

Boah'gug and the Search for Fire

In those primeval days when the world was still young, and gods still roamed the lands, and seas, and air, and mountains, and caves, and forests, and back alleys, and rubbish bins. The elements were raw – the sea was wide and cold, the land open and vast¹, the mountains tall and forbidding, and the sky fierce with wind. The people lived in tribes wandering the great dark forests of Yukk catching and eating thickwitted glums and huddling together to protect themselves from the elements. Sometimes they huddled together for other things too – but mostly they huddled to protect themselves. One of the tribes was the Claynana tribe who had a great tradition of armpit sniffing and expelling anyone who seemed to be slightly smarter than the average smoth². One dark and stormy night with the rain lashing at the roof of their twig lean-to built into the sheltering roots of a vast squat and wind sheared tree, the elder of the tribe, Duh'myung, threw down his bowl of cold glum gruel and put his face in his hands.

"Fuck – this weather sucks.", he mumbled from behind his big hairy hands. "Fuck I hate this place. Everyday we are rained on, winded at, shat on, eat cold glum gruel, get cold and wet, and Ahhhhh!"

"Don't you want your glum?", asked Boah'gug the most hopeless³ of the three glum trackers the tribe had. After a couple of minutes during which time Duh'myung didn't answer, Boah'gug shuffled over and began scraping up the spilled glum gruel and shoveling it into his mouth together with a considerable quantity of dirt, dead leaves, and twigs. "Yum yummm yummm.", he mumbled contentedly as he did so.

Eventually, Duh'myung spoke. "It would be just SO nice to be warm and dry just for once."

"But, great elder.", spoke up a little voice. "I saw one of the other tribes a week ago, they had this red and yellow jumpy thing that they were sitting around. They were happy, and laughing, and dry. We should go and find out from them what they have."

Duh'myung looked up. "This kid is too smart. Expel him from the tribe."

With the child kicked out the door and sent on his way – Duh'myung felt a little better. Seeing Duh'myung a little more normal, the medicine man, Tseh'bleg, felt more comfortable about approaching him. To add to his effect he rattled the bag of bones that he kept around his neck and moaned loudly. "Great Duh'myung. I feel a presence. It is getting closer. It is coming here."

Just then a gust of wind blew in around the edges of the lean-to, and a squat greasy figure with a large beard and nose waddled around the corner. He was surrounded by a blue aura, and his eyes glowed yellow. "Perhaps I can be of service to you.", said the short demon of the one hundred and twelfth circle. "You see, what you want is a good fire. Something to warm the bones, and set your hearts at ease. Something to heat your.....is that cold glum gruel you're eating? Disgusting, you are just such a sad bunch. Anyway, fire is what you want. It warms, it cooks, it dries, it lights, and feels nice, but wait that's not all.... It is also inspirational and can provide you with power, comfort, and sex appeal. You'll be the envy of the other tribes."

"What?" asked Duh'myung. "That all sounds so reasonable. How do we get some?"

"That's what I like to hear.", enthused the demon. "An eager customer. Well – I can't give you any myself but I do know where to get it. Send your spare tracker to the snakegod who lives in the palace on top of the anvil crag in the greater desert of Yore. There he must steal the eye of the guardian snake statue and take it to the secret amphitheater of the sun. At midday he must place the eye in a holder in the centre of the amphitheater and pass wood under the holder. That will enable you to bring fire to your world. How does that sound to you? It will be perilous, but your spare tracker is expendable afterall..... One time offer..... Never to be repeated."

"And you give us this information for nothing?" asked Duh'myung.

¹ Except where the land was covered by forest, deep valleys, inside caves.... actually there were a lot of places where it was not vast and open.

² To the average smoth, an act of genius was peeling a banana before eating it so as to avoid the nasty taste of the skin.

³ Boah'gug was a very bad glum tracker even by the standards of the Claynana tribe. He had managed to lose the trail of almost every glum he had ever been sent off to track. As a glum is not dissimilar to a three metre long hairy slug, and moves at only about one kilometre per hour leaving behind it a thick trail of purple slime, losing their trail requires a complete lack of any useful bush skills.

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“Well – yes. Of course, as one friend to another.”, said the demon, smiling.

