

Pondfolk

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/40193628) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/40193628>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Hermitcraft SMP
Relationship:	No Romantic Relationship(s)
Character:	Keralis , xBCrafted (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Zine: HermitHorrors , Body Horror , Drowning , Post-Apocalypse , Alternate Universe , Collab , Implied/Referenced Character Death , Mind Manipulation , Mutation , very short chapters
Language:	English
Collections:	Hermit Horrors Fanzine Written Works
Stats:	Published: 2022-07-10 Words: 2,248 Chapters: 15/15

Pondfolk

by [MawoftheMagnetar](#)

Summary

Amid a tangled web of thorns and leaves, you pluck from the ground a tattered notebook, coil-bound and stained. In it, the scribbled journal of someone you've never met.

You take a step deeper into the oasis, your respite from the desert heat.

Behind you, a twig snaps.

A collab with the fantastic Time-Slink for the HermitHorrors fanzine! [Check out the companion art for this piece!](#)

NIGHT 44. 16:46

There's no water. None anywhere. I'm trying to stay positive, but it's getting harder and harder. If I don't find somewhere to refill my canteen soon, I'm going to die. Oh, and I'm also running out of food. Makes travelling...fun...but you're not supposed to eat anyway if you don't have water, right? I really wish my map was more useful- none of these towns, cities, or roads are anything more than piles of sand-swallowed rubble at this point. It's just me and the trailwalkers out here. And if I stop for too long, they'll catch me.

I just have to keep moving north. Just follow the compass, and I'll get there eventually. The farther I go, the milder the heat will get and the greater the odds I'll find rain, or maybe even...maybe even life that's not twisted to hell and back. It's a long shot, but it's all I've got.

NIGHT 45. 15:57

Got real lucky today and found a semi on a patch of highway that hasn't been torn up yet. I even-
man, I know I sound like a lunatic even suggesting it, but I thought I saw a fly. Remember flies?
Buzzed around and ate dog shit? Remember dogs? I'm making myself depressed.

The semi wasn't exactly flush with stuff- just a load of chairs for some city that doesn't exist
anymore. Hit the jackpot in the cab, though- next to the trucker's bones was a quarter-full plastic
bottle of water he'd been drinking before he died. I topped up my canteen with it and kept the
bottle. Big win of the day, and well worth the stop.

NIGHT 46. 16:38

Woke up at the crack of dark. As the sun set, I saw... birds??? I know I sound insane even suggesting it, but I swear, I swear I saw birds. I really am going crazy. They were circling over a hill in the distance. In the last light, I saw a flash of green on the side of it. Like...green from a tree. I didn't think there was anything alive in the wastes, just me and the baking earth. But if there's greenery, then there's life, and if there's life, there's water. If I can get there, I can refill my canteen. I'm going for it.

DAY 47. 02:44.

I walked all night and got here while the stars were still safely overhead. Glad I took a compass bearing before I lost visual on the hill. The birds had all gone to sleep when I arrived- my first warning was when my boot slammed into something soft instead of more barren earth. And- I saw- I saw grass. Grass under my flashlight circle. Didn't even bother with the pillow or the sleeping bag- I just passed out right where I was. Waking up this morning was...something else. Sunlight through the leaves. I feel like I'm dreaming. Like an old memory brought to life. This place is incredible.

The birds were real. The greenery was real. I can sit under the shade of a tree and listen to the wind rustle through the leaves. The birds are just gulls, and all they do is squawk, but it was so...so different from the emptiness that I almost burst into tears. This place is...I'm so tired of running. Just for a day, I'm going to rest here. Just for a day.

And the bushes- the bushes are covered in berries. There's fruit hanging off of every tree. There's *food*. Real, actual, non-synthetic food!

I'm not going to stay here forever- this place is giving me the willies, considering all these plants have somehow totally ignored the wastes around them on all sides, but for now...for now I'm going to rest. I'll set off tomorrow as soon as I can. And you'd think someone else would have found this place already, but I'm the only one here. So that's another great reason to get the hell out of dodge.

But I have hope. If this place survived...how many more oases are there?

DAY 47. 04:04

I ate a *ton* of berries. They're so good. They look like raspberries, but they're sky blue. They taste just like candy! Maybe that's 'cause I've been eating synthetic beans for so long, though. I ate and ate till I felt sick. Then I ate some more. Then I threw up.

There's water over the hill- I can hear it splashing around. I'll fill my canteen and keep moving tomorrow. I can't afford to spend too long in one place. If I get caught, I'm as good as dead, and they were at most a day behind me. But tonight...I'll rest. Just a little.

DAY 48. 05:15.

I passed out under a tree last night after eating myself stupid. Woke up this morning to some guy with big eyes and half a body poking me in the forehead. I clocked him in the face and I just ran. Stupid! I should have known someone would have got here first. I knew they'd find me sooner or later. I really thought I could just outrun them forever. I got away, but- I left my pack. If I don't get that back I am going to die out here. The sun's already unbearable. I can still see the green place, but I can't- if that guy's still there, I'm so screwed. But if I don't get my canteen back- I don't want to think about it.

DAY 48. 06:45

I thought I was being sneaky. I really did. I thought I'd just slip back in and grab my bag and run. I grabbed it but I can hear whatever that guy is stomping around. I'm hiding under a rock and just. Waiting for him to go away. I really hope he can't-

Oh god he's getting closer

DAY 48. 07:12.

So my new 'friend' introduced himself by ripping me out from under my mossy boulder and slamming me against a tree hard enough to knock the wind out of me. I thought I was gonna die.

