

DRAGONS O U L C H R O N I C L E
RELICS OF AETERNUM



A SHORT STORY TO ACCOMPANY THE ALBUM BY
HOLLAND ALBRIGHT

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This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events portrayed in this work are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

RELICS OF AETERNUM

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DRAGONSOUL CHRONICLE:
RELICS OF AETERNUM

A short story to accompany the album.

Holland Albright

World of Fantasy / A Tale of Long Ago: Thousands of years ago, a magical sect of unknown origin created powerful relics to aid the inhabitants of the world. These gifts from the Ancient Ones came to be known as the *Gods' Artifacts* for the incredible power they possessed. At first, the power was evenly dispersed among the land and the realm was held in balance. However, over time, people began to desire the power for themselves. Wars erupted as many sought to obtain the artifacts to take control of the realm.

During this time, dragons formed alliances with men and fought against one another to near extinction. Seeing the turmoil, the Ancient Ones split the world and created a secret realm, where the artifacts would remain hidden away out of the reach of mortal beings: Aeternum, the Eternal Sanctuary. In the wrong hands, the power of all of the *Gods' Artifacts* would bring only destruction.

One of the last dragons, allied with the northern people and protector of the Woodlands, was tasked with guarding a compass. Made of platinum and with a crystal needle, it was the only link to the realm of Aeternum in case the Ancient Ones needed to return. The dragon retreated to Sagewood Forest, where he kept the compass safe for hundreds of years.

In the midst of these tumultuous wars, the Ancient Ones vanished from Ilanereus. With their disappearance, the wars ended as the memory of the artifacts began to fade from the minds of men. But as long as the link to Aeternum remained, so did the opportunity for someone to gather the *Gods' Artifacts* and wreak chaos on the world once more.

Time passed. The stories of the old wars faded to myth and were almost forgotten. Centuries later, when strange occurrences and monsters started to appear across the land, rumors of an ancient power resurfaced. The legend, nearly forgotten, was given life anew as people began searching for the relics hidden by the Ancient Ones so many years ago.

A Hero Yet to Be: Born and raised in the humble village of Domum in the Northern Woodlands of the continent of Ilanereus, Theo lived and worked on a small farm, taking care of his younger brother, Tiernan. Their father had passed shortly after Tiernan was born, and they were raised by their mother, Amaria - a retired commander of the Queen's Guard. When Theo was 15, Amaria was summoned to aid in the battle against the wicked black dragon, Eigengrau. She never returned, and the two brothers had only each other ever since.

One morning, Theo sent Tiernan off to a nearby village to buy some supplies they needed. Normally, they would go together, but Tiernan, who was now 15 insisted he was old enough to go alone. Theo warned Tiernan to be vigilant on his way. Lately, the elder-folk had been telling the children in the village the tale of the Ancient Ones and their powerful relics and their magical fabled lands. The legend was carried across the land on the wind, and the promise of treasure and riches had set more than a few folks off hunting for them, despite the dangerous creatures and unnatural storms that wreaked havoc across the continent. Theo couldn't help but feel that they were connected somehow - this legend and the sudden appearance of monsters. Tiernan assured Theo of how many times he had traveled safely across the Northern Woodlands, and set off on his cart to buy the supplies they needed.

A short time later, Theo saw Tiernan already returning, half falling off his cart. Something was wrong. Theo ran to him, catching him as he collapsed. Tiernan was burning with a fever, and had strange marks that

seemed to crack the skin around his temples as if his skin were made of stone. Theo took his brother inside and sought the village healer. After examining Tiernan, the healer said he did not have a remedy. This was no illness, but the curse of a dark wizard. The healer told Theo that perhaps in Nova Lux he could find the remedy he needed to save his brother. Without something to stop the curse, Tiernan would die.

Theo had no choice. He felt responsible for his brother's ill-fortune. If only he had not let Tiernan go alone. He would make the journey to find a cure. The roads were perilous, so he grabbed his mother's sword for his trek to the capital. He felt as if he were in one of the old stories, which would have been exciting if not for the curse slowly killing the only family he had left.

