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Shattered Green: A Novel

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Shattered Green

A Novel

By
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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Shattering Green	4
Chapter 1	4
Reflection	21
Personal Background	21
My Style	27
The Origins of Avery	29
Process	30
Reflection and Future Plans	35
Acknowledgements	39
Appendix	40

Abstract

My thesis takes the form of a fantasy novel. In it, a girl is teleported to medieval times the night before her eighteenth birthday. I've always enjoyed fantasy and medieval stories, and I wanted to write one where a main focus was on the characters and their relationships. While I created an entire world for the majority of the novel to take place in, I also worked to create a variety of primary, secondary, and background characters to make the world feel more authentic. In my novel, the main character has to deal with missing friends and family and what to do when she finds them again. She has to come to terms with her own history and personality and mesh that with her new circumstances. While there are still aspects I need to rework, as I would like to self-publish my novel in the future, I pushed myself to make the manuscript the best it could be.

The Novel

Chapter 1:

I had a fairly simple routine for getting home from school. On a good day, I'd greet my mom before making my way up to my room, ready to relax until dinner. On a bad day, I'd keep the greetings short and go to my room before blocking everything out via distractions until I had to come to dinner.

This afternoon was teetering the line, and it wasn't the school day's fault. Thoughts of tomorrow flitted through my mind, and I needed to do something immediately to push them all as far away as possible. It happened every year, one of a few days where I'd always end up like this. I always saw it coming, but it never helped change the outcome.

The moment the front door closed behind me, I saw Mom's head pop out of the kitchen like it always did. I really should have known by then that I couldn't escape Mom when arriving home. Dad would still be at work, but Mom would be waiting. I had nothing against her; I just really wasn't in the mood to talk today.

"Welcome home, Avery!" Mom called cheerily, wandering down the hall toward me. She was stirring a bowl aggressively with a whisk. As she got closer, she tilted it toward me, showing off the lumpy brown mixture. "I'm making pudding for dessert. Figured we hadn't had it in a while."

I toed my shoes off, waiting for the question that always followed the greeting. Normally it would come naturally, and I could just answer cheekily as I liked to do. However, I could already see the hesitation in Mom's movements. Her

smile was larger than normal, she'd been talking fast, and she was looking anywhere but at me. Currently, the hall lamp had all her attention.

I knew exactly what I'd see when she looked up. She would be sheltered, carefully searching. She'd look me over like she could see my thoughts in the way I stood. She probably could, and I hated that I was so easy to read.

But it was today. And tomorrow was tomorrow. And there was no way Mom wouldn't be extra careful.

Slowly, as if every word were trying to avoid a landmine, Mom asked. "How are you holding up?"

I didn't like to be treated like I was about to break, even though breaking had been a specialty of mine through the years.

"I'm holding," I told her. And it was the truth. I'd made it through the school day fine. It was the weekend now, and I didn't have to worry about pretending to be okay tomorrow. I knew I wouldn't be.

"I'm pretty sure I already know the answer, but it's about tomorrow, isn't it?"

I opened my mouth to respond, but the words didn't feel like coming, so I just nodded quietly.

"Do you want me to drop it and leave you alone until later?"

Another nod. Boy, Mom really did know me well.

She set the bowl of pudding down on the hall table before pulling me into a hug. It was a little awkward, with my backpack still on, but it felt nice to feel Mom's arms around me. I hugged back as I closed my eyes. I squeezed tight, only slightly wishing that it was someone else I was hugging.

Tomorrow, I'd be missing out on two hugs that I desperately wanted: one that'd been missing for years and one still freshly gone.

Mom gave another tight squeeze before pulling away. She grabbed the pudding and started to retreat to the kitchen. "I'll text you when dinner's ready. I'll leave you be until then."

It was bordering on pity, which was not my favorite thing in the world. I had to make some exceptions, though, and Mom was one of them. I felt my mouth stretch into the beginning of a genuine smile before I said a quick thanks and headed up the stairs.

Room door closed, backpack thrown to the side, I finally flopped directly onto my bed. As was custom, I just lay there with my face pressed directly into the mused comforter for a good minute. I could feel the tension leaving me body as I just allowed myself to lie down after a day of sitting and standing. It never failed to improve my mood after a school day.

Today, I let myself lay just another minute longer, thinking of nothing but the scent of my sheets. Mmm, lavender fabric softener.

With my daily lie-down completed, I stood back up and turned to my desk. Eyes purposely down, I quickly plugged my phone in, remembering to turn the ringer up to hear it if it went off, before quickly grabbing my laptop. As I reached around to unplug it from the power source, my fingertips brushed against the picture frame residing in its place of honor.

My room was a mess of posters and other random things taped to walls and furniture, but I only had two things framed.

To the left of where my laptop normally sat, an overly decorated frame housed a picture of my sister and me.

The two of us smiled up at me from the picture. I was still in elementary school at the time, sitting on my feet for an added bit of height. I was giving the biggest grin a human could possibly give, cake frosting smeared all over my face despite the perfectly clean utensils in my little hands. Rosalind leaned against my chair behind me, frozen mid-laugh caused by her silly little sister.

My eighth birthday. I'd waited for it for weeks. All I'd wanted was a day to play with my sister, who I loved more than anything in the world. I'd grown up extremely close to her. She wasn't my only friend, but it frequently felt like she was the only one I truly loved to be with.

As my birthday had approached, I knew our dynamic had been changing.

Rosalind was ten years older than me. While I was still a child, clinging to her older sister, Rosalind had been ready to spend more time with her friends than with her little sister. It had hurt, knowing Rosalind was doing things without me, but I knew she'd have to be at my party. It was the only thing I'd wanted.

And she had been. Even though I'd never heard her be involved in the planning, she'd shown up with a beautifully wrapped box. In it was a homemade photo album full of photos of the two of us. A perfect little scrapbook, just of the two of us. Resting delicately alongside it had been the extravagant frame, empty of a photo, with a small sticky note resting on the top.

For my Favorite Little Sis and her favorite photo.

That had been one of the last few good memories I had of my sister. I had plenty of fond memories tucked away in my brain, but the closer they'd gotten to the day in the photo, to Rosalind's birthday only a few weeks after mine, the more scattered they'd become.

And then, there had been no more chances for any more good memories. Or bad ones. Just a gaping hole in my chest.

Only a few weeks after the photo was taken, after I'd tried to admit to myself that my relationship with Rosalind was changing whether I liked it or not, she'd disappeared without a trace. The night before her eighteenth birthday, when she was out at a movie with friends, she vanished. No one had seen what happened to her. One moment she was there, the next she was gone.

I thought I was losing my sister, but I'd never imagined it would be like that.

Man, I hated the number eighteen.

For most other people, they were always super excited to turn eighteen. At least, if the movies and gossip from school was anything to go off of. They always talked about being ready to move out, thinking they knew better than their parents. They were ready to be full adults, to move on from their childish lives and embrace the adult world.

Rosalind sure had been.

For me, eighteen only brought pain.

