

OTHER WORLDS

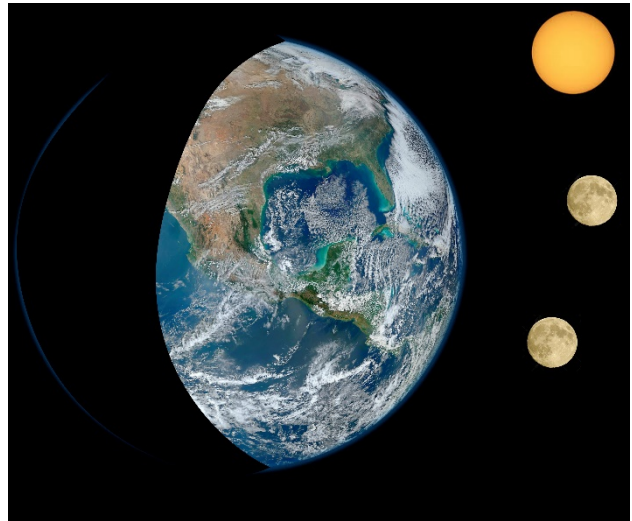


By Paul Harris

After World

The Earth:

Time – They say time is upside down and topsy turvy. The earth rotates around the sun once every 1,000 years, or so, and the light reflects off the earth's twin moons illuminating 50% of the surface



(Light World) from the dark side (Dark World). Many believe the dark side to be icy wastelands, totally dark, and full of blind hairy monsters capable of withstanding the -200°C (estimated) temperature of the side hidden from the sun's rays for so long. They say these monsters search around the periphery of the wasteland looking for anyone foolish enough to venture into their freezing world.

There is no north or south as there are no magnetic polar caps and compasses would be useless here instead, intrepid adventurers rely on the position of the sun to the dual moons and triangulate their positions thus.

Time is measured by 20 clocks located in China, Phoenicia, Polynesia and some other minor trading countries; built by the Polynesians many, many years ago, which are said to be super accurate to a hundredth of a second. Days are measured as 30 in a month and 10 months in a year with the current date being the 20th Day of the 3rd Month in the Year of the Bull 456. The first day, month and year being when the clocks were created and first run. The Bull representing the Chinese notion of years being represented by animals with 10 in all.

Moons – The two moons rotate slowly around each other and take 500 years for one rotation which makes them ideal for navigating with.

Queen Latifa– The beautiful Queen Latifa leads the Phoenicians, a people who are mostly quiet and hard-working with a political system where everyone shares in the country's wealth. They are coloured



light brown with Rastafarian hair styles and live just above the equator in the tropical half of the Light World. These are a nation who like their hard-earned time off and are not ones for travelling to other countries when everything they need, they already have, and although traders do from time to time visit their country, they are reluctant to trade to avoid contamination from other races and to keep themselves pure. This was about to change, however.

It all started with the Queen hearing that China had one million terra cotta soldiers hidden underground that may be for sale. The thought of an army that could literally surround her country's border was too

much of a temptation to miss out on and with 5 ships and 100 marines she set sail to China to barter for the terra cotta army.

China – China is the second largest country in the Light World and sits high above the equatorial line about 10,000 miles from Phoenicia with dangerous currents and giant whirlpools waiting to trap the unwary sailor. The Chinese people, called Chinesians, are Mongolian in features, thin with black straight hair and live in a culture of sharing what they have with their neighbour. The heads of state retain the wealth of the country while the remainder, the peasants, live on what they can grow and barter with for the variety of food necessary for a healthy lifestyle. Their leaders are much larger and more muscular and quite vicious.

The Voyage – The Phoenician boats with their distinctive red and white striped sails set out to navigate the Calypso Sea to China which wasn't too difficult to find if one went upwards with the dark side to the left, and the crew were in good spirits, their boats were well made and they made good sailors. They had brought goats for milk and meat and plenty of fruit. During the journey the Queen was worried about an event that had occurred the previous year when she had foolishly tried to control the tide. Now she was worried that Poseidon, the Sea God, would sink her fleet in anger for her stupidity, but he was nowhere to be seen. Fortunately, there were no known monsters either in the Calypso Sea but perils existed below the surface with loose icebergs barely visible above the waterline and giant whirlpools. But all went well and they made the trip in 3 days flat with no rest and a good wind.



Landing – They anchored about 200 yards off the southern tip of China and rowed onto the beach where they dragged their boats onto the beach head and secured them with one guard to make sure they didn't disappear leaving them to beg and barter for rowing boats! After a day's trekking they arrived at the Citadel, a magnificent building with towering minarets and beautiful gardens with



children running about playing. These were the children of the rulers judging by their fine clothing and free will. They approached the heavy citadel wooden gates, knocked and waited.

Emperor Kun Wong – The Queen and a guard were let inside the citadel to meet the Emperor, Kun Wong, a wizened and ruthless ruler who stood no nonsense and was straight to the point. “Why have you travelled to my country without warning or invite?” He snapped. The Queen introduced herself “I am Queen Latifa of Phoenicia and I knew of no way to contact you except to land in peace with a proposition.” She carried on saying that she had travelled to trade for his one million terra cotta soldiers in return for opals, emeralds, diamonds and gold. “Where did you hear that I had one million soldiers?” asked Emperor Wong. The Queen replied that it was common knowledge that these soldiers used to protect China’s borders but not anymore and she would like to buy them for her borders.

“I have one hundred thousand, which is one tenth of what you thought you were getting. How do you feel about that?” “Even one hundred thousand soldiers are a lot and could secure my border in case of attack from pirate seafarers” replied the Queen, unruffled by the brashness of the emperor. “In that case you can take the soldiers, all one hundred thousand for all the jewels you have brought me” the emperor retorted. “Well, I was thinking of one tenth of my jewels for the one tenth soldiers I am to receive.” “Preposterous!” Shouted the emperor upset now that someone tried to belittle him. “You give me all the jewels if you want to leave this island in one piece!”

The Queen outgunned at every level reluctantly agreed and paid the emperor with all the jewels and gold she had brought and the emperor for his part had all the soldiers taken down to the beach for transporting back to Phoenicia, which took 8 months to complete, but as they didn’t need to enter the citadel again, and meet the surly emperor, all went well and the Queen had her army of static soldiers.

Formation – The terra cotta army were lined up in military formation which covered a large area on the beach head and to the casual onlooker looked like a real army, however, if you studied them for any length of time you would soon realise that they didn’t move and were lifeless! The Queen disappointed now with her purchase at such a high price and with soldiers made of a material that broke very easily, which a high wind could blow down and break them into little pieces, she decided that they needed to be made more animated and tougher. This was a job for a druid the Queen thought and summoned her court magician Okono to her throne room.



The Druid – Okono was a mild-mannered man, aged around seventy with white hair, beard and moustache, and a golden tan who always dressed in white with a white hooded gown. He was a pagan who knew much about herbs and natural medicines and nature but animating inanimate objects was something new. He knew the Queen felt foolish and needed a result soon if any of the soldiers were to survive the winds on the beach and although normally a mild ruler, she could be very nasty if she didn’t get her own way as the druid had learned to his cost some 12 months earlier.

