

A scenic view of a rocky coastline. The foreground is filled with large, dark, rounded boulders of various sizes, some partially submerged in shallow, turquoise water. The water transitions from a light green near the shore to a deeper blue further out. In the background, a hazy sky meets a distant mountain range. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

REIGN OF ZOUUVISIA

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MISSING
MERFOLK

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Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Zoulvisia, the sleepy serene city which guarded the ocean was horrified to find a set of sinister tracks leading down to the shore. They were ready for fleets of warships to come from the ocean, but not an enemy to come from the other way around. It just wasn't right!

At first nothing out of the ordinary happened, but that night the townsfolk heard no sounds from the sea. Oh there was the roaring of breakers and occasional crashing upon rocks, but the songs of the merpeople were silenced.

Every evening as long as time had been, a lovely serenade had lilted across the water to the sea village lullabying them all to slumber. At first one, then all came out of their houses, wrapped in shawls and blankets to see what was the matter. Not a sign of any merfolk could be seen. Where had they gone?



The next day, Bob the Unicorn was out taking his bath and splashing through the waves when he saw a little girl crying on the shore. After cheering up, she told him what had been happening with the merpeople vanishing and strange tracks seen by the shore. This worried him greatly and he cantered over to find Isabel.

She quite agreed that something ought to be done, and the little girl showed them where the tracks had been found. Without losing a moment, Isabel waded in following the direction the creature seemed to be using. Taking a deep breath, she dove underwater and kept her eyes open searching through the clear depths for any sign of a struggle. Sparkling beneath her was a bright comb left by a mermaid and she scooped it up before swimming back to the surface and gulping in more air.

As you know, mermaids never leave their combs save in the gravest danger!





Fortunately, all mercombs have a magic in them so they can never lose their owner, even when the sea tosses and turns. Touch them to any pointed object and it will inevitably indicate the direction of the mermaid. Since Isabel was aware of this, she tapped it to her blade which instantly wheeled toward the south-west. The heroes began swimming in that direction, hoping it was not too far. The last thing you want is the sun to go down and be lost in the open ocean, even when the water is warm.

The two companions swam and swam, Bob's hooves felt heavier with each stroke and even Isabel wished for any sight of land. Fortunately, before their courage gave out, a tiny isle sloped up and they collapsed onto the shore. Unsheathing her sword, Isabel allowed it to point and this time it dove into the sand.

“Must be a cave underneath,” she surmised.



Since he could hold his breath longer, the unicorn offered to take a look and dived deep down. Before he had disappeared beneath the waves, Isabel heard a dreadful roaring and saw for the first time that tracks of the beast were all over the isle. Rising out of the sand itself, a monster at least three times the size of the nimble Isabel snarled, casting flames and a sight rather terrible to behold.

Smiling with undaunted nobility, Isabel swept out her faithful sword and with a twirling leap jumped safely out of the monster's grasp, sending a large chunk of the beast onto the sand where it lay smoking. Once more in an elegant whirl she launched herself into the air and her blade knifed down with ease and precision cleaving the horrid beast in twain. With a roar of flames and black smoke in exploded, sending soot and burning rocks in every direction. To escape the rage of the monster's destruction, Isabel dived into the waves after the unicorn.





During the battle, Unicorn Bob had not been idle. He found a large underwater cavern with solid bars across the entrance and countless merfolk inside, terrified at what their fate might be. No cell has yet been constructed which can withstand the might of a unicorn's anger. Warning them to stay back, he kicked off from a nearby outcrop of stone and rocketed straight into the cavern entrance. Like paper the iron bars bent before his wrath and the grateful merfolk swam hastily out through the twisted remains.

Glad to see the merpeople safe, Isabel signed underwater to them that the fire monster had been vanquished and they were safe once more. Upon surfacing, nothing was left upon the island but blackened sand and a few wisps of smoke still rising up into the bright blue sky. Joyful at their escape, the merfolk began swimming back to their old home and Isabel returned the mermaid's comb.

