

CAT & MERINGUE

The Curse of Sir Thermidor

Cat and Meringue find themselves separated in a spooky reef city filled with mindless zombie crabs! On top of that there is talk of a curse, brought on by mysterious black coins! Oh, and there's a lobster knight called Sir Thermidor too...

Get lost in the daft world of Cat and Meringue with this short story collecting all 31 illustrations from their Inktober challenge in 2019!

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Nich Angell

**BIG PUNCH
STUDIOS**



CAT & MERINGUE

The CURSE of Sir Thermidor

The illustrations that make up this story started life as an Inktober challenge in 2019. Inktober is a drawing challenge for artists online. Each October, a list of prompts is created, one for each day of the month, that are used to create daily inked artworks. All the artists used the same prompt list but create wildly different things!

For the second year running, I decided to create a story, attempting to link these wild words together into one continuous narrative!

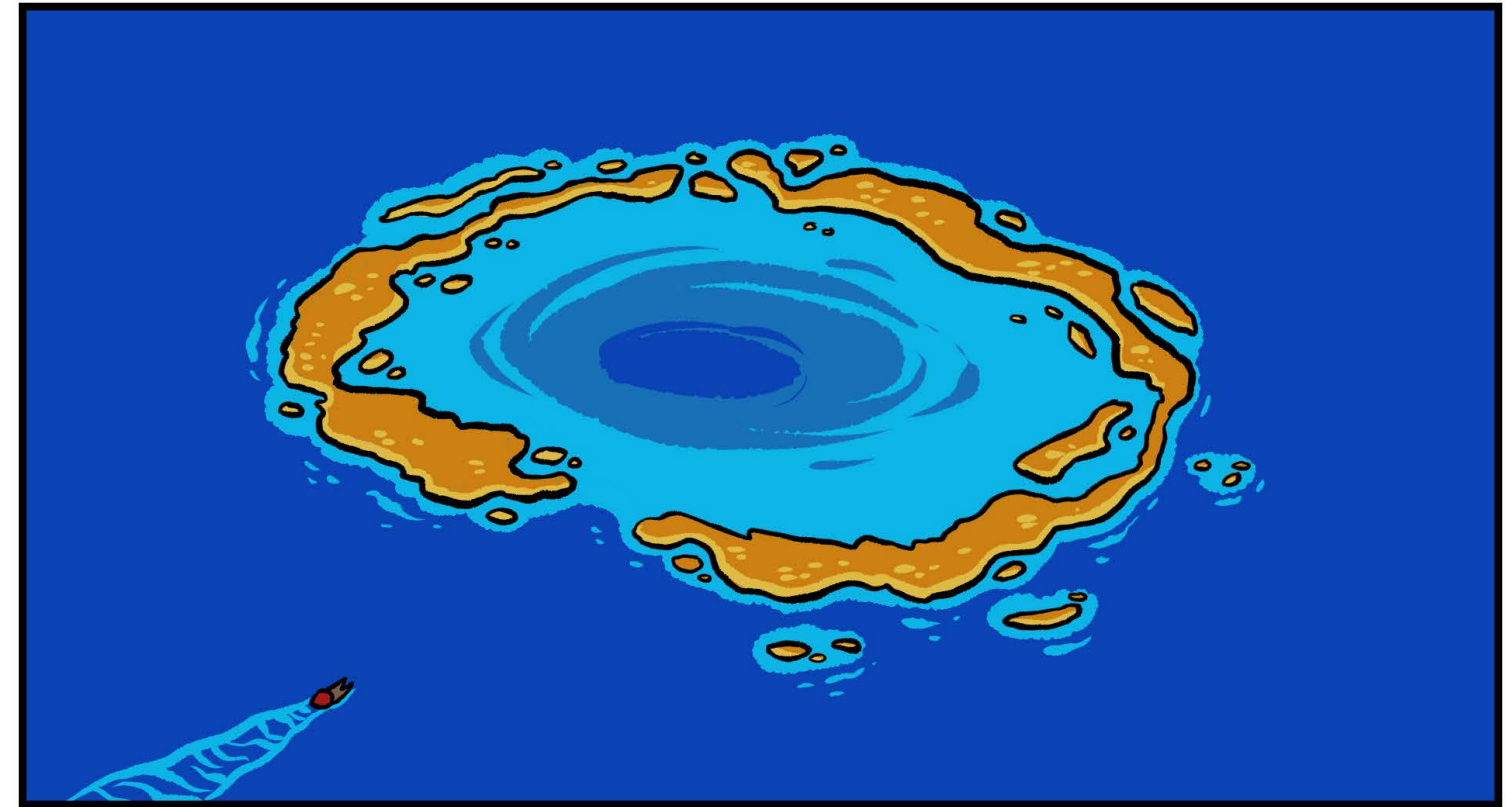
'Cat and Meringue' and 'The Curse of Sir Thermidor'
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The ocean was calm, the sky was still and Cat and Meringue were disturbing the quiet with an argument about who had eaten the last of the cheese. Meringue maintained it was Cat, but Cat was insisting it was the work of a particularly ambitious Sea-Dalmatian. (A creature that doesn't exist, even in this stupid world)

It was in the middle of this argument that an island appeared on the horizon. As the daft duo got closer it became clear that it was a reef in the shape of a ring!

The reef didn't seem to be in great shape, and there didn't seem to be anyone living there and just as Meringue was about to ask if Cat thought they should steer clear, Cat had tied the boat up to a jetty and was already heading inland.

Meringue sighed and hid the last of the cheese he had stolen, to join Cat who seemed to have found an ancient staircase heading down below sea-level...