“In that case – we'll send him at once” Duh'myung was relieved. He thought the price might have been his soul, but as he'd already bargained that away the other year on a particularly flavour-some root that made him feel particularly happy when he ate it, he was a little worried about the fallout that might occur if he sold it again. “What is it again?”

“Fire.” said the demon. “ A sort of red and yellow jumpy thing, sometimes accompanied by a black billowy thing. Here, look, I'll write it down.”

“What's write?” asked Duh'myung.

“Oh. I see.”, the demon drew out some paper and wrote down the description of his directions together with a map and some wavy lines to represent the snake god. He then handed the paper to Duh'myung, who passed it straight on to Boah'gug who was gazing blankly out at the wind and rain. Boah'gug gazed blankly at the sheet, blinked, and looked up with a slow smile spreading across his face.

“Well? What are you waiting for?” Duh'myung snapped at the stupidly smiling Boah'gug. “Go and get me this fire. Quickly – before I get too cold.”

Boah'gug looked puzzled, and looked at the instructions given to him. He didn't understand a word of it, and hadn't been listening, but the pictures looked like he could figure them with a little effort. Beaming with pride at his new responsibility, he scuttled out of the lean-to into the wind and the rain.

“A man of quick action. Very good.”, puffed the demon. “I must be off – obviously you are a busy guy, so I shan't detain you any longer. I shall watch progress with considerable interest.” A snigger escaped his lips as he waddled off into the forest and vanished.

In the shelter of a large tree bole, Boah'gug sat down and pulled out the map drawn by the demon. Of course he could not read the careful annotations, but the pictures were obvious enough. The wavy lines were obviously the sea-god. Boah'gug had heard that the seas was a sort of wavy, wobbly thing. All of the other glyphs were just supporting material to back up that the sea-god had this fire stuff. It was a bit of a useless map though in that it didn't show where the sea was. Boah'gug picked up pebbles and threw them into the bush as he thought about what to do about finding the sea. The description “thought about” is a bit of an exaggeration in this case as Boah'gug was completely incapable of such an action.

“Watch it!” squawked a voice in the bushes near where Boah'gug was tossing his stones. An indignant kid emerged from the bushes. It was the smart kid that Dah'myung had so recently expelled from the tribe. “Oh its you.”, said the kid. “What are you doing out without supervision?”

“I'm going to find fire.”, said Boah'gug proudly.

The child looked at him with an expression of amused surprise. “I see! So how are you going to do that?”

“The demon gave us instructions on how to find it.” Boah'gug showed the child the map.

The child studied it carefully, “Hmmm focussed sunlight, and a whole lot of superstitious mumbo jumbo to hide the real facts. It could work.”

“I'm going to get fire from the sea-god!” Boah'gug snatched his map back muttering and growling “Mine! Mine! Mine!”

“From the sea god?”

“Yes.”, said Boah'gug. “I will ask him for it, and if he doesn't give it to me I shall steal it. There will be legends written about me and my great exploits.”

“From the SEA god?”

“Yes.”, said Boah'gug. “I will change the world with my red and yellow wobbly fire stuff.”

“From the sea god? A fellow surrounded in water?”, asked the child.

“Yes I think so.”, said Boah'gug. “I think the sea is water....Unless you're trying to trick me.”

“Hmmm.”, the child was amused. “You'd better come with me to talk to the elder of our neighboring tribe. “I think he will be interested to hear your tale.”

The village elder looked closely at the map, and scratched at the grey stubble on his chin. “I can't read the writing very well, but the glyphs on this map are fairly clear and back up what little

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of the script I can read. It seems that this is a map to direct you to an artifact that can help you make fire.”

“Yes. From the sea god.”, stated Boah'gug.

“The sea god you say?” the elder peered at Boah'gug in puzzlement. “I think you are mistaken. The map shows the way to a snake god – see the wavy lines in the desert.

“No! The sea god!” said Boah'gug firmly, standing up and snatching the map back. He clutched it to himself muttering and scragging. “It’s mine.”

“Are you sure you know what you’re looking for?” asked the elder.

“Yes!” snapped Boah'gug. “I know what it is....and, and don’t you try to trick me out of it. I will find it! I will! Hah Ha Ha.”

“Well if you must go to the sea, the best way to go is to follow a river, they all end up at the sea eventually.”, said the elder. “Goodbye.”