Eighteen meant changes. It meant loss. It meant being abandoned with no traces left behind. It meant nights of tears as you waited for someone to return who never would.

It meant being held in embraces that weren't from the person you truly needed them from.

Tomorrow, I'd be eighteen.

I wonder what eighteen would take away from me now.

I shook my head, breaking my stare with the picture frame. Unfortunately for me, my shaking only made my gaze land on the other framed photo, sitting on my nightstand. I still looked at it every night. That wound was still fresh.

A few weeks after Rosalind had disappeared, he showed up. Carter Benson, a kid transferring into our class from Ohio. He'd been cheery and friendly, everything I despised at the time. He didn't mind. He saw the quiet unfriendly kid in the class as a challenge. He didn't want me to be sad all the time.

Where all the other kids left me alone, knowing full well what had spiraled me into darkness, Carter forced his way to my side and refused to leave. While I had been upset at the time, I hadn't realized how much I'd needed a friend. Carter had been just that.

He'd been the one to pull me out of my funk, out of the confusing bursts of hope and hopelessness I'd trapped myself in, and brought back the regular Avery, at least when I was around him. We'd been inseparable since, a match for each other at every step. Rumors had spread more than once that we were dating, but it was never like that. I loved Carter in other ways than romantically. He was family at that point.

In a simple black frame, two photos of Carter and I were shoved in together. On the left, Carter at ten had his arm slung around my slumped shoulders. He was

smiling big, proudly displaying a pair of fake fangs, as his spare arm held the edge of a cape up. His hair was slicked back and temporarily sprayed black. He made a cute little vampire. Very intimidating.

Pulled into his side, little me smiled hesitantly next to him, white bedsheet drawn around my body trying to keep the chilly October air out. I'd pulled my ghost costume off my head for the photo, but all it did was make me look like a little kid with a blanket in the photo. Technically, that wasn't entirely incorrect. The arm Carter had slung around me was nonchalantly draping his cape over my shoulders. Not long after the photo was taken, he'd just put it on me, citing that I was now the ghost of a vampire, and that a ghost with a cape was even cooler.

In the other photo, Carter had once again slung an arm over my shoulder to pull me in. Seven years later, he'd traded the vampire costume in for a black turtleneck and green cargo pants. By his side, I matched him. His hair had matched the character, but I was wearing a horrible red wig. Electing to coordinate, we'd thought we'd made a pretty good Kim Possible and Ron Stoppable.

Like the characters in the show, we were a good pair in real life.

That was, until eighteen took him too.

The night before his birthday, he'd never returned from his evening jog. I'd gone right back into the spiral of darkness that had been my home for the few months before he showed up.

That was only six months ago, and funk had settled firmly back in the pit of my stomach.

And here it was, my turn to reach the dreaded eighteen. I, however, planned to not leave the house until Monday, when I was physically required to go to school.

Better get started on that exciting plan of mine. I blinked away the warm tears that were threatening to form in my eyes, instead grounding myself in my room by unplugging the computer like I'd originally intended. I grabbed my laptop and crawled onto my bed, careful not to kick Rosalind's photo album where it rested against the nightstand.

Computer on my lap, I successfully managed to drown myself in videos on the internet until my phone chimed on the desk, signaling dinner.

When I emerged from my room, the upper floor was blanketed in darkness, the only light drifting up from downstairs. Phone secure in my pocket, I headed down, as ready as I could be to interact with my parents.

To my surprise and delight, only Mom was present in the kitchen, shuffling around between the over and countertops. She turned and caught sight of me, smile reappearing quickly on her face. "Welcome down. Can you set the table?"

"Is Dad home?" I asked, looking behind me into the dining room as I made my way to the silverware drawer.

Mom hummed in denial. "Not yet. He has to stay late to fix some things before tomorrow's rehearsal. You know what he always says—"

"—The work of a theater director is never done," I joined in as she chimed the response. I'd heard it thousands of times growing up, both at home and at the small theater where Dad worked after class. With his job as a director, I was no stranger to the theater, often taking on random parts and jobs where I was needed.

As much as I loved my father, I was happy I only had to deal with one other person tonight. I still very much would have rather been alone.

“I made your favorites,” Mom called over as I placed two sets of silverware at our spots at the table. “Steak, sweet potatoes, green beans. Mmm.”

“Aren’t you a day early?” I mumbled as I reentered the kitchen to grab plates. Mom shrugged, but it made me wonder. Was she thinking I was going to disappear too? Was that why she was giving me my favorite dinner the night before my actual birthday? I shivered, pushing the thought further from my mind. I hated that I’d come up with it in the first place.

Mom decided not to elaborate further on her non-answer, choosing instead to grab a plate out of my hand and beat me over to the oven, where the food awaited.

Dinner passed mostly silently. Mom asked me random questions about school before letting me eat in peace. Before long, it devolved into her reading a book and me checking out social media on my phone. Every now and then, one of us would muffle a laugh as we found something good, before moving on.

It was nice.

After dinner, I slid my phone in my pocket and took the dishes into the kitchen. I normally had the option of taking out the trash or washing the dishes, but tonight was feeling very much like a dishes night.

As I bustled around in the kitchen, Mom still reading at the table, the doorbell unexpectedly went off, sending a chime through the house. I caught Mom’s eye as we both looked curiously toward the door.

“Were we expecting anyone?” I asked.

“Not that I was aware,” Mom mumbled. “Your father should be able to let himself in. Did he forget his keys?” She trailed off, moving to get the door. “Keep cleaning.” She shot me a cautious look before disappearing down the hall.

There was something off about the instruction, a little too rough and harsh, but I did what she said.

I heard but didn’t see the door open. I casually moved closer to the door while staying out of sight in the kitchen, undeniably curious.

“Sorry to bother you, but is Avery Holton home?”

I froze. It was a woman’s voice, one I didn’t know, asking for me by my full name.

Nothing about that was good.

“If I may, who’s asking?” Mom’s voice was louder than the stranger’s, and much more forceful. Her motherly instincts were always strong, for which I was grateful.

“It’s . . . not very important right now. What does matter is that, and please don’t take this the wrong way, but I believe your daughter might be in danger and I think I can help. May I come in?”

The stranger sounded hesitant, maybe even scared. Mom could do that to people, but it seemed like even more than just intimidation. If anything, she was rushing through her statements.

I could imagine Mom’s eyes narrowing as she asked, “Are you threatening my daughter?”

“No!” The response was quick. “No, not at all! I want to help. Please let me come in, I don’t know how much time we have.”

“I’m going to ask again—” Between her words, I could hear the door squeaking as I guessed Mom closed it further. “Who are you?”

“My name’s Diomira, and please, you can trust me. Please, just,” a pause, then a very strained, “let me in.”

Part of Mom’s iciness was gone as she asked, “Are you okay?”

The temptation to peak around the corner was too strong. I carefully tilted my head around the corner.