Dragon of the Sacred Grove: The fastest route to Nova Lux would be through Sagewood Forest. Theo would cross the river from the Northern to the Southern Woodlands, and then make his way east. After many days, he reached the edge of Sagewood Forest. As he ventured into the woods, a dense fog began to settle on the forest floor, obscuring the path. Theo pressed on and soon realized he was lost. He had no sense of where he came from or where he needed to go.

After what must have been hours of aimless wandering, he caught a glimmer of light breaking through the trees. He moved a few hanging branches out of his way and revealed a beautiful, lush grove. Sunbeams streamed through leaves overhead. Soft light emanated from some of the plants. And in the center of it all was a small pool of crystal clear, shimmering water. On the far end of the pool, he saw something he never could have expected, and if he weren't seeing it himself, he wouldn't believe it existed. A large, emerald green, scaled beast with giant wings. A dragon. Theo cautiously moved closer and noticed that it was badly wounded. The dragon sensed his presence and looked up, staring intensely at Theo. The heavy silence lasted only a moment. Visibly angry and rearing back, the dragon demanded to know if Theo was there to finish him off as fire sparked through his teeth. Theo, heart racing, gulped hard, and explained that he was traveling and got lost in the fog. The dragon's demeanor slowly changed as he mulled over Theo's response. He finally introduced himself as Noru, once referred to by many as the Dragon of the Sacred Grove before people began to forget the wars and the ancient artifacts. Then the memory of him faded as well.

Noru explained that he was attacked by greedy humans who sought a dragon's hoard, but the only thing of value he had was a compass made of platinum. He told Theo what the thieves didn't know - the compass pointed to the fabled lands spoken of in the legend that now swept across Ilanereus. It was the only way to get there, the last link to that secret realm. He admitted that he became careless about his duty to keep it safe since the disappearance of the Ancient Ones who had entrusted it to him. He believed no one would find him as the stories of the wars and the relics faded from memory. The compass would be safe as it was forgotten.

Noru surmised that the compass would likely be pawned off somewhere. No place would be better to pawn the treasure than the old capital, the Grand City of Iron and Steam. Now, however, it was a city of thieves, and even that small amount of platinum could fetch a high price within its walls. Noru had a request for Theo: find the compass and use it to reach the fabled lands of Aeternum, by its true name. There, Theo would find remnants of the Ancient Ones' power that could put an end to the growing darkness spreading across the land. The *Gods' Artifacts*.

Remembering the purpose of his journey, Theo apologetically declined Noru's mission. He explained that he needed to find a healer in Nova Lux to remove the curse from his brother; he was no hero, just a farmer from Domum. Noru let out a slightly pained laugh, telling him that no healer in this realm could remove the dark curse Theo described. The best chance to save his brother was in Aeternum, where perhaps some remnant of the Ancient Ones or their relics would hold the power to remove the curse. There was nothing in Ilanereus with such an ability. He retreated into a nearby cave to rest and tend to his wounds and called for someone by the name of Loestvaria.

Loestvaria: A tall and slender woman with pointed ears appeared from behind the thick trunk of a tall pine. Theo couldn't tell if she was there the whole time, but suspected she might have been. Loestvaria had been a good friend of Noru's for many years. She had come to discuss the appearance of the monsters and unnatural storms that had been rampant across Ilanereus. She found Noru mere moments after the thieves had attacked and decided then that she would track them down and retrieve the compass when Theo stepped into the grove. Loestvaria hid herself, ready to attack in case Theo was another thief, and silently watched their conversation unfold from behind the great pine. Noru suggested that she and Theo join forces to find the compass and then use it to find the fabled lands of Aeternum. Together, they could help each other achieve both of their goals; and so, Theo and Loestvaria set off together to find the compass.