Screaming obscenities, Boah'gug jumped up and dashed out of the hut. Or he would have dashed out of the hut but unfortunately he was so busy laughing insanely and staring at the elder that he ran straight into the wall beside the door. On the second go he ran into the wall on the other side, and then forgot to duck as he finally went through the opening. Picking himself up he dashed off for all of twenty metres before turning to see if any enraged crowd was following him. Nobody was there except for a small child sitting in the dust. The child flicked at stone at him with a slingshot. The stone entered Boah'gug’s ear and rattled around. Keeping an eye on the child Boah'gug walked up to the nearest hut and snatched a handful of thatching before running away.

“You did well to bring us that information young Dweezle.” said the elder to the smart kid. “Thank you. This fire thing will be useful. We’ll send off a search party as soon as possible to find some stone roses⁴. I think they will be a good source of glass for us to make a sunlight focusing thing.”

Dashing through the woods, Boah'gug tripped over roots, whacked his head on low branches, and got thoroughly scratched by twigs and thorns. He sniggered to himself at his own smartness in outwitting the other tribe and being able to get away with vandalising their village. He considered sneaking back to snatch another handful of thatching but soon realised that he was hopelessly lost anyway and had as much chance of finding the village again as of finding a polite flea that didn’t immediately bite him on the arse. Boah'gug slowed to a walk and continued in the direction he was already heading. Seeing as he didn’t know which way to go anyway, one direction was as good as another.

The wind howled and the rain struck at Boah'gug as he eventually emerged from the relative shelter of the forest on the edge of a deep chasm at the bottom of which a churning river boiled. Holding onto roots and scrabbling at the damp rocks, Boah'gug let himself slowly down the steep rock faces towards the river. Halfway down, the shrub he was swinging on gave way and he was pitched out into space. The sound of him hitting the water was lost in the all encompassing roar of the cataract. Boah'gug did not know how to swim, but by thrashing and struggling he eventually found himself staying with his head in the air enough to be able to continue surviving. Around him, the chasm walls slipped by rapidly as the swift current swirled and tumbled him along its course. Slowly, the river became calmer and the steep chasm walls gave way to low forest clad banks. Feeling his feet touch the ground, Boah'gug stood, and waded towards a small sandy beach beside some large boulders. The setting sun filled the sky with red and gold, and painted the forest in deepening shadows. Boah'gug was hungry – he had no food with him, and had never considered bringing any. Casting about he looked for glum sign, but failed to find anything. After waiting five minutes he checked again to see if any glum tracks had miraculously appeared, but there were still no signs. As he had only ever hunted glums he was not too sure what to do next. He picked up a rock and hurled it into the surrounding bushes for something to do. There was a thump followed by a squeak from amongst the ferns.

⁴ Sand fused into glass from a lightning strike. They exist, honestly.

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“What was that?” asked Boah'gug. Cautiously he parted the ferns to see a grey furry creature with a long pink tail, its head pinned under his rock. The creature struggled. Boah'gug quickly grabbed it in both hands and pulled it out from under the rock.

The creature blinked its golden eyes and said in a little voice, “Please don't eat me. If you release me I'll grant you true happiness and contentment for the rest of your life.”

“Sure.” Boah'gug smirked, and opened his mouth wide.

“If you eat me – I shall use my powers to ensure you have misfortune for the rest of your life.”, said the creature lowering its voice to a hiss.

“Bollocks.”, smiled Boah'gug stuffing the creature into his mouth, and slurping down its long tail. Boah'gug burped.

Settling down to sleep, Boah'gug laid his head on a log and closed his eyes. He awoke shortly after to a thumping and bumping in his stomach. He felt the creature moving inside him. He felt it move to the bottom of his stomach turn around and then start galloping towards his throat. Quickly he grabbed his throat and squeezed hard to stop the creature escaping. Everything went dark with white spots, and Boah'gug felt happy to be able to get off to sleep so easily. He woke again some time later with a bit of a headache. There was someone beside him. They were tall and glowed in the darkness with a flowing blue nimbus. “Fool.”, said the spirit. “I could have helped you with your quest. Now only misfortune is yours. You will never know of the short ways through the world that I could have shown you. Farewell.” With that the spirit drifted off up the river, and Boah'gug assigned the experience to a dream.