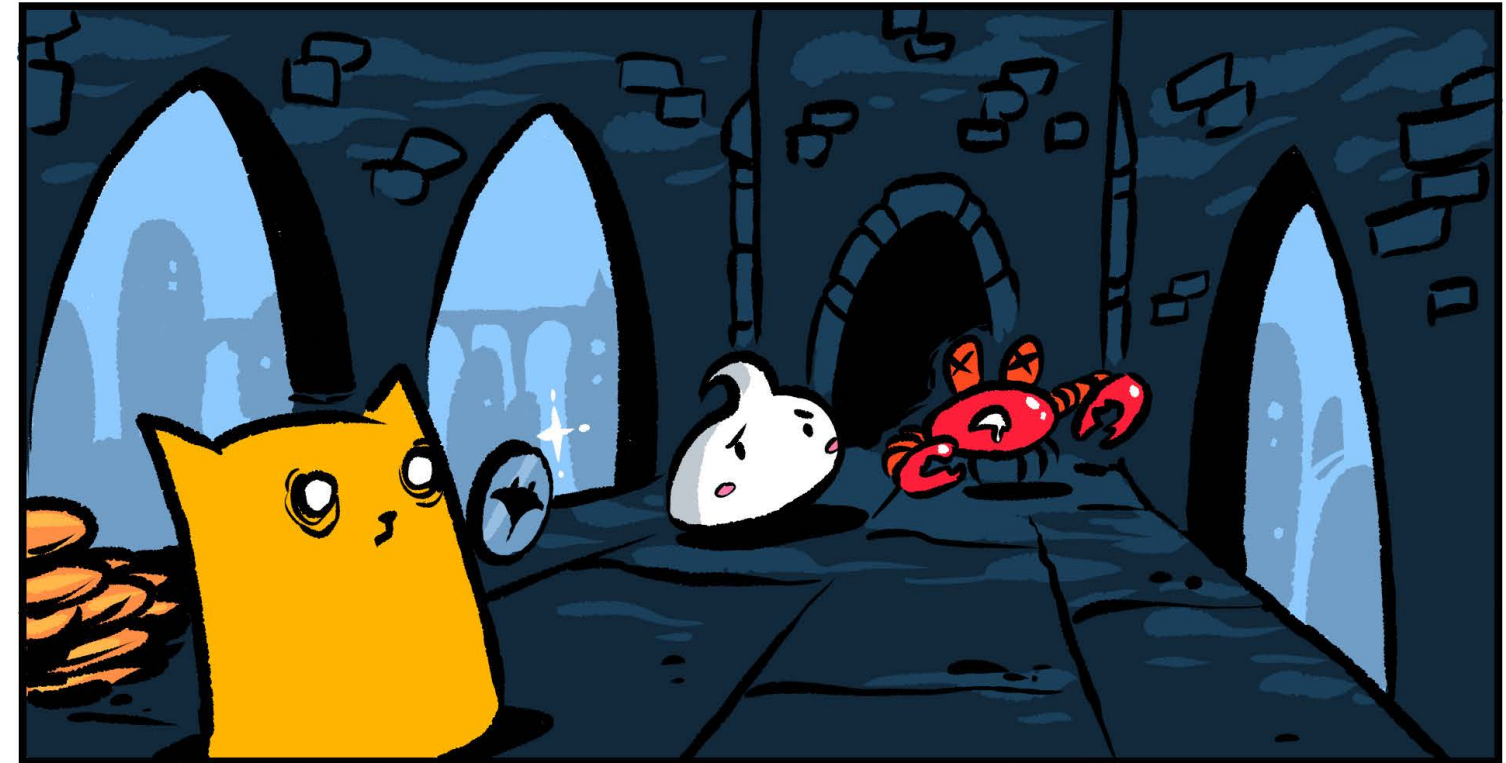
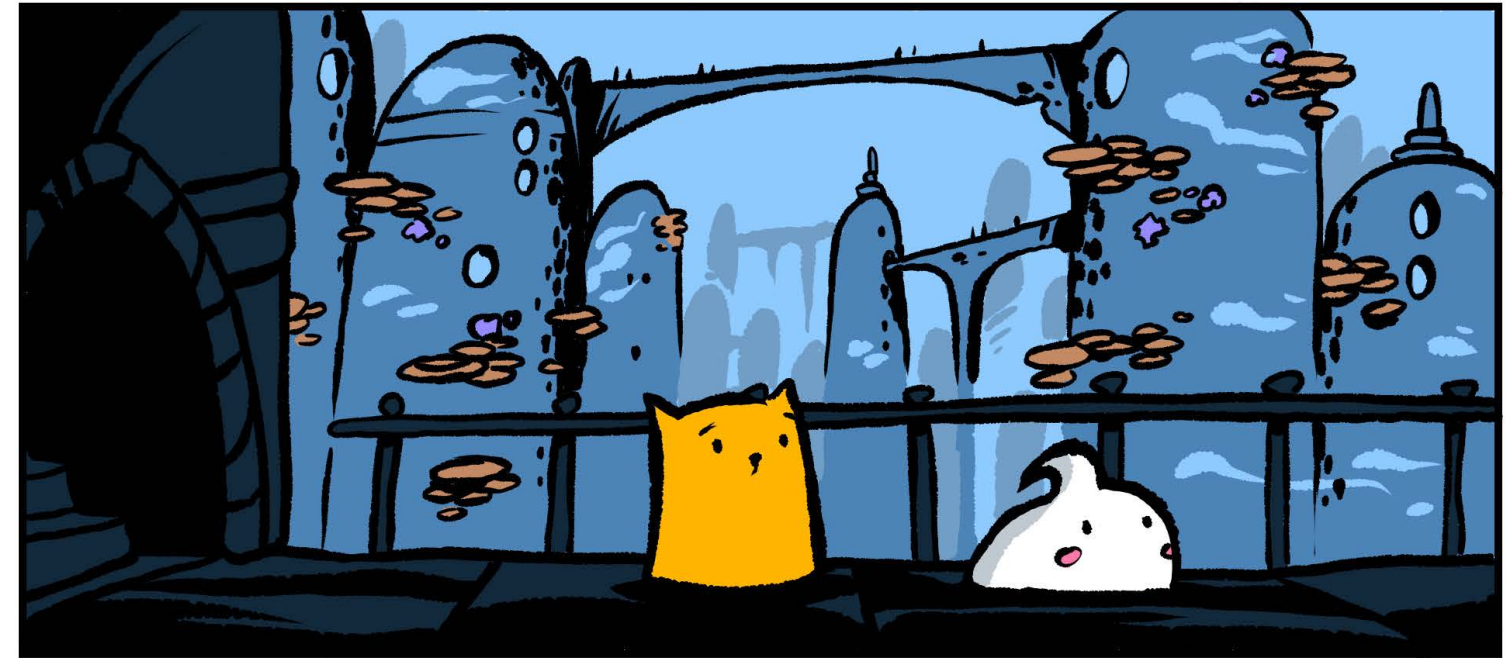
The steps seemed to go on forever but finally they led out into a corridor and Cat and Meringue couldn't believe what they could see!