The Queen had learned that one ancient ruler had commanded the sea to withdraw when the tide was coming in and she thought that the sea obeyed him which made him powerful in her eyes and she wished to emulate this great king. Of course, the tide did not retreat but merely washed over the king's feet making him look foolish, but humble, and a better king for it, but not for the Queen. Like the king before her she had her throne brought onto the beach when the tide was coming in and she ordered the sea to withdraw because she was a great Queen with great powers. The sea ignorant to her plight rushed in and soaked her regal shoes ruining them and in a fit of temper she had the druid, who could not make the sea retreat either despite desperate shouts of "go back, go back!", buried up to his shoulders in the golden sands. He remained like that for an hour with the salty brine licking his lips and cursing throw his hair as the waters engulfed him. He was drowning! However, the Queen similarly to the king before her, had a change of heart and realised that the Gods of nature were more powerful than her and had the druid brought back to the castle.

Not wanting a repeat of the Queen's punishment, he set about his spell book looking for something he could use to bring the terra cotta army to life. After much soul searching, he saw something about dragon magic which could do what he needed if, he could find a dragon, learn of its magic and without dying bring back the magic. He felt very unsure of himself and thought that if he failed this task he could never return to his beloved island for fear of certain death.

His journey was now of national importance as word had spread of the Queen's purchase and that she had so much gold and jewels making her a target for many pirates who were also aware that the soldiers she had bought were made from clay! The Queen fortified her borders as best she could with a limited army, armed with just spears and long bows. They were thousands of years off realising what an asset China's gunpowder was, which she witnessed being used for firework displays to entertain the emperor's family.

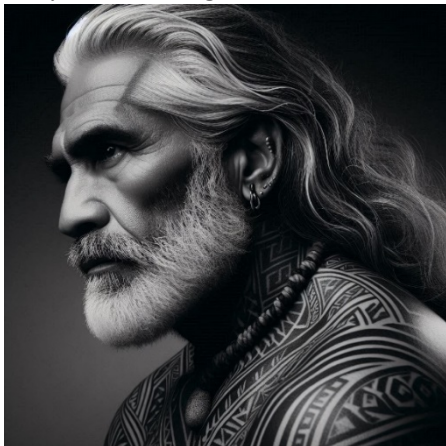
In search of a dragon, one needed to venture to Dragon Island which was next to Slovia a place they did not wish to visit, in fact Dragon Island was just as scary but was the only place with live dragons and not just statues of them like in China.

Slovia – Slovia is the largest country in the Light World with half of it extending into the Dark World. It suffers from 'creeping cold' where the freezing temperatures carry on past the peripheries like icy fingers that destroy crops and will not allow anything to grow. The weather is hazardous in this region with electric storms and freezing rain, a common occurrence. It lies at the bottom of the world with only 25% of the land arable, it grows basic vegetables and has reindeer, wild boar, wolves and mitzer bears. Mitzer bears are similar to polar bears but black which helps them to blend in with the peripheries. They are carnivorous and larger than a regular polar bear making them a fearsome opponent to come across one dark night. They will eat anything including Slovians but seem to hunt with wolf packs who, being much quicker, can quarry their prey and allow the bears to go in for the kill with them. It is a better system of co-management than being hunted by bear packs.



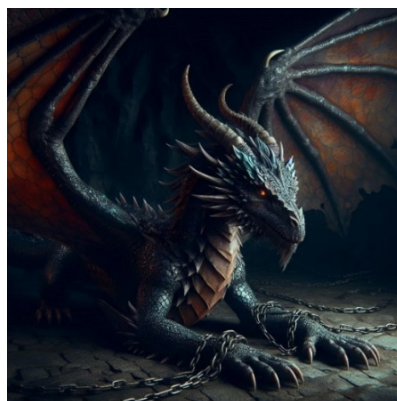
Slovians - The inhabitants of Slovia, the Slovians, are a cross between an Asian and Neanderthal Man. They speak in grunts which amazingly are received telepathically as words and also use sign language. They are ferocious warriors who mainly fight amongst themselves as they lack intelligence and compared to the rest of the planet have never developed. They are useless at ship building, or any craft, or the ability to navigate the Inner Sea, which stands between Slovia and their nearest neighbour the Polynesians. The Polynesians under an 'order of protection' do all the work for the Slovians including building work. The Slovia's President is named Drovisky and is a ruthless leader and quite barbaric in his treatment of anyone who opposes his authority. He grew up bullied because he was weaker than those of his age, but then grew and grew and turned out to be not only a capable leader but also a great warrior and hunter, usually with an axe but also with spear and long bow. He is a large Slovia with powerful muscles and stands a good 6 inches above his nearest rival. He is feared and respected at the same time and hunts with wolves who are treated and behave like domesticated dogs until it comes to the kill when they show why they are feared in the light world being immensely powerful and fearless. The Slovia peasants were taught to fish using nets and coracles by the Phoenicians and are very grateful to them but there is also a counter-culture against these friendly people who would love to remove them from the face of the planet.

Polynesia – Polynesia is a small country compared to China and Slovia, although slightly larger than Phoenicia, and stands between the equator and the lower countries and islands including Dragon Island. On one side is the Calypso Sea and on the other side the Inner Sea which is landlocked and non-tidal. The climate is temperate meaning they can grow anything, much of which is exported to Slovia. They also built the palaces that the Slovia leaders use in exchange for being friends with them in case they ever manage to traverse the Inner Sea, as they would be unstoppable, as they pillaged any



countries, or islands in their path. As a race Polynesians are fair skinned with blond hair, although some are darker. They are led by King Thesus, an older grey-haired man and a fair and just leader loved by his subjects. The Phoenicians are masterful at arts and crafts, building, fishing and inventing. Any Slovia found to have killed one of these 'Polynesian Angels' would be beaten to death by guerrillas, self-styled police and executioner squads using wooden shafts with nails through them sought from the building sites. A poetic end for such a barbaric race. The guerrillas are the protection for the Polynesians whenever they come to Slovia to work on their behalf.

Dragon Island – The land of the dragon, Dragon Island sits adjacent to Slovia some 5,000 miles away in the Inner Sea protected by strong currents and sea dragons, smaller versions of their land-based cousins who can easily sink smaller craft. The land dragons are controlled by Bear-Cats, a hybrid human/bear/lion with great strength who have the dragons in cavernous caves chained to the granite walls. They feed them regularly with wild pigs and sheep and allow them to fly short ranges every week or so.



Going Down – The Druid left Phoenicia with only twenty marines. They had provisions for the journey to Polynesia where they needed to cross the land to reach the Inner Sea. Their long boats arrived after 3 days with a strong head wind driving them forward and the steering wheel tied so they could rest and arrive fresh. They sailed the boat as near as they could to the beach head and were only thirty feet away when they disembarked and started to unload logs that they used under the boat to roll it across the land. They had brought with them a large elephant with enormous tusks that pulled the boat out of the water and across the land.

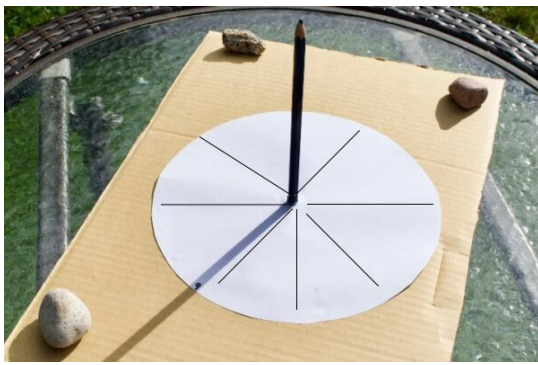


The Druid met with King Thesus and discussed with him about trying to get dragon magic and how favourable his chances were. He had brought gold and jewels would that be enough? The king told him of the bear-cats that controlled the dragons and how fierce they were and probably had no need of gems or gold. “They have wild pigs and sheep maybe you have another animal they could use?” Asked the king. The Druid replied that he had an elephant that they needed to move their boat across land but they did have goats maybe they would like goats for their meat and milk? The king was impressed with the elephant as he had never seen one before, “yes, maybe a goat would do it” replied the king. And so, it was settled and they prepared to bed down for the night after a sumptuous meal.

