

LAST OF HIS TRIBE

One by one his brothers had died. The humans that hated them so much, brutally killed them all until only he was left. And the last Terrian cried. His eyes, hidden beneath the folds of leathery skin, remained dry and dusty but he cried just the same. For his species, for the death of an era, and for the planet that was their Mother. Who was going to look after Her now?

His name was Ts'aan. He was a young Terrian, born a mere twenty springs ago in a hidden cave located in a valley far from here. A valley so green and abundant with colorful flowers that it was obvious human hands had not touched it yet. The elders of his tribe had known from the day he was born that he was special, that he would fulfill a destiny. That's why they gave him the name Ts'aan: the Fated One. And he knew what his purpose was in this world.

Ts'aan shifted in his crouch and continued to peer down the hill at the collection of darkened dwellings the humans called New Pacifica. He didn't understand what was so 'new' about the town; it had been there as long as he could remember. Yet, the myths of his people told of a time before, when his species ruled this world and served the Mother. A time before the humans had come. And came again.

The old stories the elders told during the long sleep, when the Mother was resting from creating and sustaining life for Her creatures, spoke of the arrival of the humans. Even then, the first time they laid eyes on the ungainly creatures that looked so small and weak, the Terrian tribes had known their existence was doomed.

Among the early human settlers had been a boy. A special child, the one that might save them, a child destined to form a bridge between the two species. The Terrians healed him from a sickness and changed him so he could communicate with them. When the boy grew up, they tutored him in the ways of their kind while he taught them of the ways of the humans.

But the child, a man by then, had died at the hands of his own. The humans said he betrayed them, that he was an abomination and that his contact with the indigenous people was unnatural and undesirable. The 'elders' of the boy's tribe –Ts'aan knew the humans didn't call them elders, but he lacked a better word— had captured him, and ordered him killed. And with the boy, the hope died.

Yet, the Terrian tribes refused to give up hope. Abandoning hope was abandoning the Mother. Instead, they turned their focus to the children of the Dreamer. And his children's children. And their children. Ever so on, until now, many a score of springs later.

Ts'aan lowered his head and closed his eyes, respectfully entering the Dreamworld. Concentrating on the children's mental image, he called to them. He told them they should come and be educated in the ways of the Mother, so that when he died, they could take over his duties and serve Her.

oOo

Jeremy Solace woke with a start. Disoriented, he squinted in the darkness and recognized the familiar surroundings of his bedroom, looking alien and otherworldly in the shadows that the moonlight created. What had woken him? He had a vague recollection of a dream. A dream featuring the strange creatures that were long since thought extinct. What had his father called them? Oh, yes, Terrians.

"Come, Son of the Dreamer."

His head whipped around. Where did that voice come from? The summons was repeated and with a shock Jeremy realized that the sound wasn't really a sound. The voice seemed to exist inside his *head* instead of his ears! The boy switched on the light and rubbed his face. He wasn't going crazy, was he?

Jeremy recalled the gossip he had overheard as a child. About his uncle Alphonse, who also heard voices inside his head and claimed that he was talking to alien creatures long dead until the doctors took him away and 'fixed' him. His uncle died while Jeremy was still a toddler and he had nothing but a hazy memory of a pale and quiet man with dark, dull eyes that seemed to stare right through you.

The voice, definitely inside his head now, kept prompting him and Jeremy found it harder and harder to resist. The urge to listen and obey the voice, to leave the house, leave town and go into the hills was strong, very strong. By their own volition, his legs moved and his feet took him out of the room, quietly, so as not to waken his parents. In the hallway, he bumped into another person.

"Janna," Jeremy gasped with surprise. Janna was his twin sister. She looked up at him, blinking owlishly in the darkness of the hallway.

"Do you hear it too?" she asked. Relief and fear mingled in her tone "That voice, calling?"

"Yes. We have to obey it."

Janna nodded.

Together, the two children slipped out of the front door. Barefoot, they padded across the paved streets of town, leaving no trace of their passing.

They were never seen again.

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