It was an underwater city but clearly a long abandoned one. Towers rose up from the depths covered in coral and colourful growths, and the water dappled light across all the stone surfaces.

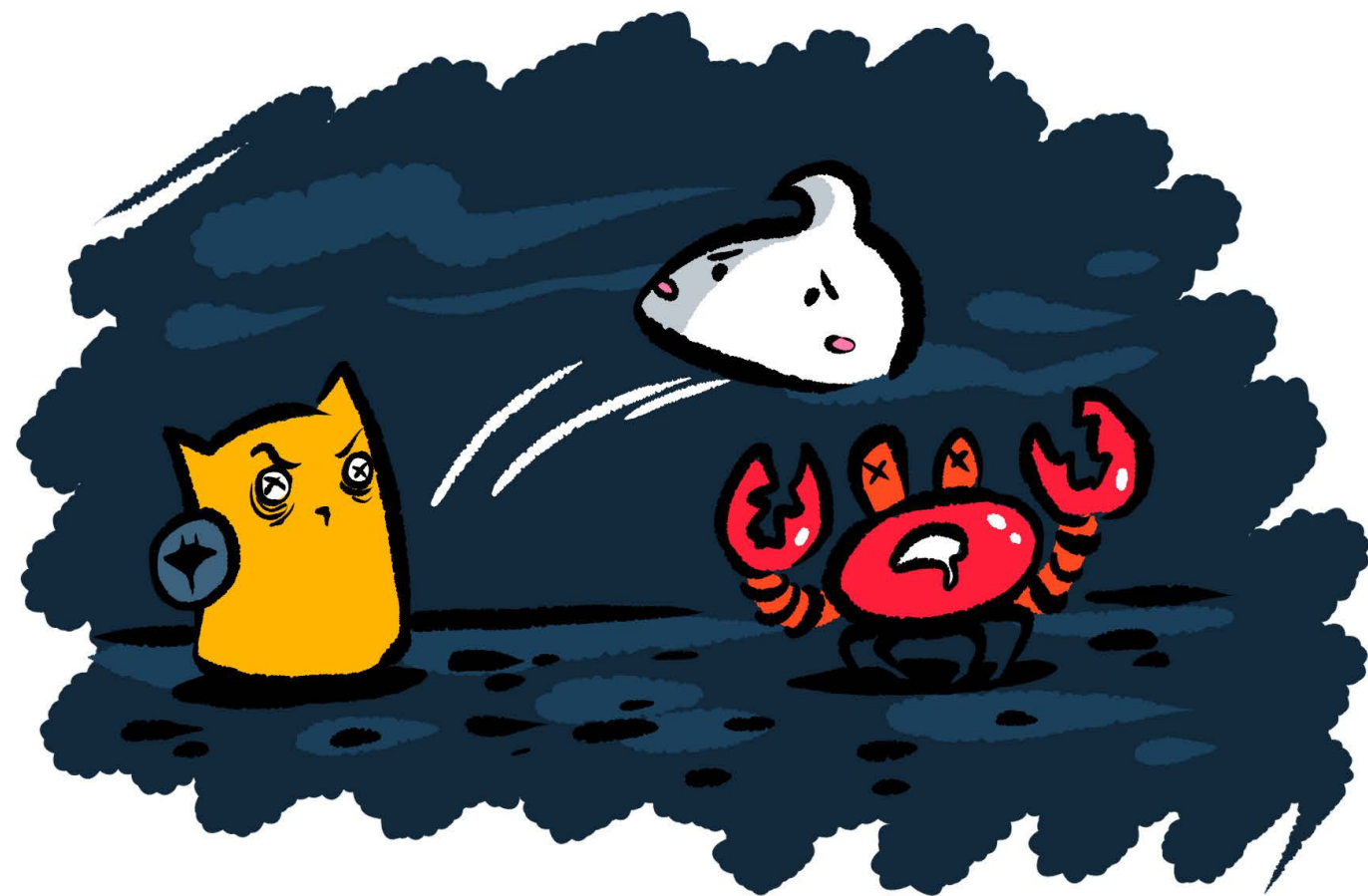
The daft duo were clearly below sea level but something was holding the water back, like a window but without any glass!

'Cat!' Meringue suddenly cried out as he spotted movement at the end of the corridor. It seemed like a mindless crab was shuffling towards them!

But Cat had found a strange coin on the floor and was entranced...



Suddenly, Cat found himself possessed with the urge to save himself and threw Meringue as bait, towards the advancing zombie crab, allowing Cat to escape clutching the mysterious black coin...

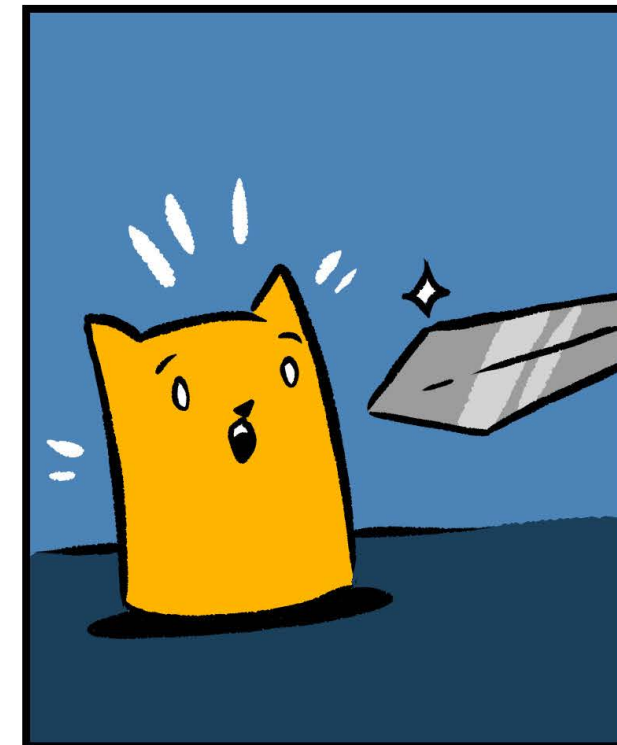


Cat felt awful. He had thrown Meringue to the mercy of that crab and run off and now he was lost in this city, with no idea if his friend was ok.

He'd also dropped the coin he found while running away which was annoying because he was pretty sure he could have used it in the capsule machine back at the Wok Empire and finally got the last Peanut Ranger figure he needed to complete his collection.

