

*A*manda Evert:

*Journey to the Spire*

*A Tomb Raider Tale by Hunter Wolfe*

It was fierce, the cold. The wind had turned harsh as the hours tumbled away down the mountain. Every step was painful as she walked step by step, farther away from Helheim...the place she so vigorously sought.

It was a funny feeling. She had spent years hunting down the underworld temple...and now, after everything, it seemed a wasted expense of her time. She had lost the one man she cared about, caused another's death, faked her own...and to what avail?

She thought long and hard going down the mountain about why she wanted to find Helheim so badly...but not a thought came to her. She hadn't an inkling of an idea as to why she caused so much mischief.

And now she was alone...stranded on a vast desert of cold and snow. It was a horrible feeling...and it would never leave her.

Amanda Evert sighed in a painful sorrow.

### **AMANDA EVERT: JOURNEY TO THE SPIRES**

"We're almost there, Amanda," Lara said not paying a bit of attention to Amanda as she lumbered behind them.

They hadn't spoken since they left the ruins of the Norse temple, situated near the peak of a cascading mountain. Minutes later, they had arrived at a place Amanda knew not of. There was a plane, smashed and it looked recently fallen. In front of them, a cliff towered precariously above them casting a looming darkness around the icy ground.

Amanda recalled the day before Paraiso, a distant memory, Lara and she sitting on a bench under the hot Mexican sun. They both drank flavored water and shared stories upon stories.

"My mother died after a tragic plane crash. She and I had been flying over the mountain when a wing caught fire. The plane crashed. We were the only two survivors. We found a temple high up in the mountain, a place where we were sheltered from the cold."

"What happened?" Amanda has asked her.

"I don't know. My mother vanished, though. I never saw her again...There was a small village at the base of the mountain. I made it there as a young child and they made sure I got home safely."

"Wow. That is so bizzare! She's probably still out there, ya' know," Amanda said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well...it's against the Laws of the Universe to have things magically disappear. Everything leads somewhere...right? So...your mother *must* be out there somewhere!"

Lara smiled. "Let's go, Amanda. The bus is leaving for the hotel. We have a big day tomorrow."

"This is the plane you and your mother crashed in?"

"What's it to you, Amanda?"

Amanda backed down for a moment, then began, "I just mean...this is the place where you landed?"

Lara stared at Amanda. "No."

Amanda was confused. "We crashed up there. The plane fell down here a month ago when I went to the dais. It came from up top," Lara finished. She pointed up to the peak of the cliff, a mid-afternoon sun peaking over the cliff's precipice. Then Lara turned around and waved her hands in the air.

At first, Amanda wasn't sure what Lara was doing. Then she saw the small blip on the horizon grow larger and materialize into a helicopter. A minute later and the chopper was landing slowly on the icy ground, two men inside. Winston, Lara's butler and her tech-man, Zip. The third was gone, now. And it was her fault.

Lara, Zip and Winston ignored Amanda as they engaged in conversation close to the helicopter.

"...buisness at the manor..." Winston had said.

"Father had...tablet...controls..." Lara said.

Their conversation couldn't be heard well from the distance between them as the cold wind rushed against the cliff and brought up snow at Amanda's feet. The howl of the cold rushing air served a decent block around her ears.

Then, Lara walked over to Amanda. "Come on, Amanda." Three words. Lara was obviously still angry with her.

Amanda didn't blame her...

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## BRITISH MUSEUM

### THE FOLLOWING DAY

Amanda stopped to look at an exhibit in the British Museum, London. It was a hot summer's day, no breeze and a light London fog began to form along the city's floor. She had returned to Evert Estates, a glorious structure built around the mid-nineteenth century. Everything was trimmed and tidy on Amanda's estates, the lawn clear of litter and the indoor fountain a sparkling, crystal color.

Nobody had been home upon Amanda's arrival. She had instead decided to take a trip to the British Museum then, simply to gaze at the new exhibits. She hadn't been there since she was a young girl, she and her sister pressing their faces up against the glass of each exhibit. It looked as if it had been renovated in the more recent years. New lights hung from the ceiling and an entire new wing of showcases were put up in a very organized order.

She stopped at a case showing the climate of Antarctica. Lying at the bottom of the case were artifacts dug up from a dig of an abandoned polynesian tribe. She missed the old days. They weren't ones of deception and death. They were fun adventures in history which brought them out with small trinkets to pride and cherish.

Then she saw another case.

