

# The Sea Eternal: Fishing Loop

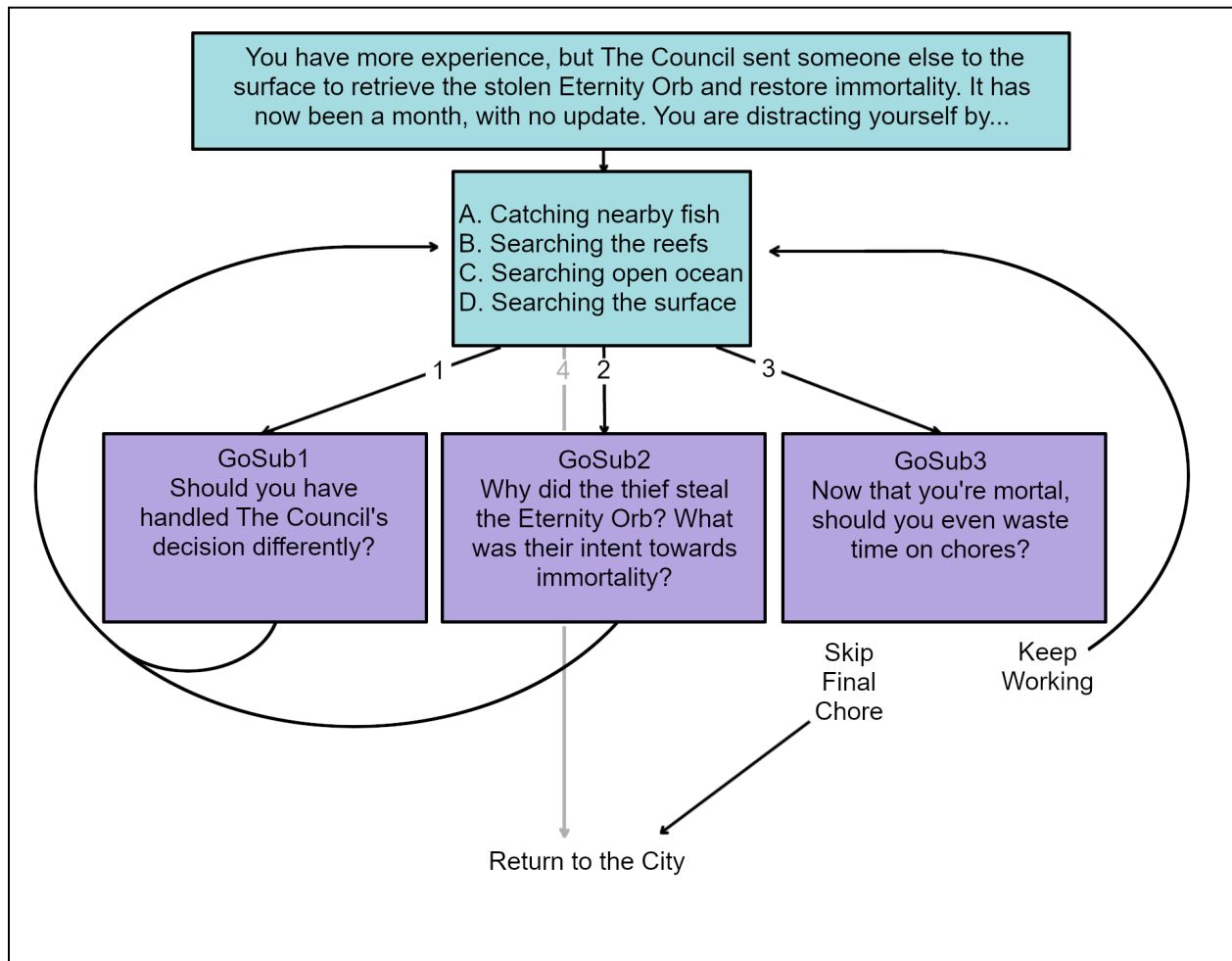
## Format: Looping Choice Node with several GoSub options

On the player-facing surface, this starts as a simple choice between 4 locations to fish.

After making a choice, the player is faced with increasingly existential concerns about their community, their immortality, and their immediate future. After 3 locations, the player is then offered the choice between leaving chores early or sticking it out and searching everywhere.

This takes what might have been a relatively linear-feeling and static path of “a character in one location thinking about things”, and turns it into a choice-based adventure: multiple locations, a gathering quest that tracks progress, an escalation of internal questions, and then one final choice that allows the player to frame both the quest and the questions at once.

This loop is a little complicated, so I've included the visual outline for reference.



