

This moment was everything Jasmine had wished for.

The light scent of spring flowers was no longer detectable. They approached the station, and the smell of exhaust fumes took over. It was a very loud and unpleasant place. A small square invariably busy with bulky coaches, people running around with suitcases, hastily looking for their bus.

'All right then, I'll have to go.'

'Of course', she smiled.

Obviously, smiling was far from enough. She felt like singing and dancing and jumping, but she had to wait another ten or fifteen minutes before she could freely express her feelings, and there were so many. Overwhelming excitement, paralysing shyness and also a little bit of sheer joy, all mixed in her head.

It doesn't happen all too often that your life becomes just what you've always wished it to be. So when it finally does, you're overcome with all kinds of feelings, most of them positive, but sometimes you get this notion that it all might just be a dream. Dreams have their limits too, however. And this was so far beyond any limits.

'Remember to listen to the music I've sent you!'

'I will, I will.'

Zach got on the bus and looked at Jasmine through the window. She was smiling at him widely and as their eyes met, she raised her hand and waved shyly. He returned the gesture and smiled too. A nice girl, that Jasmine. She's probably in love with him, judging by the way she's been acting.

Zach sighed heavily. How does he tell her about... about everything?

He closed his eyes as the bus moved on the bumpy road. He was almost asleep when he remembered: he promised to listen to Jasmine's music! He pulled out his earphones and plugged them in. He opened the email app in order to see what it was that she sent him. No internet connection. Well then, he'll listen to it later.

Thank God traffic wasn't too bad that day and two bumpy hours later Zach opened the door to his house.

'Hi there!', he shouted as he put his jacket on the coat rack. The hall was filled with the warm smell of slow-cooked pork. 'Wow, I'm so hungry!'

'You're just in time then,' his mum replied happily. 'Dinner's served.'

'Awesome.'

'I'm really happy that you come home every weekend, Zach,' said his mum, smiling. 'It's not a common thing, I know, but it's nice that you still do.'

'Yeah', Zach nodded in response. As if he had any other choice than to return here every couple of days, he thought. He had so many more interesting things to do, going out with his friends or seeing Jasmine to start with. He'd rather have coffee with her in some cozy café than come here again and again, that's for sure. No one was interested in his preferences though.

Or, more precisely – the king wasn't.

'Is everything alright?'

'Oh, yes, yes, it is, mum. I'm just tired. I'll go and have a nap. Thanks for the dinner.'

'Sure.'

Zach entered his room and headed straight for his desk. He turned on the computer and listened to its quiet humming, waiting for it to boot. The blueish light of the screen made the furniture cast weird shadows on the walls. Zach rubbed his eyes and sighed.

*Installing updates: one out of twenty-three. Do not turn off your computer.*

Nice.

Zach checked the time. It was almost half past six, so he still had some time left. Hopefully the updates are installed before seven because he needs to have the music playing by then.

*Installing updates: thirteen out of twenty-three. Do not turn off your computer.*

He's going to make it, thank God.

Too many long minutes later the computer was finally ready to work. Good. Zach tried to keep calm, but the time passed quickly and now it was almost five to seven. His hands trembled and it didn't help.

Just open the browser... type the address... pick any album... loop it... and turn the volume up a notch.

No sooner than he clicked on the 'play' button, it was exactly seven o'clock.

Zach looked at the chest next to his bed and waited. It should light up any time now.

First it seemed almost as if the light of the computer screen danced on it, but with every next second the glow became more intense and it was obvious that the chest was emitting it. Soon the whole room was lit up and Zach had to cover his eyes.

His hand trembling, Zach reached for the chest and opened its lid. The light was so intense that covering his eyes didn't help much anymore. Pressing his hand against his eyelids and turning his head away, trying to protect his sight from the beam, he stretched his arm and grasped the stone that was inside the chest. Immediately the light stopped being painfully intense. Zach opened his eyes and looked around. He wasn't in his room anymore, but he still could hear the music playing from his computer. It was very important that he could hear it at all times. It was the only thing that would make his return possible later.

In the earthly world, the light was so strong that his eyes hurt even though he did everything not to look directly at its source. Now he could stare at the stone for minutes and he found it funny how its delicate silvery glow didn't even make his fingers look orange. Zach slipped the stone into his pocket and the light disappeared.

This place was weird.

'Welcome back, Zachary.'

It seemed as if the voice came from all directions as it echoed against the rocks around Zach. Everything was in the colour of dark blue here, the ground, the rocks and the sky. Well, if there was any sky. Zach couldn't say for sure, everything was in the exact same colour. He could only tell the soil from the rocky walls judging by their surface and temperature. This world produced no sounds and no scents. Everything Zach could hear in the background was the music playing in his room. Anything else that he could hear or smell in this world was there for some specific reason.

'Hail to the king,' said Zach loudly, kneeling and bowing his head. 'For he is the only true king.'

'Stand up, Zachary.'

Zach jumped to his feet obediently as the voice echoed, reached into his pocket and produced the glowing stone. He presented it on an outstretched palm and stared into it nervously, waiting for the king to speak again.