The picture was of Mount Erebus, Antarctica on a small blip of land called Ross Island. Amanda had heard rumors years ago of a culture still living there, one that practiced spiritual meditation for the entirety of their lives. A culture that protected their version of "the secret of life".

What if these people could help her? Amanda's head began to race as she thought of the possibilities. She could find the people of Ross Island. They could show her how to relieve her of her heart aches. How to find redemption in herself!

Amanda studied the exhibit closely showing a fossil of animal tracks revealed near Ross Island. She would find it. She would find the people that lived there and maybe...possibly they'd help her.

She made up her mind. She didn't want the life she once had anymore. She wanted forgiveness. She wanted to be like she was in the old days. Maybe she could start anew. Come out as Amanda Evert, archaeologist. Not as Amanda Evert, Killer.

Amanda left the British Museum with haste. She was going to make a quick stop in the London Square...and then she would hop on a plane and fly to Antarctica.

*Soon this will all be over, Amanda assured herself. Soon I'll be a good person again.*

She didn't notice the Wraith Stone, tight around her neck since Nepal, begin to glow a vibrant array of dark colors. It wasn't going to let go of its host without a fight...

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## ROSS ISLAND, ANTARCTICA

It was another one of those cold days. Amanda seemed attracted to that kind of weather. Although, Antarctica was never a place she had down in her book of places she

wanted to visit. Mother Nature was fairly polite to her on this day though. It was bright, sunny outside and the only natural obstacle she now expected was a small wind chill.

She hopped from the helicopter that had taken her across the waters of Antarctica to this small island. Ross Island was discovered in 1841 by a man named Sir James Clark Ross. It was back during a time where the cold north was as mysterious as outer space. It was the sixth tallest island in the world housing three volcanoes, all part of the Pacific Ring of Fire.

The people she was searching for were an old spiritual tribe that supposedly arrived back in the late eighteen hundreds. All that was known about them was that they lived off the arctic waters and practiced meditation as a way of spiritual enlightenment.

If only Lara were here now...to help her find these people.

And then the thought crossed Amanda's mind. What if they would not allow her to meditate with them? She'd never be able to turn back to the life she lived. She needed these people now more than ever.

A short distance awaited her as her snow boots crunched in the snow right outside the helicopter. As its blades slowed down, she regained normal hearing once more and began heading for a fenced in area housing multiple buildings and warehouses along with two other men that had accompanied her on her journey to their station.

They passed through a security gate and then walked towards a small center, a metal door shielding the inside from the cold. They knocked on the door to the large center with its solar panels on top and water and gas tanks lining the building's left side.

The door opened and they were hurried in hastily. The interior was very high-tech with desks and computers with numbers and diagrams on their screens, one to two people dressed down working at each space. Two coat racks were stationed next to the entryway. A staircase led to a wooden door at the center's top.

"Thank your pilot for me," Amanda said to Charles, an African-American who had been chewing on a toothpick for the entire ride from London.

"No problem, ma'am."

"Ma'am isn't really necessary. Call me Amanda."

"Amanda...nice name. Italian?" he asked her pulling out his toothpick and pointing it at her questioningly.

"English, actually."

"Oh...well anyways, this is the Mount Erebus Observation Center, established back in ninety-four. Our specialists work on analyzing topographic maps, thermo, soil sampling and about any other scientific recording they know. I myself am a travel guide." Charles

turned towards the coat rack and began to unbutton his jacket, the other man already heading to an empty desk.

“I am the publicity man. We get visits from the press when oil spills out somewhere and I’m the one who gives them the information. I know this island very well. So this indigenous tribe you’re hunting, I can probably tell you where they live.

Amanda took her jacket off and replied, “You know exactly where they live?”

“Well...not quite. I have a good idea of where I’d be though. Awhile back, we found an old tunnel system running under Mount Erebus hand crafted by what we thought were the Polynesians. But one of the tunnels collapsed while they were exploring it so we just left it there. Big scare, if you’d ask us.”

“Mount Erebus...the volcano?”

“Yeah. Hasn’t acted up in a few months so you have good timing, actually.”

“Well, a nap would be very nice before we begin our journey. Do you have any guest houses?”

“Sure. We’ll be there in a minute.”

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Amanda rolled the Wraith Stone from hand to hand that night. She, in fact, could not sleep a wink. She simply wanted to get to the tribe fast. She could no longer stand her memories of her wrongdoings. Natla, Paraiso, Lara and even James Rutland. All were memories of times where she had made a big mistake.