The king spoke at the table, “I am providing provisions for your trip and giving you the best hospitality in the land maybe there is something you could do for me?” Yes of course, I will do whatever I can in return for your kindness. What is your desire your Majesty?” “At the top of the world are small islands in partial wastelands where a flower grows in rocks there. It is yellow and bell shaped with a wonderful perfume. We use the scent to make perfume and the petals to enhance our stews and the stems and stalks for a psychedelic experience where we can reach our Gods in the Heavens. The flower is so special and sacred to us and impossible for us to reach. Could you bring back as much as you can find?” “Of course, Sir, once I have the dragon magic and my task is completed, I will sail to the top of the world to recover this precious bloom for you” replied the Druid.” Good then we are on the same page, I scratch your back and you scratch mine,” said the king.

“I should mention,” said the King half turning, “that below Dragon Island is the much larger Slovia whose inhabitants, the Slovians, are barbaric people practically uncommunicable and use hand gestures, if you should accidentally land in Slovia do not go ashore as they cannot swim and have no boats, but will kill you if they can and will probably throw spears and shoot arrows at you, so stay away at all costs” and with that he left for bed.

The next day the Druid and his contingent left to travel across Polynesia with the giant elephant effortlessly pulling their long boat with the crew hurriedly placing logs at the front to keep the train rolling. It took many months to reach the Inner Sea and once at sea it became apparent how difficult it would be to navigate as the sun and moons were behind them. Cleverly, the Druid made a ‘shadow dial’ with the sun’s light leaving a shadow from a stick attached to the centre of a fixed position piece of cardboard with a paper circle marked in slices simply to act as a marker for their return.



He manipulated the paper until the shadow was in line with the vertical line and sailed on that heading, praying he hadn't overthought how to traverse the sea. With the shadow now vertical at the base he put a stone on the line so he knew which line was in line with the static sun.

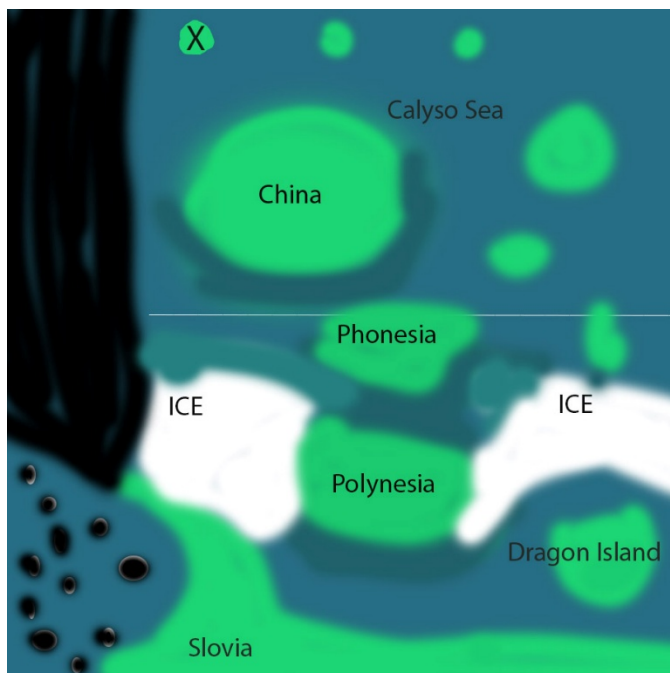
The voyage was hazardous with freezing water spilling over the sides and threatening to wash them overboard. The sky was lit with electric lightning

reaching from the heavens to the sea as stormy weather loomed. The direction they were heading for was lost by the overcast of black clouds. As the boat was thrown around in the swirl of torrents, they became completely lost with no idea which way they should be facing and had to lower their main sail for fear of it being torn apart, meaning they were incapable of keeping the boat in a straight line as it was driven hard by the hurricane winds, and with the steering wheel locked and the crew under deck, for fear of death, which would have been a certainty, they waited out the hurricane storm. After what seemed like days but was less than one day the storm ceased and they went back on deck to see what damage had been done.

The sails seemed fine and the main sail was hoisted again and the direction once more plotted with the aid of a shadow dial which the Druid knew the position needed to get back on track, although he had no idea if he was heading for Dragon Island or Slovia. The crew were ill from their being thrown about so much and the Druid decided to drop anchor and let the men be seen by anyone who thought they were a doctor, in fact none were. While they rested the Druid searched for a sea chart that he knew must be there somewhere and he was right, he found one, a hand drawn map of kinds.

Unfortunately, while it showed the positions of the countries and islands there was no showing of the sun and moons, or any rocks, or any other water hazards.

They set sail again knowing they were in the right direction but the chances were, after consulting the map, that they would hit Slovia before Dragon Island unless they were very, very lucky.



Landfall – They stopped off shore of a large island which the Druid was convinced was Slovia and with trepidation sent a scout in a manned landing craft to the island to see if they met Slovians or Bear-Cats! After what seemed days, which was only 14 hours or so, the scout returned in the landing craft with no news. He had looked around as best he could without being seen, but nothing seemed to be happening. He went up to the highest point he could find but saw nothing. The Druid being cautious thought that the inhabitants probably saw the scout but they remained hidden maybe for a full onslaught later that day. So, he rested his men knowing nothing could touch them except possibly a stray arrow and put a watch on for any unwanted visitors.

Days passed before the first sighting appeared, what looked like a bear-cat, but very far off to be certain. The Druid and ten marines armed with spears went to the shore to face them head-on. As they walked away from their landing craft, they felt eyes watching them, and the further they left the safety of the boat the more they knew they had a problem. It came in the form of a soldier like bear-cat who grunted at them, it had no weapons and didn't need them with its long claws that could disembowel

a man in seconds. The Druid flapped his arms and roared to imitate a fire breathing dragon which the bear-cat got, impressed with his charade skills he went on to pointing on the top of his head to form a wizard's hat. The bear-cat grunted again and left leaving behind two other bear-cats higher on the ridge watching them. At least they were still alive the Druid thought to himself as the wind started to build up and they had to lower themselves nearer to the ground to stop being blown over while the bear-cats merely stood their ground.

After what seemed an eternity the militant bear-cat returned with their leader, named King Leomar. This larger and greyer bear-cat could talk albeit mingled with grunts, "you want dragon," said the fearsome creature. "No, we want dragon magic" replied the Druid expanding his arms to show magic. "What you trade with?" "We have goats that give milk and meat," said the Druid. "Show me" said the bear-cat leader and they returned back to their landing craft and brought back a goat from the boat and explained that it ate grass, by kneeling on the grass and pretending to eat it! Luckily grass was plentiful here. Then the Druid milked the goat and gave the bear-cat leader a cup to drink from. He also pulled a knife across the goat's throat to show it being slaughtered for meat. "Milk good we need twenty." "Ok, how do we get magic?" "You need Slovia crystals they are red and tall and are in mines not far from beach." "We will return with the other nineteen goats and crystals then." And with a few grunts the deal was done and the Druid now really fearing for his life set sail to Slovia and directed the boat towards the Dark Side knowing they would run into the largest country on the planet which also formed part of the Dark Side too.

