

The Crystalline Mythos: SUBNAUTICA

A Short Story
By Teej R.



The Crystalline Mythos:
SUBNAUTICA

(A Short Story)

By Teej R.

All Rights Reserved
NOT FOR RESALE

2022 Edition

Support the Project: www.patreon.com/crystallinemythos

Web: www.crystallinemythos.com



*Note: This story follows Grim Glitchfield (and Patrick Puck to a lesser extent) while employed at the Easy Breezy Fishery. Just as the famous Stanley Artaro introduces a new currency into Machina's markets and prepares to take his father's former position as President Executive of the Artaro Corporation, Grim and his coworkers toil to process seafood to be sold and eaten all around Machina. It takes place approximately one year before the story **Emoti-Punk** where Penelope and Grim first meet.*

Supplemental Character Information and A Map of West Enon can be found at the end of the story.

[191 D.C.]

Along the coast of the Plastic Ocean, not far west of Machina, there stood a small, but very busy tradetown known as Easy Breezy. Easy Breezy was a port and fishing town that generated a huge amount of seafood and related goods. The biggest company in town, though not the only one, was the Easy Breezy Fishery. They had a fleet of vessels, as well as a large processing facility, cannery, and associated chain of fish markets with locations all over the place.

Early each morning, hover buses that went back and forth to the city to pick up workers. On one of these buses, Grim Glitchfield looked out of the window, half awake. It was late in the winter month of Januari. The bus windows were frosty and the sky was cloudy.

While it didn't really snow west of Machina, it did get damn cold. Grim was dressed warm, wearing a thick blue peacoat and a red beanie. When the bus landed and parked, he stepped out to a space where dirt roads met large parking lots. It was foggy to the degree that the concrete structures near the ocean's edge appeared hidden. Within the obscurity, sparkling electrical equipment and neon overhead signage peered through to light the otherwise cold grey space.

Grim had only been working at the Easy Breezy Fishery (the processing facility) for a few months or so, but that was plenty long enough to know he didn't much like it. But, when he needed employment, they were the ones who hired him, and he didn't want to go back to living with his grandparents. His mom had helped him finance his preliminary Fine Arts degree at the Calysto Center (a part of Artaro University). But, after a political disagreement, she decided to discontinue paying for his education. After that, living on the Artaro University campus quickly disappeared as an option. If he didn't want to sleep on couches forever, he needed to work, and he needed overtime.

The new job was not great. The employees all wore protective gear and face masks on the processing floor. But the smell could not be avoided. It was the saltiest, nastiest smell a person could handle, but somehow everyone slowly became accustomed to it. Grim was not quite there yet. Sometimes, he would gag to himself, then pretend he was fine when the supervisor was nearby.

"Hey Gil," Grim greeted a coworker as he punched in for the day.

Gil nodded in quiet acknowledgement, primarily focused on large fuschia colored squid on the tread before him. He was cleaning and cutting it carefully before packaging. This was the sort of thing one might do all day while working here. Grim preferred not to work with squid when he didn't have to. They were too intelligent, and when they arrived still alive, they would sometimes use telepathy to plead with the workers to let them go. Of course, it was company policy to never let the squid go. They were food and that was the bottom line.

As for Grim, today he was on lobster duty. This was his preference, as it was relatively straight forward. The facility had a large tank where he was to place newly arrived lobsters which were to be shipped out to grocery stores and restaurants all over the place. Working with the lobsters wasn't easy, but there were definitely worse jobs to find in this facility. At least the job didn't involve hacking them to bits.

Occasionally some of the lobsters would have growths or parasitic infections or sludge all over them. Grim would have to throw such specimens into a large funneling machine that dumped tons of water and fish back into the ocean.

Many more employees funneled into work within the next hour or two. All and all, about two-hundred people worked in the building. Most of them were pretty quiet. Many wore contacts or other augmentation devices to keep entertained. Management didn't seem to care as long as your performance was satisfactory. Most people looked sweaty or tired. It was just one of those jobs.

When break time came, Grim stepped out for a cigarette and a sip of coffee. Looking down at his shoes, he could see thin cracks running across the sidewalk. He noticed weeds growing out from the cracks. Among the weeds, one small plant in particular caught his eye. It was a green clover leaf, twisting and rising from the broken concrete, almost pointing in his direction. He leaned over and picked the leaf and examined it out of curiosity. The leaves seemed to wave or move a bit which was a bit strange. Raising his eyebrow in puzzlement, he took a drag from his cigarette and allowed the clover leaf to blow away in the cold wind.

