

A Tale of the Final Days

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Oh, how we once shone.

The sky of our world was warm, once, lit in red by the gentle gaze of our sun. Our cities spanned its surface, spires above and domes below. The clans lived in harmony, reaching to the stars and past the expanse. We fed the hungry, we healed the sick, and all was as it should have been. We were bound by no gods, by nothing but the limits of nature and our own imaginations.

Alas, the limits of nature are cruel.

We, the Onivero, shared our world with many things; wonders secluded only to our little corner of the cosmos. There were blooming flowers, scuttling and flying things, fruit sweeter than any your people have brought in your miraculous escape. And we shared it with each other, and another folk.

The dragons were great and strong, merciful and kind. Their lives stretched into eternity, two of their ilk growing so great that they pierced the heavens themselves.

Ah, you know of her? Kelvar, the Great... we are glad she has survived.

We built cities, and the dragons preserved them. For thousands of years, we thrived, the sky smiling red upon us. The dawns seemed ever brighter as the years went on, and we were too short-sighted to foretell our doom before it was too late.

We all still mourn that fateful day. On dragonback, a humble traveler returned from the edge of the great expanse, their visage somber and sad. The beast bowed her head, and our hero spoke, a voice that had united nations trembling. The hero named Jaern told us that our sun was dying, that each dawn rising brighter was simply a last song before she would burn, burn and disappear, taking our world with it. We had only a few mere centuries.

Some tore our furs and fins, crying to the sky in despair. They were content to lie in their last days, supping luxury as the sun burnt the seas and islands. Indeed, that was many of us, more than I care to admit. Jaern, however, raged against the notion. The nations they had built rejected their determination, insisting that the salvation of our world was already lost. The wonders it held, the people, doomed one and all.

The dragons did the same, some wailing to their goddess, some rending and razing the earth in anger, and some taking wing, dashing into the cold stars with hope for another world. We

know not their fate - though we can only hope that it was something more than a slow death in the emptiness between worlds.

With the years bearing down, the sky burning hotter and hotter, Jaern continued to search - if not for the world's salvation, for any small, undiscovered wonder - that it might be given to preserve, to survive somehow. Perhaps in the vaunted halls of the ascended beasts, perhaps in the mist of spirits that awaits us beyond... perhaps, in a stray chunk of rock flung across space and found a thousand thousand years by some far-flung people.

And, oh, what a wonder they found. The world was home not to one civilization, nor two, but three. Nascent was the third, scaled like the dragons yet mortal like the Onivero. They lived simply, on the shores and shallows of secluded wilds. They worked with their hands, hissing out language and growing kelp ever-so-slowly. They had not the power we did, to reach with our minds to create wonders, nor the power of the dragons to command the lifeblood of the earth. Every brick they laid, they laid with sinew and muscle, with a simple hope for the next tomorrow.

Jaern returned once more, and made their final address under a flaming sky. They told us of the third civilization, of the wonders they had found, and of the hope that still remained.

Mutterings are said to have moved through the crowds that day, disbelief and despair, the same as always - until the hero held up a single scale. Blue, it was, shining like beetle-shell in the harsh light, barely the size of an Onivero palm.

And a great change swept through the people. We had achieved countless wonders. Once, we too had lived in the shallows, like the lizard-folk, building rafts of premppek and cottages of shells. With our hands, we wrought wonders, we made music, we raised towers.

Who was to say we could not do it once more?

The final days came to bear. The seas began to boil, the lands to burn, and so we retreated underground, painting images of our lost golden skies, remembering the last of what was as we prepared for the first of what was to come.

The dragons, strong in body and magic, elected for their own solution. Through a conjured gate, they fled, to sleep until the work was done - until the world was saved. The nations promised to wake them when the deed was done, when the sky was once more fit to soar. Alas, we could not uphold this promise.

And, in those lost halls, we began our last effort. Every mind was to be united. Every hand was to be joined. And Jaern, the hero, would sacrifice themselves as the nexus - their determination, their ideals, every mote of their self dissolving into the great work. Into every one of us.

It is in the hero's honor we name this planet.

The sun breathed its last, and the work was done. We would raise our aegis, pure wonder, the song of billions. Our cry for our world, for its continued life. And the world answered.

We were flung away, safe and sound, as our star and our home went dark, forever. Through the expanse we would tumble, along the undefiled passages of space. Calculations were clear, precise down to the last detail. Millions of years away, a new home awaited us. A new sky. We would survive.

But we could only see that tiny point of life in the sky. We were not to know that, in rescuing our home, we would destroy another. Nor could we, with our mortal bodies, quite withstand the ravage of time.

Some of our nations stayed awake. They would continue life underground, remembering, upholding the old ways so that something of us may survive. Yet, the underground had not enough for them, not for the long journey. They warred, fractured, and destroyed themselves. Their cavern-cities crumbled, never to host life again.

Many of our nations slept, like the dragons. Our bodies were severed from time... although not perfectly. Entire clans slumber still, never to wake. Their spirits depart for the mist, though their bodies remain. When the seas unfroze, thousands more were found withered, gone. Our people, decimated... just like yours. And we can only express in these simple words how sorry we are, to have doomed your world.

But look at the sky, friend. Our eyes can watch it together. It smiles upon us, blue and wide.

Smile back, will you not? We live now.