You stretch your arms and flip your tail as you notice a school of pilot fish following behind you. You smile and bank upward into a loop with a big acrobatic twirl of a finish. The feeling of the open sea pushing past you brings a delicious rush. You check your followers: the school tries to recreate your moves, but the individual fish all just end up bumping into each other. Silly scavengers.

You pull at your woven bag, trying not to lose focus. Tomorrow is the Celebration of Eternity, a ceremony thanking the whales for their gracious gift to the merfolk: the Eternity Orb. Given that Tephra is still trying to rescue said gift from Cinza, the ceremony has also morphed into a possibly overoptimistic welcome-home party for Tephra. Whatever happens, everyone's still expected to bring a contribution as they would normally. So you're out here in the wild, looking for yours.

```
*label ExplorationStart
*if (PartySearch = 1)
  *gosub GatheringAnxietyQuestion1
*if (PartySearch = 2)
  *gosub GatheringAnxietyQuestion2
*if (PartySearch = 3)
  *goto GatheringAnxietyQuestion3
*if (PartySearch = 4)
  You've got a reasonable number of supplies. Time to head home.
  *goto SkippedOnWithThings
```

```
*label ExplorationNoSub
```

```
*choice
*selectable_if (PilotFishGone = false) #First, catch some of the pilot fish.
  *set PartySearch +1
  *set PilotFishGone true
  *set PilotFishCaught true
  *set Emptyhanded false
  Pilot fish are delicious, and their scales make for the most beautiful decorations. Plus they're
  easy to catch.
```

You kick off and press your arms against your body, twirling in tighter and tighter loops. The school emulates the motion, condensing their formation into an almost solid mass. Suddenly, you reverse your direction and open your bag wide, pulling it into the mass of fish, closing it once you're sure that you've caught at least one.

The school of scavengers regroups and then swims off to find a new target to follow. Their movements reveal nothing, no anger, betrayal, or grief. Do they even understand the idea of such emotions? Is their swimming away merely self-preservation, or do they mourn for those

they lost? Perhaps it's merely that death is so mundane to them that they can't allow themselves the luxury of grief. That must be what mortality is like.

\*goto ExplorationStart

\*disable\_reuse #Search the nearby reefs.

\*set Emptyhanded false

\*set Lobster true

\*set PartySearch +1

You dive down to the craggy red reefs and wispy seaweed. You swim through the coral stacked high in columns. As you zoom past, gooseneck barnacles close, and small fish and seahorses dart anxiously away.

\*if (PilotFishGone = false)

The pilot fish seem uneasy in the more cramped quarters. They abandon you, opting to follow a nearby sea turtle, which seems oblivious to its new entourage.

\*set PilotFishGone true

A much braver slipper lobster climbs among stinging polyps. You take your pick from an empty shell pile in front of a crevasse. Such a pile would normally indicate an octopus lair, but you actually see a moray eel staring out at you. It clicks its jaw in disapproval at your presence.

\*if (PilotFishCaught = true)

Eels are an amazing delicacy, so you bait it with a single pilot fish. Its small brain is unable to resist. You grab it by the jaw, lash it shut, and shove it into your bag, tying the bag tight. The lobster's still around, so you grab that too, shoving it into a second bag.

\*set Eel true

\*if (PilotFishCaught = false)

Crustaceans are always delicious. You push back the polyps with your bag and scoop up the lobster. It waves an antenna in confused protest as you muzzle its claws. Even though you completely outmatch it, the thing still tries to fight back, tries to hold onto its short life. You feel a stab of empathy. Soon, you may be in a similar situation.

\*goto ExplorationStart

\*disable\_reuse #Press farther out into the open ocean.

\*set Emptyhanded false

\*set Remora true

\*set PartySearch +1

You lose yourself in the emptiness, allowing yourself the dangerous luxury of losing sight of visible landmarks. You imagine what it must be like to be an open-ocean fish, completely independent of any cities or landmarks or locations. Wandering through the ocean, falling asleep while adrift and then waking up somewhere new—but not even noticing that you're somewhere new, because what difference does any single location make in the giant, open ocean?