The Shattered Mountains - Titan Peak: The two travelers decided to head south towards the City of the Western Winds in the Sapphire Vales. The most direct route would take them across the Shattered Mountains. As Theo and Loestvaria trekked through the mountains, they passed the infamous Titan Peak, the center of the old mountain towns. An entire city had been carved into the rock hundreds of years ago when the mountain towns that were sprinkled around Titan Peak once bustled with life. Now all that was left was rubble and ruin. It was said that a battle raged here and that dragons, fighting one another above the highest peak, destroyed large parts of the mountain range, including the towns that travelers and traders used to pass through. Loestvaria knew of this place from Noru's stories. He had told her that the battle that took place here was over just one of the *Gods' Artifacts* held by the mountain-folk. These ruins were a stark reminder of what could happen should the compass fall into the wrong hands. An aura of sadness lingered about the ruined mountain towns. It was not a place that Theo or Loestvaria wanted to idle, so they moved quickly through, spending as few nights as necessary in those sad, shattered ruins.

City of the Western Winds: The City of Western Winds was a busy town of trade and commerce and a popular place for travelers from across the continent. They considered going to Nova Lux, but it was huge and sprawling; they hoped to find clues about the compass' whereabouts in this smaller city where people from all across Ilanereus funneled through. They spent time listening in taverns and on the streets for information about visitors or tradesmen or merchants, all in hopes of hearing anything that might give a hint to the whereabouts of the stolen compass. They heard rumors of a mysterious new arrival and, a few times, caught a glimpse of a shadowy, cloaked figure roaming about the city. Every time they passed, it set them on edge. Loestvaria felt the figure pulsing with a trace of magic, but something about it wasn't quite right, as if it were muted, or muddled. And dark.

Just about when they were ready to give up, Theo overheard someone mention treasure hunting in a place that he recognized from the newly revived legend of the fabled lands. The treasure hunter had come to the Sapphire Vales to investigate the Runic Temple of the Crimson Moon. The temple was ancient and structurally unsound, so there were few who would enter anymore other than looters and the occasional team of researchers. But now that tales of the *Gods' Artifacts* had swept a fervor across the continent, travelers from all over were pillaging through Ilanereus' historic sites. Theo suggested that they go to the temple, as the thieves who stole the compass may be after other treasure on their way to the Grand City of Iron and Steam.

Runic Temple of the Crimson Moon: The temple was in ruins. Stones and bricks lay strewn about and empty grooves shown in the entryway where precious gems had once been set. Unsure of exactly what it was they were searching for, they made their way deeper into the crumbling, tomb-like ruins. The sun peeked through in places where the ceiling had fallen in. While they investigated, a ray of light reflected off of something shining in the room and right into Theo's eyes. Blinded for a moment, he tripped over a root that had grown up through the stone floor and fell into a wall. He grabbed an old tapestry for support, but it was so old and thread-worn that it ripped, sending him face-first onto the stone floor. Stifling a laugh, Loestvaria stepped over to help him up when she

noticed a peculiar stone in the wall that had been covered by the tapestry. It looked as though it hadn't aged with the rest of the temple. Grabbing the edges, Loestvaria pulled out the stone and looked into the space behind. She saw something glimmer, but only when she looked at it from a certain angle. She reached inside the space behind the stone - almost up to her shoulder - when she finally got a hold of something. It wouldn't move, but as she fiddled with it, it twisted, and she pulled it back just a few inches before it locked and wouldn't budge. They heard a click and the sound of stone scraping stone from further within the dark halls of the temple.

They searched for where the sound had come from, and found a doorway partially covered by an inset stone door. It seemed that the door began to open, but got stuck mid-way. Theo and Loestvaria worked together to make enough room to pass through and found themselves in a secret room containing only a small, ornate box, wrapped with silver filigree in intricate patterns. It opened with a puff of dust as part of the delicate filigree crumbled away. Inside was a scroll written in an ancient language that neither Theo nor Loestvaria could understand. There were scholars in Nova Lux renowned for their knowledge of the history of Ilanereus, so Loestvaria took the scroll in hopes that they could find someone to translate it. As they left, Loestvaria felt a presence similar to that of the cloaked figure in the City of the Western Winds, but as she looked around them, no one was there.