As he was thinking all of this a sword blade flashed out of the darkness ahead, accompanied by a gruff

'FREEZE!'...



Meringue was annoyed. First Cat had thrown him to a zombie crab, like bait so he could get away. Then Meringue had had to escape the crab in the maze like corridors of the city, only to end up lost. And worst of all, his wireless headphones were now out of range of the Catamaran and he couldn't hear his new age whale song anymore.

He found himself in an abandoned workshop and decided that this was it. He needed to build something to defend himself. Something tough and protective, simple, and proven to keep a person safe.

He put the finishing touches to his creation and stepped back.

That's one wheel, he thought. Once I've finished the whole car I can get in, lock the door, and hide.



Cat sat with the melancholy knight in the light of the small fire he had lit. Cat assumed he was a knight anyway, he seemed like one. He had an awesome sword and spoke in single words in a husky voice. Cat thought he was super cool.

The knight looked up and said in a quiet gravelly voice 'I'm Sir Thermidor... who are you?'

Cat tried to put on his gruffest gravelliest voice and replied 'I'm Cathkkkpthff' and coughed up a hairball.

Sir Thermidor just smiled and poked the fire...



Sir Thermidor seemed consumed with a task and Cat just found himself following him around and watching. He was getting tools and equipment together.

He reached into a box and pulled out a coin that looked just like the one Cat found earlier. It radiated a foul black energy.

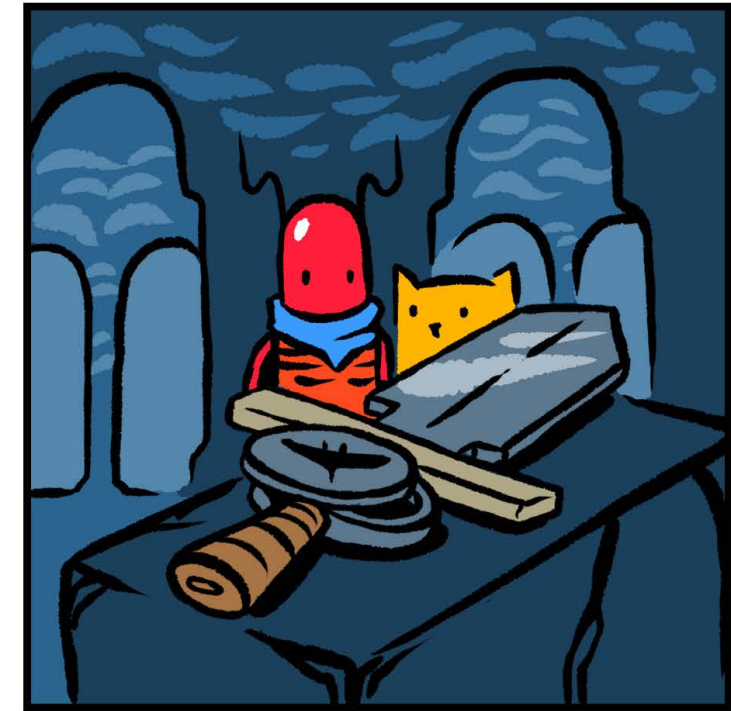
'I found one of those' said Cat 'but I lost it..'

'Then you're lucky' murmured the lobster knight, and set about resting it in an unfinished sword.

He then raised an enchanted hammer high above his head and saying a few strange words in ancient Lobsterian he slammed the hammer down on the sword! Magical sparks bounced around the room, and then it was done.

Sir Thermidor lifted up the sword and said 'I did it, this should save the city. The Vantasword. I want you to have it Cat'

He handed it to Cat. And Cat dribbled a bit.



Sir Thermidor took Cat to a nearby precipice that looked out over a huge portion of the reef city.

'This city is frail Cat' he said, pointing to a withered fruit growing from a nearby tree. 'It is cursed and it's all my fault. Myself and 3 other knights returned from a great adventure with a great many of the coins like the one you found. It was an incredible treasure, but it was cursed and now, so is the reef, ruined and barren, its people mindless and violent'

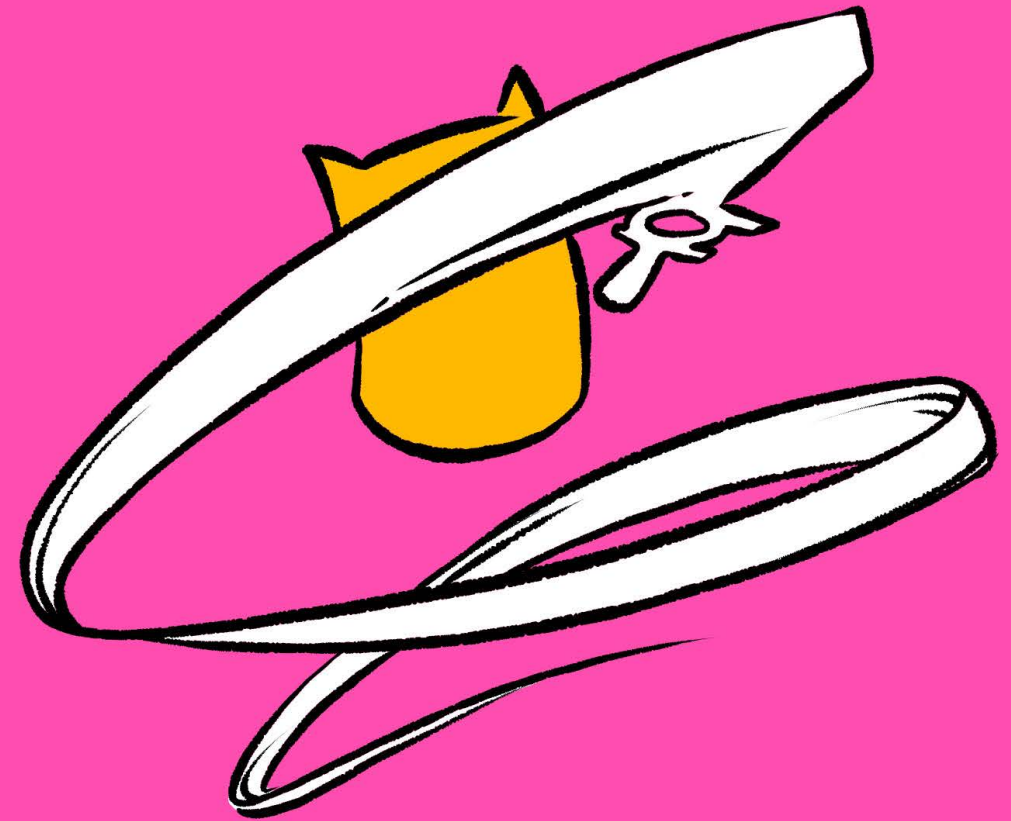
Cat nodded knowingly and said 'I once brought donuts back to the Catamaran for Meringue but it turned out he saw that as cannibalism since he is a cake, so I had to throw them out... so I know how you feel...'