Inner Fear - The Druid chartered his voyage as best he could on the hand drawn map using symbols to give it some meaning and also something only he knew in case it came into the wrong hands. The voyage across the Inner Sea got even worse with storms hitting the boat side-on nearly overturning the craft and once again they lowered the sails and prayed to reach land soon. Their prayers were answered when they ran into a rocky protected area where they could drop anchor to maintain their position before they ran aground. This left two problems, one – the Slovians could rock hop to their ship and second, they may not be able to reverse away from the rocks as the elephant couldn't leave the boat.

The Druid decided that it was most important to be away from the rocks and to be able to sail away if they needed to, although they were never going to leave without the crystals. He sent another scout onto the island to find the cave and if possible, bring back the red tall crystal but, it was imperative he was not seen or captured. The scout must take it slowly being absolutely certain there were no Slovians watching him or, that he did not walk into a trap. While waiting for the return of the scout they set about working out how to turn the boat around. They lifted anchor and rowed backwards a little at a time until the boat was clear of the rocks and a safe distance from the shore and a watch was put on for the scout's return with the landing craft in the water ready to pick him up.

The Party – Meanwhile, in Phoenicia it was a day of celebrations for the Chinese Year of the Bull. It was something done every year and although there was a fear of being invaded the Queen wanted to lift peoples' spirits. In the castle and in the streets, parties were held with beef and steak on the menus to celebrate the bull, and wine and ales aplenty. Those further from the citadel were put on border



duties with pitchforks in hand. The Queen invited special guests to her party 'Fish People' or Atlanteans. These people live under the ice in Atlantis, which was an island near Polynesia that was trapped between ice flows centuries ago and sank with few survivors. The Masters created Fish People from the survivors and large cod fish through a complicated merging process and a mass breeding project over many years. The Fish People have thrived in their freezing environment with a ready supply of their staple diet, krill, available 24/7. On land the Atlanteans were wearing breathing apparatus to be able to stay above water, something they needed to remove to eat. The Queen had ordered krill served 5 different ways for her special guests which is a very special treat for them.

The Masters – There are cave drawings of the Masters, an advanced race from an unknown planet, and probably known as Greys. The pictures show UFOs and alien beings with Phoenicians being brought aboard their crafts using some kind of tractor beam. There has been no sight of them for over 200 years. The Masters are worshipped as Gods and the cave drawings a shrine to their existence.

Atlantis – Atlantis was once an island before the ice started to flow more into the light world and pushed the floating island, from both sides, under the sea. All the inhabitants, save those in captivity aboard space crafts, drowned and the survivors merged with giant cod fish to form a new species 'Fish People' or Atlanteans. Which, with an intensive breeding program became a population, their present leader is named Glub Glub (because he always starts a sentence with "glub glub").

To show his appreciation for the magnificent krill delicacy the leader removed his breathing apparatus briefly and told the Queen, "Glub, glub, lovely grub your Majesty." The remaining Fish People showed their appreciation by speaking in similar aquatic tones. As the time progressed nobody noticed 4 men resembling Phoenicians mingling in the shadows, who were actually agents of another country who weren't there for the fun and games on offer.

Skillins – The 4 men known as Skillins are from the furthest part of the light world, a cold country with a small population of scheming and cunning hunters. Their country Glacious, has caves hidden behind frozen waterfalls which houses many Glacians, a safe place from any carnivorous animals. There are no monarchs, or politicians, only leaders of warring factions with the skills needed to lead this desperate and meagre people. The Skillins are led by Iceman and are *agents provocateurs* sent in to cause fighting amongst the party revellers. Their overall purpose being to destabilise the country by kidnapping the Queen for gold.

Murder most grotesque – The top table at the banquet was reserved for the Queen and her special guests, the Atlanteans, and some wealthy land owners. There were 20 Atlanteans with the end of the table guest, named appropriately Tail, being very close to the Skillins. With one Skillin acting as someone interested in Tail's homeland, another pulled Tail away from the table, while the remaining Skillin ran a curved vicious blade, used for filleting fish, of all things, through poor Tail whose breathing respirator hid his screams for help but the large thud as he hit the floor brought plenty of attention.



The poor hybrid fish/man was shaking as the life blood flowed away from him into a puddle that the Skillins found themselves stood in. "Glub, glub, Murder! Murder!" shouted Glub Glub, as everyone turned on the Skillins, well on 3 of them, the fourth being behind the Queen who was unguarded for a brief instance of confusion, plenty of time for a Skillin to grab the Queen and drag her off, hand on mouth to stop her shouting for help as he worked his way in the background and into the shadows and out of the banquet room, depositing the Queen who was now unconscious into a travelling case which the Skillin carried past the gate guards and down to an area

where other Skillins hid waiting for his return. Within no time at all the Queen was on a boat making her way to Glacia to be held for ransom.

First Contact – The Druid needed to be very clever now if he was to survive his first encounter with a Slovan. He was to go ashore with 17 marines, he would take 8 with him to meet the islanders while 8 would look for the red, tall crystal, sounding a horn when found and the final marine would be the ferry man between boat and island. There was no way that the Druid wanted his landing craft captured as he couldn't swim either. He devised a crafty plan to become a devil knowing in these regions the devil was feared amongst the savages.

A goat was sacrificed to the Gods for a successful mission and its blood, meat and fur stored whilst its head had its brain scraped out and a mask made of it. The Druid had stolen gunpowder from China, punishable by death, but worth it now to create a magic show. The party for meeting the islanders went ashore and were met almost instantly by several Slovians, grunting and cursing. The remaining marines had left the boat earlier near the rocks and were searching the caves nearest to them. All the attention was in the beach head and this strange being leading a pack of soldiers of some sort armed with long axes. The Slovians had normal axes no match for the marines who were better trained in the use of tactical warfare.

A roar of grunts and shouting went up as they became excited and before too long their leader with an escort of ten soldiers appeared on the beach. "Grunt, grunt, why you here now," asked the leader Drovisky looking fearsome and using broken English learnt from his dealing with the Polynesians. The Devil (Druid) threw in front of himself a ball that exploding sending powder everywhere. The powder stung the eyes and made them water and burnt the throat and they all started to cough and empty their stomachs of its filling.



I am Demon Eye, beholder of dragon's teeth which have magical properties like you witnessed just now. "Cough, splutter, why are you here Demon Eye?" Asked Drovisky. "I need some crystals from your mines to make my army stronger." Demon Eye was just a blur and the Druid thought he heard a horn in the distance and dispatched a second bomb this time white smoke kept billowing out and the Druid made his escape to a nearby rock formation where they entered the water. "Find them and kill them!" Shouted their leader as his men searched high and low but, fearing the water, never went near the rocks.

All at once a horn sounded; the marines had found their crystal as everyone now made their way to the ferry which was just within reach. As they boarded the craft arrows rained on them, half his men were mortally wounded and the remainers managed to row the craft back to the boat and safety. On board the Druid found his men had ten red tall crystals and prayed these were the right ones because he knew next time he would not have the surprise of the magic, instead they would just be shot at with arrows as soon as they landed on the beachhead.