'You will not fulfill your destiny today, Zachary.'

Zach dared not move or sigh, but he felt his stomach form a tight knot. Again, he thought. How many years was it already? He'd lost count. He was only wasting his time. He knew that he had to deliver the stone somewhere, but the king wouldn't let him try for some reason, and Zach had no idea why.

'You may now leave, Zachary.'

'Hail to the king,' said Zach and closed his eyes, preparing to cover them from the unbearable light of the stone he was holding. He focused on the music in the background, following every single note of the song that was playing. The glow of the stone grew more and more intense; so intense that covering his eyes didn't help much anymore. Zach fell to his knees, but he didn't hit the hard ground – he was back in his room, at home, kneeling on the soft carpet. His head turned away and his eyes covered, he hastily threw the stone back into its chest and shut its lid. The light weakened and disappeared in a couple of seconds. Zach hid his face in his hands and cried. The situation has been beyond his control for such a long time, and he felt that he was nowhere near the solution.

Some time later, Zach stood up and turned off the music. Another album off the list.

He had this notion that music was somehow important when it came to his quest, but he didn't know how exactly. He still tried changing his choice every time he visited the kingdom, but his choices were blind each time. All he knew was that he needed to loop the album so that – in case the king allows him to do what he's meant to – he's got a chance of coming back.

Jasmine walked with him to the station again, clearly delighted with his presence. Of course, Zach did like her as well. He just felt that he shouldn't really get into a relationship if he can't ever promise anyone that the next week he'll still be around. He could die in the kingdom any time and he couldn't tell what the blue darkness was hiding from him.

'So, did you like the album I've sent you?'

The music.

He'd completely forgotten.

Shit.

'Oh jeez, Jasmine, I forgot about it! I'm so sorry.'

Zach could see that her eyes sunk a little, but she didn't stop smiling.

'Promise I'll check it out tonight.'

When Zach reached home, it was almost quarter to seven.

'I'll eat later!', he shouted as he rushed upstairs. He threw his bag on the floor and turned on his computer. Thank God, no updates this Friday. With his trembling fingers, he opened the browser and started typing the address when he remembered Jasmine's email. He could give her music a shot, why not. It should load by nineteen hundred.

Zach opened his inbox and saw the email Jasmine had sent him a week ago. It had no subject, just the link. He followed it and quickly set the album to play on the loop. Its beginning was rather weird, sounded as if... it was the middle of a song? Zach didn't give it too much thought because the chest started glowing and he had to cover his eyes quickly.

'Welcome back, Zachary.'

Zach knelt and bowed his head as the voice echoed in the blue darkness.

Hail to the king, for he is the only true king.'

'Stand up, Zachary.'

Zach jumped to his feet obediently as the voice echoed, reached into his pocket and produced the glowing stone. He presented it on an outstretched palm and stared into it nervously, waiting for the king to speak again.

The king didn't speak for a long time, but Zach kept focusing on the stone. Its shimmery light made the surroundings look lively, as if everything was made out of water. Zach knew that it was just an impression, and that this dark blue world was entirely solid. Well, at least so was everything he'd seen here so far. The music was flowing smoothly. This album was different from all the music Zach had known. It seemed as if it was one complete work rather than a collection of songs. Jasmine had clearly said that it was an album, there was no doubt about that, but also undoubtedly this one wasn't usual.

'Today is the day, Zachary.'

The voice sent shivers down Zach's spine. Today is the day!

'H-hail to the king,' he answered, his voice trembling with anxiety and excitement.

'Follow the stone, Zachary.'

Zach focused his gaze on the stone even more intensely and he felt as if some force dragged him forward. He made one cautious step, then another one, and soon he was marching forward at quite a pace.

He lost his sense of time and space. There was no beginning and no end to the music that was playing, as there was no beginning and no end to the blue. Nothing was changing, even the rocks around him looked all the same. The force was invariably pushing him forward, the silvery stone was invariably glistening, and the world around was invariably dark blue.

It could have been an hour, it could have been a day, it could have been a week. All Zach could tell was that he felt exhausted. His muscles were sore, his body was weak. He couldn't walk anymore. He fell to his knees and crawled forward, moving slower and slower. Was that how it was going to end? Was he going to just die there in this realm?

'H-hail... to... the king...' he muttered and passed out, only hearing the endless music flowing.

'Stand up, Zachary.'

The voice seemed to come from all directions as it echoed around Zach. This time however it sounded smoother, as if the rocks that reflected it were polished. Music in the background seemed smoother here too.

'Stand up, Zachary.'

Zach opened his eyes, lifted himself up on his elbows and looked around. He was in a vast room whose floor, walls and ceiling were made out of marble of all colours – all except for blue. Tiny pieces of marble created detailed compositions of beautiful geometrical patterns, all of them forming perfect nonagons. The chamber itself was in the shape of a nonagon as well.

'Stand up, Zachary.'