Upon leaving the temple, they happened upon a group of researchers busily studying the exterior and the temple grounds. One of them, a short, stout woman with a notebook in hand and another tied to her waist, looked up from carefully observing something on one of the steps leading to the entrance where Theo and Loestvaria now stood. She rose from her crouch, introduced herself as Astessa, and explained that she was here to study the ruins. Loestvaria asked if she could perhaps translate the scroll they found. Astessa, beside herself with excitement that they had found this piece of ancient history, was eager to help. After a few minutes of study and referring to a notebook she carried in her pocket, she stated that without more intensive research and a few books she didn't have on hand, she could only translate part of the scroll. It mentioned the ruins in the far north of the Aesolis Desert, but nothing about fabled lands or Aeternum.

Not convinced of the scroll's connection to the fabled artifacts or the other realm, and without much more information to be gleaned from it, Theo and Loestvaria gave the scroll to the researcher, who was keen to study it further. They made their way to the Grand City of Iron and Steam in hopes of a better lead.

Grand city of Iron and Steam / The Cloaked Figure: The Grand City of Iron and Steam - a sprawling city built of iron and run by steam powered machines. Once a magnificent capital, remnants of its former and somewhat oppressive grandeur yet remained. But when the crown relocated, the Grand City of Iron and Steam became a refuge for smugglers and thieves; a capital now only for the world's dark markets.

Theo and Loestvaria began scouring the city to find the compass. They looked specifically for pawn shops, and in this city of thieves, there were more than a few. They decided to split up to cover more ground. As Loestvaria turned down a side street that dead-ended into a tall iron gate, she saw a familiar shadowy figure enter a shop just ahead. She felt the same energy emanating from them as the person who set her on edge in the City of the Western Winds, so she slipped through a bent opening in the gate and cautiously followed.

When Loestvaria neared the shop's door, she heard shouting quickly followed by exasperated, hushed voices. She leaned in near the door and caught a glimpse of something small and shiny quickly move from the shopkeeper's hands into a box, which they promptly locked. The cloaked figure, visibly angry, demanded the item in the box, gesturing and gesticulating to no avail to a flustered but stubborn shopkeeper. After some back and forth, the person in the cloak began muttering softly, making strange symbols with their hands. The shadows on the walls became darker than pitch, and slowly - menacingly - crept inward towards the shopkeeper. Panicking, the shopkeeper offered to take any price, but the shadows kept growing. In one swift movement, the shopkeeper pulled out the box, dropped it on the counter, unlocked it, and dropped the key. A spindly hand emerged from the cloak and snatched up the small, shiny item before vanishing within the loose folds of cloth, leaving the box

empty on the counter. Loestvaria ducked out of the doorway and back onto the street just before the cloaked figure turned around to leave.

Once the shadowy being was well enough away, Loestvaria entered the shop to inquire about what she had observed. The shopkeeper told her that he had come upon some sort of compass, but it was broken. It didn't even have cardinal directions printed on it. He had hoped to keep it, as it was an attractive bauble with a very pretty crystal needle, even though it was completely useless. This confirmed Loestvaria's suspicion that it was the compass stolen from Noru. She went to find Theo, and together they tried to think of a way to retrieve the compass. Theo and Loestvaria eventually found the cloaked figure in a tavern later that evening, but he sat with a companion: a dark elf wearing a hooded cape – not an uncommon sight in the Grand City. Theo and Loestvaria sat at a table far enough away to not be noticed, but near enough to catch parts of their conversation in between breaks in the bustling noise of the room. Loestvaria cast a spell to enhance their hearing, and they listened. The cloaked figure spoke of the ancient artifacts: powerful and destructive things. Anyone who wielded them would have the ability to conquer the continent, and more. He could command the seas and the wind, enlist the aid of the old dragons, control them, and rain down fire to scorch the earth.

Theo realized he was leaning too far in their direction and quickly leaned back in his seat. He racked his mind. How could he get the compass? The cloaked figure and the dark elf rose to leave. Now was Theo's chance. He moved to stand, but hesitated. Understanding his intentions, Loestvaria reminded Theo that they were in the city of thieves, and it had a certain magic of its own. The city could change a person, and if you wanted something enough, the spirit of the Rogue might bless you herself and help you get what you desire.

