

Future Times Past: The Eagles' Tale

written by Rafe Martin ~ illustrated by Anna Rich

Chapter Two: The Eagles

a breakfast serials story

When Eagle Mother flew at her, Rainera ducked! Even though, six weeks earlier, she had been shown the truth about the giant eagle, she couldn't keep from flinching now.

"She's just a big puppet!" Rainera told herself. The problem was, puppet or not, Eagle Mother seemed scarily alive. The scar on Rainera's finger throbbed as she sat up and watched the huge figure flying overhead on its nearly invisible wire.

In the coming-of-age ceremony, after being shown that Eagle Mother wasn't real, each of the children had stepped forward and jabbed a finger against one of the puppet's claws. That was their final test, proof that they would keep the secrets they'd been shown.

Though Eagle Mother wasn't real, the children now knew that she stood for very real things. Her presence reminded them to live thoughtfully and wisely. Haste, they were told, was what had brought about the Dark Times long ago. Back then, it seemed, the People's leaders had destroyed their air and water, and had rushed to war with other groups of people, called nations, with little thought of what might happen down the road.

The elders explained that nations were made of

many big villages, called cities. Sadly, all the cities and nations had been destroyed, and the skies had been darkened for hundreds of years with poisonous dust. In those Dark Times, there had been no winners, only losers. It had been terrible to even hear about.

But it had been a proud moment for the young initiates, too. Before they were considered ready, Rainera and the others had fasted and hardly slept for three days.

Then they were finally told the full, adult version of their history. After that came readings from the few precious, crumbling texts that had been preserved from before the Darkness.

Rubbing the scar on her finger again, Rainera recalled all she had learned. When the Earth had been shrouded in Darkness, a real Eagle Mother had flown from space with other Eagles in some kind of big flying house or ship. They had brought advanced tools and taught the People how to begin rebuilding their broken world.

That first visit had been almost a thousand years back. The People's records said the Eagles came again, three hundred years later, and then

roughly every fifty to one hundred years after that.

The last visit had been almost a hundred years ago, which meant they could return at any time. But no one knew when. The oldest living people had only been infants the last time they'd come, so no one alive now remembered that last visit. "I hope they'll come soon, in my lifetime," thought Rainera. "Wouldn't that be something!"



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When Eagle Mother reached the far end of the hall, she perched on another great tree limb. Then the masked dancers and musicians stepped out from behind the curtain at the front of the hall.

Rainera's father nodded to them, put down his pipe, and began the Story: "After the Bad Time, the Rain of Ash Time, the Long Winter of Unstarry Sky Time, the People had no towns, no villages. They say there used to be big villages—cities, they called them—with houses so high you couldn't see the tops. Gone, all gone. Taken by the darkness and the cold."

The drummers began to drum. The guitar rang. As Rainera's father spoke, the masked dancers began to act out the story. He was about to say the traditional words, "And then, great Eagle Mother flew from the stars and ended our long dark winter"—when the door of the hall flew open and snow whirled in. A body stumbled forward, staggered, and nearly fell. A woman screamed. People leapt to their feet. The dancers stood frozen in mid-step.

Rainera saw that it was her friend Dalton, who, bent over nearly double, one hand against the wall for support, was desperately trying to catch his breath. Just sixteen, he had been chosen as this year's youngest Watcher.

Rainera's father stood up and, speaking loudly over the hubbub, said, "Stay calm, friends." He motioned to the dancers to set their feet down. "This young man's job is to bring warnings and signs. He's been out on the mountain. Let's listen, and hear what he has to say."

Some people muttered that bad things happened when a ceremony was interrupted. Dr. Sawyer paid no attention, but turned to Dalton. "All right?" he asked. "Got your breath?"

Dalton nodded and straightened up.

"Speak, then. Say your piece, Watcher Dalton."

Rainera was proud that her father could stay calm when almost everyone else seemed frightened. She wanted to be like him. His movements were steady, and though his eyes were wide, he took the pipe from his mouth, folded his arms, and stood waiting for Dalton to begin. Rainera saw that his attitude was helpful, for now others were joining in, saying, "Shhhhhh! Quiet! Listen!"

Dalton stood tall. He opened his mouth, and words tumbled madly out. "It's them!" he exclaimed. "They're back! They're real! Like a fiery house falling from the sky!" He looked at the people, his jaw stuck forward, as if he thought some might think him crazy.

"The Eagles are here, I tell you!" he exclaimed. "Up on the mountain! They've come this very night!"

to be continued...



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