

The desert wind howled across the dunes of the **SAHARA** as the hunched figure scrambled down into the newly unearthed section of the ruins.

ALEX, rogue archeologist turned treasure hunter, lifted the heavy chest from its resting place and slotted the key into the rusty lock. To his surprise, it turned easily and with one big push, he forced the creaky hinges open to reveal what was hidden inside – a single, round object, roughly the size of his palm and a folded letter, adorned with a wax seal.

He lifted the object to inspect it in the light and found that it was a little compact, adorned with shimmering **BLACK OPAL** and etched with the words “**DREAM AGAIN DARLING**”.

As he lifted the compact, he could swear he saw a shimmery golden powder trickle out, or was it purple?

Alex lifted the letter from the chest and found that the seal was easily broken by running his finger under it, leaving no visible damage – “Good”. He thought. “I can still sell this off for a nice bit of profit!” Then he read the words on the parchment.

“Heed my warning.

Whoever finds this mirror – leave it be! It will show you your deepest desires, but I have seen it corrupt men in

the pursuit of its magical visions. And those were the lucky ones. Many have vanished to never return and so I have taken it upon myself to bury this cursed mirror where no man will ever find it.

Save yourself and leave it be.

Signed **CASPIAN**, Captain of the Black Pearl”.

Alex had been chasing legends across continents – from **LONDON** to **HAIFA**, driven by whispers of a relic that could bend time and rewrite fate.

From the **SOUTHERN DREAM** of Cape Town to the **AFRICAN DREAM** of Timbuktu. Alex had seen it all, heard it all, experienced it all and still he did not quite believe in the froo-froo ideas like fate, whimsy or magic. Everywhere he went, he merely found shiny trinkets to increase the weight of coin in his pocket and fund his next adventure.

But this one, was no ordinary relic. The compact pulsed with **MYSTICAL MAGIC** whispering names in his mind like **MEPHISTO**, **MEDUSA** and **SHADOW PANTHER**. Names he had only heard in nightmares.

Alex clicked open the compact and a brightly coloured powder swirled in the air as he disturbed the contents inside – purple and **MAGENTA** with streaks of gold running through it. He wondered for a second what

kind of woman would wear a powder in THIS shade. Weren't compact powders always cream or caramel or some other form or natural skin shade? He would have to ask his wife about that one.

He peered closely at the little mirror and realized that what he saw was not his reflection or his surroundings and what was more, the image moved! Alex touched the tiny mirror and suddenly the world fractured around him, the pinky-purple powder swirled at his feet, engulfing him in a cloud of smoke.

And suddenly, Alex was standing in a lush garden of **ACANTHUS MOLLIS** where a woman held out a goblet to him.

“Oh hello there, I'm **JULIET**. Quite the entrance you just made! Here, sit down and have a drink with me – I call this one a **HONEY BLOSSOM**. It is a mixture of honey, some flower tincture from my garden and a few shots of vodka over ice – very refreshing!”

Alex could not believe his eyes, but he did not want to be rude, so he sat down with the pretty lady and sipped his drink. After all he just went through, he sure needed it! Juliet just giggled and looked him over, her eyes landing on the compact he was still clutching.

“You sure are **EASY ON THE EYE**.” Juliet said with a

slight blush. “But I think you are **MISSING THE POINT**. The little mirror in your hand doesn’t show YOU as you are – it shows who you COULD be. Every version of you, across all of time and space. And if you are not careful, you will lose yourself in it.”

Before Alex could even respond, a deafening roar echoed. A man in black fighting leathers who could only be the shadow panther that the mirror whispered about, leapt from the underbrush. Chased by an impossibly handsome warrior clad in flowing silk robes and wielding a silver blade adorned with a large **SAPPHIRE**.

Juliet jumped up, grabbed at her chest, looking all flushed and exclaimed – “Ah, **PAW MEWMAN!**” Alex could practically see the hearts in her eyes, but he didn’t have time to analyze the situation as Juliet drew her own dagger. “**DON'T STOP ME NOW!**” She shouted, diving into battle alongside the handsome warrior.

Alex fled the scene in horror, turning a corner, running down a narrow walkway and rushing through a door surrounded by billowing purple curtains. The magenta smoke once again swirled around him as he passed through and found himself stumbling into a busy bazaar.

He heard an angelic voice echoing the lyrics to **LIVIN' ON A PRAYER** somewhere in the distance, and looked up to see a poster advertising **CILLA BLACK** and the Rock'n Purrs live on stage. The show must have drawn quite the crowd, as the market was packed with bodies shuffling to various stalls, pushing and shoving to get to the best deals first.

He noticed "**PIXIE**'s potions", a stall where a woman he could only assume was Pixie herself, had shelves crammed full of enchanted **JELLY BEANS**, **NAARTJIE**—infused elixers, **ESKIMO PIES** and a single potion labeled **DESERT ROSE** – Keep in a cool place, don't consume on an empty stomach, in case of unexpected side effects, RUN!

Pixie met his gaze, her eyes going wide and she hurriedly held out her hand to him. "Take this!" she shouted "It'll help you find what you are looking for! – but beware Mephisto's men will be looking for you! If Shadow Panther fails, he will send **BLACK MAMBA** next, and he will not be gentle."