Sir Thermidor ignored this ridiculous comment and said, 'We must destroy the black gold to save the reef. We must seek out the other 3 knights...'



Cat and Sir Thermidor headed out into the city to find the first knight, swinging their swords to keep the zombie crabs at bay!

Cat did such a good job he turned himself into a stylish piece of modern art. He didn't hit a single crab though... which was good considering they were the mindless innocent citizens of the reef city...



Sir Thermidor took Cat to the door of a great temple,
covered with ancient symbols and patterns.

'The first of my cohorts, Sir Ebi, was a great believer in
the spirits and the magicks, we will likely find him within
this ancient temple' he said.

'Is that snow?' asked Cat

'It looks as though the curse has taken a hold of Sir Ebi
very powerfully, even the warmth of the sea has been
sucked away'

And with that he stepped into the dark temple, with
Cat reluctantly following behind...



In the gloom, Cat and Sir Thermidor came face to face with Sir Ebi. He was monstrously huge, a colossal battered prawn with a samurai helmet and katana. He was clearly mindless from the curse.

Cat was quaking, 'He... he...'

Sir Thermidor stood fast and nodded to Cat. Cat dribbled a bit and said again, 'He...'- but Sir Thermidor pointed a claw at Sir Ebi and yelled;

'We're here to save you dear friend. Do not make this harder than it has to be!'

Sir Ebi roared. Sir Thermidor scowled and Cat finally finished his sentence...

'He... he looks... delicious'



Sir Ebi lunged at Sir Thermidor like a writhing dragon. A colling, snapping, drooling, lightly battered, gorgeously aromatic, deep-fried to perfection, delicious-looking dragon.

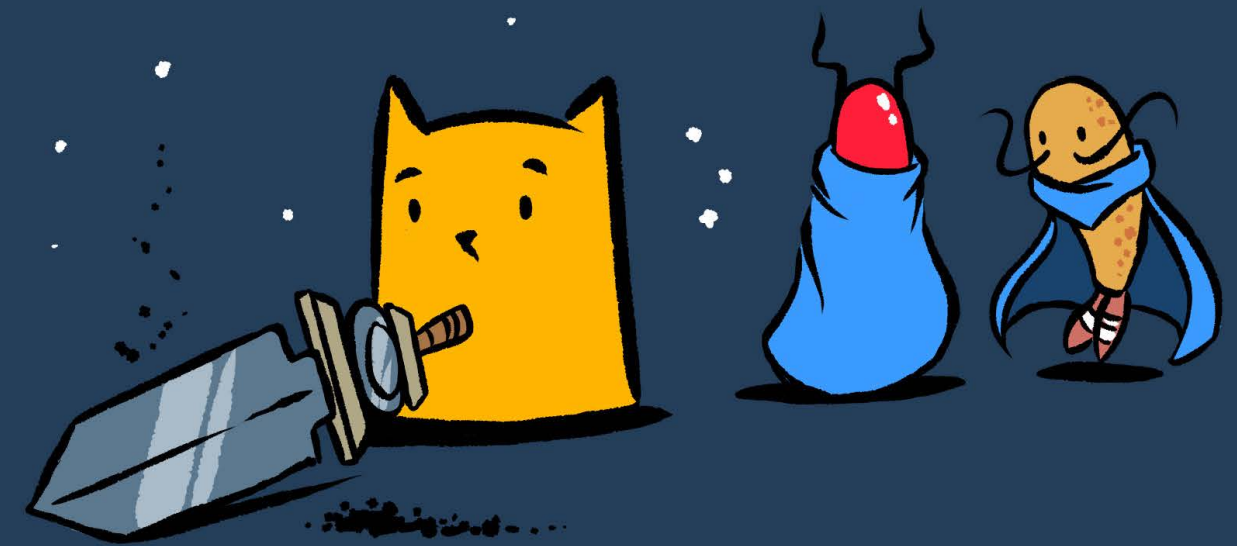
'NOW' yelled Sir Thermidor, and Cat raised the Vantasword high above his head, ready to bring down on Sir Ebi's black coin...



The Vantasword split the black coin in half, and with a poof, Sir Ebi shrank back, no longer mutated and distorted into a monstrous form, he looked like Sir Thermidor. Even down to matching capes!

As the two knights talked happily about seeing each other again Cat looked down at the coin which had now turned to Ash.

This was turning out to be a pretty weird day... he wondered if Meringue was ok.



'This is a wild part of the reef' explained Sir Thermidor as they trudged out of the city and walked for hours through the overgrown corals and urchins.

'It looks verdant and thriving, but without the people of the city tending to it and caring for it, it will die.'

Sir Thermidor looked ridden with guilt and sadness. Cat was sad too. He was only tagging along with Sir Thermidor because he thought he might find Meringue along the way. He realised he was pretty directionless without his best friend...



Meringue could feel the fear in all the crabs as the oldest, Papa Pince, told the 'Legend of the Black Gold'!

He weaved a saga of brave knights splitting a mountain in two to delve into an inky black abyss. He regaled a tale of them finding gold down there along with an ancient monstrous villainy. He spun a yarn about them barely escaping with their lives, their pockets filled with the strange black currency... and how the mountain is now locked up, never to be opened again.

Papa Pince said the coins have a curse on them that brings out the very worst in you if you touch them. For some that's acts of cowardice or hatred, for others the mindlessness Meringue has seen in the city.

Suddenly Meringue realised why Cat had thrown him to the zombies before... it was the coin!



Sir Softshell was huge, terrifying and wild, a monstrous (and delicious smelling) presence bearing down on Cat and Sir Thermidor!

'HURRY' yelled the lobster knight 'The ornament!!'