Prisoner – As the icy drops dripped from her pretty nose, she gave a quiet sneeze not wanting to attract attention to herself. Queen Latifa was in a cage, within a cave, outside the cave the weather was very cold, probably below -10°C; while inside the temperature was not much higher as she eyed her captor, a guard wearing a lot of fur to keep warm. The guard was still except for his hands which held a large club which he slapped against the other hand like a policeman did with a truncheon in the 19th and 20th centuries. He was imagining himself beating someone up with the club in an aim to try to still his violent mind.

The Skillin leader approached the pair and the guard stood to one side to allow his leader to visit the prisoner. "Do you need another blanket Queen Latifa?" asked the leader with real concern. "Yes, it's freezing in here, don't you have fires?" "No, we wear animal furs to keep warm in time you will get used to the cold." "How long do you expect to keep me?" Asked the jaded Queen. "That depends on how quickly your leaders will pay the ransom demand." "Which is?" "300 bars of gold your Majesty."

"Then it's going to take a long time!" replied the Queen. "My country is poor of gold, maybe you can take jewels and gems?" "No, we will take what we have asked for." The Skillin leader, Iceman, argued back; and then introduced himself to the Queen and where his country Glacius was situated relevant to Phoenicia. The Queen was aware it was hopeless for any rescue plan and she will probably freeze to death unless she can come up with something novel. "General Tomas will have taken over ruling my country by now and will need the gold to build up an army for defence. I'll just get written off unless I'm allowed to return and then I can regain my throne and pay you." "Nice try but I have spies in your court and all over your country. They will be bringing back news shortly about who is ruling and if the ransom demands are being taken seriously or not.

Return to Dragon Island – Traversing across the Inner Sea, the Druid had the 8 marines' bodies wrapped and chained ready for their descent into their briny graves. With a short prayer to the Gods to allow these dead men into Valhalla, they rolled them over the side of the boat, one by one. As the bodies hit the water the boat was smashed into by large waves with the wind howling and the sky lit by electrical energy. The remaining marines, and the Druid also, were being sick in the galley as the boat was spun around and around, with the mast lowered just in time and the steering wheel lashed down, huge waves crashed into the vessel, as the Druid thought his time was up.

After weeks at sea and being the worst for wear they finally reached Dragon Island. They dropped anchor and ferried the nineteen goats onto the island guarded by 2 marines. Eventually the Druid and his guard also landed and went ahead to meet with the King, Leomar to fulfil their part of the deal. After a number of hours, the King arrived and had the goats took someplace else while in grunts and partial roars he said to the Druid, "You have the red tall crystals?" "Yes, I believe so" answered the Druid showing the king what they had taken from Slovia. "Yes, these seem fine to me. Now you need the magic from the dragon and put it into the crystals!" "Yes, I understand," replied the Druid unconvincingly.

"You know what you are doing Druid?" "Actually no. I haven't a clue!" the Druid finally owned up that not only had he not brought his book of magic but he never took any notes from it and with the bad voyage both ways, he had forgotten what to do! "I will take you to a dragon and the handler will stay with you. The rest of your men return back to the boat." And with that he was taken a short distance to a large cavernous cave which, had a large cavernous dragon within it!

The dragon wasn't that interested in the Druid and was quite tame and had been fed not too long before so was more interested in sleeping. The dragon handler looked upon the Druid with amusement wondering how long before 'Sidious' his dragon got fed up with him and ate him, or just barbequed him for later.

Queen's Rescue – Some 50 miles from the Skillins' camps is a very high glacier with a sheer face and no visible way up it. Within it are the camps of the Shadow People, so called because they can disappear into the shadows and are masters of concealment. Their leader, Fletcher, having learnt of the Queen of Phoenicia's kidnapping and the likelihood that her army coming to her aide, set about thinking of rescuing her himself not for monetary gain but for a piece of land in Phoenicia for his tribe to settle in; and to escape from the arctic cold to a tropical paradise!

He took three others, and dressed in silvery, scaley suits (made from fish skins) they made their way to the Skillin's camp. It was early morning and as they approached the frozen waterfall, they were invisible as they melted into the reflection off the ice. The guard was sleeping as they simply slid past him as they approached this small but beautiful bear within a cage. "Shh Queen! We're here to rescue you. Take off that bear suit and put this fish one on and then you'll be invisible!" She did as she was ordered as the cage was unlocked and they easily went past the guards as they merged into the icy background and before too long, they were on the road back to the Shadow lands. The Queen had never been so cold without her fur coat but never complained and after what seemed like an eternity they reached the glacier.

The glacier looked impossible to climb with its sheer face but on closer inspection it had hand and foot holes to climb up. After only thirty feet they reached a shelf invisible to the uninitiated and after a

short walk along found an entrance invisible until one got close to it. Back at the shadow camp within the glacier it was very warm with whale fat being used as fuel for lighting, heating and cooking.

The Queen was impressed after her last miserable accommodation behind the frozen waterfall. Fletcher told the Queen that he will return her to her lands for a place for his tribe to live in. Wanting to get away from the arctic for a life in the sun! The Queen accepted the offer of course knowing she could always renege later if she wished! Fletcher told her he would send a message written in her own hand back to her country to say that she was safe but needed to wait a while until the Skillins stopped looking for her and she was fit for the long journey back. Fletcher couldn't risk a confrontation with any Skillins with the Queen's life and a new life in the tropics at stake.

General Tomas – The General was an unsavoury character, as ruthless as he was determined to reach the top, which he did in a remarkable short time. Feared by his men, no one dared cross him or talk behind his back, he had ears everywhere. Paranoid and vain, a dangerous cocktail, he led with an iron fist which his Queen was oblivious to as she ruled her people her way and he ruled the army his way, that way they both got on fine.



Now things have changed with the Queen's capture and three prisoners to interrogate, he was a man leading the nation now as military rule was being processed and no intention to save his Queen was on his mind. He was happy and soon the 3 Skillins would be regretting the day they sailed to Phoenicia. They were strung up, and naked they were tortured, to reveal where the queen was held. A necessary process to show he

cared for the queen and the rescue of the much-loved beauty even if he had no intentions of rescuing her. After three days he had all the information he needed and set up plans for the supposed rescue mission to a different area than what he was given under torture.

The remains of three Skillins were hung up for the crows and other scavengers to devour. A proclamation was released saying that he was now in control of the country in the Queen's absence and martial law was being looked into. And this once beautiful country was beginning to show signs of despotic ruling coming in with curfews and rationing once unheard of being thought of to feed an ever-increasing army. The people were not happy and were demonstrating on the streets for the queen's return or going back to a monarchy or even political rule. However, the general was too powerful and his underlings too feeble to mount any form of a coup to replace him.

Then one sunny morning a messenger from Glacius arrived with the message from the Queen herself saying she was well and freed from her captors by a band of freedom fighters wanting to reside in her country in return for safe passage home. This came as a shock to the General whose plans were scuppered now and he had to do his best now to make sure his queen arrived back safely. He may have been greedy for the leadership but he was no traitor, and had to fall back in line now, he wasn't too upset he had a good job with good pay in paradise, why spoil it for a job that would have meant him actually working! No, he was happy that the queen would be returning soon and made plans for her safe return and had the hung Skillins brought down and hastily buried in a nearby wood.