Alex barely had time to pocket the vial he was handed – no larger than his finger and filled with a sticky substance that looked a little like **MARMITE**. The little mirror suddenly shimmered again and he heard

the rush of the wind, signaling another trip through the swirly powder cloud.

He heard the familiar chime of a bell tower and recognized it as Big Ben! Alex was now in London! He stood in the middle of a gallery, staring up at a painting by **GUSTAF KLIMT**.

He didn't even notice the little man with the glasses shuffling up behind him – his nametag stating the words Head Curator and identifying him simply as **EFIM**.

“This piece was inspired by **SCARLET**, the muse of **FIORAVANTI**. She vanished after touching a mirror if the stories are to be believed, but it is more than likely a cover-up for a fatal accident after a lover's quarrel. It drove him quite mad in the end.”

Alex jumped a little at the sudden words and turned just in time to notice **BREE**, a young woman with **SIMPLY IRRESISTABLE** charm trying to pickpocket the little vial of dark goo from him. She didn't even falter at being caught red handed and simply clutched the stolen vial tighter.

“I'm looking for my brother, **CODY**.” She said. “He's trapped in the mirror's dreamscape with our friends **YUKI**, **DIEGO**, and **JON SNOW**.” The woman looked over at the shadows where a woman with a

flowing cape was waiting. “**LOLITA** needs this to break the spell, but Mephisto’s men have been keeping such a close eye on all of us ever since he got word of the resistance movement, that we have not been able to get our hands it.”

Just then, the stained glass window next to them shattered as a tall, thin man leaped through it, breaking his fall and tackling the unsuspecting curator to the ground in the same motion. Lolita rushed over and grabbed the marmite-coloured vial from Bree, placed the cork between her teeth and pulled hard, resulting in a loud POP!

A portal shaped vaguely like a **CLOVER** appeared to pour out from the mouth of the tiny vial, swirling with the same magenta magic that Alex has come to know meant they were shifting places again.

“Don’t just stand there, JUMP! I can’t hold the Black Mamba much longer!” Efim called from his position on the ground where he was trying to hang on to Mephisto’s assassin for dear life.

Bree grabbed Alex’s hand and the three jumped through the swirling portal, falling for what felt like ages and landing on the ground with a thud that shot a jolt of pain through Alex’s entire being.

“I’m not cut out for this much adventure!” Alex thought as he painfully took stock of his injuries. Lightning struck the ground near them, lighting up the area enough for Alex to see that they landed at the foot of a set of large, stone steps leading to an intricately carved door and surrounded by a dense, dark jungle.

Alex looked up to see the flickers of **STARSHINE** peeking through the swirling purple clouds and what seemed like an **ASTEROID** blazed across the sky. He realized that wherever they were, this was no mere earthly realm.

“This is the jungle temple of **SAKATA**.” Lolita told him. “That unassuming little mirror in your hand, the one everyone has chased for centuries. It isn’t a window – it’s a weapon. Mephisto uses it to entrap people by showing them their deepest desires and whispering to them that their dreams are just one step away, causing them to chase after his woven deceptions until they ultimately go mad or get sucked into his dream world. The thing is, every time they open the compact anew, he shows them a different dream, a new ideal to chase, another thing just out of grasp and another and another...” Lolita trailed off as

Bree pushed past them and ran up the steps to the temple.

As the three ran, they noticed endless corridors with walls filled with paintings – they even noticed some familiar places and realized the truth. These were mirror portals – This tiny mirror didn't reflect reality at all, it rewrote it!

Bree finally stopped running when they reached a large courtyard with a pedestal in the center – it looked like it was made to hold something important. Just past the pedestal, Alex could almost not believe his eyes! All the companions that he had met on this strange adventure were already there! And what was worse, they were fighting shadowy figures clad in purple smoke – each time one was struck down, another simply appeared out of thin air in its place!

“They are illusions crafted by **BRUCE THE BOSS**, Mephisto's right-hand man” Lolita told him with a shudder. Quickly! We need to put the mirror compact on that pedestal and smash it!”

Just then, a shadowy hand grabbed at Alex and he let out a shriek of alarm!

“Oh no, they have seen us” Bree yelled! “You know what you have to do, I will fight them off! Please, it is

the only way that we can all be released from this nightmare – the only way to save my brother!”

Alex knew in that moment that he had to act fast! He rushed to the pedestal and pulled out the tiny mirror – for a second, he hesitated. A sudden urge to open it one last time tickled at the back of his neck and the pink powdery smoke leaked out from the seam, beckoning him to look at the mirror just once more.

But then Paw Mewman was there at his side, handing him his sapphire encrusted dagger and flashing him a stunning smile. Alex snapped back to reality and plunged the dagger through the center of the mirror compact, sending shards of glass and magenta powder flying in every direction. The world collapsed into light.

When Alex awoke, he was back in his own bedroom, his wife, **MARIGOLD** stirring beside him as she woke up. He looked over at where the chest should have been and found that it was gone. No sign of the mirror compact either.

He looked back at his wife and planted a kiss on her forehead.

“**MA CHERI**, you are my greatest **TREASURE**.” He whispered as he pulled her into his arms to tell her all about his wild dream of the night before.

Nothing but a few specks of shimmery Magenta powder remaining hidden in the folds of his clothing. She pulled away and wiped the shimmery magenta dust off his collar with a smile. “Which nightclub did you go to last night?” she laughed.