

Future Times Past: The Eagles' Tale

written by Rafe Martin ~ illustrated by Anna Rich

Chapter One: The Gathering

a breakfast serials story

The People had come to the Gathering Hall in the year 3426, as they did every year, to hear the old story of how, a thousand years ago, the Eagles had first flown to Earth to help them. That had been after the terrible wars of the 2200's, after the skies had been covered with mushrooming clouds of dirt and dust, after the years of sickness and death—after the cities had been destroyed.

Rainera was seated next to her six-year old brother, Bilt, and her mother. Her father, Doctor Sawyer, was at the front of the hall, trying to get things organized so they could begin.

"We call ourselves the People," Rainera whispered to Bilt, "which is a name on an old, old piece of writing from way back before the Dark Times."

Bilt, clearly not impressed, whispered "Shhhh!" and stuck out his tongue at his older sister.

Rainera was about to answer in kind, then told herself, "No. I'm an adult now. That's only for kids."

So she just looked at Bilt, shrugged, and turned away. Bilt looked up at her, disappointed.

"Gather, friends," their father was saying. "That's it. There's still plenty of room if we all squeeze together."

Her father, a large, kindly man, kept turning the brim of his hat round and round in his hands and tugging at his collar. But he never stopped smiling as he

spoke and pointed, hat in hand, at yet another seat a newcomer might take. It was a good smile—warm, trustworthy, and genuine—and was one reason he had been chosen to lead the Gathering for the last eleven years,

which was almost Rainera's whole life. She was fourteen, and proud of her father. She just wished he'd stop tugging at his collar. Mother always made him promise he'd stop fidgeting, and he always said he would. Then, clearly, he'd forget. Again.

Rainera looked up at her mother and saw the exasperated frown on her pretty, tanned face. Her mother looked down at her and laughed. "Maybe next year we'll just tie his hands," she whispered. Rainera giggled.

"That everyone, then?" her father asked.

The doorkeeper, Mr. Early, nodded and answered, "Except for the Watchers."

"Okay. Let's begin."

Mr. Early shut the door, then took his seat beside the entrance. Rainera's father put on his hat and, with a quick wink at his daughter, took his seat on the mat facing the crowd.

The room grew dark. The crystalline electric torches glowed, highlighting Dr. Sawyer, who lit his pipe, blew several impressive smoke rings, then looked at the crowd and asked, "Why are you here? Why aren't you in your fields, shops, and homes? Why aren't the hunters in the



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forests, and the agri-technicians in the crop domes monitoring the growing cycles? Is this a special day?"

"Yes it is, Doc! You bet!" came the answering calls.

"It's Story Day!" Bilt yelled.

"Story Day?" Rainera's father said as he pushed back his hat and puffed on his pipe. "Has another year passed already? Well, sad to say, some of us have gone Up the Mountain since last year. As your doctor, I've walked part way with most. Let's remember them now, as tradition requires."

The crystalline torches burned a deeper blue, making the hall glimmer as if they now sat under the sea, or atop a snow-covered mountain beneath the moon and the stars.

"Read the names," said Doctor Sawyer.

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A woman stood, and in a clear voice announced, "Sylvia Fleming, Petra Shannon, Abraham Wolf. Gone this year. Age and illness, ice and storm, beast and beastie, flood and fire; we acknowledge all the Paths that lead Up the Mountain. Farewell. Tonight you are with us—not forgotten, but part of the tale."

"That's right!" called voices in the crowd. "That's right, Abe! Sylvie! Petra!"

This was where the chills began. It was as if the dead were there, taking seats among them, Rainera thought. Bilt's eyes were open wide, and he held his mother's hand tightly.

"Now that respects have been paid and the dead honored, the time has come to remember how we got where we are today," said Dr. Sawyer, "and who it was that helped us, after we fell into Darkness."

As he spoke, his pipe glowed, lighting his face eerily. The winter wind gusted and moaned outside, making Rainera feel glad that they were safe and warm inside the Gathering Hall.

Suddenly, at the front of the room, the dark blue

curtains with the silver stars on them parted, and a fire leapt.

There was Eagle Mother, with her big, round, golden eyes staring out of her immense head! Her great wings—nearly twenty feet long—flapped three times, making the flames of the fire dance, Rainera's father's hat lift, and the smoke from his pipe swirl wildly.

Eagle Mother's huge talons gripped her perch—the branch and bole of a great oak tree. Rainera remembered how, only six weeks before, in her initiation ceremony, one of those sharp claws had cut her finger. She had been joined at last to the People as an adult. Thinking back, she rubbed the thin, whitish scar.

Eagle Mother's ivory beak clacked loudly. Her golden eyes blazed. The great head turned, peering around as if seeking someone. A child whimpered with fear and a mother soothed it, saying, "Hush, hush."

Then the great Eagle spread her gigantic wings, leapt from her perch, and flew—straight at Rainera!

to be continued...



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