The next day Boah'gug tripped and fell into the river again as he was getting a drink of water. The current picked him up and carried him sedately along between forests and ever widening banks. Boah'gug grabbed a passing log and held on. For two days and two nights, the river continued on its way, the log staying in the centre of the flow and never coming close enough to a bank for its bedraggled and hungry passenger to get off. Boah'gug was dozing one afternoon, and suddenly found himself plunged unexpectedly into the water. The log had suddenly come to rest on a sandbar a short way from shore. Ahead, the river split into multiple channels of slow moving water, forest surrounded it on all sides, the branches and leaves dipping into the tea coloured water.

“Which one leads to the sea” wondered Boah'gug to himself as he waded towards a nearby bank with a small grassy patch on it. Boah'gug sunk into the deep grass and started eating. He was quite hungry. With green gunge dripping from his mouth he munched happily and then fell asleep.

“Boah'gug, my descendent.”, whispered a voice.

Boah'gug mumbled and snored.

“Boah'gug, my descendent!” the voice said a bit louder.

Boah'gug's face twitched and he muttered unintelligibly to himself.

“BOAH'GUG, MY DESCENDENT!” yelled the voice.

Boah'gug sat bolt upright and shouted “What d'ya want?” before opening his eyes and finding himself looking into the ghostly face of his long since dead great great grandfather. “What?...Oh?...Ah!.....Hi.”

“Boah'gug, my descendant, I am here to provide you with the guidance you need to help you on your quest. Ask of me what you need to know.”

Boah'gug considered for a while then said. ‘I'm going to the sea but don't know which river to follow from here. Which way should I go?’

The ghost of Boah'gug's ancestor, nodded slowly and faded a little as he thought. A big grin crossed his insubstantial face, and was then replaced with another thoughtful expression. “If you go that....No. no. that's not it.” He pointed down another waterway ‘It's tha....No. it's not that way either.....Maybe it was THAT one after all..... But then maybe not.....”

Boah'gug listened intently for a couple of minutes while the ghost debated with himself then went back to sleep when nothing was forthcoming.

The next day was raining and windy, the clouds were low as if the god who was said to be holding up the sky was feeling a bit tired. Without guidance, Boah'gug randomly chose a water

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course to follow. It was slow progress as he made his way along the scrub choked bank. Close to midday Boah'gug stopped and looked around. There was something on the river. A most peculiar thing with a tall dark robed figure standing in it, gently pushing it along by means of a pole. The thing looked a little like a long food trough with pointed front and back. Boah'gug watched as it drew closer, and waved. The figure waved back – “good day to you.” The voice was deep and rich carrying across the still water.

“What is that thing you’re standing on?” asked Boah'gug.

“This?” asked the figure leaning on his pole and bringing the device to a standstill opposite Boah'gug. “This is a boat. Or more precisely a Ferry.”

“A faery is a small person with wings and doubtful goodness.”, said Boah'gug knowledgeably.

“Okay it’s a boat.”, said the boatman seeing that following a path of trying to enlighten Boah'gug was likely to end up in an argument.

“What does it do?” asked Boah'gug.

The boatman was puzzled. “You stand in it, and you don’t get wet when travelling on water.”

“Why would you want to travel on water?” asked Boah'gug.

“Well....Look, there’s a river that must be crossed by all people when they die.” This just makes it easier for them than swimming. “Just a small service I offer, carrying dead people from one side of the river to the other. Obviously not today as I’m on holiday.”

“So you take these dead people across a river somewhere. What happens when you get to the other side, do you just chuck the dead bodies onto the beach and end up with a huge pile of bodies or is there someone else there who can take them somewhere else?”

“Er....no.... no that’s not it at all. Well nice to have met you. I can see you’re a busy person.” The boatman put his weight into the pole and was soon gliding around a corner in the waterway and out of sight.

“What a strange person.”, said Boah'gug and continued fighting his way along the bank entirely missing the packed mud path that ran along the bank about two metres into the forest.

Scratched and bruised Boah'gug toiled along the scrub thick bank of the slow moving river until eventually it ended in a marshy swamp surrounded in trees. A rhythmic roaring could be heard beyond the trees. Boah'gug stamped his foot.

“Stupid old fart.”, he snarled. “‘All rivers lead to the sea.’ What a crock.”

With that he turned and stormed back along the way he had come. Back at the split in the river, he took the other branch, again fighting his way along its course until he finally ended up at another marshy bit of ground, beyond which the strange roaring could be heard. For two days he struggled his way along watercourses only to end up at a swampy end.