He checked his wrist-connect watch, noticing a few pings from his girlfriend, Daphney. He rubbed his brow, hoping things were okay. This job was quickly becoming a major stressor on their relationship. He had met her a year prior, while still in school. While things had been good between them, Grim was now spending all of his time right here at work. When he did find time to visit her, he was overly exhausted and no fun at all. She always attempted to at least be understanding, but that didn't mean she was particularly happy at this point. Still, she had her band and a busy life in West Onyx to worry about.

Grim looked to see a message which read:

You're not going to move to Easy Breezy are you?

A tad annoyed, Grim wrote back.

I already told you, I'm looking for an apartment in Apathia. Things haven't changed. Today is payday and the plan is still the same.

It was true. Grim had already applied at a few places, but he didn't have enough money to cover the deposit quite yet. Plus, it was hard to schedule time for a viewing. He was working five days a week, and in all of the commercial city-states of Enon there were only five days in the week. Weekends were a long forgotten notion—a fairy tale stamped out by companies like Artaro before Machina was even a full-fledged city.

After clocking back in, Grim was rotated to a prawn station to clean shit from the guts of dead prawns. The prawns were enormous and had an ungodly amount of fecal matter backed up in their tubes. After that, he had to throw them in huge ice boxes for shipping and help pack the boxes onto big trucks at the head of the building. This was way worse than lobster duty.

When lunch time came, Grim ordered a hot sandwich from a talking vending machine outside the building. Then, he walked to a bench near the shore where he had a good view of green ocean waves

and sat down. The Smiley Bay was full of boats to watch go back and forth. Seabirds squawked from perches on nearby rocks.

His watch pinged, and he noticed that his paycheck had gone through. One interesting thing was that a third of his pay had been issued in the new Stanley-bucks currency. Apparently his job was an early adopter. There were bound to be a lot of discounts and deals for a while available for people who could pay in Stanley-bucks instead of normal credits. So, he felt mildly excited about it. It seemed like a good deal.

When he was finished checking his watch, Grim looked down the way to see one of his coworkers sitting by himself eating a cold hamburger from a brown paper Archer Piglet's Pancake House bag. It was this guy, Patrick. He didn't talk too much and when he did it was usually something awkward or pissed off coming out of his mouth. He was one of those people who worked constantly, but seemed like he could hardly stand to be there—basically a more extreme version of how Grim felt.

When Grim got back to work, he was asked to shovel huge shipments of silver scaled fish onto a wide conveyor belt for the rest of the day. He was aided in this task by his coworker, Gil. Gil's neon green hair was dripping with sweat as he worked. Grim had a sense that maybe Gil took some kind of stimulants to get through the long days. He didn't judge him for that. Maybe that's what the job required for some. For all the industrial equipment on site, they still had to use standard shovels to move these fish piles. Back injuries were relatively commonplace in this facility. Grim was sore often. But, he usually just chewed Emoti-Gum to dull the pain and dealt with the rest of the discomfort one day at a time.

"You know, if you're stuck in Easy Breezy, you can rent a bed at the Boatman for cheap," Gil said. "You can pay in credits or the new Stanley-bucks. It's pretty convenient if you think about it."

Grim knew the place, and Gil was probably right. There was no point in going back all the way to Apathia or Onyx just to find a place to crash for a few hours before returning the following morning. Until things changed, he was stuck right here in Easy Breezy.

After the shift ended, Grim walked to the Boatman only to find the hotel with no rooms available. The concierge, however, did make a suggestion to try another hotel along the cliffs a few terrans up the way. The place, he was told, was called The Hotel Subnautica. There would be affordable rooms available there. He just had to walk.

The walk to cliffs was windy and cold, and Grim's feet were sore from work. Luckily the walk took barely more than a half hour. When he got there, he saw that much of the hotel was built into the cliffs with thick walls which descended into the water. Still, there was nothing else too particularly fancy about it. That was a good sign. Grim didn't want to get stuck in some five star luxury hotel situation that he couldn't afford.

The interior lobby of the Hotel Subnautica had the whole fishing village theme down to perfection. At one end there was a help desk with elevators in the center, and an escalator which apparently went down to a subterranean seafood restaurant and bar called the Sunken Emerald where you could get a look at coral reefs from beneath the ocean surface.

Grim inquired about the rooms. If you paid in credits they were a bit pricey, but if you were able to pay in the new Stanley-bucks you got a twenty percent discount. Luckily, Grim had Stanleys in his account and took the deal. Given the decent price, he decided to book the room for the rest of the week.

Quickly, he took a retinal scan which would be used for his hotel room key. Then went down several flights of carpeted stairs to find his room and see what it looked like. After scanning in, he opened the door to find that it wasn't a very large space. It was maybe even a bit cramped. But the bed looked

comfortable enough, and the blankets looked to be of high quality. There was a desk and armchair with a bookshelf by the back wall. This was all normal enough. Yet there was one detail that could not be missed. Behind the armchair, there was a single large window of thick glass that covered most of the space of the wall. Outside of the window was lamp lit ocean water with tall streams of seaweed waving slowly in a soft dance. Walking up to the window, one could look down to see reefs of colorful fish below. Perhaps he would have a better view of said reefs if only his room had been down a few more floors.