Returning Home – 3 Months later the queen finally returned to her beloved country where her subjects went wild with joy and love for the return of their most beautiful leader. The queen went to her boudoir to rest and recover from her ordeals as the shadow people started to arrive and were given a piece of the country not suitable really for anything, mostly sandy waste but still a paradise to the Glacians. General Tomas welcomed the queen back and asked about retaliation against the

Glacians. “No!” replied the queen our borders are weak we cannot afford to weaken our forces anymore. Where is the Druid, has he returned yet? “No, your majesty we have not heard from him since he left.” “Send a messenger to Polynesia and find out what he can about the Druid and the dragon magic he spoke off. “Yes, your majesty” replied the rebuffed General, still happy he had nothing to do besides the sports he enjoyed. “I want a report on the availability of troops and food stores in case of a siege” the clever queen shouted to the general, “of course your majesty I will have my clerk bring the information you require to you as soon as possible.” Maybe, the idle general thought, he had better be making preparations for any impending siege, while he still had his job! The queen would be resting for a few weeks at least while her army and workers kept her regularly updated on the state of the nation in case of any threat of large-scale attack, which they were not ready for.

The Queen was angry at herself for the foolish purchase, trusting a druid and publicly revealing her countries wealth, which was now wide open for a large-scale attack, especially by China. But it showed how 4 meagre peasants could take her captive and how useless her personal guards were. She summoned Fletcher of the Shadow People to her chamber. He arrived presently and bowed a curtsy to his new queen. “Your majesty what can I be of assistance for?” The queen explained her dilemma with poor house guards, a weak army and a lazy General and wanted to employ his people as protection from the shadows, which was how she was taken. She wanted the shadow people to travel where they thought a threat could come from, and invisibly, bring back any evidence of any planned attack.

Fletcher was over the moon not only had his people paradise to live in but employment as royal guardians, life couldn’t get any better, they were perfectly placed to spy and to hide in the shadows to protect their queen, the queen too was happy with how things were panning out. Now if only the Druid could bring back dragon magic...

Dragon Magic – The Druid took 5 crystals and lined them up and asked the dragon handler if he could get his lazy dragon to breathe over the crystals which he could and did. The flames didn’t seem to harm the crystals so he had the second set of five equally breathed on. Again, they survived the tremendous heat. This he thought must be how the magic is instilled into the crystals now known as ‘dragon stone’.

As he was leaving the general of the bear-cats arrived and grunted, “have you your magic now?” “I think so” replied the Druid honestly. “Good, now leave my island. If you return make sure you have plenty of goats!” The Druid replied, “thank you for helping us. I look forward to meeting you again, maybe.” The large bear-cat just growled and snarled maybe the return invitation was sarcasm!

The Druid was glad to be back on his boat and set sail back to Polynesia.

Return To Polynesia – The druid and the surviving crew although skeletal (literally) made good time, (the Gods were with them thought the Druid whimsically), and once close enough to the beach head set about unloading one very nauseous elephant and a lot of logs. The elephant glad to be back on terra firma again ran in the water squirting himself and frolicking in the surf while the crew lay down to get their land legs back. After 2 days rest and little food left, they made the arduous journey back to the capital Artimis with the mighty elephant effortlessly pulling the boat atop rolling logs which were resupplied at greater effort now there were fewer hands to do the grafting. Months later they arrived back at the court of the King, Thesus.

The king made sure there was a fuss made of them and everyone was fed and given comfortable accommodation ready to sail back home again. The druid told the king of his progress and that he should within a year, or so, be able to return with his precious bloom. The king was thankful he had remembered but told him of the sad news brought by a messenger from Phoenicia about the queen being kidnapped during a bloody banquet but being freed by the shadow people who as a reward are now inhabitants of his land. Also, that China was making noises of an invasion for the return of the rubbish army that the queen paid over the top for. “She showed her wealth to everyone now they all want a bit of your country’s wealth, China a lot more.” The king said in a compassionate way. “And here I am eating your best food and drinking your finest ales while my queen and country are ready to be invaded. I must leave at once!” “Please let your men rest a day more or you may lose your boat

with a tired crew and a tired captain!" "You are right your highness, we will sail tomorrow evening at last light." Replied the very tired Druid anticipating a good 12 hours sleep.

The next day the boat was replenished with food and water and the sails trimmed for speed. "Your elephant looks the worst for wear. I do not think they make good sailors?" said the king earnestly. I have no use for him now unless I need to return to Slovia or Dragon Island which I sincerely doubt. Maybe your highness could care for him in my absence?" "Surely, I can. Thank you for your kind offer." Replied the king his men already making a sedan for him to sit astride the majestic beast. He thought about how important and wealthy he would look to his subjects. "Do not worry Druid your elephant will be in the best hands and treated with the majesty he possesses and deserves." Replied the king as the boat left the dock sailing for home, the Druid anxious for his beloved queen and country.

China Spies – Back in China four shadow people had infiltrated the citadel and the court of King Ku Wong. The queen was right to suspect China's wily king of reneguing on their deal as the King was assembling a 40 ship armada with 400 marines ready to attack Phoenicia. He wanted his terra cotta army back for the tourists, even though no one had seen them for over a century. His armada was close to being ready to sail and the king wanted them to sail breadth-wise so they were always in contact with each other and didn't miss their target! They were to remove the terra cotta army back to their ships and take the capital so the king could loot them for all the gold and jewels they had. The spies now aware of the plot and assemblage were eager to return back to the queen aboard their fast boat and with a good head wind and trade winds they arrived back in record time.

Coming Together – The four spies returned back to the capital and the queen's palace just ahead of the Druid. The queen was aghast to hear that the king wanted to pillage and rob her of her gold and jewels and no doubt make slaves of them, even surrendering the terra cotta army would serve no purpose now. "WHERE IS THAT DRUID!" She cursed.

The Druid returned to court dishevelled, having lost a lot of weight, and saddened by his loss of crew on their horrific journey, and the plight his queen now finds herself in. "Your majesty I have 10 Dragon Stones obtained at a very high price for the loss of my crew. They have been enhanced by dragon breath but I don't know about magic?" The druid said earnestly. The whole court knew without the magic they were doomed to slavery by the chinesians. The queen was infuriated, "What does your book say?" "I need to read up on it your majesty," squirmed the druid sure of his demise. "Well, Druid I have it here tell me what it says." "Of course, your majesty let me look now. Ah yes, here we are."

"Dragon Magic: - needed: 1 dragon stone ✓ 1 dragon ✓ script x

The script is a symbolic representation of a magic spell conjured by the Stone People centuries ago. "

The Druid had failed to see the part about Stone Men (whoever they were) when he originally read the spell. "I have never heard of Stone Men!" the queen raged; we have dragon stone but no magic then!" "May I interject your majesty? I know of Stone Island on the horizon to the other side, with my fast boat I could be there and back within 30 days I am sure of. It must be worth a chance?" "Thank you, Mr. Fletcher, for your superb service. Take the druid and the Dragon Stone and be back here before 30 days is up, if there's anything left of us by then!" And with that the small boat, with only a handful of shadow people and the druid set sail for Stone Island aware of the hopelessness of it all and not wanting to return to the queen knowing that she would take it out on him if he should return empty handed, again!

Back in Slovia – President Drovsky was holding counsel in his palace in front of a white board with a stick to point with. On the board was his perception of the inner sea, well what the Polynesians had supplied. The President was furious about being duped by the Druid and the theft of crystals, that he had no knowledge of or use for, but he wanted him brought to court and executed. "So, pointing to the board, "So, here we are in Slovia, the largest country in the world and unable to leave it! And we cannot bring the Druid to trial!" Everyone grunted in agreement. There were 2 artisans there from delivering the whiteboard and awaiting release to leave the island safely. "So, my friends how do we get off this island and find the Druid?" Lots of grunting, then someone said, "We can take a boat.