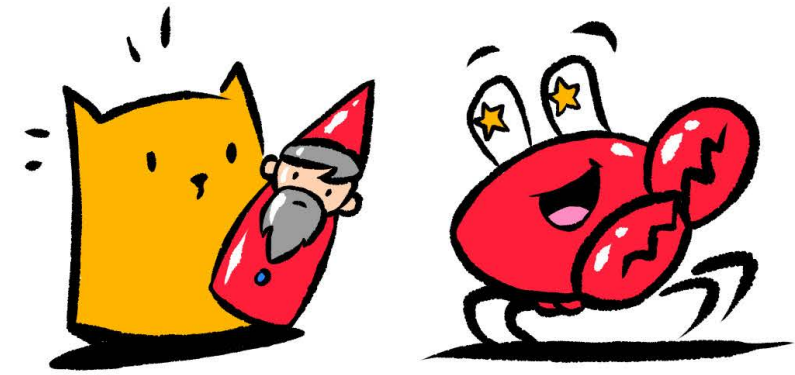
Cat remembered what Thermidor had said to him before they entered Sir Softshell's territory. He was tough, the strongest of the 4 knights... but he had a weakness. He loved garden ornaments!

Cat rooted around in his fur pockets, where was it?!!



The ornament worked, the monstrous crab was momentarily distracted, the coin was found, and smashed with the sword, and Sir Softshell found himself back in his normal form.

And Cat was stood holding a gnome wondering what the heck was going on...



'This is all my fault' said Sir Thermidor melancholically as they stopped for a rest.

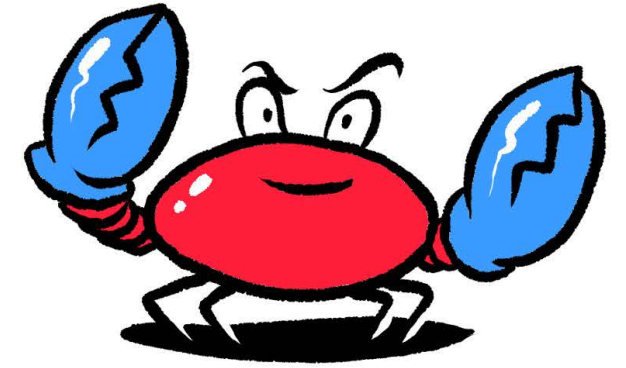
'No it isn't' said Cat, 'You couldn't have known what the black gold would do, and the four of you worked together to bring it home anyway'

'It was my idea though' said the lobster knight. 'I always felt like the misfit in the group. Sir Ebi was the wise magician, Sir Softshell the muscle and Sir Bisque our leader and symbol. And then there was just me... I sought out the gold to prove my worth to the group and look where that got me...'

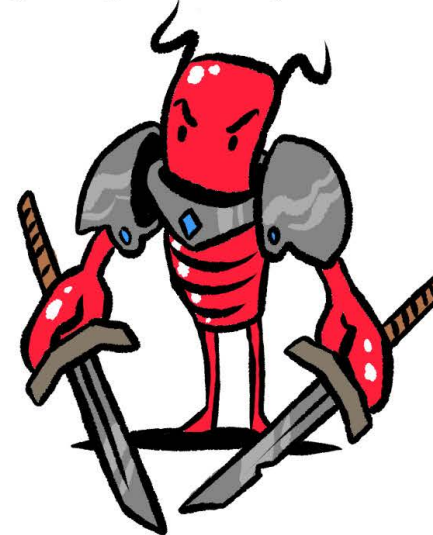
SIR EBI



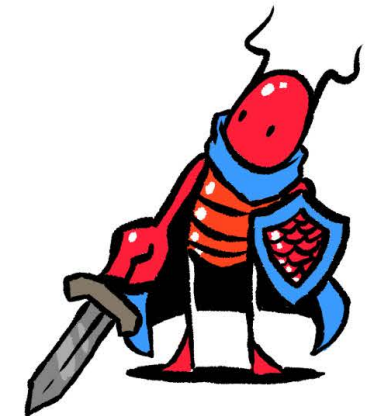
SIR SOFTSHELL



SIR BISQUE



SIR THERMIDOR



'SLING THE HOOK' yelled Sir Thermidor as the two boarded a small ship they found at the edge of the city.

'What the what?' asked Cat, who knew little to no nautical slang, despite living on, sailing on and working on a boat every day of his life so far.

'The anchor... stow it so we can get moving' Sir Thermidor seemed agitated. They were crossing the middle of the reef ring to get to where the last knight, Sir Bisque had holed up, it seemed to be making Sir Thermidor a little anxious.

'Why didn't you just say that' muttered Cat hauling the anchor aboard...