Emboldened by Loestvaria's words, Theo moved with a stealthiness he never previously possessed, sneaking through the crowd in the tavern, closing in on the cloaked figure. The dark elf ran ahead to hold open the door, and as if the gods themselves were altering luck, she stood on the outside of the door, allowing Theo to move closer behind the cloaked figure without being noticed. Theo reached out his hand, stretching his fingers as far as they would go, straining, almost... and then...

Aviator: Success! Theo let out a small, victorious shout. And quickly realized his mistake. He covered his mouth to cut the sound short and turned to leave through the other door across the dining hall, weaving through tables, servers, and patrons. He hoped that his exclamation may have been shrugged off as just another hoot or holler from the bustling tavern. Loestvaria already had the door open, waiting. The moment he stepped out, Theo heard a curse, turned, and caught just a glimpse of the cloaked figure coming fast behind him as the door shut.

They bolted. Snaking their way through the large city hoping to lose their pursuers, Theo audibly cursed at his stupid mistake. If only he kept his mouth shut. They ran through the city toward the southernmost plaza, near where the airships took off. An idea flashed through Theo's mind. He ran toward the airship docks looking for a small ship and finding one easily. He signaled to Loestvaria and they dashed aboard. Both realized that neither of them had ever flown an airship before, but they didn't have time to consider another option. They began working at random: pulling levers, turning knobs, mashing buttons. Suddenly, the airship took off, jolting haphazardly into the sky.

As they caught their bearings and flew through the sky, Theo looked back for a moment; it seemed they were in the clear. However, after what felt like only a short moment, the clouds behind them began to move upwards and the mast of a larger airship broke through; the cloaked figure and the dark elf were at the helm. Loestvaria pushed and pulled a few more levers, still unsure of what they might do, but after quick trial and error, the airship lurched forward at a faster pace. Despite their speed, they still couldn't out-fly their pursuers, so they ascended into the clouds to obscure their view.

While the clouds streamed past, Theo noticed a dim light, growing brighter as they flew closer. A small orb of light compelled him, seeming to pull at his mind, beckoning him to follow. Theo looked behind them. Storm clouds were brewing, swirling unnaturally and creating a heaviness in the air. Afraid that this may be the work of the

cloaked figure or the dark elf, and with no better options, Theo took a chance and followed the orb of light through the clouds. They broke out of the cloud cover, still in pursuit of the orb, when a bolt of black lightning struck the control panel of the airship. It began to smoke, the wooden parts catching fire. The flames were a deep red and black. Loestvaria recognized this as corrupted magic, tainted with evil and pulled forcibly from nature. It was wild and dangerous to wield. Only one thing could be the catalyst for a spell so dark – a Dragonsoul. She was told by Noru that Dragonsouls were created by a ritual spell that tears out and captures the soul of a dragon; if taken unwillingly, the trapped soul becomes a source of pure rage. The user can channel and wield whatever element is tied to the dragon, however, the use of such power can cause one to go mad as the rage of the Dragonsoul seeps into the mind of the one possessing it.

Steering as best he could and trying not to lose control, Theo followed the orb of light as the airship sped up, falling closer and closer to the earth. Wind and debris whipped their faces as they careened downwards, and then suddenly, everything went dark.

Ignis Fatuus: Theo slowly came to. Looking around, he realized they had crashed on the side of a mountain. He knew he was lucky to be alive; had he fallen off the opposite side, there would have been no ground to catch him. Theo took a few steps and found the airship completely destroyed, punctured canvas draped on the craggy rocks of the mountainside. Loestvaria was making her way towards Theo from a little ways up a mountain path.

Thankful for a cover of clouds to hide from the spellcaster, who Loestvaria now knew was a dark wizard, they began to look for a way down the mountain. Seemingly out of nowhere, the familiar orb of light they had followed through the clouds appeared. It beckoned Theo again, pulling his mind toward it. Theo and Loestvaria followed it along the mountain path for a ways. After turning a bend, they came upon a castle constructed on a part of the mountain that was jutting away from the rest of the rock. It appeared as if it were suspended in the air, like the path to the castle and the ground it sat upon were constructed by magic, leaving the structure floating out over the vast, empty space beneath.