I couldn’t see much. The door was only open a sliver, and Mom had planted herself directly in front of it. Through the pane of glass next to the door, I could see some ragged strips of fabric dripping from a sleeve.

The woman moved backward suddenly, and I could briefly see her face. She looked maybe a little older than Mom, maybe in her late fifties, with the beginnings of wrinkles on her face and silver hair, but she still looked like she had plenty of energy. If anything, it looked like she was frantic, one hand gripping her other arm.

“It’s too late. I was too late. I need to go, but if I can, please, just let me talk to Avery for one moment. I have to tell her something important,” the woman began to ramble, tripping over her words. Suddenly, through the glass, her eyes locked onto mine. I was taken aback by how bright green they were, even with the layer of glass distorting them. It was almost like they were glowing.

“Avery,” she breathed, and I could barely hear it from where I was. In a burst, the woman lunged toward the door. Mom abruptly shut the door, and I was briefly

worried the woman would launch herself straight into it, but instead she focused on the window. On me.

“Tell him the crystal wants blood. It’s feeding on the bloodline. Please, you can stop it!” With that statement, I watched her wince and bite her lip, hard, as if to stop a scream. Her hands wrapped around herself and she began to bend over. With one last look up at me, one full of pleading and pain, she took off into the darkness of the fall evening.

Before I could realize it, I was sprinting to the door. Not even bothering to pull on a hoodie, I half-shoved my feet in my shoes and yanked the door open. I’d barely crossed the threshold before I felt a hand clamp down on my wrist.

“Avery, what are you doing?” Mom all but hissed.

I stuttered before blurting out, “I don’t know.” I wasn’t sure what was coming over me, but something inside me was telling me that I had to go after this woman. It was tugging me outward, out of Mom’s grip, and out into the evening air.

I could hear Mom still yelling behind me: ordering me to get back home, that it wasn’t safe out, maybe a few curse words tossed in there. My own inner fear mirrored her warning, telling me not to be out alone on this night of all nights, but for whatever reason I couldn’t stop.

By all means, I should have been terrified. A random woman showed up on our doorstep, knew me by name, then gave me a cryptic message about blood. If anything, I should be cowering in my room, far away from people like I’d originally planned.

Instead, I was making my way down the street by the light of the streetlamps, calling out to a woman I didn't know.

"Wait! Dio-something!" I shouted as loud as I dared. There were lights on in the houses lining both sides of the street, but no signs of any people out. I didn't know which way she went, but something told me to go right, turn the corner as if I was going to Carter's house, just less than a block away from mine. It was a route I knew like the back of my hand, even in the dark, after going so many times.

The moment I turned the corner, a flash of green caught my eye in front of me, on the sidewalk in front of a house I didn't know. It was the same green that had illuminated the woman's eyes when I saw her.

As I watched, trying to perceive what was happening, the figure of someone slowly grew solid in the center of the green glow. In only a few seconds, someone stood on the sidewalk, facing away from me. Even though I couldn't see their face, I could tell it wasn't the woman. They looked younger, maybe only my height, and the build was skinny but definitely male. Their clothes looked like something out of one of Dad's Shakespeare shows.

The figure turned, and from where I'd skidded to a stop, I could see tears reflecting green light in his eyes. He definitely wasn't older than me, but he was crying and clutching his left forearm close to his chest.

"Help . . . me," he gasped out. "Please . . . help."

A flash of emotion launched through my body. It screamed at me to help this boy, this person I didn't even know. I could be in danger, for all I knew, and all I wanted was to help.

As I took a step toward him, ready to say something, anything, I noticed the same green glow that was circling him spreading its way up my left arm. It didn't hurt, but I shouted in surprise nonetheless. If anything, I couldn't feel my hand properly, only a slight tingling as if it was asleep. I stumbled around, trying to push it off of me to no avail. By some miracle I didn't trip into the street, but my foot did catch on something and, with a yelp, I felt myself begin to sail down onto the sidewalk. I barely managed to throw my arms down to catch me. I could feel my knees hit hard, as well as my hands.

Er, well, only one hand. My left hand, fully covered in that green glow still making its way over my body, only tingled harder.

I don't know if you could classify a light, or even a tingling feeling, as aggressive, but boy, was this thing trying its best. The green kept going, taking advantage of my fall to speed up and take over my other arm and start down my leg. Another yelp decided to release itself in the form of a generic yell of panic as I shuffled my way onto some poor guy's lawn, now flailing around on all fours attempting to shake the glow off.

I kept struggling, trying anything I could think of to free myself, but it was proving helpless. As a last resort, I looked up at the boy. He stood rooted in place, clutching his arm and staring terrified down at me. "I'm so sorry," I heard him mutter, somehow, before a roar threatened to drown out every sound in my head. Everything felt far too tingly, which only increased in intensity as every piece of me glowed green. I shut my eyes forcefully as my vision turned white and I felt myself curl into a ball of tingling as I waited for the green, the roar, everything to pass.

After what felt like an eternity, but was likely only a minute, the roaring in my ears was gone, along with most of the tingling. Hesitantly, I opened one eye.

Green was still clouding my vision, and everything beyond that was just black. I closed my eye as a wave of nausea swept over me. I stayed on all fours, gasping for breath as the traces of green faded into the normal black of my eyelids. My fists grabbed at the ground beneath me, trying to steady myself on the grass. Feeling a bit better, or at least like I wouldn't tip over the moment I tried to move, I opened my eyes properly and looked up for the first time after the flash.

I had to blink and wait in wavy silence as my eyes adjusted to the darkness of the evening. I could make out shapes around me, but the streetlights that had illuminated everything before were gone. Unable to make out anything distinguishable in front of me, and not in the mood to spin around and make myself dizzy, I tried looking up.

A bright blue night sky, plenty of stars showing, peeked through thinning leaves of tree branches all around me. My brain helpfully supplied the concept that I couldn't see stars from my house due to light pollution. I was also pretty sure none of my neighbors had trees in their front yards.

With my eyes adjusted somewhat, I could tell I was in the middle of a small clearing. The grass was wild, not like any of the lawns in the neighborhood. Around the outer edge of the clearing, trees extended up above a circular wall of mismatched stones. There was no sign of the glowing boy or the woman.

As much as I wasn't an intrepid explorer of my neighborhood, I knew this was nowhere I'd ever been before.

“What just happened,” I muttered to myself, my quiet voice far too loud in the sudden silence. Until, it wasn’t silent. With my words, other sounds made themselves known. Where before there’d been far off sounds of traffic, cars, and people in their homes, now there were owls hooting, wind and other things moving through the branches and leaves. Nothing about wherever I was matched my neighborhood, which meant I was somewhere else, right?

Wherever it was, nothing was immediately trying to interact with me, which I was grateful for. I sat there, letting myself take several more, much-needed deep breaths. Another bunch of nausea was trying to overwhelm me, but I just closed my eyes and let it pass.

My brain was going a mile a minute, asking myself far too many questions I didn’t have the answers to. Where was I? Who was the woman, or the boy? Was Mom okay? How was I going to get back to Mom? How would I tell her I was safe after whatever had just happened?