Several months passed and the summer began. It was now the month of Juno and Grim was still working five days a week and staying in the same room at the Hotel Subnautica. After his third paycheck, he bought a used scooter and fixed it up. Suddenly, he had transportation, even if it wasn't anything fancy. Each day, he would ride to work to grind all day processing sealife into seafood, and each night he would sit in the armchair by the ocean window to read for a while or stare at the waving seaweed from bed as he fell asleep.

One morning, he woke up and called in sick—not because he was actually sick, but because Daphney decided to drive out to visit him. They ordered food delivery and spent much of the day in bed that day. Then, in the evening, they took Daphney's van to the little downtown section of Easy Breezy. Grim brought his scooter in the back, in case he needed to drive himself back later.

Downtown, they found a divey saloon with booths in the back where hopefully nobody from work would see him out and about drinking and socializing on his sick day.

“How's the apartment hunt going?” Daphney asked. “Any progress at all there?”

Grim set their beers on the table. “A little. I think. It's hard to say until you go to a viewing or make a deal and I've been working every day. But, the viewing appointment is set, and I do have deposit money. I would have the money put together sooner, but I had to repay my Cogship status with the city. That set me back about twenty-five hundred credits. But, I've got everything ready now. It just took longer than expected.”

“Yeah I hope so. It's just been so long that you've been out here, Grim. I never get to see you anymore. I can't keep driving back and forth all the time.” Daphney said. “I know I said it was fine, but I'm starting to wonder. I mean, in order to have a relationship, you have to see each other sometimes at least.”

“Yeah, well I didn't picture my life going quite like this either. I keep thinking—wow, I went to art school for this? But, at the end of the day, I don't know what else to do right now. Anyway, I might have found a place in Apathia. I just need a few more weeks.”

“Well, have you applied for any more jobs?” She asked.

“Just some Street Sweep job,” he answered. “I doubt they'll ping me back about it. I don't want to think about that part quite yet. I need to just focus on getting into a new apartment.”

Across the back room of the bar, an overweight guy with cybernetic eyes turned on a big Mid-Tech television monitor. Holograms projected, but they looked flat and old like the screens from twenty years ago. The guy just drank his beer and flipped the Circuit channels until he found the news.

The news was concerning the titanic Artaro Corporation. The President Executive, Wolfgang Artaro, was dead. The cause: parasites. Already, pundits were arguing about whether the facts were true or not. Some more conspiratorial personalities were arguing that a man of Wolfgang Artaro's stature could

not have died from such a preventable ailment. Some even went so far as to assert that Wolfgang Artaro was poisoned or murdered by similar means. Other pundits argued that such conspiracy chasers were vile and insane and that their theories were damaging to the very fabric of the greater polity of Machina. The heated arguments were very attention grabbing. No wonder the guy with the cybernetic eyes had turned on the television. It was hard to look away.

These were the facts. Wolfgang Artaro was dead. Board Member and V.P., Reginald Leavenworth, was to serve as Interim President Executive of the Artaro Corporation for the remainder of the year until the month of Endel (at the end of the year) when Stanley Artaro would be installed in the position.

In the meantime, more Stanley-bucks were being issued to the banks over the coming days and weeks. The new currency was coming online by the day. By the end of the year, a trillion Stanley-dollars would be in circulation. Pundits were arguing how this might affect the economy, and the current Pulsar Credit currency which had been the primary form of exchange in Machina (and most of Enon) for over a century.

Even the Mayor had things to say about all of this. Mayor Omega Flink could be seen on screen shaking hands (an impressive thing for a hologram) with Stanley Artaro, the Interim Exec. Reginald Leavenworth, and with the rest of the Artaro Corporate Board. By the end of the clip, Stanley Artaro went so far as to present the Mayor with an oversized ticket denominated as a million Stanley-bucks. They laughed and explained this was for historical purposes, of course. People cheered. News pundits and parliament members waxed and fawned over the spectacular display.

“It really does feel like a new Era.” Grim said to Daphney.

“Honestly, I couldn’t give two shits what those corny fuckers in their tophats do with their time,” Daphney replied. “They’re probably all huffing Pollyanna smoke and blowing each other, anyway.” She took a drink of her beer, then grabbed a nail file from her purse and began sanding down her fingernails.

“You don’t think this is a big deal?” Grim asked. “Doesn’t your dad work for Artaro?”

