

THE WATCHER
(PROLOGUE TO FALSE NIGHT)

The void swirled and twisted with the energy of potential, of becoming. The Watcher felt, in that moment, that all thought and knowledge, time and matter was the same. All of existence was but a reflection on the void underneath. Like a forest reflecting on water, the universe appeared as something it is not, and yet, it still exists. If the reflection of a tree is touched, the surface of the water is touched, but that is not the same as touching the tree. The Watcher, traveling through space and time, saw the universe as that reflection, and, for a moment, its consciousness was aware of the world our universe reflected. But it was only for a moment.

Time itself bent to the will of thought, and the consciousness of the Watcher moved through the raging torrent like a fish in water, aware of the eddies and currents, yet unaffected by them. The essence of the Watcher felt pulled toward one point. A singularity. A place where time and space collide with thought and matter to form a gateway for those that have knowledge of their use. After what could have been a moment or an eternity, the Watcher approached the point, as a thought would approach its logical conclusion, and was pulled inside.

Potential changed to absence. The consciousness of the Watcher was in a place between plains of existence. Still something shared the space in this connecting point. A frightened soul, screaming as if being torn asunder. Somehow the sound was vaguely familiar to the Watcher, but the memory was gone as quickly as it had come, and the other presence as well. The mind of the Watcher was alone again, but all sense of movement had ceased. The Watcher had reached its destination.

Its consciousness swirled in a jumbled mix of thought, memory, and emotion. No purpose, or reason, or even belief held the Watcher together. Then, at its most vulnerable,

something invaded the void. *The creature knew now what had transpired, the thought began, as thousands had before.*

The words vaguely rippled through the Watcher's mind. Everything inside the void was still only thought, but somehow the Watcher knew that those words came from outside. *The transference can be an unpleasant process. Especially to one so new to consciousness.* Blurry visions began to penetrate into the clouds of thought, but the Watcher could not make sense of them. The sensory input was unfamiliar. *By the end it will understand the need.* The thoughts continued, unbidden, as if they had been placed in the void with the Watcher. *The watching must take place. The cataloging of events and experiences is essential to us, essential to all that follow us.* The words came from somewhere else, a memory perhaps, but The Watcher felt they were true. If it is possible for pure consciousness to feel anything. *It is the purpose for which we exist.*

The man stood unaware of his surroundings. His arms raised upward toward the center of a circle in which all others had fallen long ago. The large fire in the center of the camp popped sending sparks into the night sky. No stars twinkled. The moon was a barely visible brightening in an otherwise dark and turbulent atmosphere. Thunder cracked in the distance.

The blaze intensified in a sudden gust of arctic wind. The watcher heard the sizzle as a flurry of snow blew into its flames. It was the only sound. The gathered members of the tribe stared at the man. Their worried faces and shifting eyes giving away the panic that was quickly building inside the group as a whole. But one among them did not look away. The Shaman showed no fear. He broke the silence with a hoarse, dry voice that sounded as though he had spoken for days on end. “Why... why do you not lower your arms J'Ut?”

Yes, that's it, J'Ut. This creature's moniker, its name, is J'Ut. The Watcher thought. It had heard the words, but barely understood them. *Obviously the transference has been hard on me as well.* The memories were still cloudy to point that the Watcher could not rely on them. Its consciousness was sure of nothing except a sudden purpose that flared in the void, burning away some of the fog. *I must not raise suspicion yet.* Somehow that was clear. Though the Watcher could only catch small shards of memory as its consciousness sought to rearrange itself into the host's brain.

Suddenly, the synapses connected. the Watcher could finally see through the creature's eyes as well as hear from its ears. It felt the warmth of the fire and tasted the dryness in its mouth. *His mouth.* The watcher reminded itself. *These creatures have gender.* Memories were falling into place inside the Watcher's conscious mind, but it knew time would not allow a full recovery before actions must be taken. The situation around its new body was quickly deteriorating.

The tribes people were growing increasingly agitated by the silence. The Watcher could see that without knowing anything about the culture. It concentrated, reaching back into the incomplete pieces of its training, looking for something to divert the attention of the tribe long enough to complete the transference. Its mind finally attached the connections to the body of the man. Learning to use a surprising advanced nervous system was a slow process, but the Watcher worked as quickly as possible to gain control. Finally it was able to lower the arms of its host. *My arms for the time being.* If the host died, the Watcher would fair no better.