Spiritual enlightenment. It would take away the hurt. The pain. It would all go away.

Amanda rolled out of her bed tying the Wraith Stone around her neck again. Charles had given her the file of the location she was looking for before they left the observation center. She would leave now, and go by herself. It was a journey she had to make alone.

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The headlights of the all-terrain jeep burst to life as the engine roared awake from its snowy rest. Small flakes of snow were floating down onto the windshield. Amanda turned on the wipers, the flakes vanishing instantly. She pulled out of the guest house carport and expertly pulled onto the icy road.

In the distance, Mount Erebus stared down at her in patience. “I’ll be there soon.”

Amanda drove off into the distance, straight roads winding around the volcano which had grown at the island’s central point. A small GPS unit, specially created for the

observation workers as a way to navigate during storms. Several points were marked around the island, one road red meaning it was inaccessible. According to the coordinates on her file, this was the road Amanda needed to take.

She increased her speed and rode off into the night.

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“Charles...isn't that the woman who came from London?”

Damien, a worker also working the late shift pointed out a large glass window. Amanda's jeep pulled out of the guesthouse and drove off into the distance at an increasing speed.

“What the heck is she doing!?” Charles shouted spitting his toothpick to the ground.

“Ummm...we have bad storm signals coming from the dish at Station Three. We need to get out of here before everything goes all windblown like last year.”

“You and the others secure this place. I've got to go stop her.”

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The cute car symbol that represented her on the GPS was now halfway along the red road. It was bumpy, trailing along the curved spine of the volcano. She slowed down coming across a bridge and then sped up again. The snow was coming down hard now and the heater in the jeep was about shot.

“Crap. The battery is shot!” she said angrily smacking a hand against the heating vent. It cracked in reply and turned off completely.

*YOU HAVE REACHED YOUR DESTINATION.*

The GPS voice spoke out of her speakers in a clear, fluent voice enunciating her every word. Amanda jerked to a stop. She pulled a backpack of equipment from the passenger's seat she'd brought from London and pulled it over her shoulder.

As promised, a large opening in the volcano's side had been crafted. It was large and could have fit the jeep. She turned the jeep off and tucked the keys into a small pocket in the backpack.

Amanda approached the tunnel's entrance.

“Here goes,” she said followed by a short sigh.

She tightened the grip on her backpack and began to walk forward, a flashlight in her hand. Then two lights shone on the rough walls surrounding the tunnel entrance. Amanda turned in surprise and peered through the thick snow falling around her as Charles pulled out of a jeep parked near hers.

“Charles! What are you doing here?” she called out to him. The wind was picking up and it was hard to hear.

“I should be asking you the same thing Amanda! Come on! There’s a storm right over us!”

Amanda inched closer towards the tunnel.

“No! I have to do this alone!”

“Do what, Amanda? Why do you want to find these people so bad?!”

“Because...no!” The earth began to shake violently. Time seemed to move fast as thousands of pounds of snow began to tumble down the side of Mount Erebus.

Charles turned back swiftly and sprinted for his jeep.

Amanda was torn. She could either jump into the tunnel without knowing if it would even lead her to the tribe, or accept the same fate as Charles.

She chose the tunnels.

Amanda twisted, the Wraith Stone was giving her a burst of adrenaline. She was only a few feet from the entrance. And the snow was only a few feet above her. She dove into the tunnel as the snow thundered down around her.

Suddenly, the world was torn from her as the moon vanished from site, the view of Ross Island and even the jeep that needed a battery change. It all disappeared leaving her buried under a heap of snow.

She squirmed out from under the pile, hoping she hadn’t been caught underneath the entire avalanche, or worse...*outside* the tunnels. Then her head and arms poked out of the snow heap to be welcomed by an infinite darkness.

She was in.

Amanda pulled the rest of her body out of the snow, and then dug around for the flashlight that had fallen near her. She found it, still on and shined it through the icy tunnel. It was wide like a cavern.

“Just great. I would’ve liked the option to come back when I was done. But, oh well. Looks like I’ll have to find another way. I bet this place is probably just a fluke.”

Amanda walked through the icy tunnels. She came to a fork and took the left tunnel which led to a hundred-foot drop off. She returned to the fork and instead went right which descended deeper into the mountain.

“Me without my bread crumbs. I think Hansel and Grettle had it a bit easier than this.”

She had come to a chasm, stalactites and stalagmites glimmering from Amanda’s flashlight beam. It reminded her of the mirror rooms in Egypt where a single beam of light



could illuminate the entire room by use of a series of mirrors. The flashlight did just that and, before Amanda knew it, the chasm was lit revealing multiple branches of tunnels.