Daphney’s focus remained on her fingernails. “You’re always telling me you feel overworked, Grim,” She said. “But, my dad is overworked more than you. Working at Artaro totally sucks. I don’t think he is even going to stay there. He keeps getting job offers from every other big company. They all need research scientists to help them find new ways to market products to the public. You have to understand, to these people we’re all just lab mice with wallets.”

That was a fair point, Grim thought. He finished his drink.

“Hey, drink the rest of mine too.” Daphney said. “I have to drive back to the city in a few hours. I can put the van on auto-pilot, but it goes too slow. I should probably get a coffee after this.”

They ended up at a donut shop with coffee and donuts. They talked a bit and kissed and then said goodbye. Grim wheeled his scooter out from the back of the van and drove home. The ride home was windy and cold. He looked to the ocean from the road to see the hum and flicker of lights from the many fishing vessels of Smiley Bay. At one point he stopped to see the large plantlife-encrusted tail fin of an Algae Whale swimming in the deep waters not too far from the shore.

There were a few Artaro Cars buzzing along on the road behind him, but traffic was light. The rest of the drive back to the hotel went quickly. When he got back, he took the stairwell down to his room. He was feeling rather tired.

When got to the room he turned on a small lamp on the desk near the sea window. He grabbed a can of fizzy water from the mini-fridge and sat down in the armchair. Seaweed waved slowly in the ocean outside the glass. He thought for a moment about how if the glass ever broke for some reason, the sea water would pour in and flood the place. But, the view was peaceful. He almost drifted to sleep right there in the chair.

Then, something strange happened. A squid, maybe a meter and half long, swam right up to the window. Grim looked at it in amusement, though he was a bit startled as well. The squid appeared a reddish fuchsia color with large orange eyes below a bulky spotted mantle topped with a pair of waving fins. When Grim looked at the creature, he could tell it was looking back at him. It began shifting hue from a dark fuchsia to brighter fiery red, back and forth between the two colors. Then it placed a tentacle with suckers right to the glass.

For a minute, Grim just looked at the animal in puzzled fascination. Then, he placed his hand on the glass in an attempt to reciprocate whatever it was trying to communicate with him. Perhaps, it was just a hello. Grim didn't really know.

Suddenly, he could hear a voice, coming from within his head.

"Chom," It said.

"Chom?" He said aloud. "What?"

"Chom," it repeated.

Was this creature speaking to him? Grim had seen these squid before in the processing facility, but they were usually always dead. He had seen warning signs about squid telepathy before but had never really paid much attention to it.

Grim thought for a moment. "Is your name, Chom?" he asked.

"Chom. Brother. Missing. Chom missing."

"Chom is your brother?" Grim asked.

"Yes. Chom missing," the squid repeated.

"Okay," Grim replied. "What's your name then?"

"Me Irid. Irid Chom sister," the animal specified. *"Boat take Chom. Boat take Chom to bad place."*

Grim's mind instantly turned to the Easy Breezy Fishery processing facility. He knew lots of fish and sealife went into that place, and mostly they were food after that. He never really paid it much mind before, but now this creature had a name and she was speaking to him. Obviously she was scared and worried for her brother.

"What name you?" the Squid asked. *"What name?"*

"Grim," he replied. "My name is Grim."

"Grim help Irid find Chom," she said. "Go to bad place, bring Chom home."

And there it was. Grim felt his heart sink in his chest. He worked with seafood every day and was not a vegetarian or an animal rights advocate or anything of the sort. But this animal was literally speaking to him. Perhaps it wasn't just an animal at all, but rather a sentient species like the humanoid Gastropods (or slugs) who worked and traded stocks in Machina—or the shy Isopods that traveled across Enon as merchants. It made perfect sense that there could be more oceanic beings who could think and speak out there. They simply weren't recognized by Enon's commercial city-states or by people on land in general—maybe because they lived underwater or because they didn't stand upright. It was difficult to say for sure.

“I think I work at the place you're talking about,” Grim said. “We collect fish to eat. But squid come in too. I'm sorry. That's just how it is. People sometimes eat you guys. I don't know what to tell you exactly.”

“Find Chom. Chom not fish. Chom good squid.”

“Okay, I'll look for him tomorrow morning. If I find him, I'll funnel him back out to the ocean. But, only if I can help him. I didn't know you guys could talk like this. I just didn't know. I'm sorry.”

“You good listener.” Irid said. *“Chom have many brothers and sisters. They be happy when see Chom okay.”*

“I can't promise anything, but I'll help him if I can.” Grim said.

The squid looked at him as if to study his face. Then, blasted off into the depths. Grim was left, shocked and moved by what had happened. After that, he shut the curtains and tried to sleep. But even with curtains shut, he could see the shadows of the waving seaweed against the lamplit ocean water. But, eventually, he fell asleep.

