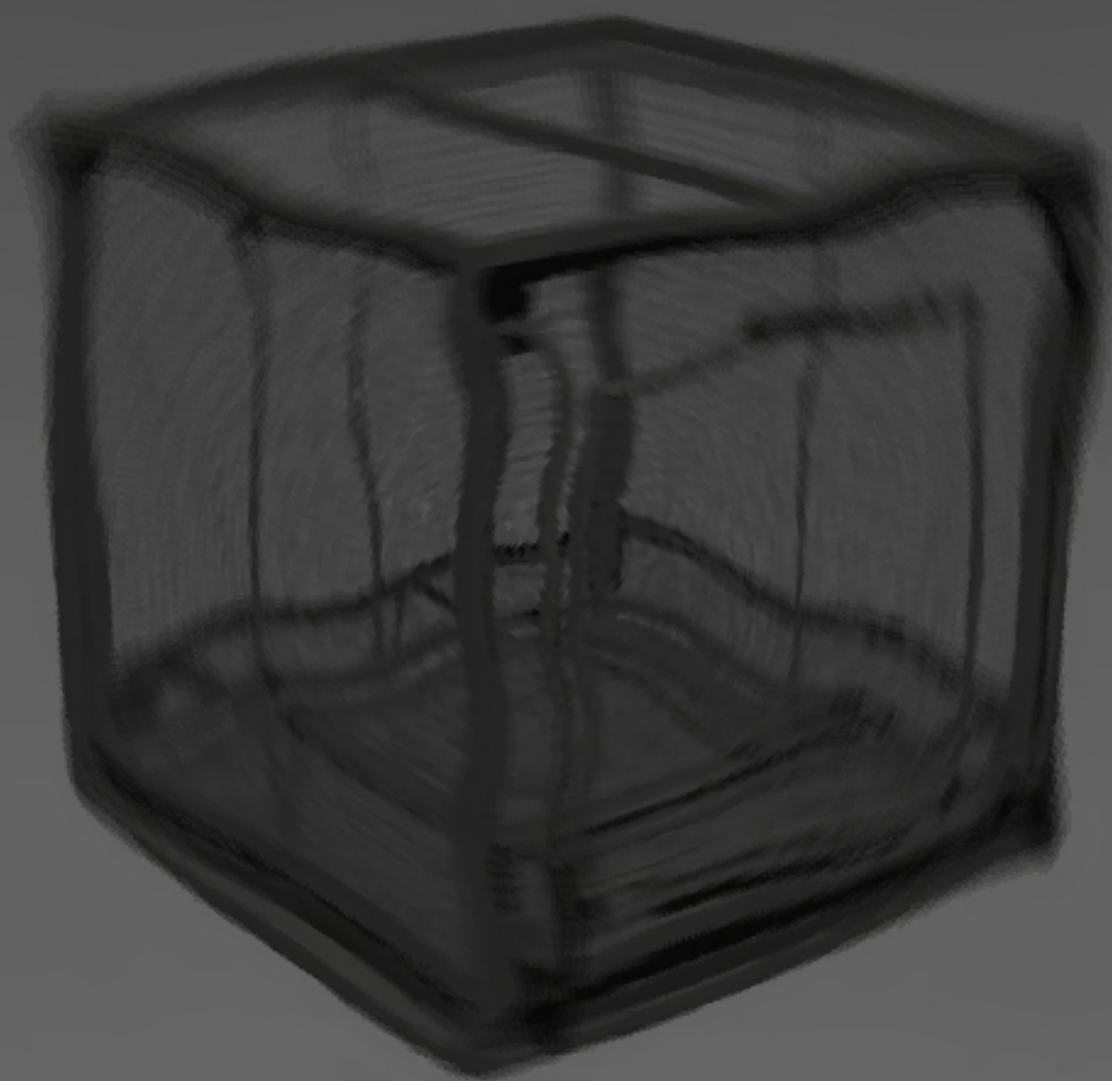


# *LEGEND KEEPER*



*Anthony Marc  
OLLON*

The Legend Keeper stared at the ceiling.

