

The Dreambringer

Mordan came to the parting between the dead trees, where the dirt turned to rubble, and the grass returned between the stones. In the distance across a great and barren field, he could see the great ziggurat, the many-tiered pyramid of which he had been told. The fortress of hope. He fell upon his knees and wept. "I loathe this island," he cried, "and all its waking nightmares, from which I shall never wake even when I am perished. For here, even the slain get no sleep." He looked up at the ziggurat, empty, and alone in the distance. It seemed abandoned, but he longed to reach it. He looked at the trees around him, charred and old, and dead. "There is the tower of my savior... But what worth is salvation without my companions! What is treasure to me without the company of my brethren?"

But Mordan smelled something, then. It smelled of meat, and rising sulphur. It reeked of wretched fumes and smoking, and of rot. Fear pricked his spine, and he slowly turned to face what was behind him. There, he saw the beast. The great and monstrous horror which he and his companions had called *The Old Bones*.

They had called him *The Old Bones* because the beast appeared to be the old way living again in a human form, though entirely unearthly. His head was the skull of a stag, great brown antlers stretching out to his sides. The head was shrouded in smoke which rose from between exposed ribs, covered only by black and charred sinews which stretched over them. Long black feathers fell over the bones of his arms, and the furs of many animals covered his legs. Red, barbed talons were fixed to his hands. Two white eyes rolled forward in the bone, black pupils shrunken, and fixated with a piercing gaze. They were human eyes, but they were wild with madness and rage. The beast stomped hooves of blackened iron, bent forward, and lunged.

Mordan spun and bounded forward, as though a deer from his hunter. He ducked below the branches and fell between the stumps, but his predator tore them down in his wake. A fiendish madness ripped through the air. The wild, hungry rage reached through the rushing air like an aura of hate. The claws, infinitely sharp, clove through tree wood as though it was naught but water. In quick glimpses, Mordan saw the beast. The great black smoke from Old Bones rose above the dead branches, and red lightning burned in his evil eyes. The great black hooves pounded on the rocks. *Doom! Doom! Doom!* A great fog shrouded Mordan, the first steps of the pyramid becoming darkened and hazy. Mordan flew, and flung himself upon the first of the steps. A great roar rang out, and Old Bones emerged from the fog.

The beast bent low, and Mordan could see the great, dark eyes piercing through his soul. Mordan could smell the death on his tongue and could see the hunter's fangs nested in the jaw. The Old Bones smelled him, but did nothing. His head would not lower beyond the first step of the old temple. Then, a great light appeared, and chased away the fog. The Old Bones was blinded, and he fell away as though he had become the prey, and disappeared into the dead wood. Mordan turned to face the light, and he could see the wings of a great bird silhouetted before a showering, heavenly light. Mordan got to his feet, and climbed each step until he reached the great platform at the very top.

There was a creature beautiful beyond Mordan's own imagination. There rested a gold and technicolor swan. In the light, it seemed to shimmer and drift between a glowing white, and a shifting pattern of all the colors he could imagine. He fell to his knees before the creature, and his nose met the stone floor. He could tell by the shades shifting, and the golden light fading, that the creature had changed into something else.

"Pick up your head, wanderer." said a warm voice.

Slowly, Mordan raised his eyes to the being. It appeared as a man, clothed in a coat of many feathers of all colors. He had a young, hard face, but old and gentle eyes. “Your trial has passed, and you have won your salvation.”

Mordan breathed a sigh of disbelief. “You are the one which my friend spoke of, the giver of dreams, reviver of souls,” Mordan smiled. “I doubted your very existence.”

The man’s mouth turned upward, and he smiled too. “I am the Dreambringer, who lives at dusk,” said the being, gesturing to the setting sun. “I am the messenger of the soul, and I am here to free you from your binds.”

Mordan’s face fell. “You will free me from the island, I am told. But for such a reward, I am undeserving. When I arrived upon this island, two others welcomed me, cared for me, and taught me their way. I forged a life for myself here, free from the binds of my old world.”

Mordan looked the Dreambringer in the eyes, which watched calmly, and listened with timeless wisdom. “The beast, the Old Bones, took them both. A father for an astray son, and a wife for a lost husband.” Mordan produced a small flower which had been pressed flat, wrapped in an old cloth. It was a white tulip, offered to him by his old companions when he reached the island, on the day they truly accepted him.

The Dreambringer peered at the flower, and took it. He looked at it, and raised it in the evening light. A smile came to his face again, and he raised it up to the horizon. “How have you missed the healing in the breaking? In your old land, you would never have kept a thing so trivial, and beautiful as this. You love your companions that is why you kept this. In doing so, you have carried them across the river, and into my protective gaze. Through you, they have lived on.”

The light of stars and the moon began to shimmer on the waves of the ocean, and two figures caught the light beside the Dreambringer. Translucent figures in shimmering blue appeared, moving toward him. Familiar figures, of Ander the fisherman, and his daughter Mary, who had taken Mordan in as their own. Mordan wept once more as he felt the embrace of his old companions.

“The waves of a cruel sea brought you to this place to feel the tenderness which the old way could not offer you. An old fisherman and his daughter to become your family, only to be taken by the beast. A demon of your own creation which you knew was not yet destroyed. In carrying this flower across the river, you have delivered them to your same beacon of hope.” The Dreambringer turned around with a smile, and returned the tulip to Mordan. “In reaching my temple, you have shaken off the yoke of the old way, *your* old way. As Dreambringer of the isle, I judge you worthy of salvation, and worthy of peace in the afterlife.”

Mordan felt the embrace of his companions lighten, their touches fade. But when he looked at the Dreambringer, he felt warm. His breath bubbled in his chest, until it leapt from his lungs as a laugh, a great and happy laugh. A laugh that carried over the island in a living echo, joyous, and free. His vision brightened, until there was nothing around him but light. All he felt was peace.