The castle had a view of all of the west of Ilanereus. They could see from the Woodlands far in the northwest down to the Sapphire Vales straight out to the west. And to the south, they could see the Unnamed Spire in the Burnt Lands where Eigengrau resided, away from the humans he despised. They were overcome with a sense of wonder as they entered the empty halls of the castle. It was grandiose, and they found themselves in awe of the platinum and marble decorated halls.

They followed the orb of light through an endless series of twists and turns, finally entering a long, dark corridor that appeared to go on forever with no end in sight. The orb of light floated onward into the dark, and so they followed. Finally, after what seemed like hours, they noticed a light coming from afar. Dim, small, but not coming from their ethereal guide. They were coming to the end. The light in the distance grew closer, and they noticed it flickering, almost like... torchlight?

They entered a large chamber; the air heavy and dense. Theo wondered who lit these torches and if they were alone when a spark of black lightning crackled just past his ear. Theo and Loestvaria immediately looked towards the source of the lightning to find the silhouette of the cloaked figure at an entryway high above. The dark wizard. The orb continued through the air, right up to the wizard, and settled into a stone on his scepter. They had been caught in a trap.

Battle Against the Dark Wizard: Theo fought for his life against the dark wizard. Wild magic crackled and sparked around the room as he deftly moved, attempting to close in on the spellcaster. The lightning was sporadic, striking sand that immediately exploded into tiny shards of glass. Loestvaria cast protective spells, calling upon spirits of the forest to aid them. She conjured vines to entangle the wizard, but her spells' power broke against a sudden burst of flames that surrounded the wizard and then quickly dissipated.

Theo couldn't seem to get close, no matter what he did. A bolt of black lightning hit the pouch on his belt

that held the compass. The dark elf jumped forward to grab it, but Loestvaria summoned a blade of ice that burst into razor sharp shards, causing the dark elf to stagger back. Instead of falling to the ground, however, the compass levitated and began to faintly glow, hovering in mid-air before Theo. Suddenly, time drastically slowed down, almost to a complete stop. Broken bits of rubble appeared suspended in mid-air. Loestvaria was in the middle of casting some sort of spell, and the tendrils of lightning from the wizard's staff slowly inched forward, fighting against the time magic.

Theo was the only one unaffected. A voice emanated from the compass, light pulsing with every word. It told Theo that it knew his intentions and had watched him journey across Ilanereus. Now, it would aid him to stop evil from reaching Aeternum. It instructed him to hold up his blade. As he did, the voice in the compass spoke a series of chants in a strange language, resonating throughout the chamber. Beams of light emanated from the blade. Or were they being drawn into it..? The handle was warm as energy pulsed through it.

When the blade was completely enveloped in light, the ethereal voice told Theo to take aim at the wizard. He aimed the blade and a solid beam of bright light streaked through the near-frozen time. The recoil pushed him backwards and slightly down into the stone ground as he firmly held his stance. The light shimmered, reflected in the dark wizard's eyes, as the beam connected. Light began to crack and spill out of the wizard, mixed with his own corrupted, dark energy. A strong wind began pulling in towards the wizard as time resumed its normal flow, yet the compass remained suspended in the air, unmoving. Theo and Loestvaria took cover behind fallen chunks of staircase and broken stonework to avoid being pulled by the strengthening wind. They could hear the dark wizard screaming in pain, cursing them as he anguished in his demise. A boulder rolled past and crushed the dark elf against a wall. As Theo peeked around to see what was happening, he saw a bright light overtake the dark pulsing magic bleeding out of the spellcaster. There was a brilliant flash of light, and the wind ceased. The dark wizard crumbled to the ground. His body began to dematerialize, turning to dust, floating upwards. Before disappearing completely, he uttered a name: Daendroag.

A perfectly round, yellow stone was all that was left in the place where he fell; it was translucent and glowing faintly with black lightning crackling inside. Loestvaria picked it up gently and put it in her coin pouch. A Dragonsoul. Perhaps, she thought, she could return it to the beast from which it had been taken.