*“Jewnigger currycunt! Pissblogger anthologies!”*

He let out an exasperated sigh, rolled over on his side and pulled the covers over his ears in a vain attempt at blocking the annoying, tiny, nasal voice out. Sleep would be hard to come by tonight. In the far end of the room, the creature had yet to show any signs of getting tired, jumping around in his little cage like a chipmunk on amphetamines, shouting random gibberish and making an absolute mess of his straw bedding.

And to think the day had started out so nice.

\* \* \*

The Legend Keeper lives in the Library of Bones. A rickety, ramshackle tower of sandstone and clay, overlooking the dark green waters of Lake Fossil. Here he tends to his daily tasks of feeding and caring for the extraordinary creatures in his ward. Some might think this a great and important task, but as he often put it himself: *“Well, someone’s gotta muck the Unicorn stables out or the poor buggers will be knee deep, right?”* Day in, day out, the Legend Keeper performs his duties; making sure the aforementioned Unicorns have clean stables and crisp carrots to munch on, collecting dust from the Pixies, filling the Sandman’s bags with pixiedust and making sure there’s nobody hiding under the Boogeyman’s bed. You might believe otherwise, but in reality the Boogeyman is a very anxious creature and he can’t sleep at night if the Legend Keeper doesn’t check under his bed for monsters.

Occasionally a carrier raven will arrive, carrying a scroll of instructions from the High One, but most of the time his days pass uneventful, one after the other. He lives a relatively carefree life, quite happy with his duties. Well, up until now, that is. A raven arrived today. He rather wished it hadn’t.

\* \* \*

The raven landed on the stone floor next to the fireplace. In its beak it was carrying a small, square cage with metal bars. With a loud clank it let go of the cage, dropping it to the floor, twisted its neck towards the Legend Keeper and cawed aggressively. Usually it would wait expectantly for a handful of delicious entrails, but not this time. It scrambled towards the window,

talons clicking against the floor and took flight as fast as it could. “*What the...*” was all the Legend Keeper had time to say before the raven was a mere black speck in the distant sky. Well, this is certainly curious, he thought and approached the cage cautiously.

“*Yellow chickenfuck nobama!*”

The voice was coming from the cage. A small creature, three thumbs tall, launched itself at the metal bars and started shaking them furiously. It was a pudgy little thing, with long, unkempt black hair and the tiniest of beards and it smelled to high heaven of manure. Its shrill voice echoed in the chamber as it shrieked an unending litany of profanity laced gibberish.

“*Darkety dark controversial diner! Sleepsack granny! Roster!*”

It was all downhill from there.

\* \* \*

He had tried everything. He took out his flute, a beautiful little piece of driftwood, carved into an instrument by the fairies of Wonderglade and played the softest and most soothing lullaby he knew for the creature, in an effort to calm him down. Alas, to no avail. The creature listened for a while, eyes twitching madly, and then promptly shat in his hands and threw the tiny, smelly pellets at the Legend Keeper.

He went down to the kitchen and brought up the most succulent soffruits and sweetberries he had in a little bowl for the creature to eat. The creature rammed a sweetberry up his left nostril and inhaled... hard. To spare the sensibilities of the more delicate readers, what the creature did with the soffruit shall remain untold.

Tobacco! That always worked wonders for the Legend Keeper after a day of hard work. Perhaps the imp would calm down a bit with a pinch of Trollgrass Deluxe, he thought? From his pouch, hanging from his belt, he produced his beloved corncob pipe, carefully packed it, lit it and proffered the stem towards the little one. Suspiciously, the creature sniffed the stem and grabbed it. “*There you go, little one. Now take a little drag. It'll make you all nice and mellow*”. The creature seemed to grasp the idea and took a deep, slow drag out of the pipe. Eyes wide, he stumbled backwards and immediately began coughing and sneezing like there was no tomorrow.