One tunnel was collapsed...just as Charles had told her.

Amanda pondered what had happened to Charles. She wanted to believe he had made it out of the avalanche's way...

Quickly she disregarded her thoughts and laid down her backpack on a heap of icy rock. She unzipped the main compartment and pulled out a bottle of water. She was dehydrated and also getting somewhat anxious. Charles hadn't told her what they found inside the tunnels. Amanda knew it was the tribe, living secretly underneath Mount Erebus for the many centuries.

It was absolutely possible, Amanda assured herself. Volcanoes always had underwater rivers. The rivers would be the perfect life source for any underlying culture. And based on the animal fossils back in the British Museum, animals must still exist around the island, taking shelter in the winters inside, oh say...tunnels.

She picked up her flashlight, the light changing throughout the chasm, and walked towards one of the new tunnels. Each one, now that she noticed, had a small symbol embossed in the ice beneath each entrance. An eagle, a river, a fire emblem and a mountain.

"These things look ancient!" Amanda exclaimed. Each symbol had been carved and preserved way before any observation center's existed. "But which one leads to the tribe? Eagles are nonexistent around Ross Island, the weather too harsh for them. That would be a dead end. The fire symbol, located right above them. The volcano. She would enter that one.

Amanda had no idea how to examine and interpret the symbols. How did she know that they even lead to the people?

"Guess I'm going on instinct now." Amanda sipped from her water bottle, closed the lid and then journeyed forth into the fire tunnel.

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It had been hours. The tunnels twisted and turned and spun downwards before her. And then...a dead end. She froze up as the large icy wall stopped only a few yards ahead.

"No. Not after all this time!" Amanda began to get angry, the stone around her neck silently feeding from it.

"No. No. NO!"

Amanda stomped her foot hard on the ground.

And then she was silent.

The ground cracked. It was quiet at first, and then grew louder as the cracks deepened around the floor. And then the ice split and swallowed Amanda as she twisted to turn around.

“Agh!” she cried. But her screams vanished during the fall as she blacked out. Her last thought had been, *not a dead end after all!*

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“I refuse to do it, father! The test is not humane. I wish to see the world! There is so much more than spiritual enlightenment.”

“Your heart is with the world and your selfish desires. We are a people of tradition and your desires are not of significance to the greater plan. You will take the test tomorrow and begin your journeys of spirituality. No further arguments shall take place!”

The father and son argued relentlessly in their hut. Tomorrow, his son *would* take the Trial of the Spire and become one of them. It was a necessity for their way of life to be preserved.

A knock on the door.

“Coming.” The son opened the door and bowed at the visitor.

“Come quickly my brothers. The ice has broken and a woman has fallen from the sky!”

The father and son stared at each other, and then rushed out the door to the crowd of people swarming towards the still waters. A river rushed under the great chasm that separated their world from the modern world. A simple look up would reveal darkness through the gap between the surface.

One of the fishing nets that was strung from each side of the river had multiple members of the order in action around it. They were pulling out what appeared to be a woman from the surface world who had fallen through the great chasm. She was unconscious, blacked-out from the scare of the fall.

“My son, stay back with your sisters.”

“But father! I wish to see the...”

“Your wishes are of no concern to me. Now obey me at once!” the father said.

He rushed over to his brothers. “Who is this woman?” he asked.

“We have no idea. She just simply fell from the chasm. Should we wake her?”

“Yes. But keep a sharp eye on her. We have no idea if she is good or evil.”

One of the men returned with a bucket of water. As several heads nodded at him,

he dumped it on the woman's face and she awoke, startled.

"Where...where am I?" she sputtered out between two wet coughs. She sat upright.

"You have traveled a great distance. Who are you?" one of the men replied.

"My name is Amanda Evert. I've come from across the world to find this place. I have come to practice spiritual meditation with your tribes. Where is your chieftain that I may have a word with him?"

One of the men, wearing the same orange robe as the rest of them looked at her in amazement. And then he smiled and helped her to her feet, the crowd still nearby watching in awe along the river.

"We will take you to our leaders. But I must warn you, they are very harsh against visitors from the surface world."

"Okay. Let's go."

The tribesmen lead her through the village, upriver where the water turned hot. They followed a rocky path, no ice in sight. Amanda figured they must have been near the volcano's heart as there was no snow in this place.

