

The Dance

Ever upward, soaring, were the flames of that pyre, a balefire of kings and queens long gone. And in that dead of night, darkness encroached, only kept at bay by the burning wood. A glowing circle of light spread out, like an island amidst the gulping void, which was the night. Above the roar of the flames were the beating of steadfast drums, slowly beating the cadence, slowly and heavy as the great waves of the sea upon barren cliffs. And to that cadence, in the flickering light, out at the rim of the endless void they danced. Slowly they moved, like drunks of a thousands droughts, shifting through the sand, slowly moving in a great circle around the fire. They were half shadows, half light, shifting as they turned to face the fire or the void. Displaying their naked bodies in this twilight they danced. Grim faces with eyes half closed they turned their dance in small circles, turning around the fire in one great circle. Their naked bodies shun the heat of the fire and trembled by the cold touch of the void. They danced and danced in this limbo, belonging to neither the fire nor the night. In the fiery gloom they brandished their painted bodies, painted in circular patterns of red, circular patterns and symbols that were twisting inwards their own centres, hard to follow in the gloom and the dance. The steady beat of the hollow cadence quickened, increasing its rhythm to that of a heart's beating, still slow but gaining in strength and energy. And the dancers moved with it, turning faster and faster around the pyre, at the verge of entering the void. And upon them reflected the flames which lightened their paintings so their circle itself seemed like a wheel of fire, ever turning around the great pyre. Thus was their dance made, at the slowly increasing rhythm, the beating cadence and in the flickering light of the great balefire. And in the sand beneath their feet was a trail. A trail of generations of dancers, and the sand knew them well. And they danced until the cadence went wild and the wheel of fire turned as fast as the wheels of a rolling wagon and when they danced so fast it seemed they soon would fall, they stopped. Where they stopped they spread their arms wide and turned their faces upwards, against the endless night. And the night did answer them with rain. Their dance now fully ended they got their prize and the sand heaved a sigh, remembering the rain of all generations that fell upon it. For now the dance of pain was over and now came the rain to wash all their tears away. And the rain washed their tears into the sand who remembered the pain of all generations. So was the pain washed away and the fire did finally die to a mere pile of glowing embers. And the dancers fell to their knees and last to be seen was the glowing core of the once so proud pyre. Like a heart, beating its last beats inside a dying body. Its light now diminished so that the kneeling dancers seemed gently caressed by the touch of the light. Barely visible figures, graven images unmoving in an engulfing void. But there was no more pain and the rain poured down their naked bodies and quenched the last life of the glowing pyre. And then, there was only darkness. And silence lingered in that moment; in that absolute darkness that was the void.

But finally from within that very void a hollow sound came, one hollow strike, and after it silence, its echo more a memory than a real sound. The imagination of that echo had not yet died until the next strike came. And thus was the cadence awoken. Slowly it was, like the rise and fall of a waveless ocean. Low, and in accordance with the cadence, a chorus of voices sang into the darkness. There were no words and very few

tones, like the breaking of surfs reaching for the shore. As the cadence gained in speed to that of a great tree bending in the wind, the song gained tones and words and with it, a faint light of red spread from within the void. And it came from the singers, kneeling in the sand. Circular paintings glowed on their skin, like serpents of fire, ever turning inwards in smaller circles. And the dancers knelt in a huge circle, facing a mound of ash, the remnants of the balefire of kings and queens long gone. And they sang for their sorrow and their grief and they were alone in the darkness. They were wet of rain and cold and their sorrow merged with their song and they were one. The rain fled the domain, unable to stand the grief which it beheld. And the paintings upon the skin of the singers glowed brighter as the cadence quickened to that of a beating heart. And the singers gave meaning to their words and they arose as one, standing, singing and slightly moving their hands to the rhythm of the cadence. And they sang out all their sorrows and their voices hunted the sorrows out into the void. Then the singers slowly began to dance, following the cadence, still singing their lamentation into the void. And the words of their song became blurred as the rhythm increased and they danced ever faster and faster. The glow of their paintings was like red hot iron with a pulse of its own, illuminating them as they danced around the ashen mound, the dance of generations. And the sand knew well the sorrows that were being banished into the void and knew that after the song there were only the cadence and the dance. And thus was their dance made. And they danced until a golden light spread throughout the void. They danced into this dawn, as it was the first after all the pain, the grief and the sorrow. One by one the dancers fell onto the sand, exhausted and naked, falling at once into a sleep without dreams, without pain, without sorrow. And finally the sun climbed over the horizon and the morning had come. But all the dancers slept in the sand, as generations of dancers had done before them. And the sand knew that sleep well. And never again did the dancers awake and the sand took their blood and their bones. But they had no more pain and no more sorrow, for what is done cannot be undone, and they gladly paid the prize for their release. And the sun did set and rise again, for generation upon generation. It was a world and time without end and the wheel of fire was turned anew. And the sand received the dance and the song of generations, and knew them well.

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