky. Though for years afterwards, the sky during the day was not colored blue, but was a sickly yellowish brown.

Slowly and determinedly life began to return to Elanor. The sun warmed the soil of the land and the water surrounding the island. To the people of Elanor, it seemed a long winter had begun to pass and spring was returning to the world. The refugees planted seeds they had carefully hoarded from the wreck of the *Palarran*, and they were able to make a few crops grow. Seeds of native plants, long buried in the soil, sprouted and grew. Fish in greater numbers returned to the waters surrounding Elanor. But Elanor, even before the years of darkness, was not a pleasant and rich land. Three sides of the island were jagged mountains, sheer peaks of grey granite, capped by snow, that thrust up like teeth into the sky. The occasional storm that blew in from the sea and across the mountains carried little water. The center of the island was an arid plain of rock and sand. A few hardy shrubs and tough grasses grew upon it. Yet the mountains held a few springs, and high up in the hills there was a small but deep lake, fed by the melting snows of the highest peaks.

As the years passed, the people of Elanor expected no rescue. They had long since stopped keeping a lookout, and they could spare no wood for signal fires. A ship never appeared on the horizon. They could build no craft to challenge Belegaer's fierce wind and waves. They lacked the tools and supplies, and there were no shipwrights among the refugees. The great timbers of the *Palarran* had been lost to sea.

There were two signs that any man had set foot on Elanor, an ancient road and a small

sturdy stone house.

Wide and well-paved, the road stretched from the plain at the center of island down to Elanor's western shore. The stones of the road led down into the sea and continued far underwater. That the road led underwater, as if the stones had been laid there, was not strange to the people of Elanor. Such sights had been common in Gundabad. They had long faced the ever rising waters of the Great Sea. Their world had been sinking into the sea for what seemed forever. At the time of their flight, more than half of their city had been submerged. And Gundabad of old was not a coastal city. It had been founded far inland at the base of a great mountain.

The house was built near the side of the road. Above the entrance of the house, in Dwarven runes, a single word had been inscribed: Elanor. It was a forlorn and dreary home, and so heavily did it bear the memory of some ancient tragedy that no one could abide there.

(end of excerpt)