There's one on the beach that the Polynesians brought." The place went into riot as the Slovians started fighting amongst themselves in anticipation of much fighting to come and the death of the Druid. "Stop, stop." Shouted one of the artisans terrified of the Slovians ever leaving the island. "As you know we cannot get close to your island and we need to swim for a distance. Slovians cannot swim because you are so muscular and heavy, you would just sink." "How then?" Replied a very angry President wound up tight with agitation and hatred, even the artisans were in danger. "The Druid will be returning to our land in 1 year with a precious bloom the king has ordered, we can kidnap him and bring him to you" answered the sweating craftsman unsure if they would ever get off the island again. "Good, 1 year then I will be expecting your return with the Druid or there will be trouble for you." The craftsmen were hoping the president would forget all about it. But that was not to be...

The Armada – 40 ships with 400 marines and captained by Lau Tong an OK sailor, but not for the magnitude required for an invasion force. He had his orders to sail abreast of each other and to signal when they had found landfall as they had no idea where Phoenicia was except for direction with the dark side in relation to the 2 moons. Their boats were OK boats but not for speed or anything other than fishing as they were fishing boats stripped out to accommodate all the men. Soldiers but not sailors, China had never had a need for a naval presence, as would become apparent on this haphazard journey into the unknown!



The dateline was the 1st day of the 4th month in the year of the armadillo 458 when the armada set sail on a slow and dangerous voyage. Within the first month 10 ships ran into a giant whirlpool in the darkness of heavy rain clouds and were lost with all hands. In another 3 weeks, 10 more ships had the same fate with the same morbid results. 20 ships remained separated by a lot of sea and incommunicado with no sign of their captain's boat. 10 ships were heading correctly to Phoenicia and the other 10 blown off course and heading for Stone Island.

The much-reduced armada, now only 10 ships with 100 marines on board, who were seasick, dropped anchor unwittingly only 50 miles from Phoenicia but of no real threat and unsure on how to continue without their captain, who was now 5,000 fathoms below in Davie Jones's Locker. They would remain there for 3 weeks unsure how to proceed and if they were even on course. The other 10 ships were being driven hard to Stone Island by strong winds but still a long way off. Their method of communication was by beacons high on each mast which could be seen for miles, but the only thing they could see was the sea and stories of sea monsters, the same for both the boats.

Stone Island – The fast clipper owned by the shadow people, essential for their secret trips into other countries unseen and unheard, was now at Stone Island, as they secured their boat by anchor and waded onto the beach unsure of what reception, if any, they would receive. The name suited the island as it was all stone boulders, different sizes and shapes and different characteristics the Druid thought

to himself, unsure why. They set up a small camp in a sheltered area of the island and made a fire and cooked a goat freshly slaughtered for sacrifice and eating, and said a prayer for help on this crucial mission. When they were filled up on their caprine offering to the Gods and their bellies, they settled down as the light grew dimmer and dimmer with dark clouds gathering on the horizon, on this area close to the 'other side' to the Light World with biting cold winds coming in they made their sleeping area inside a gap between boulders.

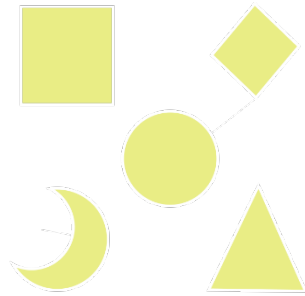
In the morning it was still cold, and they ate cold goat for breakfast, as they tidied up their area not wanting to leave a trace of their presence. "That's strange," said the Druid, "Where's the gap we slept in last night, its gone?" True enough the boulder had disappeared. "But that's impossible" said Fletcher the Shadow leader. "It's too heavy to be moved, maybe it rolled into the sea?" "No" said the Druid "it's just vanished." Indeed, it had for a while, then a voice spoke to them, softly. "Make sure you clean up properly." Everyone looked around where had the voice come from? And then they looked up and it was a talking boulder! "Who are you?" said Fletcher. "I'm Gobun, one of the Stone Men, why are you here?" The druid explained his predicament and the dragon stone but no magic to make their terra cotta army alive like, like they were! "I see, you bought an army of clay, now to want to make them animated to protect your borders. ""Exactly sir" said the Druid fearful of being easily crushed by a 40 ton rock, with a cute face. "But why are you here? How can we help you?" The Druid explained that Stone Island had the symbolic magic he needed. "I see. Well, my leader will probably know he's been here for about 300 million years. I've only been here for half of that." And with that he went off rolling along at a speed that the mariners could not match even if they ran, so they stayed and waited for his return.



In a short while Gobun returned with his leader, Tuton, an even bigger boulder. "You're after our magic spell that animates us, I hear. Why should I give it to you, Magician." "Because were neighbours really and we can benefit each other," said the Druid. "How so?" asked a perplexed Tuton. "Well," the Druid said, beginning to think on his feet, "We can send working parties here to keep your beach nice and clean and remove any flotsam that's polluting your beautiful island." "That sound good and we *are* neighbours." Then the heavens opened and rain fell heavier and heavier as a hurricane came in from the China region of the seas. "You had best hunker down, we will build a shelter around you so you will be safe from the winds and in the morning, we will do the Dance of the Yunkers and reveal our secret to you!" The boulders all joined in one big circle encompassing the 5 mariners who were well sheltered and putting oilskins over themselves they were completely weatherproofed too.

20 miles off shore the left flank of the armada had also dropped anchor in the hurricane and with life jackets on they tied themselves to anything they could fasten to, in the distance they could see the rocks which would smash them to pieces, and may still.

The terrible weather lasted for 3 days with the left flank of the armada losing half of its quotient in the heavy squalls. With the mast broken and reliant on the tide they hoisted anchor and floated towards Stone Island. The boulder men had now opened up their formation ready to do the Dance of the Yuckers for their neighbours. They formed a circle in pairs and started whirling round, spinning so fast and then weaving in and out of each other at such speed, that the mariners were fearful of being crushed like bugs! However, there was nothing to be fearful of as they eventually slowed down and the majority rolled off into the sea dizzy from the manic dance. "OK" said Tuton now for the symbols you need, now draw these as I direct into the sand."



The Druid drew the shapes as directed by Tuton. "Good. Now place a Dragon Stone in each symbol." This the Druid did and Tuton did a whirl and spun so fast that he levitated up and up and up until he was a dot in the sky and then he came back to earth. "Boosh!" Tuton made a large crater with the Dragon Stones on his head!

"Wizu, wazu, magic in.

Crystal, stone, magic begin.

Whirl and swirl, stone men create.

For all time. Let no man wait!

The stones took on a strange hue, shimmering and alive it seemed. Tuton rolled 30° towards the Druid as the stones fell into the soft sand now enchanted and ready for use. The Druid hastily put the stones in his bag and began to leave for his urgent return to Phoenicia. "Thank you, my friends I hope, you have saved the country I love." "God speed" and "goodbye" they all shouted as the clipper silently went back to the sea, with all the mariners waving goodbye to the stone men.

On the other side of the island the remaining crew of the left flank of the armada landed and made their way to the side that the Druid had just left. This time the stone men did not speak to them for they carried swords and axes and did not seem friendly so they went back to sleep for another millennia, maybe.