He woke up early the next morning, hoping to clock in before processing began. Maybe he could find the squid before one of his coworkers cut it into pieces. When he got to work, most of the lights were still turned off. He clocked in early knowing that nobody would care because the facility was short staffed and because there was always so much work to be done. But when he got to the treads, he found them clean with no new shipments coming in. For this squid Grim was looking for, this was probably good news. It meant that the inventory was likely still on one of the fishing vessels parked at the docks out back.

After suiting up in his protective gear, he followed a wide concrete corridor to the ramps and wet tanks in the back of the building where unloading took place. At the moment there were four large vessels ready for unloading. Both of them from the previous day. Grim decided to start with the large boat on the left, and if he couldn't find the squid there, he would work his way rightward.

Aboard the first vessel, a few workers cleaned their stations and drank their morning coffees. Luckily none of them asked any questions. But, unfortunately Grim didn't see Squid in any of the wet tanks. There were plenty of large and colorful fish. But no squids at all.

The second vessel was different. There were plenty of squids in the wet tanks, though none of them seemed to be of the large Ecologian Reef Squid variety. He looked for a while, avoiding boat workers. But, he didn't see any squid that remotely looked like the one he was looking for.

It wasn't until the third vessel that he found wet tanks with Ecologian Squid in them. There were several of them. Grim didn't know if any of them were Chom. He felt bad for all of them because now he understood that they were probably all very likely sentient and intelligent. So he crouched down and put his hand on one of the larger wet tanks and told the squid that he would help them.

One of the squid came over and looked at Grim suspiciously.

“Hey!” Grim said, “Have you seen a squid named Chom? I want to help you guys, but I need to find Chom. You can tell what I’m saying, right? Yeah. You hear me. You find Chom and I help you.”

The squid made a squawking sound and slinked away further into the tank, out of sight. Grim wondered if maybe he had pissed it off or scared it.

But, after a few moments the squid returned with another squid behind it. This second squid was a little over a meter in length, maybe. It was a purplish color. Far more purple than Irid in the ocean window, and definitely smaller than Irid, as well.

The suspicious looking squid put a tentacle on the glass, and Grim heard a sound as if it sprung right from his own thoughts.

“*Chom.*” the voice said.

The squid had brought him Chom. Just like that. There he was. But, like the other squid, Chom was looking at Grim quite suspiciously.

“I didn’t realize before...” Grim said. “You don’t deserve to be here. I can see that now. Look, I spoke to another squid from a window at a hotel near the reefs north of here. A squid named Irid spoke to me and explained that you guys can talk and stuff. Irid sent me here to find you.”

Grim saw right then that the pupils in the large eyes of the squid he believed to Chom dilated in a quick and drastic way. The squid swam close to the glass and leaned close.

“*Chom. Me. Chom.*” A voice answered in Grim’s mind. “*Irid save Chom?*”

“Well, yes. Sort of,” Grim answered. “Irid sent me. I’m gonna save you. I’m Grim. I’m gonna get you out of here.”

“*Grim,*” Chom said.

“Yes,” Grim said.

Then, Grim did one of the craziest things he might have ever done in his entire life. He reached right into the wet tank and grabbed onto this large and strange squid. As he picked it up out of the salty water, he could feel its barbs and tentacles wrap around him. He knew at this moment that if the squid wanted to, it could slice him up, badly. Also, it didn’t smell great, but as an employee of the processing facility, Grim was used to that sort of thing.

Quickly and quietly, Grim hustled along the boat’s interior corridors, looking for an easy way out. He turned one corner to see some employees stocking crates with sea urchins. Rather than running past them, he decided to try a different route. He found a second hall with many wet tanks and nets of fish. There was one guy in the room, but he appeared to be napping. So, Grim risked it and ran past him.

When he got to the end of the hall he saw an exit, but there were workers and even an Artaro Robot with a forklift outside. Taking this exit would be far too risky. But, then an idea occurred to him. He didn’t need an exit. He just needed a way to slip Chom out of the boat and into the ocean.

He turned down another corridor and found a small stairwell. This led into the ship’s lower deck. He ran past a ton of pressure dials and engine equipment until he found what he was looking for. On the

ground was a large panel where divers could exit into the ocean right here from the ship. This was what he needed. This was good too because Chom's barbs were beginning to cut his arms up.

Carefully, Grim placed Chom on the ground. The squid watched as he pried the floor panel open with a crowbar. The metal clacked as the panel opened. Looking down into the opening, the ocean was maybe three or four feet down.

"Okay," Grim said, looking at the squid. "This is it. Then I'll go back and see if I can help some of the others."