Then he started, uh, talking to me? Instead of just ripping my head off like everything else these days. Asked me why I kept hiding from him in this freakishly calm voice, which really did a lot to soothe my nerves. (That was sarcasm). So I sort of- I mean, he's got the look of a trailwalker's victim- just without the stitchmarks sewing the corpses together. And when I said that, he just laughed and said that the trailwalkers don't come for guys like him. He's not with them, not with the government, not with anyone like that. He said he's always been like this, and then he put me down and asked my name.

And because I'm an idiot, I gave it to him. He says he's called Keralis, and this is his place, and "my home now".

Right. Sure. Great.

From where I'm sitting right now, I can see a trailwalker in the distance.

DAY 48. 09:01

My canteen's getting really close to empty. I'm not sure what I'm gonna do when it runs out. I don't trust Keralis' oasis, because no human body should look like his does.

Keralis came back with a bunch of yellow grapes from the other side of the hill, in a nice reed basket. Says I look hungry. So what do you do when a guy with rows and rows of razor-sharp teeth brings you lunch? You sit and talk with him. Because at least he's not going to staple your face to the chest of some other poor bastard who couldn't run fast enough. Maybe. Assuming you're polite enough.

It was kinda funny watching him sit- all his legs don't like doing it. (He must not sit very much. I wouldn't either if I had that many flippers and that much tail to worry about.) He was really curious about the world beyond his lagoon- he asked me a lot of questions. Questions that if anyone from the government is reading this, I didn't have answers for! I know nothing! I told him nothing!

Still, I told him...told him a lot. I'm so stupid.

I can see that trailwalker still. The second one's caught up. They're just pacing back and forth a couple miles from here. If I leave...if I try to leave... they've got a good shot of catching me.

What the hell am I supposed to do? I can't stay here. I can't leave.

DAY 49. 11:10

You ever just fall asleep at dark and wake up at dawn? You remember that? I don't. It feels good. In the same way hard drugs feel good. This is such a bad idea. If I get out of my nocturnal pattern I'm screwed.

I need to think of some kind of a plan. Keralis showed up briefly with a basket of fruits from inside his oasis and suggested I come for a swim with him. Sure thing, buddy. I'm totally going to swim in your radioactive water. The only reason I keep eating this stuff is because my canteen's empty and I have no other way to replace lost fluids.

I tried to feed one of the gulls that landed near me. Stupid thing wouldn't eat the fruit. You'd think they'd be all over free food.

Trailwalkers inched about half a mile closer. Confirmed, they know I'm here.

Fuck.

DAY 50. MORNING?

Woke up to find that my watch was missing. I haven't been able to find another one and being able to tell the time is one of the only things keeping me sane out here. It's so hard to know how much time has passed without an external reference. It's like, I can keep track of the days, and I can keep track of the minutes, and it's the only thing I CAN keep track of anymore. The whole world's turned upside down but I can at least...I can at least count the days, right?

I'm getting sidetracked. I turned the whole damn place upside-down and couldn't find it. How could I have lost it? How could I be so stupid?

I need to get out of here. I'm losing my mind.

Day 50. LATE MORNING?

Keralis was missing all morning, and I still can't find my watch. It's stressing me out- you know how many working watches you find these days? None. When he got back, I tried to ask him about it and he just... well, first of all, when he came back he was soaking wet. I asked him about the watch, and he shook his head. He said he hadn't seen it...then he asked if I wanted to go swimming? Again? What the hell? I just want my watch back! And then I want to get out of here.

Did he steal my watch...?

DAY 50 LATE AFTERNOON?

Keralis said I should stop scribbling and come join him in the water, then he walked off over the hill. I really don't want to.

Honestly, the more I think about it, the weirder it is that he's the only one out here besides me. You'd think a place like this with free food and water would be absolutely mobbed with refugees. It's...weird.

I really need to refill my canteen, though. And even if that water's toxic, that means it'll just kill me thirty years from now. Assuming I even live that long.

Okay. The plan is I'm gonna sneak down there, fill my canteen, and run as fast as I can. The trailwalkers are on the other side of the hill, so if I- if I put it between us and take off at sunset, maybe I'll- maybe I'll be able to get out.

Right. I'm gonna do it. Just gotta fill my canteen. Won't take more than a few seconds.

**HE SAW ME HE SAw ME HE SAW THERES BODIES IN THE WATER RUN IF YOUR
READING THIS *RUN FOR YOUR***

DAY 50 LATE EVENING.

The water's wonderful. Keralis shoved my head in and forced me to drink my fill. Cool and refreshing. I can't get enough of it. After that first drink I've just been shoving my face in and slurping from the source. I've never tasted water so nice.

Keralis said not to worry about the bodies floating in it. They look kinda like pretty lily-pads- I dove underneath, and they all have those braids Keralis does, sinking down into the depths. They all look so peaceful. One of them looked at me, lifted a bloated hand and gave me a wave. I was a little worried, but then Keralis looked into my eyes and promised me it was okay. He says they're his friends, and mine too.

I've been thinking about Keralis' offer. Let's not mince words, the world is capital-F *Fucked*. And I...I like this place. I've got food, I've got water, I've got friendship. I want to stay here forever. I think I'm gonna tell him just as soon as he gets out of the

Day my apple tree is in bloom!

I found Princess' book! He liked to scribble in it all the time. Such a funny thing to do. I read his scribbles. They're sad, aren't they? He's much happier now. I made sure of that.

I don't want to, but I think I should send Princess away. He likes plants, he likes pretty things, he remembers how the world used to be. I should send him away to make his own green place. It'll be easy to make him just like me. Then he can make lots of new friends.

Besides, it's not like we'll ever be apart.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!