Phoenicia Straight Ahead - The Druid and his entourage landed back at Phoenicia and quickly made their way to Phoenix and the queen's palace eager to show her the enchanted crystals. The queen told them that the invaders apparently were 10 ships not too far off with probably 50 marines on it. "Still," the queen said "let's get our new army up and running and send off a few ships to draw the invaders into arrow shot of our new army." The Druid got to work and went to the first terra cotta soldier and inscribed on its armour the five symbols with dragon stone and repeated the script, the soldier now glowed brightly as it too took on the same hue and shimmering and it spread down the line as each soldier became a glowing object that shimmered and danced in the tropical heat. Then miraculously while the shimmering went down the lines, the first ones began to move and to stand to attention and so on and on it went until there was a complete army standing to attention. The queen ordered them to line up 10 feet apart in a long line along the land and gave each a longbow and arrows and told them to draw their bows and with an intellect that came from who knows where and they did as they were told.

Ahead a small flotilla approached the stricken remains of the armada and drew them towards the land and in reach of the powerful archers who rained their craft with thousands of arrows, some aflame, so that the boats went down ablaze taking all life aboard down to their watery graves. A cheer went up as the flotilla returned triumphant. Then the queen got her general to organise the new army into sentries and patrols as these tireless automatons protected the borders for all time. The queen thanked the Druid who finally came good and the shadow leader Fletcher and his men for the forewarning and eventual discovery of the magic. The Druid told the queen of his promise to King Thesus to bring to him the priceless and sacred bloom from the top of the world. The queen was happy that China would not raise another army and if they did, they would be defeated and so she gave the Druid her blessing to take leave to venture to the unknown parts of the world with a small crew of specialised mariners equipped with longbow and arrows, spears and axes to report back within a year.

The Bloom – The much-relieved Druid with his marines set sail for the outer reaches of China and the dark side as he relaxed certain that this would be an uninteresting trip to pick some flowers and return back to Polynesia and see his elephant again. In China, news of the failed armada and the now impregnable fortress that was Phoenicia, reached the king's ears. He fumed at the useless navy he had acquired and cursed everyone especially the queen who was now beyond the reach even of him. The king so wanted the druid and his magic to build his own army of automatons that could traverse the sea and take countries for him or to just protect his borders. But how could he get to the Druid he asked in open court. "I hear on the grapevine" said a spy known to the king for speaking strangely "that the Druid and one boat are sailing past China to the top of the world to collect a bloom for the King of Polynesia." "Really, how hard can it be to take him on his voyage to the top of the world, (known as 'Toadie') get 3 boats and a good crew and find me a good captain, now!" "But, sir we have only one boat left and few sailors, but maybe a captain could be found." "Make it so" retorted the King, "and I want a new terra cotta army making, one million soldiers!" And with that the race for the Druid began with one boat a handful of marines and 3 days between them.

The Druids boat, the fast clipper borrowed from Fletcher was effortlessly sailing in between the dark side and China, the Druid oblivious to the trap being set for him. Toadie approaches shouted one of the Druid's men as small islands came into sight surrounded by the glow of the horizon and the ice flows that they had to navigate through. They were there for several weeks going from island to island collecting the bloom with root where they could until they finally thought they had enough and wanted to finish this adventure and return back to his duties with the queen as court magician, a job he really liked especially as he was such a hero now! As they began to turn towards China they came across the chineasian craft coming to them at no great speed but hailing them to stop and be boarded in chineasian dialect which they couldn't understand and had no wish to be boarded anyway. The China boat ran across the bow of the Druid's clipper forcing it to turn into the ice flows once more as they played cat and mouse not able to pick up any speed and being more wary of holing their boat and stranding themselves for mitzer dinner.

"Stop the boat" shouted the Druid as the boat rocked against ice and the anchor was dropped. The party got off the boat and set up their own ambush for the chineasians as they came around the bend looking for the black clipper. As they slowed alongside the black craft they came under fire from both sides, a perfect ambush with no hope of escape, as arrows rained on them they jumped into the freezing waters. The Druid back on his boat set sail once again for China and left the chineasians to a very cold death and food for the main predator in these parts the mighty mitzer bear.

The journey was fast as trade winds were behind them as the scooted past the outer borders of China and into the tropical Calypso Sea passing their home land and into Polynesian waters. The special and sacred bloom was delivered to the King who was so thrilled that he promised the Druid anything he wanted. He only wanted to see the elephant before he sailed home again for the last time. The king duly had the Druid taken to the elephant who was very lively now in his new home with a better climate for him and plenty of things to do especially parades all dressed up in gold and red satin with a very ornate sedan ready for his back and the king's ride. The Druid was happy that his elephant was happy and in a better place, where he was the star of attention, even if the king thought it was him! Time to leave and my duties in court said the Druid to himself as a bag was put over his head and he was

manhandled into a crate. The crate had plenty of holes so he could breathe but no one could hear his screaming as he was taken by horse to the far side of the island facing the Inner Sea and Slovia!

A boat was waiting for them as the crate was loaded, the Druid had food and water and was exercised so he could survive the ordeal.

Typically, the Inner Sea was malevolent and those who took the Druid were not good sailors, or even average ones, and were soon out of their depth as the darkness descended and the winds howled and huge waves crashed over the meagre craft that was just bobbing in the water like an apple being ducked for. The boat went round and round caught in a whirlpool and driven down breaking the boat in two as the crew perished and the crate bobbed up in friendlier water adrift and floating towards Dragon Island. When the Druid came too from his noxious sleep he found he could kick the crate lid open enough to get his hand out and feel for the lock. "Ahhh!" screamed the Druid as a clawed hand grabbed his. "Let go of me" and the bear-cat did and with little work ripped the lid off the flimsy crate revealing the Druid again, but with no goats. The bear-cat growled and pulled the Druid out of the crate and laid him down on the sand as he went off to get help. Not wanting to meet the general again, goatless, he hurried up and ran across the beach looking for a sanctuary which came in the form of a dragon cave. The Druid approached the dragon who snorted at him and became curious as he had seen him before, ah yes with those crystals. Outside The dragon handler was asleep as the Druid slipped silently alongside him and removed his keys. With the stealth learned from his dealings with the shadow people he unlocked the mighty dragon and drew it outside. "Shhh" whispered the Druid in the dragon's ear and they went into the daylight. The dragon unfurled his huge wings and the Druid climbed aboard and hung onto his mane as his wings flapped and flapped giving lift. His handler grunting and shouting threw a spear towards the Druid but missed as the dragon went to sea.

It didn't take long for the Druid to take control of flying the dragon and pointed him in the direction of the beaches of Polynesia. The weather was quite good, a few electric bolts ripping the air apart and exploding into the sea while the dragon and rider kept low and straight and finally approached the beaches where they landed and rested. The dragon had his freedom now although he would like to fly to Artemis and regain his boat but didn't want the dragon to be harmed or captured. "Good bye friend" he said to the dragon as he patted it on his snout and walked away and kept walking not looking back. That was the last he would ever see of the dragon but word got around of a dragon flying around Polynesia and the Inner Sea freeing other dragons by unseating their riders and being free beasts once more.



The Druid made it home and was loved by all asunder and given special privileges only royalty ever had. In China, Slovia and Dragon Island he was a wanted man but he was safe and secure and a new

type of hero for the Phoenicians who once more had everything they needed and more an integrated population of Phoenicians and Shadow People who together saved the day and would always be a part of a great nation with a beautiful leader and a very wise Magician.

- The End -