The tribe had an increasingly frightened look. Even the Shaman's fear was clear to see now. Though, the Watcher noted, it was not the same sort of fear the others showed. *Fear for the*

man, rather than fear of him, It thought. They are connected somehow. I wish I could remember!

The Watcher took hold of the vocal chords, and cleared *his* throat loudly.

“I...am...sorry, Wise one. I did not...mean to frighten.. you, any of you.” He spoke in spurts and slurs as though he were a child speaking for the first time, but speaking with a man's voice. The Watcher had finally taken its host. Its form was now his. But the memories were still a jumble of fragments, the language disjointed. He sought out eyes that would not meet his own, knowing what would soon come if he did nothing to stop it.

“I was simply stricken by the sky.” He said, dropping his head as if in shame. *Shame, I'll put on the fool's face to convince them. I only need until they sleep to begin my journey.* But, if anything his statements had only brought the tribe closer to a state of alarm.

The Shaman broke the circle, nearly leaping across the fire to cross the space quickly. He examined J'Ut closely. The man grabbed at his face to spread open his eyes and look down his throat. “What was the light that shall be again?” The Shaman asked finally. He whispered quickly in a feverish voice. Although, J'Ut noticed that he need not have. The rest of the tribe had backed at least five steps away. The fire popped sparks into the night, somewhere an infant wailed for its mother.

J'Ut looked at the Shaman, an older man, grizzled by age, but not lessened. He had a lean muscular look hidden beneath the thick furs that were customary for every member of the tribe. But upon his head rested a small golden circlet, inset with a single blue crystal. It was the only piece of gold visible among them. The man's eyes were sharp with fear, and boring directly into his own. J'Ut saw again that this man's fear was different. *A fear of loss.* He finally realized.

“I have no answer for you Wise One.” He said in a less awkward voice that matched the

volume of the Shaman. J'Ut regretted the statement, but without the right facts, he could make the situation far worse. The Watcher could feel memories piecing themselves together, but the wrong parts were coming into focus. Nothing useful for this situation.

The Shaman opened his eyes wide in shock. He stepped back and looked J'Ut over as if he had never seen him before. "He has Been taken from us!" He cried. "J'Ut is gone!" He screamed, turning to the others in the circle. "Take him if you can, but kill him if you must! J'Ut is gone!" With that, he fled before The Watcher's surprised face. Fled from the man who had been his son.

Black tipped stone spears appeared all around as if from nowhere. Women screamed and fled to their huts. J'Ut found himself facing men that seconds before would have died to protect him. *These Humans are more perceptive than we give them credit for.* J'Ut thought as he eyed the spear points, the men who held them, and the Shaman that now stood behind twenty armed frightened tribesmen.

The wind began to pick up. *Snow.* J'Ut was not sure where that thought came from. "It need not be this way." The Watcher said calmly as the hunters moved in on their common foe. But their fear was growing faster than the Watcher had anticipated. *Damn the Circle!* Yet another thought that came unbidden and seemingly without meaning.

The Watcher tried to back away from the spear points ready to pierce him. J'Ut needed to stall for time until he could remember more of the training. Just a little longer. Sharp points in his back drove home how the dire his situation had become. He was surrounded. But to his relief, the small amount of pain seem to bring a memory into focus.

Transference into an unknown culture will be risky Watcher, but the rewards, if you

succeed, will be immense. This mission must be completed. Interference by the host or any others on your journey cannot be tolerated... Not my voice. J'Ut's thoughts broke in. *Could be instructions... Mission? What Mission?* Another thought entered his mind. *The Circle has prepared for this.* The hunters would strike any second now. The fear had overcome them. *That is why we have chosen this host.*

All around J'Ut the snow fell in silence. The grayish tint of the flakes made them look more akin to ash. The storm let in a hint of starrise that had broken in the east, though it barely penetrated the thick dark clouds that roiled angrily across the permanently blackened sky. The fire had grown small and smokey, burned low through the night. An empty circle of hunters lay in the snow, their deadly spears fallen harmlessly beside them. The pools of blood from their noses were beginning to freeze when J'Ut finally found the Shaman.

He had fled to the hut they had shared as a family only hours before. The wise man had a piece of cloth pressed to his eye. Both cloth and hand were covered in thickened blood. Long streams of crimson wound their way down his exposed arm. J'Ut frowned down at the man who had been his best hope for counsel on the journey.

“You must have broken some blood vessels shielding yourself from my attack.” J'Ut noted calmly. “More than likely, you will lose the eye.”