Upon reaching the end of yet another watercourse he threw himself onto the soft ground and had a little paddy. All the action of having a paddy complete with kicking and screaming, Boah'gug felt his bladder was a bit full and scuttled into the bushes to relieve himself. As he scuttled into the trees alongside the marshy patch he tripped over a tree root and was pitched through the undergrowth onto a wide stretch of sand. He picked himself up, spitting out sand and shells, faced the trees and did his business. “Ahhhhh – nice!”

He straightened up and looked around himself. Breakers rolled into the white beach casting spray and foam across the sands driven by the stiff breeze coming in across the ocean. The tang of salt was strong and invigorating.

Boah'gug looked at the wide vista and walked boldly up to the foam line. “Sea god!” he shouted. “I want to talk to you. I want some fire.”

The heavy waves crashed on the beach and spread up to Boah'gug’s feet before receding. Boah'gug waited for half an hour before shouting “Hey! Pooh head sea god. I want some fire.” Still the sea continued its eternal crash and roll, the foam line moving slowly up the beach as the tide rose. For seven days and seven nights, Boah'gug stood at the foam edge shouting taunts and demands to the sea. Once or twice a larger than normal wave spread up the beach enveloping his feet in cold water, and sucking the sand from around his toes.

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On the eighth day, a strong wind whipped up the beach flinging sand at Boah'gug in a stinging blizzard. He took refuge amongst the trees and watched as the skies darkened with churning clouds. The storm intensified, stirring white horses into the seething broth of the sea. The waves reached up towards Boah'gug in his hiding place amongst the trees, the foamy fingers sliding and fanning across the beach in a search for their tormentor. Two massive dark shapes drifted monumentally through the sea spray filled air, the waves foaming at their bases. As they came closer they resolved themselves to be two jagged crags of rock. Silently they slid majestically through the breakers and came to rest at opposite ends of the beach. Nothing more happened.

As the day wore on, the wind abated and the sky began to clear. By evening the seas had calmed and the sun was out, casting its reddened glow across the sands, and lighting the now parked rock crags. Music drifted and wafted along the beach. It was hypnotic. Boah'gug was drawn from his hiding place, the exquisite music and song from the rocks calling to him. As Boah'gug's feet carried him closer to the nearest rock crag he could make out two figures upon it lounging amongst the flax and wind sculpted trees of the crag. He could see the sunlight glinting on the ivory curves of lyres they carried. The two women raised their heads and sang. Their song gripped Boah'gug's heart. He felt it pounding within his chest as if trying to escape and go to the two women who sang so sweetly and enticingly. Boah'gug's feet stumbled after his heart, his brain although numb to most things most of the time was even more numb, and just let his feet and heart lead. He could feel his face flushing. Boah'gug had never seen such perfect creatures as these, he just wanted to throw himself at their feet and be their slave forever more.

The women watched Boah'gug approach, a wicked smile upon their lips. When he had approached to within five meters of the foot of the rock crag, the music and singing abruptly stopped. Boah'gug snapped out of his dream-state as if slapped. "Huh?" It struck Boah'gug then just how sharp the teeth of the two women looked. He looked at them, his blood snap chilled from their rosy heat to rivers of ice. Fear replaced love. His feet that were a bit faster than his head spun him on the spot and carried him madly along the beach towards the trees he had hidden from the storm in. He was just about to plunge into the safety of the trees when a fresh wave of fabulous music swept across him, washing away his fear and turning his toes back towards the rocky crag and the two women. A second layer of music joined the first. A subtly different song, more insistent, more enticing but this time emanating from the crag on the other end of the beach. Boah'gug's feet faltered, and started paddling towards the new song. Closer to the source of the new song, Boah'gug saw that it was three very beautiful women singing to the music of lyres that they strummed casually and skillfully, the evening sunlight glowing on their bare skin. When Boah'gug reached the base of the crag and began to look for a way to climb up the black rocks to the flax lined cupola that the women were lounging in, the music suddenly ceased, leaving Boah'gug's head ringing with the abrupt vacancy of sound. Terror overtook him as he realised that the women of the same type as the others. He raced back towards the sanctuary of the trees, but before he got there the beguiling song drifted into his ears turning his brains and its terror to mush and redirecting his running feet towards the first crag. He skidded to a halt at the base of the crag as the music abruptly stopped sweeping aside the glamour that fogged his brain to reveal his terror again. He ran back up the beach, but was picked up by the song of the second group of sirens. When his mind cleared again he found himself at the base of the second the crag, with the women grinning at him from their lofty perch. He ran.