Finally, they came to a halt at the top of a hill of rocks. In front of her was something she hadn't expected. A bridge of stone was erected out into the middle of a lake of steamy water. Out where the bridge ended was a circular stone platform, large enough for the entire village to commute. And just beyond the platform...was a tower.

The tower, which resembled more of a spire reached into the volcano's crater. She could only barely make it from all the steam, which made her understand why nobody had ever found the people before.

On the circular platform were nine figures, all shrouded in orange robes, hand-woven. They were in a line, watching the tribesmen bring Amanda out to the tower. And then, as they approached, the tribesmen dropped to their knees and bowed.

"We have brought exactly what you prophesied, brothers. This woman seeks to know our ways of meditation and so we bring her forth humbly for your judgment.

The elders whispered amongst themselves in a strange manner, not moving their heads to talk towards each other. And then they bowed in unison and began to speak to her together.

"We are the Order of the Spire, an order of monks dedicated to the protection of the secrets to spiritual enlightenment. This place is the Ethereal Spire, a place of meditation that allows communication between realms. We have spoken with spirits and ancestor from when the Earth was new. In most cases we would look inside your heart and be weary of the darkness inside. But the only darkness we have found in you is the talisman

you wear across your neck.”

Amanda was startled. She hadn't realized that maybe that Wraith Stone was what fed her anger. That it could be the source of her bad choices.

She pulled out the stone and threw it to the ground in front of her.

“For you to practice in our ways of meditation,” they began in unison once more, “You must pass the Trial of the Spire, a test of faith practiced for centuries and set forth by our ancestors. Only when proven pure may you heal the aches in your heart. But until then, you shall travel with that evil around your neck.”

“When can I start?” she asked.

The nine members of the Order began to chant. For a minute, Amanda watched them as their mouths moved together in perfect harmony. And then, the steam from the pond disappeared from the inside of the volcano and a great door from the spire's front opened slowly.

The Wraith Stone rose from the ground and magically tied itself around her neck. She touched it with a finger, feeling its familiar power on her again. And then Amanda Evert entered the Spire where she would face a trial she had no idea of.

“Well...I've been through worse, I'm sure.”

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## ETHEREAL SPIRE

The world had changed once more around Amanda Evert. Originally, she had been in a natural location: outside atop the beautiful Mount Erebus. And then she found herself stuck inside an icy wonderland. From the icy wonderland to an underground city of flowing water to the bowels of a volcano.

Her head was spinning.

This time, she had left the natural world completely. The Ethereal Spire, an urban legend, was not what she expected it to be like. She expected to be faced with some hideous monster or something. Anything combat-ish, she had planned to easily dispatch it with the Wraith Stone. A puzzle she thought she could handle. She didn't quite have the mind-boggler agility of Lara Croft, but she knew after awhile, she could solve it.

But no. The Ethereal Spire was a white chamber. She didn't know how high up she was, or how far in she was. As she took her first step, the door vanished behind her leaving her in a pure white room with no conceivable end. It was much as she'd imagine

heaven to be, endless and clear as crystal.

Amanda let her backpack slide off her shoulders. It vanished as well.

“Hello!” Amanda called out into the white abyss.

“Why, I didn’t expect to find *you* here.”

Lara Croft stood behind Amanda with a gleam in her eye. “Lara! How did you get here?”

“I should be asking you the same thing. After Helheim I thought you would have left your old life behind you. As it appears, you just didn’t get enough travel-time in history.”

“I...I came here to make up for my mistakes. I’ve done a lot of people wrong and I thought maybe spiritual enlightenment with the Order would heal my wounds...I thought I could find redemption here.”

“Well, at least this time you have good intentions.”

“So what are you doing here, anyways?” Amanda asked turning around and gazing across the room.

“I’d imagine someone looking for forgiveness like you would’ve...here’s a funny idea...*apologized* by now.”

Amanda turned around again to find James Rutland standing next to Lara. “James!” Amanda was stunned. First Lara...and now James. This was the test. This was the Trial of the Spire. “This isn’t real. You two aren’t really here and this is just a test...isn’t it.”

James shook his head softly. “Oh, Amanda. You just had to do this the hard way.” He and Lara were swept away in a gust of black light that beamed across the chamber. Suddenly, the blackness began to devour everything Amanda could see, which wasn’t anything much, really.

“Wait! Hold on I can make things right!” she shouted as she, for the second time today, fell into eternal darkness. She squinted her eyes shut and wrapped into a ball in case she was landing in water again.