The Shaman noticeably shook as the man that had been his son approached and knelt before him. “If you hadn't set those brutes upon me perhaps we could have...” J'Ut sighed, looking down at the Shaman. “I suppose things were meant to be this way.” He had truly wanted to learn more about this culture. One of the first, if not *the* first completely Human settlement.

Now look what I have done. He sighed again. *But the watching must take place.*

“It does not matter now.” J'Ut began, looking down at the Shaman once more. “What's done is done. I am glad that you survived though, Wise One. Perhaps a few others will have survived as well. They will need tending to after...” He left the rest unsaid. The Shaman continued his silence. A snarl had replaced the terror that had been on his face before.

J'Ut reached out and lifted the Amplifier off of the Shaman's head. He had not known its use when he first saw it, had not remembered it all. But now the memories were there. All the knowledge that his race had found related to this point in time. Though now, so much of his training had been for nothing.

The Shaman drew back as J'Ut touched him. He shook his head and sighed again. “You must sleep now, Wise One.” J'Ut began softly, in the voice of his son. He saw no reason to pretend to be familiar at this point, but any comfort might help.

But the Shaman would not be comforted. “What are you that has taken my son from me?” Spit foamed and flew from his mouth as he screamed desperately into the face of his son. “Who has made him into a monster?” He glared up into J'Ut's deep blue eyes.

At first, J'Ut was irritated by the man's questions. He was about to speak when another emotion flooded through him. From somewhere deep within his consciousness a wave of pity washed away the anger J'Ut had felt. He was not sure if the emotion was his or one of the host he switched places with. As looked down at the Shaman, bleeding and beaten, but not defeated. J'Ut realized the courage of the man. *I must make note of that for later.*

Then he thought back into his training, and found the useful piece he needed. It was much easier now, like sorting through neatly stacked bundles. “Your son must journey farther than any

in the tribe have gone. He will behold the Creators. He will find the true Gods, and he will help restore them to their rightful places.” The Watcher intoned the entire proverb as he knew it. He had studied the prophecy intensely, it was one of only a handful of pieces of information known about this tribe and their descendants.

The Shaman seemed confused at first. He mouthed the words back to himself, obviously considering their meaning once again. The wording he knew may have been different, but a sudden realization came upon him finally. The Shaman looked up once more at his son J'Ut. Wonder shown in his remaining fierce blue eye.

Surprisingly the Shaman smiled. J'Ut took the chance to force the man to sleep. He had more control of the power now. The first try had been one of desperation. An act of self preservation. But it was a shame nonetheless. *So much knowledge lost, so many potential experiences wasted.*

J'Ut left the Shaman sleeping in his Hut. The snows had mostly stopped now, but a few greyish flakes still lazily made their way to the ground. He looked south, to the land that he must trek through. It would not be an easy journey. *But the Watching must take place.*

Evergreens stuck up in twisted, stunted stands. They were separated by underbrush in various stages of decay, and leafless deciduous trees. Their cracked dry branches awaiting the spring that had not come for nearly two hundred years. He had learned the bulk of the sphere's land creatures lived in those dead and dying forests stretching out for nearly a hundred and fifty leagues to the south, finally meeting the edge of the Stony Desert.

That was the path J'Ut had to traverse. *The Watching must take place.* He scoured the camp for any rations or tools that might be useful on the Journey. He had placed the amplifier

upon his own head. J'Ut remembered what lay ahead. He would need the extra power it would allow him to generate. Though the crystal had been made for the Shaman, father and son shared a strong link. He hoped that would be enough to make it function.

When J'Ut had packed his leather satchel with everything it could plausibly hold, he took a deep breathe, and started out away from the camp. Before he had taken two steps, however, an inexplicable feeling came over him. He stopped abruptly and turned to regard the camp without realizing why. The Watcher did not understand why, but this place smelled like home. Tears were rolling down his face, J'Ut's face. Try as he might, the Watcher could not make them cease. The child had stopped crying. The wind told him more snow was on its way.

The Watcher turned away from the camp. The trail south was old and had not been used in some time, but nothing had grown over the path. The few weeds that had poked their way through the packed dirt were misshapen and yellowing from lack of energy.

The world around him seemed to be withering. Yet, the Watcher knew the sphere would change soon. This journey was the most dangerous the Watcher had ever traveled. The danger of death was very real. But he must be in the proper place when it begins. *The Watching must take place.*