



Once Upon Our Planet

By Vitta Murrow

Once Beyond the North Wind



The background is a light blue gradient with numerous white snowflakes of various sizes and shapes scattered throughout. There are also several semi-transparent, light blue circular bokeh effects. The overall aesthetic is clean and wintry.

Close your eyes and breathe.

Imagine the air enters your
body a cool drink and comes out
a new born snowflake.

This is the air of Hyrea. A land high above us. So high, in fact, that to get there one must push past clouds to where the sun and moon have made an unlikely arrangement, rising and setting just once a year. Where waters have slowed to ice.



A land guarded by Gryphons ...



... and home to Bo, the Wind Walker. Bo was born and raised in Hyrea. With the annual cycle of the sun and moon, Bo mastered new things. Bo learned to forage, to fish and pick fruit. To cut timber and build. Bo learned to climb, to trek and skate, much like you and me.



Yet one thing was strikingly different about Bo and her kin. They were as immense as the tallest trees, their feet great boulders with footsteps like thunder, Hyrea was a land of giants... and Bo, too, was a giant.



Being a giant meant Bo could do amazing things. She could run fast and leap great height. She could sculpt castles in the snow and grow plants in her hair.



Most importantly, like all giants of her time and place, Bo could bring the secret gift of winter.



For the years, the giants of Hyrea had been entrusted with bringing winter to the Southern Lands. Upon their fifteenth birthday, each giant took their turn as a Wind Walker and received the Map of the Elders.



The map directed the young giants on a trek across their kingdom towards Winter's Sea – the boundary with the Southern Lands. There, the Wind Walker would unleash a resounding breath, and bring winter to the lands beyond. It was an esteemed and vital duty.



Like those before Bo, winter lived hidden inside her, like a hibernating bear, until her fifteenth birthday. When the day arrived, Bo breakfasted at dawn, walked through the forest to stretch her giant legs, and enjoyed a treat of maple candy on ice.



Upon returning home, Bo discovered the Map of the Elders on her doorstep. It was a scroll pinned with an icicle.



The scroll unfurled to reveal a large diagram that showed the land of Hyrea, a great ring of white and sparkle. Huge mountains on one side, a voluminous river on the other. Beneath it was all the Winter's Sea – pure ice: a place of eternal winter. Underneath it all laid the Southern Lands. Throughout the map ran a path of red dots to mark the way Bo must journey as a Wind Walker.

Just as generations of giants before her, Bo was to make the great trek to the edge of the Southern Lands and offer the breath of winter. It was critical – for winter allowed all things to reset, warm together and ready themselves for the grandeur of spring.



Bo set off, following the path on her map. She came upon high fortress walls that marked the boundary of Hyrea. Two majestic gates swung open and ushered Bo through.



She followed the river to the south, the shadow of the mountains at her back. She looked over her shoulder once and nodded to the Gryphons that guarded over Hyrea before they went out of view.



The Map of the Elders was precise and had everything Bo needed. She gathered food along the way. She leaned birches to form shelter when she desired rest. And between brief moments of pause, her powerful legs propelled her on her climb. With Hyrea far behind her, Bo grew eager to see ice floes and glaciers ahead.



Yet, when Bo arrived at the edge of the Winter's Sea, the map began to fail her. Bo expected deep glaciers alongside a solid sea. The red dots indicated that all she would have to do was skate across the Sea's solid surface. But it wasn't frozen at all. It was milky and irregular. And the glaciers beside sported patches of green and brown mud, small grasses grew at the base.



Bo's heart beat hard. Her whole life had been leading up to this task: to glide across the Winter's Sea, fill her lungs with the breath of winter and deliver it to the Southern Lands on the other side. But the Winter's Sea had warmed, and the atmosphere seemed closer to spring than winter.



Nevertheless, Bo assumed the position. She straightened her
for and slid a giant foot upon the sea. She longed to drift
seamlessly across like a gently swan, but instead she heard a
crackling beneath her foot. Her heart sunk. As Bo shifted, her
weight caused cracks to splinter at wild angles all around her.
But she couldn't turn back. The Southern Lands needed her to
deliver their winter.



Bo knew she would need to run. Bo summoned her courage and sprinted. With each step the sea cried out in crackly protest under her feet. Bo surged on and made it to the other side just in time to hear the ice break into large sheets behind her. She readied herself to fulfil her destiny, to offer the breath of winter and maintain nature's balance.



She took as deep a breath as her lungs would allow, but when she exhaled, nothing happened. Bo tried again to rouse a cooling and wintry breath. A cool mist emanated, but no great flurry or frosty blanket as she'd hoped. Bo, having run across the Winter's Sea, was short of breath.



Bo, worried that she had failed her legacy, decided to return to Hyrea. She made her way back from whence she came. But where once has lain the frozen waters of the Winter's Sea, now lay an array of floating ice shards and swathes of open water. Bo knew something was not right. She needed to return to Hyrea to seek help.



Bo tired to balance on two large planes of ice, but they quickly gave way and she was plunged into the chilly water.



The force of her giant frame powered the water into a wave that rose well above Bo herself. The wave climbed and crawled across towards the shore where it broke powerfully.

The icy tidal wave sent a shower of ice crystals high into the air. The crystals flew so high that the Gryphons of Hyrea saw them shower the sky.



Alarmed, the Gryphons spread their wings and leaped into the sky. They flew in a formation, soaring over the trek Bo had taken, to the spot in the Winter's Sea where Bo had begun to sink.



The beasts lifted Bo to the surface and then into the air. They flew her safely to Hyrea.



As the Gryphons and Bo came into view, the giants of Hyrea assembled to learn what had become of their Wind Walker.



They wrapped Bo in warm blankets and mosses, and set her by a fire. As she warmed, Bo recounted the puzzling shape of the Winter's Sea, and told how she was short of breath. The giants murmured and shook their heads.



“Why has the Winter’s Sea grown soft?” the elder giants pondered.

“Has this ever happened before?” Bo asked.



Younger giants stepped forward and admitted that over the years they had noticed the Winter's Sea growing thin, and even heard sounds of ice turning into water.



Bo was determined to see her task through. But if crossing the melting Winter's Sea meant the loss of her own breath, how was she to blow winter to the Southern Lands?



Then, Bo remembered the Gryphons. They had saved her, and this gave her an idea. Preserving and sharing winter could no longer be a job for one, but for all of Hyrea. Instead of one Wind Walker, Bo suggested a fleet of Gryphons could carry a team of Wind Walkers. It would take a bit longer, but it would allow them to fulfil their promise.



And so it was, and has been ever since, that when a new giant comes of age in Hyrea, an army of giants takes to the air on a team of Gryphons.



They fly from their cherished kingdom, over their border
land mountains, across the Winter's Sea and to the
boundary of the Southern Lands.



They draw a communal breath, close their eyes and gently blow the quiet caress of winter over the domains.



They bring the gift of rest to weary animals. They safeguard slumbering plants. And create a reason for gatherings and warm embraces for the community of the region.



On their way home, the giants of Hyea and their guardian Gryphons, leave a trail of solar wind. The sky comes alive with colour, to remind the inhabitants of the Southern Lands of the magic of winter. And to inspire fortitude in the Winter's Sea, for so long as there is ice there, the Wind Walkers will never miss a visit.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