Was I safe?

I cut myself off there, knowing I could very easily spiral down a dangerous thought path if I kept at it. Frankly, I wanted to collapse right there and fall asleep, praying that when I woke up I’d be back at home. I would realize I’d passed out on my bed, and I’d dreamed of visitors knowing my name and all-encompassing green lights.

Vague memories of Dad watching survival shows filtered into my brain and told me that, no, I couldn’t just stay out here. If whatever had happened to me happened to anyone else, I didn’t want to leave myself vulnerable like this. I also had

no knowledge of my surroundings. Who knew what sort of animals lived in woods located through green glows?

With a resigned huff, I forced myself to stand up. My body protested but obliged, leaving me unsteady. Finally up and with completely adjusted eyes, I scanned my surroundings again.

The grass nearly made its way up to my knees. Vaguely, I thought I could see evidence of it being previously trimmed into a pattern, but it had been worn away through time. The stones of the wall, while mismatched, looked like they made a good barrier to keep things out of the clearing.

Or to keep me in. I shivered, both from the thought and the night breeze. Everything seemed relatively fine as I turned around, even if it was absolutely not my neighborhood, until I noticed something that made my blood run cold.

A figure, sitting on one side of the wall and completely covered in shadows except for the shine of a pair of eyes, stared down at me.

Reflection Essay

Personal Background

I grew up surrounded by reading. My mom was an avid reader, and I adopted a lot of habits from her. Every night, she'd read for a bit before she went to sleep — usually a romance novel. Thus, when I was young, my bedtime ritual was to have someone, either my parents or a special 'guest' when we went somewhere or had company, read me a story. Then I would get a little song, and then I would go to sleep. As I grew up, and my stories became more complex, my story time became individual reading time like my mom. At some point, I even surpassed my mom, staying awake later and later to read more and more because I just didn't want to put my book down. I'd get stuck in whatever dystopian or fantasy world I was currently visiting. It wasn't really great for my bedtime, but it was so much fun I didn't really care. Reading became a pastime even when I wasn't curled up in bed while it was dark out. When I went to school, I always had a reading book with me, just in case I found some free time. I'd take out my book and immediately get absorbed in the story. I always surprised my teachers with how well I could read, but it was such a natural part of my life growing up that little me didn't even notice.

Apart from my always present love of reading, I had a fairly interesting childhood. My father was in the military, so we would move every few years as he got a new assignment. I sincerely wish I could remember more of it, since I lived in so many fantastic places, like Guam and Hawaii. At one point, I even knew some Japanese, thanks to attending kindergarten on Okinawa. The downside of moving so much was that the curriculum was different everywhere, so I'd have classes overlap

or I'd completely miss on learning something; despite my love of Greek mythology, I somehow avoided ever learning it in a classroom. Even so, I always managed to read at a high level, and I even developed some pretty good math skills. It was always an interesting time when I moved and had to re-convince my elementary school teachers that yes, I could read that book, and I didn't want to be stopped from reading whatever I wanted.

More than once, my mom has told me a story about me going to the school library when I was in elementary school. I wanted to check out a book but the librarian had told me I couldn't because it was too advanced. My mom challenged the librarian, telling me to grab the book I wanted and start reading aloud. When I did, the librarian had to concede and let me check out my book. My parents never tried to stop me from reading, unless they thought the content itself was too mature. Reading was an everyday activity for me, and I couldn't image growing up without it.

Without my realizing it, coming up with my own stories evolved hand in hand with reading. I don't remember when I started playing what I called 'Imaginary Games'. I'd run around outside with my friends making up entire stories on the fly; one day it would be a pirate adventure, and the next it was a found-family story with aliens. More than once I'd get annoyed that their ideas for the stories didn't match up with mine. I always had my own ideas and wanted to see them played out. Eventually, I'd realize that this meant I was better suited for writing by myself than in cooperation with others. I wanted to be in full control and know where things were going. Even so, there were times when my friends would do something and

after I rolled with it, I found it worked really well. It was always a great time with friends.

Around seventh grade, when we were living on Guam, I had a friend introduce me to the term 'fanfiction'. I don't want to say this was one of the biggest influences on my writing career, since a lot of people look down on fanfiction, but it absolutely was. I began to create characters in earnest, no longer held back by having to create an entire world for them to play in. I could make a character exactly the way I wanted them then insert them into my favorite stories. Even if it was only practice, I had journals with pages of characters. I'd come up with a list of all the qualities I would ever need to know, then fill them all out like a form. I even forced my friends to make characters and we would all laugh and have a good time over lunch.

The same year my friend and I discovered a website called Quotev, where we could post our own stories. We both jumped on board and became each other's motivation. We'd bounce ideas off each other, read our new chapters before we posted them, and generally be each other's editor. At one point, I had a Percy Jackson and Harry Potter crossover fic that spanned over eighty chapters. We had so much fun practicing our writing, and it was somewhere in these years of middle school that I realized I wanted to write for the rest of my life. I'd found what I wanted to do and I was ready to move forward with that goal.

However, I lost my motivation for fanfiction in high school. My dad had retired and I was stable in one place, away from my writing buddy. I no longer had a set of friends to play my imaginary games with, as there was no one nearby and no

close-by place to do it. Living on base, there was always a herd of kids right outside, but my neighborhood for high school only had younger kids or older people. As a high schooler surrounded by kids who had known each other for years, I was basically a lonely child. I made friends, but it wasn't the same as on a military base, where everyone was used to making new friends every few years. With this shift, my writing spark died down.

I tried my best to keep it alive. Eventually a creative writing club formed at school, which I jumped on immediately. I'd found a passion in theater, which seriously cut into my writing time, but I still went to writing club whenever I could. We would read our stories to each other, give feedback, then pick a prompt for the next week and start writing. I loved having prompts, as I always had something to start off of. My least favorite part of club was probably feedback. I felt like everyone else was getting constructive criticism, but this was the point in my life where I started to get very familiar with the types of comments I would be receiving for the rest of my high school writing career. All the feedback I would get is 'you write so well' or 'I didn't see anything wrong'. This came attached to both my fiction writing and the papers I'd turn in for class.

I didn't want that though. I wanted people to push me to move forward. My senior year of high school I took a creative writing class with a teacher I came to love. She would give me the same general feedback, but she'd also try to give me new prompts or places I could take my writing. It wasn't exactly what I wanted, but it was something.

Once I hit high school and college, my time for reading decreased as my school work load rose. Instead of reading about all the fantasy stories I love, I spent my evenings reading my assigned novels. While it's still enjoyable, I'd much rather be reading something I chose on my own. Even though my school schedule changed dramatically, and there was rarely time when I would have the chance to read, I still lapsed into my old habit of bringing a book with me. Every now and then, whether the teacher is late or I just need to wait for something, I'm able to pull out a novel and get immersed once more. Not being able to read as much also helped bring my motivation to write even further down. I wasn't taking in as many interesting stories, so I wasn't producing as many.

