

THREE-TIME NEWBERY HONOR RECIPIENT

CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT

# LEGENDS OF LOTUS ISLAND

TEMPLE OF SECRETS



ILLUSTRATED BY KEVIN HONG

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**BY CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT**  
**ILLUSTRATED BY KEVIN HONG**



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For Saamia



# CHAPTER 1

I lived almost my whole life on a tiny island surrounded by water. But I never understood how vast the ocean really was until I was on a ship, at night, in the middle of the sea.

I stood at the front railing of the ship in my roan form. My antlers glowed with a bright ruby-red light. I swung my head side to side, sweeping the light over the dark waves below.

“Hey Plum, it’s not your turn to keep watch yet,” said a voice behind me.

I turned to where Mikko stood holding the ship’s wheel. “I know, but I couldn’t sleep.” I transformed back into my human form. “Do you want me to take over at the wheel and give you a break?”

“Nah, I couldn’t sleep either. Besides, look up. Without



that red spotlight of yours, you can see so many stars. I bet there are a million in the sky right now.”

“That’s because we’re about a million miles away from anyone who could help us.” We turned to see Hetty crossing the deck toward us.

Hetty was always a worrier, but this time she was right. It was a little shocking to think about all we had been through in the last twenty-four hours.

What should have been a fun New Year holiday on Nakhon Island had turned into a desperate escape. We had battled against shape-shifting hoverbots. And we had stolen this massive wooden ship to prevent the greedy Councilor Yurn from using it to launch an attack on Lotus Island. We desperately needed to get to Lotus Island, to warn Master Sunback and all the others that they could still be in danger.

Worst of all, we were separated from our friends. Salan had flown back to Lotus Island in his wybird form, and we had no idea if he had made it or not. Sam had stayed behind on Nakhon Island out of loyalty to his mother, the powerful Lady Ubon.

And Rella? I wouldn’t call her my “friend.” But without her, we never would have escaped. The last we saw of her, she was using her shadow powers to hold back

Councilor Yurn and the hoverbots so that we could get away.

I sighed and squeezed the seashell pendant that hung around my neck. My mother had given it to me when I was a baby, before she and my dad were lost at sea. I wish the necklace could give me some sort of sign that things were going to be okay.

The silence was shattered by a loud *crunch, chomp, chomp*.

I turned around. Cherry held a box out to me. "These ship chips aren't half bad. You want one?"

"Those are *emergency biscuits*," Hetty scolded. "Besides, they don't taste like anything except salt."

Cherry smacked her lips and pondered. "Salty nothing isn't a bad flavor."

I had to smile. Leave it to Cherry to focus on snacks in the middle of a crisis.

I leaned over the front rail of the ship and looked down into the water below. The moonlight glinted off Master Render as he rolled through the waves, swimming along beside us.

Master Render was . . . well, we weren't exactly sure *what* he was. He seemed to be some sort of ancient creature, though he was more like a giant boulder than a living



animal. We had met him deep in the caves beneath Nakhon Island.

He claimed to have been born on the Old Home, the far-away place where all our people had once lived long, long ago. When humans destroyed the Old Home through their greed and cruelty, a powerful creature called the Great Beast had fled across the ocean, bringing as many animals and humans as he could carry. Master Render had come along with him, all those centuries ago.

Master Render popped his round head above the surface of the water. “Dawn is approaching. I can hear the tiny shrimps waking up in the depths below.”

I looked behind us. In the east, the horizon had begun to glow a lighter shade of blue.

“Do you know how far we’ve traveled since we left Nakhon Island?” I called down to him.

“Hmm, that is hard to say. We left one day ago, but the Old Road carries us swiftly.”

The “Old Road” was a fast-moving ocean current that circled the globe. According to Master Render, the Great Beast had used this current when he left the Old Home and started new life on our islands.

By using the Old Road, we had been able to sail away from Nakhon Island quickly. But while Master Render intended

to use this speedy current to return to the Old Home, we had no plans to follow him all the way. We needed to turn around at some point and get back to Lotus Island.

I leaned farther over the railing. "Master Render, you told me that there would be an island along the way where we could stop and rest. And hopefully stock up on some real food. Are we getting close to it?"

He plunged his face back into the water again, then came back up. "Very close. I taste fallen coconut palm leaves."

Mikko pointed ahead. "Hey, I think I see something . . ."

A large, dark shape emerged on the western horizon. An island. As the morning sun rose higher, the ocean current pulled us closer and closer to it. But even when we were near enough to see the high, sheer cliffs that surrounded the island, I couldn't see any lights or signs of life.

"Are you *sure* people live here?" asked Hetty.

I bent over the side to ask Master Render more questions. He answered in a gravelly language that only I could understand.

"Well, what did he say?" asked Mikko.

I translated for the others. "He says this is called Sohn Island. Apparently the entire island is ringed by those high stone cliffs that drop straight down into the water. There are no beaches or places to anchor a ship."

“Wow, sounds just delightful,” said Hetty.

“But there *are* people who live here,” I continued. “In the middle of the island. And there’s a secret way to get past the cliffs and reach the island’s center.” I frowned. “At least, there *was* when he was here last, three hundred years ago.”

“Three hundred years!” gasped Hetty. “What if all the people left? What if they’re not friendly? What if—”

Cherry put her hand out to interrupt. “What if we just give it a try?”

“Yeah,” said Mikko. “Because if we don’t, our only option is to follow a floating boulder to the other side of the world.”

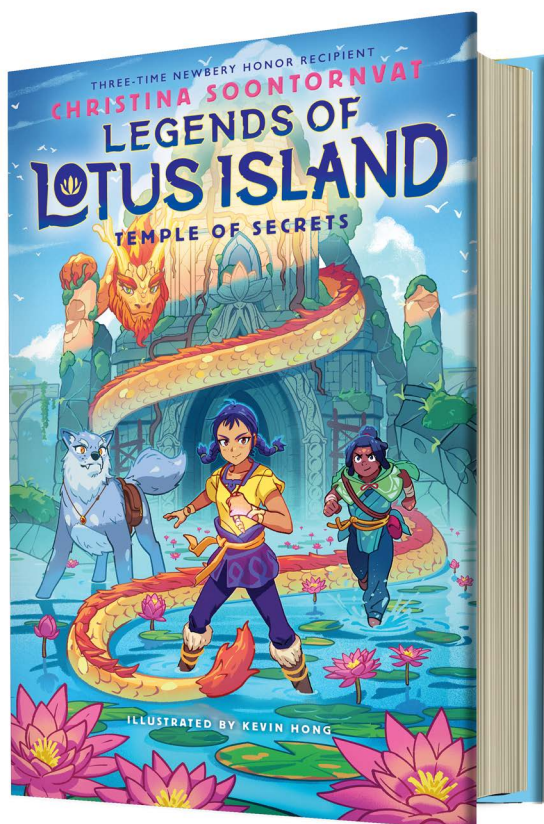
“And if we do that, I’m going to need some dip for these ship chips,” said Cherry.

“Fine,” said Hetty with a sigh. “I guess if a big rock creature can get inside the island, then it can’t be that difficult.”

I smiled and nodded, but I didn’t tell her the rest of what Master Render had told me.

Because it definitely sounded difficult.

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