The game of Boah'gug ping-pong continued for two hours, Boah'gug being alternately enticed then terrified one way and then the other. In the last rays of the sun, Boah'gug stumbled smitten and exhausted to the base of one of the crags of rock. He got to within two metres of the crags base when the music suddenly stopped and he looked up at the beautiful women standing above him. Before he could think to flee the closer of the two women spoke in a voice as sweet as nectar that carried behind it undertones as deadly as spider venom. "What do you want of Karatha, the great god of the sea, little Boah'gug?"

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Boah'gug stammered in fear – “I came to find fire. The sea god has some.”

“Fire and water don't mix”, grinned the Siren exposing long sharp teeth. “You will not find fire in the sea.”

“Yes I will.”, said Boah'gug, his anger and indignation overcoming his terror. “It is there. I know it is.”

“I'm afraid not,” said the Siren. “If you knew anything at all about what you seek you would know that this is true.”

“I know lots about fire,” screamed Boah'gug.

“Okay,” smiled the Siren. So what can it be used for?”

“Um.....well.....” Boah'gug screwed his toe into the sand then suddenly shouted. “You're trying to trick me. I don't have to tell you. I don't!”

“Listen dumb shit,” said the Siren, her words forming frost in the air. “Don't piss us off. You're on a fool's quest. If my sisters and I were not under strict orders not to eat you we would have done the world a service already by feasting on your stupid remains. At least then you wouldn't be going to annoy anyone else.”

“You don't frighten me,” yowled Boah'gug, his body contradicting him as he wet his pants.

The Siren leapt. Lightning and sea spray twisted out of the sand to meet her as she dropped the eight metres lightly to the sand in front of Boah'gug. “You should be.” screamed the Siren, her eyes suddenly blazed red, and she opened her mouth impossibly wide exposing massive sharp tusks, claws extended from her fingers, and her muscles and sinews bunched and knotted as her svelte figure transformed into a body designed exclusively for catching and rending prey. Boah'gug shrieked in terror and curled up into a little ball.

The Siren shifted again to return to her temptress look. “Be here in the morning, fool. Others will guide you to Karatha.” She waved her hand in a complex gesture and darkness enveloped Boah'gug.

Boah'gug woke stiff and sore. The two crags had gone, leaving two depressions where they had rode up onto the beach. These were gradually being smoothed away by the action of the breakers. A chill wind blew off the lead gray sea. Boah'gug sat on the sand and gazed at the waves as they broke upon the sand with a roar and hiss. “Stupid things.” He muttered, thinking about the Sirens. “They don't frighten...” Two snakelike arms lined with suckers shot out of the surf and snatched him into the waves. Boah'gug struggled, but it was no good, the tentacle held firm. Before he could determine which way was up he found himself stuffed into a vessel filled with air. A hatch slammed closed under him. He coughed violently, then lay on the hatch panting to catch his breath. He opened his eyes. He was in a small spherical pod-like capsule made of a strange dark brown slippery and slightly resilient material. Most of the sides of the sphere were taken up by large transparent oval membranes made of a similarly slightly flexible material. Through these he could see the silver undersides of the waves, and the haze of froth. Around him, dark figures flashed past and around the small pod that he occupied, attaching lines to the pod. The pod lurched and began sliding into the deeper darker water away from the wave breaking line, as the figures began dragging on the lines. He could see them more clearly now, a giant many tentacled creature had been harnessed to the pod by stout cables of seaweed, while a number of smaller lines were being pulled on by creatures half person half fish. Boah'gug watched the rhythmic fluid motions of the creatures around him as if mesmerised.

The journey took them through a vast forest of seaweed, the tall stems gently caressing the sides of the pod as they passed. Green light filtered down from the surface high above between the luxuriant fronds. They passed over the sunken ruins of temples and palaces belonging to past and forgotten gods. Onward, past reefs teeming with life, past sandy planes, and deep abysses, the sea creatures pulled Boah'gug in his strange vehicle.