This could be it, she thought. I might be falling to my doom right now. I must’ve failed the Trial. And then she hit the ground. She grunted as she landed, although she had expected the fall to have been longer.

She was on her ship. Her ship that had carried her across the seas. The ship that held Natla prisoner for so long. The sky was blue and the wind was breezy. The sun beamed down on her comfortably and reflected off the clear blue waves that collided against the hull’s metal.

“It’s funny how you come back to this place after everything you’ve done.”

Natla.

She hovered in the air for a moment, and then landed on the deck next to Amanda, leaning on the railing and peering out to the horizon.

“You’re not real either...are you.”

“No Amanda. I’m not. I am your pain. Your nightmares. Your fear. Right now I can feel the fresh terror emanating from your very core. Why are you afraid, Amanda? Is it because you think I want revenge for you locking me up in that god-forsaken containment jar?”

“No. I’m afraid because after today...I might never get a chance to apologize to those I’ve hurt. I walked into my estate the other day and my parents weren’t home. They’ll never know I walked right back out of their lives again without giving them a care in the world.”

“Congratulations. You’re one step closer to the end.”

Amanda turned to look at Natla. “What end. If you really are a part of me, then tell me something...when will this be over? When can I lead a normal life again. When will I get out of this *insane* place!?”

“Maybe you should ask yourself that question. That stone you have around your neck won’t come off until you do.”

The environment changed once more, this time putting Amanda in the white chamber again, this time with a slight change. A vanity mirror had been placed in the room’s center. Next to the mirror was a large rock and hammer placed perfectly balanced on top of it.

Amanda approached the mirror.

In it she saw herself staring back.

“You must be me,” Amanda said to the mirror image.

“That I am. But who are you? Are you the one who kills for herself? Or the one who’s heart is pure?”

“I’m the good one. I’m no longer the old person who did anything to get what she wanted. Why can’t this trial be over!? I’ve already fixed everything!” she yelled angrily, the Wraith Stone powering up.

“Why don’t you look at that talisman around your neck?”

The Wraith Stone unlatched itself and fell to the ground in front of Amanda. She felt as if a weight had been majorly lifted off her shoulders.

She picked it up. “I guess this is what the hammer is for.”

“You have two options now, Amanda. The mirror...or the stone?”

Amanda picked up and placed the Wraith Stone on its flat surface. She grasped the

hammer. "I think I already know that answer."

She swung down with all of her might.

But it stopped, a mere inch from the Wraith Stone which glowed an angry maroon color. The monster inside of it materialized in the mirror now. *"Don't do it, Amanda. You need me. Together we have done impossible feats...I have seen the future and many more could await us. Would you really destroy any chance of a life of power you have?"*

"Yep. Just like this."

Amanda swung down once more, this time the Wraith Stone shattered upon impact, sparks of colors igniting around the shards.

And again, the world was taken from Amanda and she was back on the circular platform outside the Ethereal Spire where the Order of the Spire awaited her in patience.

"Many congratulations, Amanda Evert. The spirits tell us you have passed the Trial. We accept your offer and would be honored to have you meditate with us."

Amanda, tired, looked at them all and sighed. "I appreciate your kindness and hospitality so much...but I must decline. I know what I need to do now...I know I can be a better person without your practices. I would like for a way home. Is there any way out of your tribe?"

"Yes," they all replied in unison. "A boat will be prepared at once. Follow the river downstream and you will find your exit at a hidden spring, shrouded in the shadows of a grove of trees. We thank you for your visit, Amanda Evert."

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Amanda's raft was being prepared at the moment giving her some free time. She had wandered away from the village of huts and stone fire pits and found asylum in a small rocky outcropping near the Ethereal Spire. She knelt down to the once-more steaming pond around it and slipped the Wraith Stone shards into its waters. Nobody would ever find it again. It would never burden anyone again.

"Goodbye, old friend," she whispered. The Wraith Stone had been a part of her since Paraiso, all of those many years ago. It had also been evil and she was happy, for once, slipping its fragments into the watery prison.

As Amanda walked towards the tribesmen signaling for her upon her raft's completion, her mind was beyond the Order of the Spire and Mount Erebus. She had forgotten that she was in Antarctica at all. She was thinking about plans for her new life. The life she'd spend doing good things for others. She'd make an honest living...and deal with honest people.

And so Amanda Evert traveled back home one more time, enjoying the cold of Antarctica as she traveled back towards the Observation Center.

And this time, she was walking with a smile on her face.

FIN