\*if (PilotFishGone = true)

You shudder at the thought, and search in all directions.

```
*if (PilotFishGone = false)
```

The pilot fish following behind you seem unfazed at the notion.

```
*comment Space
```

From the edges of visibility, a giant manta ray glides down toward you, smiling with that permanent goofy grin. You indulge it and circle back. You notice three remora attached to it. Remora are not only edible but also have sucker discs that can be used as invaluable tools.

```
*if (PilotFishGone = true)
```

You gently steal one for yourself and carefully place it in your bag.

```
*if (PilotFishGone = false)
```

You gently steal one for yourself just as the pilot fish ditch you to follow the ray. A fair trade?

```
*set PilotFishGone true
```

```
*goto ExplorationStart
```

```
*disable_reuse #Check the surface.
```

```
*set PartySearch +1
```

You jet up and up and up, enjoying the warming sensation as the pressure changes. After a quick underwater scan, you break the ocean's surface. The dry, cold wind is a shock against your skin. You try not to look up. Air is just this...empty thinness between you and the vacuum. It always feels as though you could just fall out into the nothingness if you weren't careful.

```
*if (PilotFishGone = false)
```

You startle as you notice an electrical stillness from behind you. Not even the pilot fish followed you up here.

```
*if (PartySearch < 3)
```

There must be something elsewhere.

```
*if ((PartySearch = 3) and (PilotFishcaught = true))
```

There must be something elsewhere.

```
*if ((PartySearch = 3) and (PilotFishcaught = false))
```

Of course there wouldn't have been anything here.

```
*if (PartySearch = 4)
```

Of course there wouldn't be anything here.

You quickly duck back under.

```
*set PilotFishGone true
```

```
*goto ExplorationStart
```

```
*if (Emptyhanded = true) #Return to the city empty-handed.
```

```
*goto OnWithThings
```

```
*if (Emptyhanded = false) #Return with my catch.
```

```
*goto OnWithThings
```

```
*comment These are the beginning of some GOSUBs. They're here instead of lower just to keep them grouped.
```

```
*label GatheringAnxietyQuestion1
```

You stare at your

\*if (Emptyhanded = true)

empty

bags. Preparing for the Celebration of Eternity while the Eternity Orb is still missing just feels so...pointless. Tephra's been gone for almost a month at this point, and you can't be the only one with serious doubts about whether she'll make it back in time. Or at all. She shouldn't have been picked to recover the Orb. It should have been you. You know the human world better than anyone else. Now Tephra might be dead or captured, the Orb might be shattered, and all because of the council's bad decision. Maybe you should have fought harder to go yourself.

\*fake\_choice

#I couldn't have known.

\*set Action %-10

Certainly, nobody could have known that Tephra wouldn't be able to make it in the human world. You both volunteered, but she was the one that the council picked, and you didn't press your argument. You just...deferred.

#I might get picked as a replacement.

\*set Feral %-10

\*set Action %+10

Surely after they're faced with Tephra's failure on the day of the Celebration, they'll have to admit their previous fault and defer to your expertise instead.

#I should be preparing for a search party instead of a party-party.

\*set Feral %+10

\*set Action %+10

This whole celebration thing just feels so shortsighted. It's the council's way to adhere to a plan, to look like they're doing something instead of facing the actual problem or admitting that they're doing nothing.

#If I had been picked, I might have failed anyway.

\*set Action %-10

It's possible that Tephra was the better choice, being one of the best fighters. Or maybe your own experience didn't factor in at all. Maybe they just picked whomever volunteered first.

\*comment paragraph break

It seems that lately the council has been getting more and more callous, more aloof. Maybe their age is catching up to them.

You sigh. It doesn't quite make sense. More and more, you suspect that there's something else, some other reason they didn't send you, beyond the fact that you broke the rules when you brought back a human. Maybe it's something you can't remember. Maybe long ago you did something terrible up on land, and the rest of the merfolk don't want you reliving that horror. Or maybe it was amazing, and you had to be dragged away. Sometimes it's hard to remember everything, and it's usually more polite not to stir up the past.

You look around you. Usually, being out in the ocean feels centering, but with everything going on, it's much more difficult to just enjoy being out here. You push yourself to refocus on your task.

\*return

\*label GatheringAnxietyQuestion2

Your mind can't stop turning it over: Why did Cinza steal the Orb in the first place? If something happens to it, the immortality of all merfolk will be lost. Which must have been her plan, since she ran away with it on land. You'd think with an artifact so important, the council would have sent more people, not just a single volunteer. It was an inevitable failure.

Your breath catches. Was the inevitable failure...intentional? That thought darkens you. You might lose your immortality at any moment. How can you even deal with something like that?

\*fake\_choice

#I should be preparing to take Tephra's place instead of moping.

\*set Action %+10

There are clothing, hair, currency, and mannerisms to consider, including practicing walking. If Tephra's not back by tomorrow, the council would be crazy not to send you, and you need to be prepared. There's still so much more left to do, to study, to experience. Memories to make. You don't want it to end.

