

PROLOGUE

May 24, 1984 AD, Grandview Nursing Home, Canoga Park, California, Earth

Mr. Hoo Nun watched two nurses unpack the few boxes that comprised his worldly goods. He lay sunken in his new hospital bed studying them from his prone position. The large hospital window offered a restful view of an oak tree with the orange-red leaves of autumn. The younger of the two nurses turned to glance at the old Asian man who had a reputation for babbling about his fantasies and delusions.

He caught her glance before the other nurse, who had warned her not to get him started, could pull her back. He asked her, “Do you know what happened?” He spoke with a thick accent. She assumed it was a Chinese accent, but an expert would say that it really wasn’t.

“Excuse me?” She tilted her head to one side afraid she misplaced something of his during the room transfer. The other nurse, five years her senior and far more experienced with Mr. Hoo Nun’s idiosyncrasies, decidedly ignored him.

He fiddled with an ornately carved mahogany rod inlaid with gold and jade and asked her again, “Do you know what happened?” Then without waiting for a response he continued, “I am not talking about the move, or what happen yesterday, or even the day before. I am talking about this,” he held up the rod, “about what lies at the roots of human history.”

The older nurse leaned toward her and whispered out of the side of her mouth in a sort of singsong voice like a mother admonishing a child, “Don’t get involved.”

Mr. Hoo Nun (they called him that because he never gave them his first name) smiled slightly. He may have been an invalid but he prided himself in his excellent hearing and although he heard the comment, a comment he often heard, he also saw the slight crease between the younger nurse’s eyebrows. She was interested.

“Do you know what happened *then*,” he continued. His brown eyes looked serious. “You children know the great stories of your ancestors. You know them to be true because your history has recorded them in writing ... except that these writings are not entirely ... how shall I say ... accurate. Let me tell you how things really happened.” He looked down at the rod. “I can, because I was there.”

“That’s nice Mr. Hoo Nun,” came the monotone response from the older nurse filling the dresser drawers with shirts.

Mr. Hoo Nun ignored her and fixed his gaze upon the younger who had opened up the windows to let the autumn breeze blow out the stale air and in an effort to prove to the older nurse that she wasn’t really interested, but she was. “I don’t believe we met before,” he continued. “My name is Hoo Nun son of Baroso, of the kingdom of Carmel on a world called Epi. If I tell you the history of my world, then you will understand your own world better. It all begin with this ancient prophecy.” He pointed at the rod. She stepped forward and took it from his offered hand. It was almost as long as a man’s forearm with ancient letters and pictographs ornately carved along its shaft. One of these pictographs was of a human form with wings. As she turned it to see the back she must have pressed a button or something because the wings from the human form snapped out. She jumped.

“That’s OK, young one. You just turned it on. It won’t do anything ... well, not much.” It hummed and glowed with an inner yellow-green light through pea-sized holes between the carvings. She looked closely at the inlayed gold and saw tiny letters but it was written in a script she neither understood nor recognized. “It’s about a group of old sages ... the Firesmyths.” He closed his eyes and laid back his head to recite the script from deep seeded memory as the autumn breeze stirred the fallen leaves outside:

“In Ancient Times a war raged
That drove the worlds asunder.
Time was unfolded and undone
And so came the Smyths together.

:+R Q2R 3+9R7 7+39VII Q2 BQ2W W92C9W
7:927 XWQ149 7:9 BQW3XVIII Q2VIII1R2X9W:
7+39 BQ2VII 1R:W3X9W Q2R2X 1R2XW1R29
Q2R2X VIIQ 39239 7:9
VIII3III7:VIII 7W97:9W:

Alas, then came the devourer,
The gray wolf who stalks his prey.
But hope arrived in this late hour,
The lion who drove him away.

Q2392VIII: 7:9R 39239 7:9 X914Q1W9W:
7:9 CW92III BQ3: B:Q VIII79233VII
:+VIII 2W9III:
V17 :W29 Q2WW+149W 7:+VIII 39279 :W1W:
7:9 3+Q2R B:Q XWQ149
:+3 Q2BQ2III:

The wolf clad in lion’s clothes
Caught the eagle in his nest
But an arrow from the wise man’s bow
Pierced the gray wolf’s breast.

7:9 BQ3: 3392X +R 3+Q2R:VIII 33Q7:9VII
3921C:7 7:9 992C39 +R :+VIII 1R9VII7
V17 Q2R Q2WWWB :WQ3 7:9 B+VIII9
392R:VIII VQB
2+9W39W 7:9 CW92III BQ3::VIII VW992VIII7:

When fire brands the Smyth of old,
The stories then shall be retold,
The robber shall forfeit his gold
And time will once again refold.”

B:9R :+W9 VW92R2XVIII 7:9 VIII3III7:
Q: W3X:
7:9 VIII7QW+9VII 7:9R VIII:9233 V9 W97Q3X:
7:9 WQV19W VIII:9233 :W:9+7 :+VIII CW3X
Q2R2X 7+39 B+33 W239 Q2CQ2+R
W9:W3X::