The writing spark came back in my first year of college. A friend and I got into a French cartoon that didn't come out in the US very fast. We both turned to online sources to find more content, and we stumbled onto fanfiction. I immediately remembered how much I used to love to both read and write fanfiction. In those first few weeks of rediscovering it, I read more fanfiction than I had regular books so far that year. I was hooked once again. I could choose to read a story based solely on the plot without having to worry about establishing brand new characters; I already knew the basic premise, so I could jump right into the meat of things. It was some of the best things I'd read in a long time, and it was made by people on the internet!

In my second year, I found a friend who watched the same group of online entertainers that I did, a Let's Play group called Achievement Hunter. He introduced me to fanfiction about them. I was hesitant, as it seemed strange to write about real people. He told me, as did the people online, to think of them as characters that just

happen to be very similar to the real people. And it worked. I'd never imagined that that community would have fanfiction written about them, but when I looked I was absolutely thrilled. The writing was amazing, and I was once again immediately hooked. I read fanfictions that were longer, more detailed, and more moving than anything I'd found traditionally published. After reading those and remembering what it felt like to write my own stories, I knew I'd found my motivation again.

So I started writing fanfiction again. I'd switched fandoms, and after several more years of reading and practice at writing, I was ready to tackle my writing again. I felt prepared after reading such magnificent stories. I wanted to write like that. I knew so much more than I had in middle school, and I felt so much more motivation to write, even if I couldn't do it as frequently.

At the same time that I rediscovered fanfiction, I found out about a little program called NaNoWriMo, which stood for National Novel Writing Month. The whole goal was to write 50,000 words in the month of November. I had an inkling of a story idea, and I thought it would be fun to try it out, so I started writing. I got nowhere near the target word count, and I got so busy with school that I all but dropped it. But, I kept my files and my story brimming in the back of my mind. I wouldn't let myself write more until the next year. That story became my NaNoWriMo story, and every November I pick it back up again and give it my best shot. I haven't hit that word count, and I'm nowhere near being done, but it's at least something to keep me thinking like I writer.

As college began to wind down and working on my thesis became an overarching goal, I stopped writing anything that wasn't my thesis or an assignment

for class. I — temporarily — abandoned an Achievement Hunter fic because I felt guilty that any time I spent writing on anything other than my thesis was wasted time. However, I didn't stop reading fanfiction. I could feel all the different styles and genres I was reading blending into whatever chapter I was working on, and I had to remind myself of who my own characters and style were. One benefit of reading online is that you don't realize quite how much you're consuming, since you can't physically see how much you've read. I also took to reading mangas, Japanese comics, which I blazed through. Despite my busy schedule of thesis and classwork, I found ways to keep me entertained and in a creative mood.

My Style

My favorite types of novels have always been full of fantasy and adventure. Why would I want to read about something normal and mundane when I could be reading about dragons or magic? Dystopian societies were way more interesting to me than modern times, or even something set in the past. The possibilities of the future and other worlds were so endless that I'd never run out of places to explore. In more recent years I've found the appeal of more modern stories, and even a romance or two, but my heart is always thinking of magic spells and quests.

One of my favorite brands of fantasy are stories inspired by mythology, particularly the Greeks. As I was growing up, Rick Riordan's series Percy Jackson and the Olympians was big, and it shaped most of my literature choices in the years to come. I fell in love with mythology and tried to find other stories inspired by it. I eventually branched into other mythologies like Roman, Egyptian, and Norse,

partially due to following Riordan's writing, but I knew I'd found a genre and style that I liked to read about.

Over the years, I found one of the best places to get my fill of magic and adventure were medieval stories. The time period naturally allows for mysterious things to happen. People like King Arthur and Merlin are rampant in fiction, and I have I read a book series or two all about knights and wizards. Despite me never being one for history, I always liked things set in the medieval era, or even just that sort of environment.

Over the years, I fell into a pretty distinct writing style. My biggest inspiration, which shaped a lot of my own work subconsciously as I fell into a similar style, was Riordan's works. Most of the things I read were in first person, so that became my default in writing. I enjoyed being inside the head of a character and being able to express their thoughts. I also just naturally wrote in the past tense. Riordan's writing was also filled with jokes and humorous anecdotes, which I found myself trying to mimic in my writing.

Eventually, I found myself writing more dialogue than I did descriptions, but it suited the types of stories I wrote. As I got into fanfiction, the style tended to shift toward third person and present tense, so I had to shift my own style to fit the medium. I made the leap to third person, tried to focus on my descriptions instead of just blazing through dialogue, but I maintained my past tense. While I do have my default style, I find myself enjoying when I have to branch out. However, for my thesis, I wanted to work where I was most comfortable, so I stuck with the first person, past tense point of view.

The Origins of Avery

The first inklings of this story began in my high school creative writing class. At the beginning of every class, we had to sit quietly and write for ten minutes. It could be on anything or about whatever we wanted, as long as we kept writing. So on the first day, I started to write about a girl being chased through the woods. It was just a whim, something that sounded like fun to try to portray, so I just wrote. I didn't finish my scene, but I enjoyed the few paragraphs I had written.

The next day, instead of trying to write something short and new, I picked up the story of the running girl. She kept running, and I started to work through her thoughts. Why was she being chased? Where was she going? What was going to happen to her if she was caught? What if she escapes? The ten minutes passed quickly, as did all remaining warm up sessions in that class.

I don't remember how I got her out of that chase, but I do know she got in a boat and was suddenly unconscious. When she woke up, she was in this other world with a camp full of teenagers. The way I'd structured the story as it was forming in my head was that it was a refugee camp for teenagers with magical powers, as was my favorite type of thing to write and read, and that the people chasing her had wanted her powers. Other things began to happen as she got settled in camp, like reuniting with her lost friend and such, but the story quickly began to spread beyond what I could do in a warm up.

Before I knew it that term was over, and with it I left behind my daily writing exercise. I'd wanted to pick it up again, to go back to this girl and her world, but I could never find the time. When it came time to write my thesis, and I could do a

novel, I began to get that itch in the back of my mind. I could pick up that story again, expand it the way I'd wanted and flesh it out. I only had a springboard, nothing concrete, but it was something.

I proposed the idea and, once it was accepted, went back to my old journal. At this point it had been three years since I'd written about this girl running in the woods, and all those old ideas were warped or faded. They no longer matched with the text of my warm ups, but I didn't mind. I liked the content that was resulting from the new starting point, and I felt like the story had a bright future in this new direction.

Process

To be honest, I don't quite remember where I began. The first piece I actually wrote was a chunk out of the middle, the scene where Avery enters the castle for the first time. I was just so excited to be writing something that I wanted to try one of my favorite scenes. What I originally wrote is very different from what it ended up being, but it was a fun place to start with the character.