#I'm out in the wild trying to get my mind off of things.

\*set Feral %+10

There is something soothing about being surrounded by the life the sea has created. Sometimes you envy the creatures that can't contemplate their own death. Even though you've been alive for just over a millennium, it still never feels like enough time.

#I'm just thankful for how long I've lived.

\*set Action %-10

Just over a millennium is much more than anyone else has ever been able to enjoy. Maybe it's selfish that you've lived so much longer than any other species. Maybe it's just what everyone else should be entitled to. They should have the chance to enjoy as much as you've been able to over your lifetime.

#There's no shame in accepting the inevitable.

\*set Feral %-10

Even if nothing ever went wrong, you'd still have to deal with the end of the earth. Your time would still be limited. You just wish it were a little bit less limited. You just wish your life didn't feel quite so precarious, quite so short.

\*comment break

If mortals can deal with their mortality, then so can you, right? You flit about with frustration. How do mortals deal with it? Just this perpetual dread? How can they enjoy anything, do anything? You look at your bags. You're finding it harder and harder to feel motivated about collecting anything.

\*return

\*label GatheringAnxietyQuestion3

Your search feels progressively more hollow. If you've only got days or hours or however long of immortality left, should you really be spending them on chores? Wouldn't it be better to enjoy what time you have left?

\*choice

#Forget this. Lose myself in the ocean.

\*set Feral %+10

You drop your bags, which kick up a cloud of sand as they hit the seafloor below.

\*if ((PilotFishCaught = true) or (Eel = true))

The bags wriggle with their contents, but they hold fast. They were made to hold.

You push into and through the cold water as fast as you can. The water drags against you, enveloping you, but you push against it harder still.

\*if (PilotFishGone = true)

You fully immerse yourself in the embrace of the wide expanse, closing your eyes, enjoying the silence of being so incredibly alone.

\*if (PilotFishGone = false)

You fully immerse yourself in the embrace of the wide expanse, your only grounding in reality the fluttering cloud of fish behind you.

You breathe heavily from a fresh ocean current. There is no feeling more exhilarating.

It's some time before you go back to retrieve your bags and head toward the city.

\*goto SkippedOnWithThings

\*if ((PartySearch > 3) or ((PartySearch > 2) and (PilotFishCaught = true))) #Do not lose sight of the long term. Just one more place to look.

You steady your resolve. You're going to be thorough.

\*goto ExplorationNoSub

#I don't want to be alone. Return to my friends instead.

If you and everyone you know truly only has hours left, you want to make sure you use that time wisely: with them. The school of fish following you had the right idea. There is strength in being with others.

\*set Feral %-10

\*goto OnWithThings

\*label OnWithThings

\*if (Emptyhanded = true)

You tug along your empty bags. You thought that doing something—anything—would keep your mind occupied, but it really didn't.

\*if (Emptyhanded = false)

You pull along your spoils. That didn't pass nearly as much time as you had hoped. Doing something should have kept your mind occupied.

All you managed to do was get away from everyone else for a short amount of time. It's not often that immortals deal with the fear of death, but that specter has been doing far too much looming lately.

\*if (Emptyhanded = true)

You don't quite feel like going through the motions like everybody else. Collecting food for a party is beyond useless, and there's no point pretending otherwise.

\*if (Emptyhanded = false)

It actually does help, going through the motions. Pretending like everything's normal.

\*if (PartySearch = 1)

\*comment This means Anxiety 2 and 3 haven't happened

It's almost too much to try and think about: the Eternity Orb, your immortality, the immortality of every merperson in danger. Just because Cinza decided to steal it. What happens if Tephra fails to recover it? What happens if Cinza manages to destroy the Orb? You can't afford to spend any more time out here.

\*if (PartySearch = 2)

\*comment This means Anxiety 3 hasn't happened.

But is this how you should be spending what could be the last of your immortality?

\*goto OnWithThingsMerge

\*label SkippedOnWithThings

You clasp your bags tightly shut and let them trail behind as you speed back to the city.

\*if (Emptyhanded = false)

It will be nice to drop off your supplies for someone else to deal with. They'll probably be happy to help you, considering the difficult journey everyone knows you'll have picking up Tephra's quest.

\*if (Emptyhanded = true)

Everyone will understand if you didn't collect anything. Or at least, they won't say anything.

After all, everyone must either know or suspect how difficult it will be for you to pick up Tephra's quest—and with nearly a month's delay working against you.

\*goto OnWithThingsMerge

\*label OnWithThingsMerge

You do your best not to dwell on it, and speed along ever faster.