Then, just as the situation was about to be resolved, a prying pair of eyes under a large pair of glasses stepped into the space.

"Hey what are you doing down here?" Patrick inquired with his messy blue hair tucked into the hood of his plastic pink protective robe. "Did you just let a squid out into the water? If Captain Shivers sees you, he's going to have a fit."

"Yeah, well I had to." Grim answered, trying to regain his composure.

"You're not supposed to do that. Why would you do that? You're going to get in huge trouble for this. I think I have to go tell Captain Shivers. I don't want to get in trouble, either. I always get in trouble for mistakes everyone else makes around here."

Grim had to think of something fast. The fact was, Puck was pretty weird and would almost definitely report him for this.

"Look," Grim said. "That squid was contaminated. It had that black goo they warned us about. That goo with the tiny spiders in it. It wasn't safe to keep it in the wet tank, so I'm just following protocol. If you tell the Captain, you're just going to get yourself into trouble for causing an issue where there isn't one. That's how hologram managers work, Puck."

Grim felt like a bit of an asshole at this moment. He was completely bullshitting Puck and he knew it. But, it had to be done. He couldn't have this hall-monitor twerp squashing his only chance to help this animal. Luckily, his explanation worked.

"Oh, alright. I guess that's probably right" Puck said. "Well, you better get it out of there then. You don't want to handle it for longer than you need to if it has contaminants."

Grim climbed down onto a step inside the opening and helped lower the squid into the cold ocean water. He felt as it wrapped one of its tentacles around his ankle.

"You can go now!" Grim said. "You're safe."

"*Help squid.*" Chom said. "*Help all squid. Squid all need Grim. Chom thank Grim. Irid be happy.*"

Then Chom slipped fully into the water and zipped down into the ocean.

Grim climbed out from the opening back up onto the floor of the lower deck. He looked up to Patrick Puck who still looked pretty confused and bewildered.

"Okay, so I remember when we had training on micro-spider contaminations, but I've never actually seen anything like that before. Were they gross?" Puck scratched his head as he spoke, "Also, why were you talking to it?"

“I was just trying to get it to let go of me. Those things have barbs, Puck. Anyway, I had to get it out of here immediately. To answer your first question, yes contaminants are gross, and they are a serious issue. I think we have to get rid of the whole tank.”

“Oh, yeah. I guess we would. Where’s the tank?” Puck asked.

“Upstairs. I’ll show you.” Grim replied.

Grim led Puck upstairs to the tank with the other squid. When he returned they all swam to the glass, curious. But rather than assuring the squid that he had helped Chom, Grim tried to play it cool like he was following protocol.

“This is the tank, Puck.” Grim said. “We have to drain it and dump these squid into the water.”

“Why not just throw them down the disposal with the tank water instead?” Puck asked. “If they’re infected we probably shouldn’t be picking them up. Plus, like they have claws. That could be dangerous.”

“Nonsense.” Grim said. “They are very docile creatures. I just carried that squid all the way to the diving door no problem. I don’t see why we couldn’t do the same for the rest of them.”

Grim looked over to the wet tank. There were around twenty more Ecologian Squid in the tank. Most of them were over a meter in length with plenty of sharp looking barbs.

That was when Gilbert Pez entered the room. “Hey. There you are Grim. I thought you were going to help me with lobsters this morning. I was looking all over the facility for you until the manager said he saw you come out back.”

“I think Grim is breaking safety protocol,” Puck told Gilbert Pez. “These squid are contaminated and he thinks we should carry these squid to the diving exit downstairs instead of flushing them with the waste water down the disposal.”

“What’s the big deal, Puck.” Gilbert said. “You sound like a damn hall monitor.”

“Thank you.” Grim replied. “I was just trying to get these squid out of here in a way that wouldn’t spread contaminants into the ship’s disposal system. Even those tanks are important for the ship’s internal water supply.”

“Sure yeah.” Pez answered. “I get it. It’s cool.”

So, the three of them spent the next two hours or so carrying the twenty squid downstairs, one squid per person for several trips. By the end, they were all a little bit cut up from the barbs, but the squid were all surprisingly well behaved.

When they came back up to finally drain the tank, Puck noticed a dead squid at the back of the tank.

“Shouldn’t we carry that one too?” He said. “You know, so it doesn’t contaminate the disposal system.”

“No, I think it’s probably fine.” Grim answered. Then he flipped a few levers to drain the wet tank. The squid and all the water flushed out, and the tank was basically clean.

Later that day, when Grim and Pez were on lobster tank duty in the main building once again, Pez turned off his neural-port plug-in to quiet the music in his ears.

“So, what exactly was that earlier?” Pez asked. “Why’d you want to let them Squid out like that? You just wanted to see them live? Was that it? I won’t say anything man. I just gotta know what it was.”