Eventually the procession glided through a large portal, across an open courtyard, and finally came to a gentle stop within a well-lit chamber surrounded in giant ornately carved pillars. Boah'gug looked around him in astonished disinterest that betrayed both his lack of appreciation for the effort and skill of the crafts-beings who had created the edifice, and his lack of intelligence.

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A pair of sea-people conferred some distance away, glancing in Boah'gug's direction every so often. Shortly one came over made some gestures at Boah'gug, and burbled something incomprehensible. Boah'gug felt strange. However he did not have time to explore this feeling as alarm quickly replaced it as the small air filled pod suddenly started filling with water. It filled rapidly, and Boah'gug found himself desperately trying to hold his breath.

"You can now breath underwater." Said the sea-person, through the walls of the capsule. Release your breath and come out, Karatha, the great god of the sea will see you shortly.

Boah'gug shook his head violently, his lips pressed tightly closed, bubbles streaming from his nostrils. The sea person watched as the rhythmic stream of bubbled from Boah'gug's nose lessened and was finally no more. Boah'gug continued to hold his lips tightly closed. "My word – you are so good at holding your breath." Said the sea-person releasing the pod door.

Boah'gug was led at a slow motion walk through the vast chamber to a smaller but no less well lit, room and was gestured to a seat. He floated over to the seat and settled into it, as the sea-people darted off through another door. There was a bowl of small orange spheres on a table beside the seat. He picked one up and went to eat it but found that he wouldn't be able to without releasing his breath. Maybe if nobody saw him open his mouth, he wouldn't really have released his breath. Or maybe there was another way of getting the orange thing into his mouth without opening it. He was still debating with himself how to consume the item when a sea-person swam into the room. "The great sea-god will see you now."

Boah'gug was led into a vast room with delicate lattice patterning around the walls, white columns reaching to the blue ceiling, and billowy white materials wafting in the currents. On a throne of twisted kelp and gold sat Karatha, the sea god. He was immense. At least three times the size of the sea folk, blue scaled skin, a humanoid upper torso merging into a shark body for his lower half. His head and face were like that of a cuttlefish. His beak opened, his voice coming like the rolling thunder of ocean breakers upon a beach. "Boah'gug you have spent days standing on a beach shouting my name, ignoring the messages of my envoys, and generally being a pain in the butt. What is it you want?"

"I want you to give me some fire." Blurted Boah'gug defiantly. "I know you have some here!" He then quickly clamped his hand over his mouth to prevent his breath escaping. A burst of bubbles escaped from his pants.

"He just farted.", sniggered a sea-person, nudging the one next to him.

"There is no fire under the sea.", Karatha patiently explained. "Fire and water do not work together."

"You're lying.", shouted Boah'gug.

"Listen to me!" roared Karatha surging out of his throne to tower over Boah'gug. "Fire will never exist under the sea except in a very short term way. We have no fire here!"

Boah'gug pulled himself to full height (which wasn't much), filled his chest and shouted. "You're lying." He ran around Karatha, kicked a completely innocent fish that was nearby, smashed a bowl of sea flowers, and put his hands over his ears, shut his eyes tightly and squawked, "Liar, Liar, Lair!"

Karatha sighed, picked the loudly squalling Boah'gug up by the scruff of his neck and threw him out of the palace. With the combined strength of the sea-god's throw and his influence over the water, Boah'gug found himself flung completely out of the sea, to end up scudding up a beach on his face. He came to rest with a bump against a tree trunk. A very large seed pod fell on his head to burst in a drushy yellow pulp that oozed down into his ears. Boah'gug had a hissy fit and fell asleep.

During his sleep, he dreamed. He dreamed that the demon appeared before him. "You were so close too." It said in mock sympathy. "Maybe you should try again or look in another place."

"I was close," agreed Boah'gug nodding his head. "I will go back. I WILL go back. I will go back". He snapped awake and raging "I WILL GO BACK!"