“*Pacioooooon! Pacioooooon! Pacioooooooooooooon!*”

The Legend Keeper quickly put his pipe away. “*Looks like you're not much of a smoker then*”, he

sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. What was he to do? What had he done to deserve being burdened with this pint-sized hellion? And what the blazes was he supposed to do with him? Outside the sun was setting and the creature was still as agitated as he was when he arrived. Perhaps he would tire himself out? Perhaps it would all sort itself out if he just got tired and eventually fell asleep. The Legend Keeper carefully lifted the cage into a corner in the far end of the room, found a burlap sack and placed it over the cage. There! Everything will sort itself out soon enough, he thought!

It didn't.

\* \* \*

The Legend Keeper stared at the ceiling.

*“Jewnigger currycunt! Pissblogger anthologies!”*

This had gone on for hours now. Covering the cage with the burlap sack had apparently no effect on the tiny creature whatsoever. He was still rattling his cage and spouting meaningless nonsense at the top of his voice and he did not seem to have grown tired at all.

*“Plagiarist bondage wordcount! Heavy metal buss pass! Morris!”*

Groaning deeply, the Legend Keeper got out of bed. He walked over to the window and took a deep breath of the cool evening air. There was a splash in the water below. It was his old pal, Lossil Fossil, the skeletal dragon who lived in the dark waters of Lake Fossil. A bony head raised itself out of the water on a row of ivory vertebrae and looked at him with its hollow eyes.

*“Hellooooooow, Keeper. Why up soo laaaate?”* said the dragon.

*“Hi there, Lossil, my friend”,* the Legend Keeper replied. *“I cannot sleep. A raven from the High One delivered this hideous, foul, little creature to me today and it's been keeping me up all night, screaming and ranting. I'm at my wit's end here. I don't know what to do anymore. I have no idea why he's here or what I'm supposed to do with him”.*

Lossil Fossil tilted his head in a gesture of perplexion. *“Ooooooh, reeeally? No scrooooooll? Always a scrooll? Hiiiigh One aaalways send wiiiise woords!”*

*“Nope, not this time. If there was, then the raven forgot to deliver it to me”,* Legend Keeper sighed. *“I cannot say I blame him too much, to be honest. Having to carry that thing in your*

*beak all the way from Highcloud would be enough to scramble anyone's brains. The raven just dumped the little critter at daybreak and scrambled for the window. Swoooooosh! Gone!"*

*"Hmmmhhhh! Thing go splosh in lake at daybreak", Lossil Fossil replied. "Almoooost hit Lossil in heeeead. Perhaaaps Raven droooop thingy? Lossil diiiiive! Lossil feeetch! Lossil good boy!"*

Well, for a 150 million year old Plesiosaur, you've always been one smart cookie, the Legend Keeper thought and leaned against the chilly stones as the skeletal shape disappeared beneath the dark waters of Lake Fossil. If anyone could find anything in those murky waters it was Lossil Fossil.

Soon enough a sleek cranium rose from below, carefully carrying a metal cylinder between its jagged teeth. A message tube! So there had been a message after all! The Legend Keeper closed his eyes and whispered a quick prayer to St. Joseph under his breath, that he finally might have some sort of clue how to provide for the latest addition to his menagerie. Gingerly, he plucked the message tube from Lossil Fossil's jaws and hurried inside. With trembling hands he unscrewed the lid and pried the scroll out of the tube. In the amber, flickering light of his beeswax candles he started to read.

*Dear Legend Keeper,*

*How art thou? I hope thou art well and in good spirit! As always, your service is greatly appreciated here at the Court of Highcloud. Today, I have a new task for you. Unfortunately there has recently been a slight pest problem in the grain silos of the Sunfields and a variety of minor Turdgoblins have begun to breed there. They are quite harmless, for all their posturing, but they do make an awful racket, so we do need to round them up and sort the problem out. It occurred to us that they might be a nutritious source of food for your friend in the lake, who both lacks taste buds and has the dentition needed to chew these critters efficiently. Please let him enjoy this sample of Turdgoblin and report your findings. If found satisfactory we can provide three bags per week, for your lake dwelling skeletal friend.*

*Your friendly Overlord,  
The High One*

The Legend Keeper stared at the parchment and a gentle smile slowly crept across his face. He turned towards the window and felt the cool air wash his frustrations away. He'd be sleeping soon! Very soon!

THE END