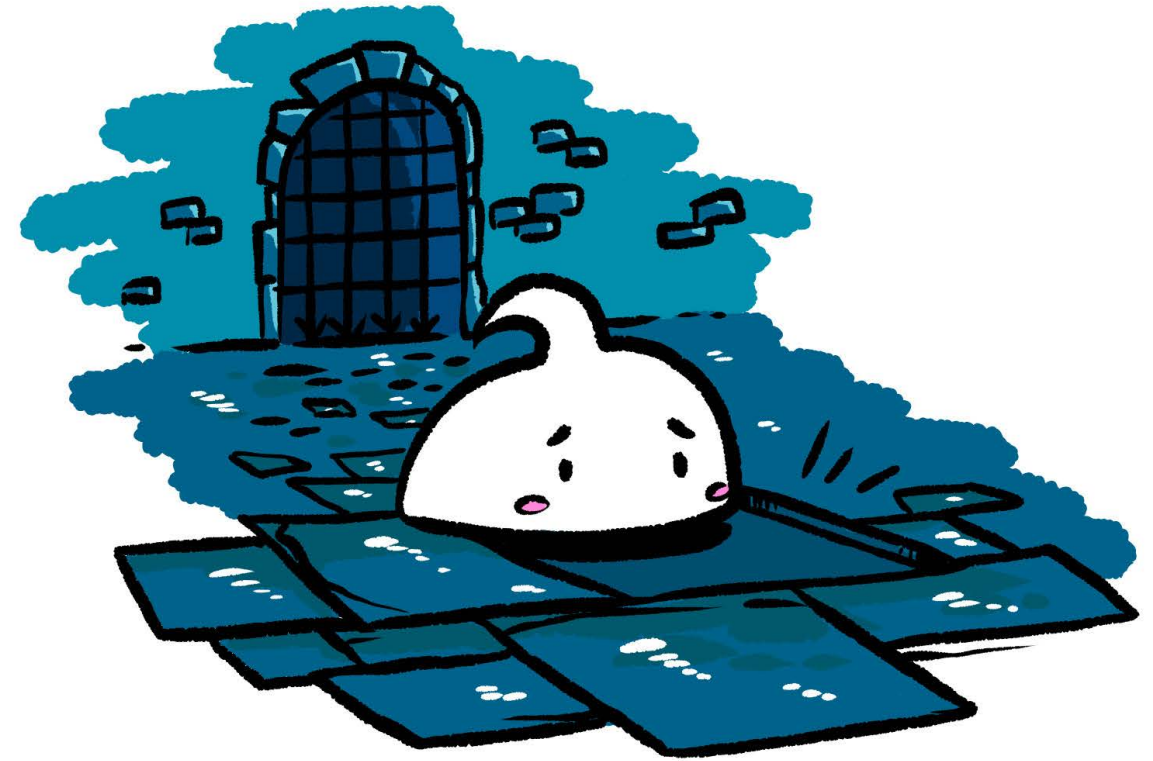


Meringue had been walking for a while. He had followed the directions that the free crabs had given him and was trying to get to the coastline so that he could follow it back around to the USS Catamaran.

As he walked he watched the buildings around him change from houses to castle. He found himself within the outer walls of a vast castle complex... all covered with algae and water, like the wet mouldy fortress of a sea king.

As he thought about how he could write a poem about this place and add it to his latest collection of poetry 'Whipped Wit: Vol 4' he wasn't watching his step and suddenly felt a stone click beneath his meringuey tread.

A portcullis slammed closed behind him.
He was trapped!



Meringue continued through the castle complex until he reached a central forecourt. In the middle there was a large grave. It was clearly ancient, damaged and chipped from years of ruin, with moss growing across the stone surface.

The name on the headstone meant nothing to Meringue but there was a treasure sat atop the coffin, a piece of the black gold, glinting in the light. Meringue recognised it straight away, and as he leaned in for a closer look the lid of the ancient stone coffin shifted...



The ghost of Sir Bisque swirled out and up onto the air,
his form hanging together in rolls of fog and mist
(and ghost paste).

He towered over the quaking Meringue and spoke in a
voice that sounded like someone whispering
through a gravel driveway

'HOW DARE YOU DISTURB THE GRAVE OF THE GREAT HERO SIR
BISQUE... ME! MY GRAVE WILL BECOME YOUR GRAVE
TOO, LITTLE CAKE'



As Cat and Sir Thermidor walked across a huge bridge, and the buildings around them changed from the homes and streets of a city, to the looming darkness of a huge castle, the lobster knight talked:

'Thank you for helping me with my quest Cat, but there's something else I haven't told you...'

'You see, the black coins bring out the worst in those who touch them, and Sir Bisque, our leader had a dark desire in his heart. Our city was opening up and new people were coming to visit, he was scared of change and the curse found that fear. Sir Bisque made it so that everything would stay the same. Time hasn't passed like normal since then...'

'Cat, the story I told you of us finding the black gold happened 1000 years ago. We're all ancient here...'



Meringue was dizzy from the speech Sir Bisque had been giving for the last half hour. He had been ranting about how the reef was changing, how it was his job to protect everyone and how he had managed to stop time to keep everything as it was...

'But if you stopped time so effectively, why are you a ghost now?' asked Meringue between gulps and shakes of fear.

'In the early days of my reign, the people rose up and tried to overthrow me, they failed of course, fools, but in the battle I took a fatal wound. My body died but the spell wouldn't allow me to die! And now I can't be harmed at all, HAHAAH!!'

Meringue laughed along a little bit too but he didn't really find it all that funny...



'ENOUGH TALKING' roared Sir Bisque 'YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE AND YOU LOOK VERY TASTY!! I THINK I'LL END THIS CONVERSATION NOW!'

And then he stopped, looking over his shoulder. 'Someone approaches' he said as Meringue cowered against a wall.

'Your friends perhaps? I see, you were just bait to try and catch me by surprise...



But then, from out of the dark a voice said in reply...

'Meringue is not bait...'



'COAT HIM' yelled Sir Thermidor as the two heroes emerged from the light and charged Sir Bisque!

Cat readied the VantaSword and on his command black ink surged out of the blade, distracting Sir Bisque for a split second.

In a flash, Sir Thermidor was in the air, sword in hand. The two knights eyes met... in battle.



Meringue looked on as Cat and a lobster
wrestled with a huge ghost.

Suddenly there was a screeching of hastily assembled
wooden wheels. It was the crabs that Meringue
had met in the city, and they'd finished off the car
that Meringue had started building way back at the
beginning of this story!

'But that was just a four-panel joke' protested
Meringue 'I never meant to finish it!'

'Don't worry about that now' said one of the crabs,
'Jump in and come with us to safety!'

'I'll ride with you' said Meringue, 'but first
we're helping my friend...'



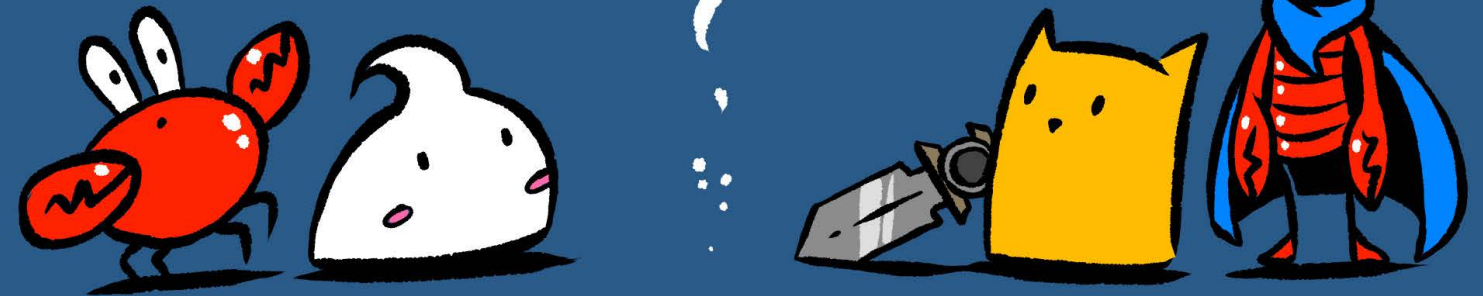
Sir Thermidor deflected a ghostly claw with an expert sword swing. Cat made a high pitched whimpering noise. Sir Thermidor raised his shield and slid backward from a heavy strike. Cat made a scared face and let out a small fear-fart. Sir Thermidor raised his sword and Sir Bisque knocked it from his claw, sending it flying. Sir Bisque watched the sword soar through the air, and Sir Thermidor yelled;

'NOW CAT!'