After that little warm-up, I started properly at the beginning. I didn't get very far, though, before my advisor, Katherine, suggested that I focus more on background work. I had ideas for the world I was trying to create, but they had yet to be put to paper. Thus, I drew up maps for every location, zoomed them out or zoomed them in, did some sketches of the characters, just general things to give myself some visual reference. I enjoyed it more than I thought it would, since I now had something physical to look at and reference as I was writing.

At the same time, at both my advisor's request and as an assignment for that spring's Honors' Thesis Development class, I created a variety of documents to help keep my ideas straight. My original plan was to have twenty chapters, and I mapped out the major plot points using sticky notes on a posterboard. It was nice to be able to step back and look at my work as a whole, and I could even move myself through depending on how much I'd written.

For that class, I also created possibly one of my favorite pieces: The Info Doc of Ultimate Info. Here, I copied down my sticky note plan, created tables to keep track of how much I'd written, and gave descriptions of everything I could think of. I started character profiles, grouped my characters for easy reference, and summarized my locations. The document became a place I could simply create a list of whatever trivial bit of information I could possibly need. Every time I wrote a new chapter, I'd update the document accordingly. It was a good way to keep myself on track while also wrangling all the minor details I came up with.

I created a few more chapters over the summer, but by fall term of 2018, I was starting to doubt my plot. Originally, there was going to be a warring group of time-travelers who wanted Toka's (affectionately called 'Rock Boy') crystal. When Avery vanishes in the beginning, she was supposed to be chased by some of those agents. Unfortunately, that was all I really had for that plot line. My sticky notes simply said "War happens" and "Some sort of resolution." The whole second half, after Avery met Rosalind, would have been different. I started to realize that I had no idea how to expand on that particular plot, and it sounded like more trouble than it was worth. I needed to overhaul the second half of my novel with a different plot

and ending. Most of what I'd written could stay, but everything moving forward had to be adjusted.

And that was when I started to slow down, text-wise. Most of my effort went into fleshing out the second half of the plot. I changed Aelric into the villain. I created Danyull and Diomira out of nowhere. Toka . . . remained the same, for the most part; I'd grown attached to him the way he was. I'd already put a lot of thought into Glenwood, since it was where all of my existing chapters took place, and I felt like that, as a setting, was about as fleshed out as it was going to get. I just needed to expand on the world around it.

Going into winter break, I had ten chapters, approximately. Half my original estimate, but only vaguely near half the plot (in both plot lines). I was starting to get nervous, to say the least. I'd already re-written some scenes — and the entire first chapter — to help improve the quality, but I felt I needed to keep moving forward or I'd never get to the end. Over the break, Katherine had tasked me with rewriting/reworking all of my existing chapters to add in detail, backstory, and general improvements; most importantly, I had to fit that new plot in there. By the middle of winter term, I managed to do it, and even wrote four new chapters. I thought that I could bring a few more chapters into existence before I did more revisions, but there was still more to add to those original chapters. There were certain places, in particular the Bonfire scenes, where Katherine believed I could add in more depth to the plot, but I was unable to come up with anything suitable at that time.

Panic was really starting to set in in February as I realized how little time I actually had left. I felt like I'd never actually finish a manuscript since I kept going

over the same sections. In March, I handed Katherine all of my revised chapters (now dubbed “the first fourteen” or “the first half”) and expressed my worries. We agreed that I could write more chapters for the rest of the term while she looked over the first half. She also suggested that I get a tutor at the Writing Center; that way, I would have another person who knew everything about my thesis and could help me accordingly. I could talk things through with them and have them look at my work, seeing if they could help me work through some remaining plot issues.

Working with my tutor, Morgan, was a big help. I didn’t have her actually read anything, since I didn’t want to use up discussion time and I was self-conscious about my own work. However, I enjoyed having another person to bounce ideas off of. I could share all of the little details and ideas I had, and she would give me her honest opinion on them, especially things toward the end of the plot. As I was getting closer to writing the end, Katherine wanted to read the plot before I discussed it with her, so having Morgan to talk over my plans with helped keep me in check. She also helped me come up with ideas for improving the Bonfire scenes and adding in that darker side to the plot. Unfortunately, I still wasn’t able to come up with anything that made sense to me at that time to further develop those concepts. Any idea I did come up with was too vague and would require a large amount of overhaul to implement, something I didn’t feel I had the time for right then. I was at a loss for how to handle it, as my thesis had become the longest and most detailed thing I’d ever worked on. Morgan helped me find smaller solutions so that I could work my way toward those bigger goals in the future. Somewhere in here, I also created my second info doc, a spreadsheet timeline of all the characters,

their jobs, and even their living arrangements, thus giving me something to keep track of my ever-expanding number of background characters.

By spring break, I'd only written a few more chapters, and I finally buckled down. I knew I'd have to go back through any new chapters like I had the original set, as well as look through those again, so I kept pressing forward. I set my own personal goal to write a chapter, normally four thousand words or so, every two days. I'd write for a day, then rest while I thought of how the next one would proceed. I knew by now that my original goal of twenty chapters was far too short and that I'd need to reach for thirty. I kept expanding scenes and having to push others back. But at least I was generating new content, which made me happy to no end.

I kept up my schedule and my meetings with Morgan when spring term — my final term — started up. Katherine and I met in the first week, where she gave me feedback on the first half, but we decided that I could wait to work on that while I finished the last half, as I had the end in sight and it would only take me another week or two. I personally needed to have a full draft, or I felt like I would go insane.

And then, shortly after midnight on April 22nd, I finished. Sitting at 31 chapters and just over 116,000 words, I'd finished my manuscript. To say I was ecstatic, and just a bit in shock, would be an understatement. I'd actually managed to complete the thing, and now it was back to revising. I gave Katherine the second half, and she gave me the first half back with her comments. I printed it out — a whopping 90 pages of single-spaced text — shoved it into a binder, and attacked it

with my red pen. Now that I knew how it ended, I could find places where I could add or change things in the first half to tie into the latter half.

Several weeks later, we traded, and I did the same process on the second half. By the time I'm writing this, I'm doing my final revisions throughout the entire text, mostly on small things. I'm also going back through my extra documents to make sure they're ready to show off, fully encapsulating all of the work I've done.

Reflection and Future Plans

Looking back over the whole process, I can tell that I've done a lot of work. Avery and her situation has changed so much from her original creation five years ago, and I couldn't be prouder. I've written stories before, but never to this degree. By far, this is the longest, most complicated thing I've written. As I kept track of all of my word- and page-counts, I was fascinated as I watched them grow. I kept comparing them to finished novels, marveling as I passed this book or that. Sure, a lot of it would be cut or reworked, but I was generating that many words, putting them on a page that other people would read someday.

A large part of working through this was my own reluctance to show anyone my drafts. When it comes to academic works, I get very particular about doing the work myself. Since my thesis was an academic text in addition to a creative one, my possessiveness of the text took over me. I was fine sharing random questions and details with my friends, but for reasons even I'm not sure of, I wouldn't show them any of the actual text. Even after I started meeting with Morgan, I only showed her little bits, while Katherine remained the only one who had read the actual text.