Fabled Lands: Loestvaria picked up the compass, which had gently settled to the ground. The crystal needle inside it moved, pointing to a staircase. As she and Theo made their way down, she studied an ancient text that was etched into the walls. The connection was suddenly clear - the scroll from the Runic Temple of the Crimson Moon would have led them here - and she realized where they were. Loestvaria laughed in a mix of awe and disbelief. The long corridor they walked through from the mountain castle had been a passageway that led to these hidden chambers in the ruins of the Aesolis Desert. It must have been built by the Ancient Ones, and somehow, they had walked across half the continent in only a few hours. It made her truly wonder at the magic and power the Ancient Ones possessed.

As they walked, the needle moved to guide them. The walls, only stone at first, began to show traces of nature. Vines, leaves, and other plants appeared as they continued winding down the wide staircase until they came upon an arch, overgrown with plants creating a latticed wall so thick they couldn't see the other side. Through the tangle of vines and plant life, sunbeams like honey streamed into where they stood. They pulled at the wall of vines to clear the way and stepped into an open field full of tall grass and wildflowers with the sun shining brightly overhead. Somehow they knew they had made it. This was Aeternum - the Eternal Sanctuary.

Beyond the tall grass was an ocean, and ahead of them was a round stone dais inlaid with gemstones and golden script in the familiar ancient language. As they approached the dais, they heard a disembodied voice - calm and speaking directly to both of them. The same voice that Theo heard through the compass. It was the spirit of an ancient dragon, tasked with guarding Aeternum since its creation by the Ancient Ones. It recounted the history of the relics - how they were created, the wars fought over them, and how they had to be hidden from the world. It

spoke of the compass, and with a hint of sadness, requested that Theo use it to seal Aeternum for eternity.

The ground beneath the dais shifted. Lines in the stone sunk down, expelling a puff of air as a staircase appeared, descending into the ground to a small round room. Carved into the walls were shelves that contained different items - the relics of the ancients, the *Gods' Artifacts*. Theo and Loestvaria walked about the room until they found the only empty shelf with a groove inlaid that looked just large enough for the compass to fit. Theo asked the ancient dragon if there was anything he could do for his brother to heal him of the curse set upon him. The dragon's voice spoke directly to Theo, instructing him to seal Aeternum. Theo asked again, but received no response. Reluctantly, he placed the compass in its final, rightful place. As it settled, the room began to dissipate around them. The ancient dragon thanked them; now no one could find their way into Aeternum and use the ancient relics. It would be forever sealed off from the world.

The surroundings changed around Theo and Loestvaria. Trees shot up from the earth and the ground shifted, the sky swirled with the colors of twilight and sunset until they found themselves in a familiar place - right outside the village of Domum. Loestvaria realized she was holding a faintly glowing, blue gemstone in her hand. She examined it for a moment, and then gave it to Theo. She said it was a gift: a Dragonsoul created by the ancient dragon himself to hold a small portion of his power. Just enough to heal Tiernan of his curse.

As twilight began to fade, they made their way to Domum. Tiernan was sleeping, a village elder sitting at his bedside. Theo took the Dragonsoul and placed it in Tiernan's hand. It glowed brightly, and the dark markings around Tiernan's face lifted from his skin, appearing like ink floating in the air. He gave a deep sigh, but remained asleep. The elder placed her hand to Tiernan's forehead to discover that his fever had disappeared. With a sigh of relief, Theo thanked her for watching over his brother, and as she left, he took her spot beside Tiernan's bed.

Loestvaria felt compelled to start a new journey - to restore the Dragonsoul she recovered from the dark wizard and to seek out others that may share the same fate. She invited Theo to join her. After hearing them speak more of their journey, Tiernan, now recovered from his curse, was eager for an adventure and insisted on joining his brother and Loestvaria. They wouldn't know what lay ahead, but after their journey to Aeternum, they felt ready for whatever might come next.

Thank you for reading! I don't consider myself a writer or novelist by any means, but I wanted to share this short story that accompanied the album. I hope you enjoyed it, and the album as well.