And Cat inflated his microbe of courage up to a thin-skinned balloon of valour and darted under the ghost's tail to its grave... and the black coin.

In a flash Cat brought the VantaSword down on the coin, instantly turning it to ash.

Sir Bisque screamed, he was injured! It seemed impossible! With his coin gone the curse was weakened and whatever was keeping him a ghost waned in strength. Sir Bisque dwindled to a sliver of ghost paste... and then disappeared.



Sir Thermidor looked up to where Sir Bisque just was and said under his breath, 'I'm sorry old friend...'

Cat flooded the VantaSword with one last charge of energy and then, being careful not to touch it, popped the coin out of the hilt.

'Hey, Sir Thermidor... CATCH!' He said, and tossed the coin to the lobster knight.

'No!' said Meringue but Sir Thermidor had it firmly in a claw.

And nothing happened.

'I knew it' said Cat with a smile. 'You said to me you were the misfit knight with no purpose, but it's clear now that you were the 'good' of the group. The curse brings out the worst in people, but there's no bad in you. Not a single bit. You were the hero this reef needed.'



Cat brought the sword down on the last black coin, turning it to ash. And with that the VantaSword lost its enchantment and returned to being a normal sword. The curse was broken, they could almost feel it in the air!

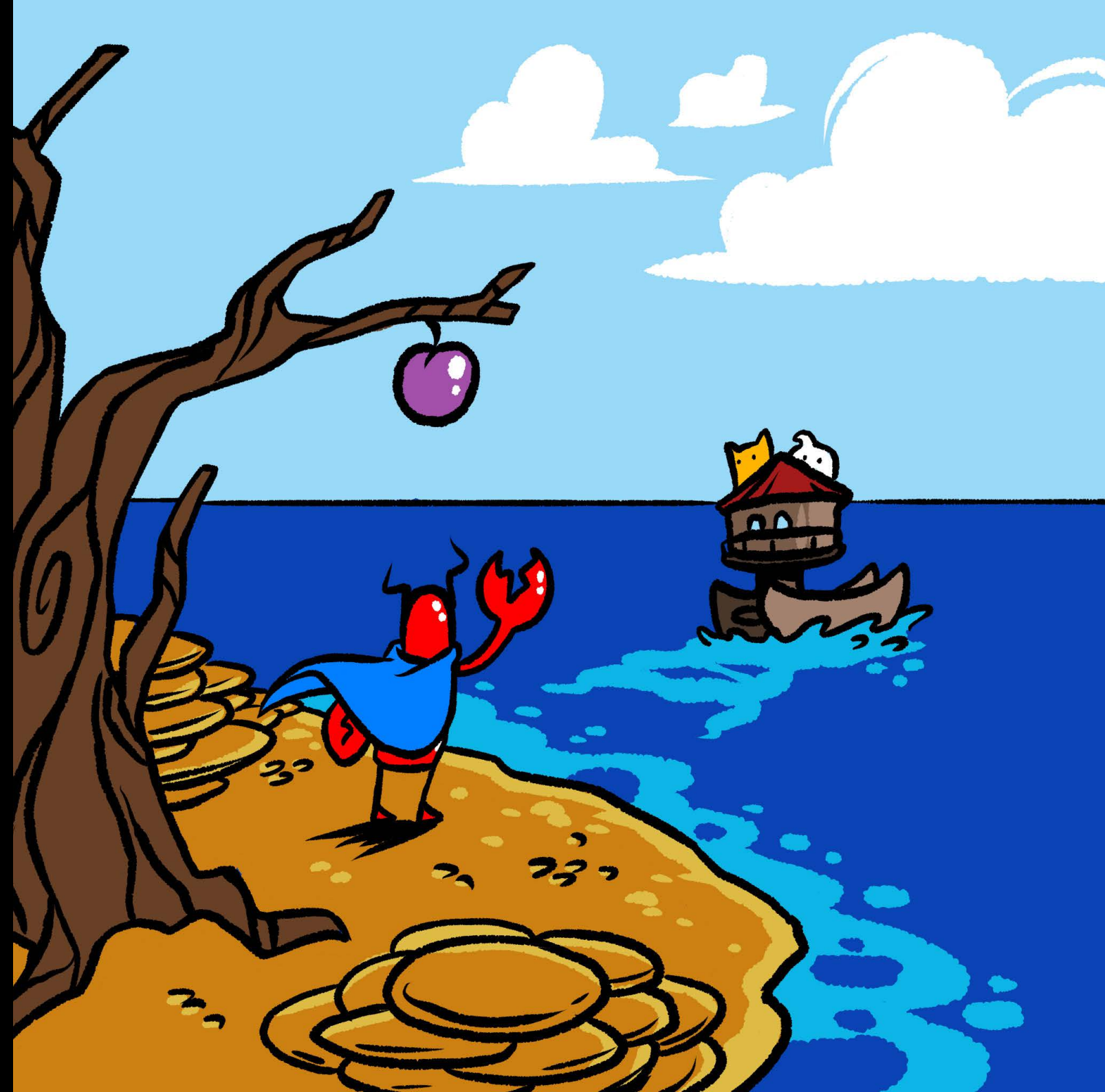
'Thank you Cat' said Sir Thermidor 'I couldn't have done this alone'

'Yeah you could've' said Cat, 'but I appreciate you including me!'

'You should keep the sword' said Sir Thermidor, 'Consider it a souvenir!'

Cat was secretly really hoping he would say that and swallowed a hiccup of excitement.

They said their goodbyes and set sail on the Catamaran for horizons new. And as Cat looked back at the waving Sir Thermidor he could have sworn he saw one of the fruits from the reef trees, not rotten like before, but fresh and ripe.



THE END

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