Revising is not my favorite thing to do, by any means. I'm a big fan of writing then being done with it. I'll fix small things as I go, but I tend to like my ideas how they originally were. I was used to writing something, posting it, then moving on and receiving very little feedback. In the past, even when I did get feedback, it was minimal and not very constructive, which was a stark contrast to working with Katherine on this. The entire process was completely different from what I was used to. I found it hard to be objective and incorporate all this new feedback into my work. I worked and reworked sections three or four times, and I got tired of looking at the same sections repeatedly in what seemed like a short time period. I felt like there wasn't anything more I could do, and I just wanted to move on. I had all these other, new ideas bubbling in my mind for where the story was going, but I couldn't move forward yet.

It became a test of patience, at times, mostly with myself. Especially when it comes to dialogue, I have a hard time working new things into what I already have without completely changing the flow of what was happening. Since I was forced to do just that, I got mixed results. Sometimes, I absolutely hated what I was doing, and changed parts back before moving on entirely. Other times, I found myself loving where the new branch was taking me, as it incidentally tied to something I'd written in another chapter. I found that I liked opening a blank document and using the old text as a guide rather than trying to worm my way into what already existed. Sure, I still copied some parts over exactly, but a lot of it was entirely new, more descriptive, and, in my opinion, better.

When I was done, I still had the scenes and plot pieces Katherine said I could improve on. She was urging me to add on to those sections, to give them more meaning, but my brain refused to show me a way I could do that. I like the smaller solutions I'd added, as they had given me several key pieces I could bring up in later chapters, but they didn't change the overall arch of the story. I got angry at myself that I couldn't figure out how to work through those sections, and my own insistence on checking how much time I had left did not help. I liked my text at a slower pace before it ramped up in the second half, but she thought it dragged on for too long, and I couldn't think of anything that I could add that wouldn't change the entire course of that half of the story. In the end, I didn't have time to make any of those changes in a way that I would feel satisfied with. I still hadn't been struck with inspiration on how to add more drama and plot, and I had an approaching deadline and a reflective essay to write.

Katherine and I decided that I could wait and see if new ideas came to me after the "thesis" portion of this story was complete. In the future, I want to self-publish this book, both digitally and in paperback. I was hoping to do that before turning it in as my thesis, but I ran out of time. Thus, I plan to keep thinking on ways to improve my plot even more and then try my best to work in those ideas. I look forward to being able to hold my finished work in my hands in a form that isn't loose paper in two binders, but I want it to be something I'm proud of. To do so, in addition to making my plot the best it can be, I still have to create the other sections that make a finished book, such as cover art. For me, being able to publish it later is an added bonus.

I've learned so much, both about my writing style and the process of writing a novel, over the course of the past two years. My original idea was vastly different from the final project, but I couldn't be happier with the directions it has gone. I'm glad that I decided to take on writing a novel as my thesis, since it was actual motivation to get something completed. It also pushed me to work on something more complex than what I'd done in the past. I would not have been nearly as happy doing any sort of other project, I imagine. This was something I'd wanted to do and experience for a long time, and I feel this was the perfect setting to do so.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I just want to say that I still find it hard to believe I actually completed this thing. It still hasn't fully sunk in yet.

Even so, I want to thank the people who repeatedly told me that they believed in me and assured me that I was, in fact, actually doing it.

First and foremost, I want to say a big thank you to my parents for basically everything: supporting me, assuring me that I was doing fine, and keeping me on track.

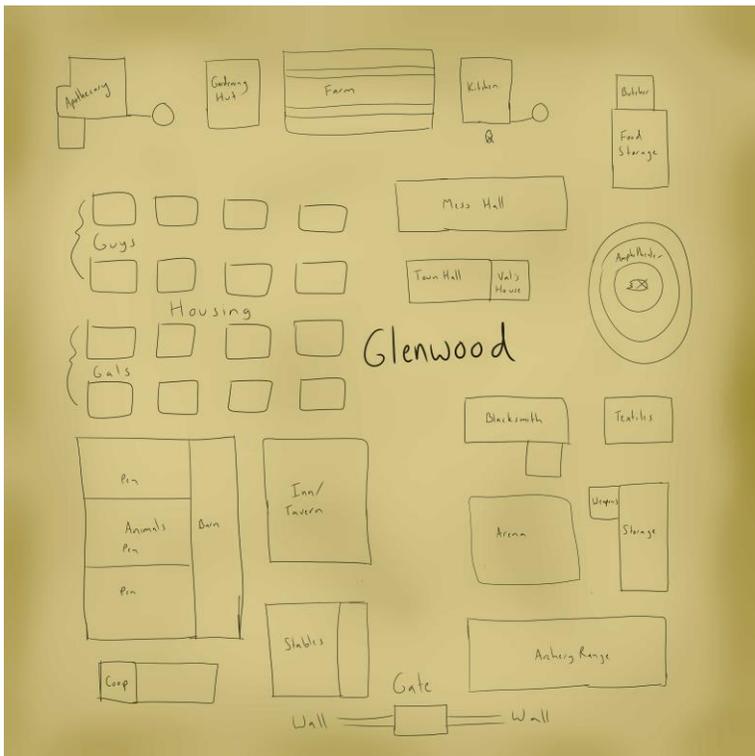
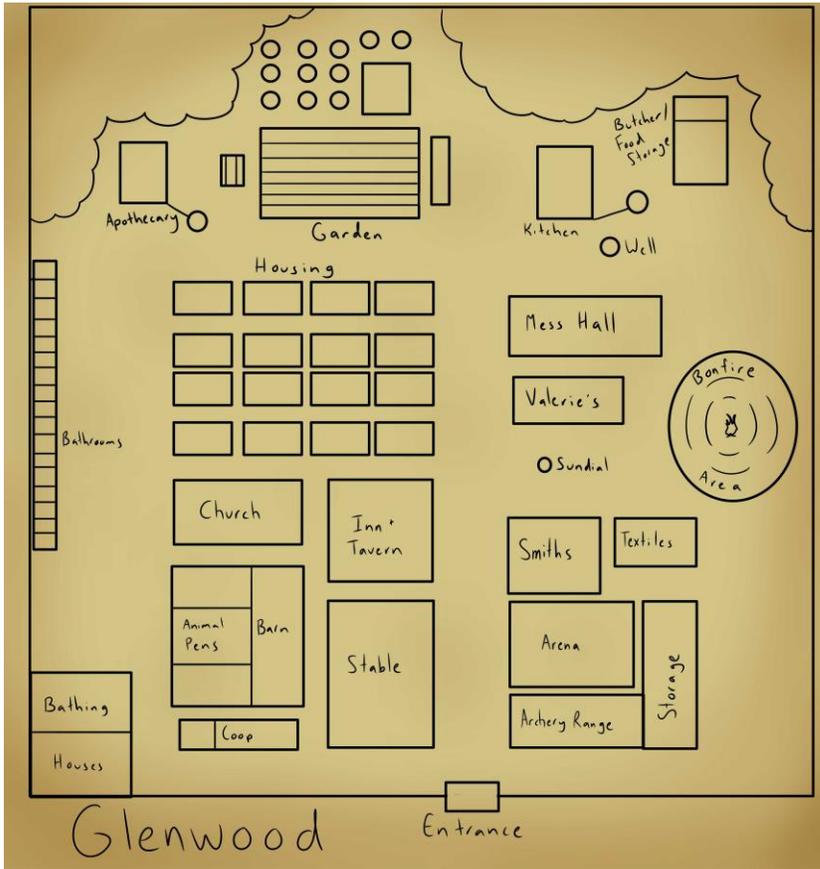
Thank you to Gavin Keulks and Katherine Schmidt, for helping along the thesis writing process and making sure I didn't stray or miss anything. Thanks to Morgan, for listening to me try to describe everything in wild and somewhat-vague terms and assuring me that things made sense to other people.

