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Silence held for miles around in the fog shrouded lands that made up the immense bog, only ever interrupted when a gas bubble breaks the surface of the murky water with a loud, fleshy pop. Accompanied by the pitter patter of raining driblets splashing across the environment and whatever else might've been sent running or flying, startled by the sudden disturbance in the otherwise serene haven...that is, if stagnant water infested with parasites, sun bleached bark pockmarked by rabid insect colonies and stale air sounded appealing enough to qualify for one.

In what should've been an inhospitable environ for foreign lifeforms, a humanoid figure trudges through the wastes alone, their identity shrouded behind a thick ramshackle suit that seemed to be cobbled together out of scraps and made specifically to withstand the bog's unrelenting nature.

But the condition of the suit itself was far from favorable, showing cracks in the seams while every movement made the joints creak loudly, threatening to give away the displaced stranger's position, something he seemed to be more than aware of, trying to lessen the noise he was making despite the mad, steady rush through the diseased wasteland. Producing panicked wheezing through the malfunctioning filters jutting out the side of his helmet.

And at the back of the suit, embedded on a raised collar was a rusted plate with strange symbols scrawled across it in a foreign language, a script known only to one tribe, letting those familiar with it know that whoever bore the mark was a great deceiver, ousted for putting themselves before their people. Guilty of committing an act that could bring potential harm to the many for the benefit of themselves. And it wasn't an easy mark to hide, for the suit itself was just as much of an indicator that the person inside was not to be trusted...although it wasn't as if there was anyone to ask for help from. And that left them feeling greatly bitter, accompanying their haggard huffing and puffing with curses and other vitriolic statements uttered in a language far removed from the common tongue spoken off across the globe in a time long forgotten.

Back within the reaches of the misty bog the suited figure was still in the midst of escaping from lies an isolated village. Built out of scavenged material from an accident that left the original inhabitants stranded around a patch of dry, fertile land suitable enough for plant growth and sustained by a metal structure at its heart that could purify the surrounding area, giving the people there a modicum of hope, living to see another day, making do with what they had while continuing to build and grow hand in hand with their fellow man.

And in a community as tight as the water logged village, the concept of leaving was totally absurd. There, they had everything they needed to survive as long as they managed their resources. Outside? Beyond the reaches of the safe haven provided by their purifier? The waters were tainted and the air was just as soured. Ruined by an unknown plague that was said to have ravaged the rest of the world long ago,

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something their forebears had spoken of and recorded in books that the current generation could not understand, preserved in the main, oblong hulk that served as the village chief's home.

But the plague wasn't a conventional one that wrought death and pain in its sufferers, rather it was like a curse that seemed to slowly eat away at a victim's very identity. Manifesting as a fever with intense aching in the joints before the mind would begin to slip as cherished memories faded away, ending with a complete mutagenic remake of the host body, almost always resulting in an albino female sporting insectoid traits in the form of feelers, extra limbs, veiny translucent wings, compound eyes or any mix of the above no matter the age or gender of their former selves. Leading the village as it is today to incorporate the plague into its traditions; where the creatures borne from the mysterious affliction were called the Children of Mist, treating them like the ghosts of yore; a second life after death that awaited those in the village.

A second commune they would never feel alone in on account of the fact that the creatures were never seen by themselves, usually sniffing out the edges of the village in pairs, retreating swiftly into the milky brine whenever curious eyes got too close. Certainly better than pitch black nothingness for all eternity as soon as life's last breath leaves their cold, cold body. So when the deceased have breathed their last, their bodies would be ferried out towards the edge of the village, left to drift off into the bog where the harsh, uncured environ would immediately lay claim to them, rebirthing them anew as the Children, swimming through brine to rejoin their sisters out there in the murky fog.

There were no funerals or goodbyes to be said for those who lived on, knowing full well that their own time would come to rejoin their loved ones on the other side of that misty barrier.