Grim raised his eyebrow. He knew Gilbert Pez was astute but he would have preferred to not have to explain.

“Okay,” Grim answered. “I didn’t want to tell Patrick since I knew he wouldn’t understand and probably just get me in trouble. But those Squid they talk. They have telepathy. You know, like the signs say. I never heard them actually do it before, but those Ecologian Reef Squid are actually smart. They have families and stuff and one of them has a sister who wanted me to help him. So I helped him, okay. I know it’s crazy.”

“Hah!” Pez laughed. “I knew it man.”

“What?” Grim said. “What do you mean, you knew?”

“Dude,” Pez laughed. “Those squid talk, man. I’ve heard them talk to me like ten times right in my goddamn head. They want you to let them out. Let them go. That’s because they don’t want to be served on a plate with some rice, man. I never let them go before though, because I thought I’d get in trouble. I didn’t want to get canned for the sake of some weird animal.”

“So, do you think we did the right thing there?” Grim said.

“Hell no!” Pez laughed. “You could have gotten us in big trouble there if you hadn’t come up with that contamination bullshit. But, it worked out, so who cares. I guess if they’re smart and have families out there in the ocean, then it’s their lucky day. I’d just as soon have turned them into calamari, but I guess it’s also nice to be able to help sometimes.”

Grim and Pez laughed for a minute, and then got on with the rest of their day.

A few weeks later, Grim finally got the key to move into his own apartment on the east side of Machina’s Apathia District. Judging from the hologram specs, it was not a very spectacular place. It looked like a simple studio apartment with a single window and fire escape. Nevertheless, he was excited to check the place out.

Grim’s dad, Roland, came out to Easy Breezy and picked up his scooter and his suitcase. Then they had a long, boring drive back to Machina. It took several hours to get to Apathia, and when they got there they had to stop at Grim’s grandparent’s place to pick up Grim’s computer terminal, music station, and a few of his jackets. Of course they had to pick up his dog, Rip, as well. That was important.

But, eventually, they got to the place and unpacked. Grim even ordered a boxed mattress that showed up via the vacuum mail tube. Then he surfed his food options. Holograms of restaurant menu items projected from his watch. He liked seafood, but thought he might avoid it for a while. Instead, he decided to have a delivery drone drop off a big bowl of noodle soup with beef and bok choy. His dog, Ripley, sat with him as he ate. The little brown pug looked at him with big eyes, awaiting food scraps with muted whining noises. Eventually Grim caved in and gave the dog a strip of beef.

When he rested in bed that night, he knew it wouldn’t be sustainable to keep working in Easy Breezy much longer so he followed up with a few of his job applications. He noticed that the street sweep

job he had applied for a while back had replied to him. So, he asked them for a good time to come in for an interview. It seemed like as decent a plan as anything else.

As the blue sun exited the sky and the broken pieces of the moon slowly took its place, Grim wondered what living in Apathia would mean for him. He was on his own, in a decent place, right where he needed to be. But, it was impossible to know what would come next.

When he slept, dim dreams of green eyes and green pastures drifted in his mind. And as the night continued, darker and dimmer dreams of men in long coats with long knives. There was a looming feeling. As a Half-Ravell, his very genetics held markers originally designed for cool and rational waking thought processes at all times of day and night. But his human genes were pushing back. He did not know it yet, but Grim could and did dream just as a typical human might—only in a slightly more muted, subdued way. Late in the night, he woke up to drink some water and use the bathroom. He did not recognize that he had dreamt, at all. There was no memory of anything—just odd mixed feelings of hope and anxiety.

Supplemental Character Information:

Grim Glitchfield:

[Eyes: Fuschia] [Hair: Thick, Indigo]

[Born: 165 D.C.][Background: Half-Ravell, Pale Grey complexion, from Machina]

A Half-Ravell fishery worker from the Apathia District of Machina. Grim has an art degree and would prefer to find a different job as soon as possible. While Grim's life is far from perfect, he is always searching for the next step to achieve his goals and move forward. Grim has a girlfriend in Machina named Daphney, and a dog named Rip who is currently living with his grandparents. He smokes Happy-Go-Lucky cigarettes and likes seafood and noodles. He finds video games and virtual reality to be very addictive and can get really competitive when gaming. More can be learned about Grim in other short stories like *Emoti-Punk* and *Lucid in Machina*.

Gilbert Pez:

[Eyes: Augmented Violet][Hair: Messy, Green]

[Born: 162 D.C.][Background: Rosari, Tan Brown Complexion, from Termite Hill]

Gilbert Pez is a guy born and raised in Machina but with a Rosari upbringing from his parents. He has a few holographic tattoos and genetically shampooed his hair green. Unlike Grim, Gilbert is content to live in Easy Breezy and plans to live there for the foreseeable future.

