

# Sanctuary

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She hunched over the desk that has been her office for the last few years. The desk was full of notes and old scrolls and artifacts acquired from the local collectors, as well as her own excavations. She had been busy translating one of the strange metal plaques she recently got her hands on, cross referencing them with collections of old crumbling pamphlets she managed to get from a dusty old antiquarian store a few years back.

Caught up in her work, the world around her melted away, losing its form and color. Time seemed to no longer matter as she threw herself fully into the problem in front of her. Her small office turned into a vast cavern of possibilities and

inspiration in front of her eyes. As she gets sucked deeper and deeper into the quest of tying errant and loose facts and figures together, the outside world becomes more and more distant. Her work was seldom appreciated by her peers, even more rarely, understood. She is told time and time again that she is wasting her time, looking into a past that will never return.



Her work consisted mainly of trying to put together narratives,

stories and memories from past generations. Putting their collective history in patterns and maps that makes sense for herself, and to those willing to listen. Translating old books and scrolls into modern tongue, gleaming stories from old carvings, paintings and sculptures. Much of it was still conjecture, she had to admit, but for each year that passed, she guessed a little less, and knew a little more. Or at least, she could guess with a bit more certainty.

Gently placing the last of the stamped iron plaques back on the pile, she got ready for a well-deserved lunch break. She had managed to decipher most texts that were still legible; they supposedly relate to descriptions of ancient masters of the arts. There was a four-letter seal at the bottom of each of the artifacts that still bothered and confused her.

Wrapping her worn bathrobe closer around her she shambled to the small pantry next to her study and pulled down a few cans of preserved food. Looks like baked beans and smoked pork again today. Far from luxury food, but with her work, she couldn't really afford to be picky.



She ate her food in silence, at the roof of the dilapidated old factory building where she had made her home and office. They used to make furniture here once. Now it only made shadows, dust and occasional historical breakthroughs. For as long as she has lived here, the sun has barely been able to shine through the thick carpet of smog that

permanently permeates the surrounding industrial complex she now called her home. Few people ever bothered to go to this part of town anymore, even fewer people lived here, not after the last collapse of the eastern steel mill. This fact suited her just fine, after all her work required quiet and contemplation.

In the distance she could still make out the smoke from the latest battle between Mark Corp, and Intra steel Inc, using gangs of mercenaries and destitute waste-landers to fight over the meager resources still left in the surrounding mountains. She hoped she would not be forced to leave again.

So far, no cooperation had taken much interest in the hollowed-out shell she now called her home and place of work. The only things they care even less about, would be her research. This fact was both a

blessing, and a curse. It was a blessing as she could go where she wished and take what she needed from the dilapidated ruins. It was a curse because she knew that, when she died, her work would die with her.

She was not young enough to remember anything of the Before world, before the wars, and the rising tides, and clouds of ash and soot. No one left alive now remembers, only faded images and stories remained. She hoped to change that one day, or at least that is what she told herself. Deep down she knew it was just something to keep her mind active, and to keep herself busy.



She finished her meager lunch, tossed the empty cans over the roof of her building, and wandered downstairs. Her work was pointless in the larger picture, she knew that. It would not clean the skies, it would not bring back the plants, it could hardly put food on the table, she had to salvage or barter for most of what she needed. This work was just for her, her peace, asylum, her sanctuary.

Down in the bowels of the hollowed-out shell of the furniture store she got back to organizing the haul from her last trip to the nearby dilapidated storage building where she had found so many artifacts. There were strange drawings, with minimal lines, statues of monstrous caricatures of humans, plaques and pamphlets barely legible, mentioning names and places she had never heard of. Only one thing tied them together, a stamp, with a four-letter word, m,

o, m and a. She had no idea what they could mean, but she was sure it was the key to understanding all of it, to understand the past.