But the tenets of family and comradery also made for some bizarre punishments. Especially when it came to those who've committed crimes grave enough to warrant the harshest one on the list; exile. Despite the simplicity of the sentence, it could not be carried out without ceremony and grandeur by the locals, who had their own ways of going about the otherwise simple process. Something the exhausted individual in their bulky suit could attest to as they continued to push through the bog, feeling panic well up in their heart upon realizing they weren't getting anywhere, masking the subtle sound of ancient material breaking apart after an accidental shift of the arm had brought it too far forward, causing the seal in the shoulder to come loose, exposing tanned hide and a burly shoulder to the elements.

Donning the suit was simply the first step of the punishment, followed by a brief yet vocal sentencing that saw the entire population stoning the 'Betrayal' out of the village, vanishing forever into the mists for their transgressions against their own people where they would be left to their own devices to seek one of two fates; miraculously escape the bog or suffer an unknowable fate alone in the bog where not even the likes of the plague saw fit to lay its hands on those marked by the suit, made of a material far removed from the sewn fibers used by the village. It would remain sealed forever once closed, trapping

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the 'Betrayed' within until either they or the suit expired. And in the mind of the criminal, he was determined to make sure his prison broke apart long after he was safely away from the dangerous bog.

Still able to feel the sharp thunk of debris and the piercing eyes of an irate people seared into his back until he was well and truly gone from the village earlier that day, he knew he could never return after what he had done. But it wasn't as if he had anyone there to look after or vice versa, he was completely free of attachment to persons living or dead. And he couldn't care much about tradition to be bothered much about human company, or so he thought...

What mattered to him now was survival, and he wasn't going to go down without a fight if the Children showed up. He didn't believe in the fiction propagated by the village chief and his advisors, thinking of them as insane geezers acting as minions for creepy monsters playing coy for no other reason than to jump someone when they least expected it, devouring the bodies of the dead offered to them in rites he never bothered to observe. Without land or clear water in sight however, the exile's legs soon slow before coming to a complete stop, looking all around him before letting out a frustrated yell that comes through the suffocating suit as a deep, bellowing roar. Wasting no time as he falls to his knees, taking extra care to avoid getting any of the rancid water into the damaged portions while fishing around for something he could use, gleaned some measure of hope in the form of a plank. If he could gather enough, he could make land of his own, some place to rest his weary form on before continuing to find a way out of this dreary gray wasteland. And until he did, the suit was his only lifeline against the noxious environment, more concerned about disease and rising water levels than some fairy tale plague, growing less and less afraid of the Children after not having seen a lick of them for miles.

With his skills as a gatherer still fresh in mind, the clumsy, suit wearing exile begins his efforts to stay ahead of the tide as gloved hands begin to gather and amass a sizeable pile of wood and reed from filth around him, assaulted on occasion by a stinging insect that fails to penetrate the rusted metal and plastic protecting his hands, continuing to work unabated, stopping only when a small mound of faded brown wood and dark gray soil juts out of the milky paleness, stable enough for him to put a boot on without the rickety platform coming apart and at a height suitable enough to stay above the high tide when night fell, a moment that would soon be upon him judging by the pale orange glow beaming down on occasion like dancing trickles of waning light...the fog was so thick here that not even the light of day could fully break through, rendering everything past a few feet around him an obscure shadow. What was there to even live off of out here? Was the air safe to breathe? Were there nocturnal predators the Children were afraid of?

There were so many questions on his mind but so little answers available to him, making the exile feel that much more exhausted as he does what he can for the remainder of daylight to reinforce his personal platform before shimmying his way on top, coming to rest on it in a mildly comfortable position with his extremities at a safe distance from the edge, adjusting as best he could until he could reliably drift off to

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sleep despite the sweaty rankness of his body beneath the stiff exterior. None the wiser to the still open breach on his left shoulder as he begins to lose consciousness, easing the edge in his furrowed brow while his body relaxes as best it can inside of its cramped prison, spiting the village with bitter animosity for this perceived injustice until heavy eyelids slide shut and his ragged breathing stabilizes.