I want to say thank you to my friends and roommates for letting me rant and bounce ideas off them. Thank you to Mikey, Julianna, Regan, Katie, Laura, and even Ali and Ewan.

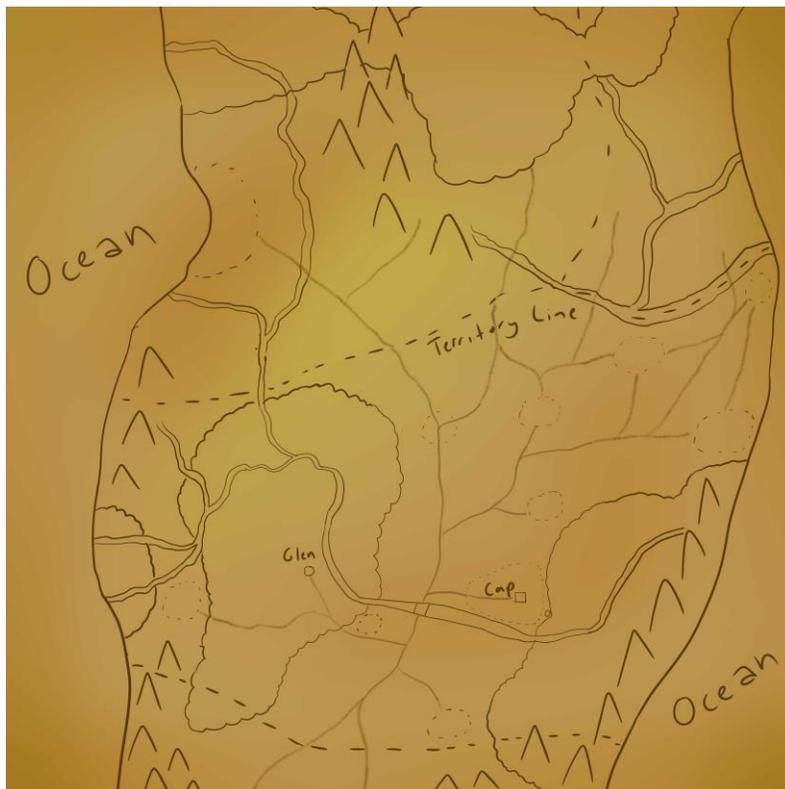
A huge thanks to RJ, who sat with me and helped me through my plot overhaul.

Shoutout to Katie Mac, my original writing buddy, for not letting me stop then. I told you I'd do this eventually!

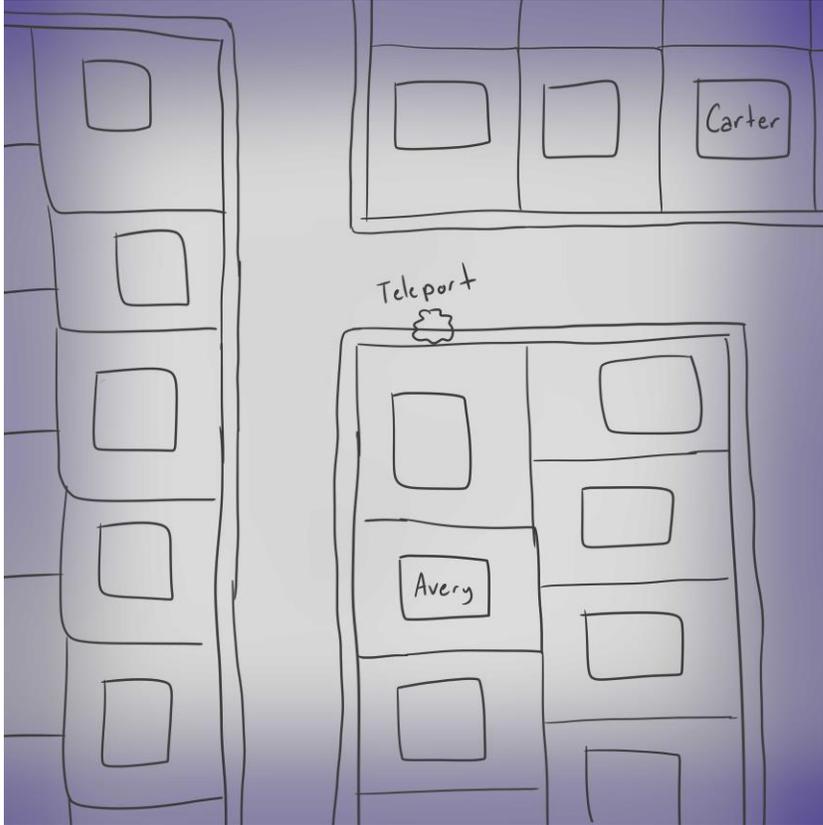
Appendix (Maps & Sketch)



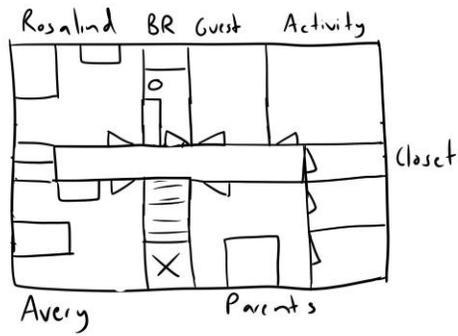
Maps of Glenwood
Above: Updated
Below: Original



Above: Map of the Kingdom
 Left: Map of Larger Country
 Both are original sketches with few updates for newer plotline



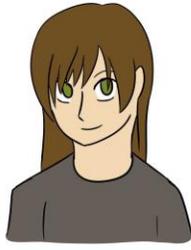
Above: Map of Avery's Neighborhood
Below: Map of Avery's House



2nd



1st



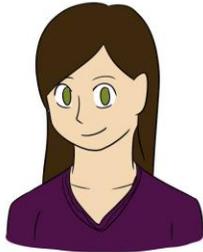
Avery



Jer



Carter



Rosalind



Valerie

Character Sketches

5-13-18



Above: Original character sketches/doodles of the main group
Left: First, full body drawing of Avery



First Sketches

5-18-18