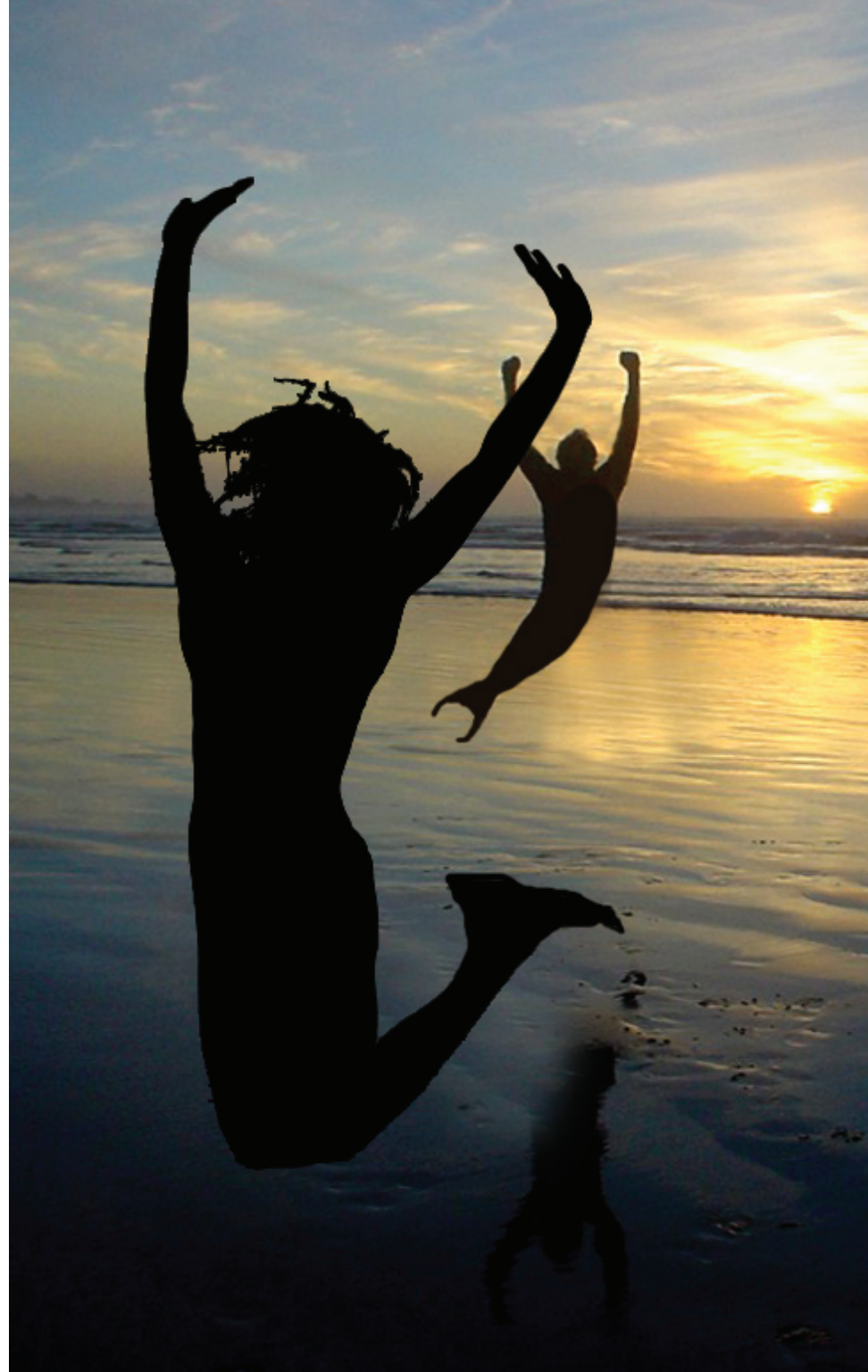


That evening the people of the sea village gathered eagerly on shore, waiting to see if our heroes were successful.

At first all was still, but then dozens of merfolk splashed and flipped their way out of the water in a sort of carnival water dance before songs swelled up more beautiful than any ever heard before or since. For that night they not only chorused to the village folk, but in gratitude to Isabel and Bob who stood upon the shore with the little girl who had first told them of the merpeople's peril.

Though never as strikingly lovely as that night, every evening the sound of music fills the ocean town as it goes to sleep knowing all is safe with Isabel and unicorn Bob always at hand to lend them aid.

THE END (for now)



A scenic photograph of a beach at low tide. In the foreground, a sandy beach is dotted with small pebbles. A thick layer of white foam from a wave washes onto the shore. In the shallow water, several pieces of weathered, bleached driftwood are scattered. One large piece stands upright, while others are partially submerged. In the background, the ocean is a deep blue-green, with white-capped waves breaking. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

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