But, how would he get into the palace? His eyes narrowed as he suddenly conceived of a cunning plan. Searching along the shoreline he soon came across what he was looking for, a

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thick tangle of black seaweed. He draped it over his head, snail shells and sea-lice falling from its mass. Sniggering gleefully he rushed back into the sea. Soon the waves engulfed him, and he floundered his way along the bottom of the sea in the direction of the palace. In his slow journey back the way he had come, sea-people came to investigate him. At these times he would greet them and say "Hi. I'm one of you," and tug on his thick mop of seaweed hair. The sea-people would invariably smirk and gracefully glide away into the blue. Eventually he came in sight of the great gates of the palace of the sea-god. He hunkered down behind a low wall and muttered to himself. "I need to find this fire for myself. The dumb shit sea-god will not give it to me so I shall steal it. Yes, that's it."

From his hiding place he observed the sea-people passing freely through the main gates. No guards were evident. Brushing off the cluster of shrimp that were making a meal of his glum-skin pants⁵, we made his way to casually join a group of sea-people entering the palace. They looked at him in surprise, questioning smiles on their faces.

"Hi!" said Boah'gug, "I'm just like you. I'm off to look over the palace. Are you doing that too?"

"No." a tall slender sea-person replied. "We were keen to join the fire feast. Karatha keep boxes of it down on the cellars and brings it out for feasts on very special occasions."

"Wow. You don't say? Down in the cellars you say?" said Boah'gug scratching his seaweed wig and accidentally knocking it off. Quickly he put it back on and looked around to see if anyone had noticed.

"Yes," enthused the whole group of sea-people. "Lots of little boxes of fire. Blue ones."

"Gosh. Sounds very neat. Well I must be off," said Boah'gug. "The cellars you say?"

"Yes."

"Are they this way?" Boah'gug indicated a stairwell off to one side of the large courtyard they were passing through. "Not that I'm going to look for the fire....I'm looking for other things there you know."

"That's not the way," said the sea-person helpfully. "The shortcut is that dark shaft over there."

There was a particularly dark and slimy looking shaft set into the floor of the opposite side of the courtyard. A crumbled set of columns, a tall stand of seaweed, and dark fence surrounded it.

"Right. Well, I mustn't keep you," said Boah'gug, surreptitiously backing towards the distant shaft. "Oh I see my friend over there. Bye. Have fun at the feast," he turned and walked away towards another group of sea-people across the other side of the courtyard. He turned briefly to look at the group he had just left, and saw them watching with interest. "Nosey buggers," he muttered. As he passed by the fence surrounding the shaft he quickly sidestepped and pressed himself to the corroded bars, sniggering at his cunning. He squeezed between the bars, losing his wig as he did so. His momentum carried him through the surrounding seaweed, and into the darkness of the shaft.

"What a nit," said the Karatha, shedding the image of the sea-person he was wearing.

As Boah'gug slowly fell, he tried to grab the walls, but came away with handfuls of black slime. The little circle of blue light above him shrank as he sank deeper. In the darkness he felt the brushing past but now his motion was not vertical. He was going carried by a current along a slimy stone conduit. After a number of turns, drops, rises, a glow appeared up ahead that grew quickly. Boah'gug found himself cast out into a high vaulted chamber lit by the phosphorescence of fish. In the strange shifting light, Boah'gug came to rest on the floor near the foot of a massive pillar. All about him were piles of glittering yellow metal disks, wooden boxes draped with bright metal chains and small silvery spheres strung on cords. There were many other objects of strange shape and uncertain function that were made of the same yellowy metal. Boah'gug picked up one of the disks. He bit it. It didn't taste of anything. He dropped it again and made his way towards an opening off the chamber. With the glow of passing fish to light his way he pushed his way deeper into the cellars. He passed through innumerable chambers large and small, all with vast collections of things in them, some familiar, some enigmatic, some boring, but

⁵ And succeeded in eating the belt and a few strategic holes.

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never any with little blue boxes. He stopped in a large chamber and munched on a slab of glum meat he had found in one of the chambers. This chamber was filled with old boots⁶. Maybe he had walked past a passage to the chamber where the fire was kept? He turned and walked back through the passage he had entered the chamber by. He didn't remember the curve when he came through it the first time. The passage opened out into an enormous chamber filled with age-encrusted bottles and urns of wine. This wasn't what it was previously. He sniffed and continued searching the chamber. "It's around here somewhere," he muttered picking his way amongst the massive crates and shelves of wine. "I know its here. I'm not leaving till I find it!"

Muttering and mumbling he continued his search. He is searching the sea-god's labyrinth to this day.

⁶ Complete with convenient holes, and loops for attaching to fish-hooks.