Patrick Puck:

[Eyes: Sky Blue][Hair: Messy, Light Blue]

[Born: 172 D.C.] [Background: Newworlder, White, from Machina]

Like Grim, Patrick Puck is a new employee at the Easy Breezy Fishery. He is young and this is his first job. Needless to say, he absolutely hates it.

Jenni Yang:

[Eyes: Dark Brown] [Hair: Black] [Background: Kao Islands (near Rodash), Immigrated from Kao Islands to Easy Breezy]

Jenni Yang is a worker at the Easy Breezy Fishery. She has many responsibilities at the facility, but is often seen cleaning fish guts from the treads and floors with a large spray pack connected to a hose.

Captain Shivers: [Eyes: Red with Eye Patch][Hair: Dark Grey Hair and Beard][Hologram]

A mascot Hologram designed to oversee the Easy Breezy Fishery processing facility. He appears as a fishing boat captain who had been lost at sea. As with most management holograms, Captain Shivers operates as a tyrant program. This means that he is often very harsh and demanding to the employees, but oppositely personable when speaking to suppliers or customers.

Daphney Tsu-Avilon:

[Eyes: Dark Brown] [Hair: Black] [Background: Rodashi, Tan Complexion, Raised in Machina]

Daphney is a working musician and part-time bartender who lives in Machina's West Onyx District. She plays electric guitar for a popular underground Emoti-Punk band called Memetic Night, and lives in West Onyx with her bandmate, Betty.

Irid (Squid): [Color: Fuschia, Hue Shifts Red][Size: 1.5 Meters]

Irid is an Ecologian Reef Squid with a red complexion, purple spots, and large inquisitive eyes. She is looking for her brother Chom, who has been taken by a fishing vessel. Like other Ecologian Reef Squid, she has the ability to speak to other beings using telepathy.

Chom (Squid): [Color: Fuschia][Size: 1.2 Meters]

Chom is an Ecologian Reef Squid with a dark purple complexion, blue spots, and large trusting eyes. Unfortunately, he was taken aboard a fishing vessel, and is in need of rescuing. Like his sibling, Irid, he has the ability to speak using telepathy.

Rip (Pug Dog): [Color: Brown][Size: Small]

Ripley, or Rip for short, is Grim's pug dog. He wears a green collar and is a bit fat. While he isn't particularly well trained, he is totally adorable, so he has that going for him.

Important Mentioned Characters:

Stanley Artaro: In the time of this story, Stanley Artaro has not yet come into his fated position of President Executive at the Artaro Corporation. However, as this time of ascendancy is quickly approaching, Stanley Artaro's team of economic researchers have begun the introduction of a new currency (the Stanley-buck) into Machina and surrounding markets. As could be expected, this recent and quite major change in Machina's economy is dominating the news cycle.

Mayor Omega Flink: During the time of this story, Machina's Mayor is a large and powerful holographic man named Omega Flink. He is an advanced hologram, meaning that he has the ability and government approval to interact with real objects in material space. Many believe that he is an artificial intelligence, while others suspect that he is in fact a human piloting a holographic form from another location.

Grim Glitchfield Early Life Timeline:

Gregory Roger Glitchfield [165 D.C. to 275 D.C.]

- 164 D.C.** Deli-owner and butcher, Roland Glitchfield meets Artemis Valentaire at his shop.
- 165 D.C.** Artemis Valentaire has an artificial pregnancy with Roland as a genetic donor.
Grim is grown in a bag and born.
Artemis returns to Alchemia leaving Grim with his father and grandparents.
- 170 D.C.** Grim meets his mother for the first time.
He is placed in the Apathia Public School System by his family.
- 184 D.C.** Grim adopts a pug from the Apathia Animal Shelter. Names him Ripley, or Rip for short.
- 188 D.C.** Grim's mother pays for him to pursue a Fine Arts Degree for two years.
He specializes in traditional oil painting.
- 189 D.C.** Grim begins dating the musician, Daphney Tsu-Avilon.
- 190 D.C.** Grim attempts to pay for his own schooling by getting a job at a Fishery.
He soon drops out of school.
He meets Patrick Puck who also works at the fishery.
- 191 D.C.** After moving to an apartment in Apathia, Grim quits the fishery and gets a job as a street sweep.

NOTE: Learn more in the subsequent short story, ***Emoti-Punk***. (which stars Grim and takes place in 192 D.C.)

- 192 D.C.** Grim and Daphney Tsu-Avilon break up.
He meets waitress, Penelope Curtis, at the Wizard's Bar in West Onyx.

A Map of West Enon: Easy Breezy can be found to the west of Machina near Smiley Bay.