Zach jumped to his feet and reached into his pocket, only to find that the stone wasn't there. He raised his eyes, scared, and noticed a majestic figure right in front of him. The man was holding the stone in his hand, the silvery light making him look royal. Zach fell to his knees immediately and bowed his head.

'Hail to the king, for he is the only true king!'

'Hail to you, Zachary,' said the king, 'for you are the one who brought the glistening stone to me. We may now destroy it.'

Zach raised his head and jumped forward. He covered the stone with his hands.

'No!'

The king looked at Zach carefully.

'You must want answers, Zachary,' he said, nodding slowly. 'I might owe you some.'

Zach glared at the king, feeling confident suddenly, anger building up inside him. His life has been guided by this weird quest for so many years!

'I am King Gizzard,' said the majestic man. 'I am the guardian of infinity. I have no beginning and no end, and there is no beginning and no end to my kingdom. I have protected life from falling into infinite loops. It is only thanks to me that time passes, people change and every life will end one day. I am responsible for the balance between life, space and time.'

'Years ago,' said King Gizzard, 'a wizard appeared out of the blue and entered my realm, and he persuaded me to grant him one loop of infinity. Oh, what a mistake I had made then. It was the Lizard Wizard. He tricked me into agreeing that lizards can grow their tails back if they have it cut off. Nothing special, one could say, but my one moment of weakness caused years of my suffering. The only infinite thing in the universe is the number of wizards, and they all decided to come and ask me to grant their one wish. I could not do it and I had to hide in this finite chamber, and it is a prison to my mind.'

King Gizzard closed his eyes and sighed heavily.

Zach had mixed feelings about this story. He figured that King Gizzard's powers were essential to maintain the right balance in the world, but he also did force Zach into a particularly uncomfortable situation, and kept him in the dark for years.

'Time and space were meant to be infinite, but as long as I am imprisoned here, they cannot expand,' the king continued. 'And one day life will run out of its time and space, and the universe will collapse forever. The only solution for me was to create one more infinite loop and place it in the world, because I knew that one day the loop will become its right shape, and bring an end to all this. And this time I was not mistaken. You have made it, Zachary. You have brought the glistening stone to me, and the answer is inside it. You have shaped the loop of your life in a way which let you enter the infinite realm tonight. For that thank you, Zachary. For everything else I apologise. I plead your forgiveness, Zachary.'

King Gizzard's voice echoed in the perfectly shaped chamber. Zach looked into the king's eyes and saw deep sorrow in them.

'Can we now destroy the stone, Zachary?'

Zach nodded, stepping back. King Gizzard raised the stone up above his head and threw it on the floor with his full force. With a piercing sound resembling shattered glass, the stone smashed into tiny pieces which covered the entire floor. They weren't glowing anymore. The only source of light was now something that lied at the king's feet.

As Zach carefully moved forward, King Gizzard slowly reached for the shimmering item.

'This is it,' the king whispered in amazement. 'This is it.'

King Gizzard was holding a tiny quill, a grin of satisfaction on his face.

'A quill?' Zach said, puzzled.

King Gizzard didn't answer. He rushed to the other side of the nonagonal chamber. Zach followed, suddenly noticing a huge old volume sitting on a bulky desk across the room. The volume emitted this familiar silvery light. As Zach approached it, he could see that letters were appearing on the volume's pages, and when a page was fully covered in writing, it would turn, and letters started appearing on the next page. King Gizzard reached the old volume and hesitated for a moment.

'No,' he said. 'You should do it, Zachary.'

'Do what?'

'Bring an end to this, Zachary. Put a full stop at the end of a sentence. Free me from my curse, I beg you.'

King Gizzard turned to Zach and stretched his hand, presenting the quill to him. Zach hesitated, but he grasped it. He leaned over the volume and tried to follow the appearing words.

'You must put the full stop exactly at the end of a sentence, Zachary. It is of highest importance.'

*...the king found his saviour the time and space started expanding again the balance was restored and the world was saved forever*

'NOW,' shouted King Gizzard, and Zachary lowered his hand quickly, touching the paper with the glistening quill. The nonagonal chamber trembled but Zach held the quill firmly.

'Hail to you, Zachary, for you have fulfilled your destiny,' said the king. He placed his hand on Zach's back and closed the volume. 'Thank you forever. You may now leave, Zachary.'

King Gizzard smiled at Zach. The chamber was trembling stronger and stronger, and Zach knew it was going to fall apart. He closed his eyes and focused on the music, following every note if the infinite loop it created. The light of the quill grew more and more intense, and Zach had to turn his face away from the intense silvery glow. He fell to his knees, but they didn't hit the cold marble.

Zach collapsed onto his soft carpet, back in his room at home. He spent some time staring at the ceiling, listening to the music that was still playing in the background.

The music, what was it?

Zach jumped to his feet and reached for his computer. The blueish light of the screen made the furniture cast weird shadows on the walls.

Zach looked at the author and the title of this mysterious infinite album, and he felt a rush of blood to his head.

The band was called King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard.

The album's title was *Nonagon Infinity*.

Zach closed his eyes and focused. Please, please let Jasmine be real.