



Short Story Shoot-out
Contest Winner

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Spirit Walker

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"The Cave"

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& Dawn Vanderhyde

In 2012 Sam Walker was standing in front of the Viet Nam memorial taking his last look at the names of friends loss in that conflict that changed a nation. There was an eerie haze over the city of Washington. The economy had collapsed in the past three years and much of the nation was in turmoil. He had decided to make the trip from White Springs, Florida and pay his respects to the hero's of this war one more time. The shadows of change moved over the land and in an instant all life would turn like the hands of time. The world would once again become a struggle for survival as it was in the beginning. The poles of the globe were about to shift. Most of what was would be destroyed in the blink of an eye.

Twenty-four Seventy

There, on the last road of the ancient nomads, stands the one who could save them. The power of dragonfly lives within her, she has the gift and Valindor lives in fear of her. With the aid of the Spirit Walker she may save the Nomads from total destruction.

Valindor is bent on annihilating all that remains of the Nomads. Linked to the spiritual callers and the Scepter they must be destroyed or they could bring down the Host and all her armies would be useless.

The wilderness of the black road is dark and seeps with unseen things. All who approach run in fear when the voices and invisible waves reach out at them. The wilderness has stayed untouched for over four hundred years now and held the darkest secrets of the past known only to the Nomads. It is believed to be the home of the Spirit Walker.

Kizatta has come to the wilderness, called by a voice of mystery. Her wings carried her over the eyes of the Valindor and safely guided her to the black road. She enters the wilderness with cautious eyes, saber ready, compelled by the unseen force that called her. Here the accent ones lived, fought in the last battle when the Host captured the white house of the district and enslaved all the free people. Only the Nomads escaped. They were the children of the Seminole's, proud and never defeated in all of this lands history. They are all that remains of the free land's children.

Here the trees have ears, they listen for intruders and send warnings deep into the darkness of this forgotten place. Winged creatures and crawling ones are silent, waiting to bring down all who enter. The black road is the only safe path to the depths of this land. The black road winds and twist flowing ever lower into the unseen. Kizatta moves with all her senses tuned for any sign of danger.

She comes to a place where the black river flows, mixing with the white water of healing. There is a calm here and piece seems to take hold of all that surrounds the mixture. In the center, surrounded by Cypress standing 300 feet tall, there is a moss-covered structure. From within the structure he speaks.

"Welcome Kizatta." "Come up and join me in my meditation."

"Come up!" " how?"

"Use your beautiful wings girl." " It is safe here."

Kizatta lifts up and, 'wosh' in a trail of mist, she is there on the edge looking in to the moss-covered structure. Below she sees a soft glow emanating from a round pit. Next to the glow a man with long grey hair sits cross-legged, looking into the flames that dance without fire. He is as old as time, wrinkled with the years of the past, holding him somehow strong.

"Well, are you going to join me or shall I just wither away, waiting?"

"Why have you called me?" Kizatta scan's the pit looking at the dancing sparkles of light that dart in and out of a deep hole in the ground. While she looks the old man lifts off the ground and floats to a white chair with a round base and begins to rock slowly.

"Come down here and I will tell you all I know."

Kizatta swoops down and stands in front of the old man. He points his finger and a stool appears. "Sit, we have much to talk about." "You have the gift of dragonfly, in the days of the great polar shift you and your kind came about." " There were seven new species created back then and the world changed from one controlled by man to what you see today." " The Host, a new kind of man with the power of mind control took over in the war of the district and made all of the humans in this land, slaves." "He uses Valindor, the cat, to destroy any one who opposes him, but you know that, she destroyed all that was left of your kind except you."

Kizatta stares off to the sky with anger in her memories. A tear falls from her eye and it is caught by the old one in his hand, still shaped as when it fell. One of the glimmers of light retrieves it and takes it to the hole in the ground.

"Memories should be saved." he says.

" I remember when Valindor brought her armies to the valley of yellow flowers and killed all of my family." "I hid in the dark pit and cried for days." "I will repay her soon." "You called me here." "What do you want of me?"

"The Nomads have the Scepter and are on their way here for my help." "They need to learn how to unlock its power and need someone to guide them to the district safely, so they can stop the Host control power." "You are the only one who can pass through the eyes of Valindor and get them there."

Kizatta sits looking deep in the eyes of the old one. He is like a window to the past. His green eyes reflect the ancient land as it was before the shift and the busy rush of humans fly by. It is like a hoard of bees darting all around with no set purpose or goal. Kizatta is amused.

"What do you see that is so funny?"

"Those humans are like aunts running around working their fool heads off and never seeing the gifts setting right in front of them."

"Yes, they were a foolish bunch back then." "Still, the slavery of the Host is more than they deserve, don't you think?"

"How have the Nomads kept from being caught in the mind control or free from the wrath of Valindor?"

Spirit Walker tells Kizatta of the great polar shift. The Nomads were forewarned by their elders of the shift and how the great salt water would rush across their land. They fled to the western lands to await the return of their home after the earth settled down. The Nomads come from the people of the past connected to all the spirits and are tied to land.

No power can control their minds. They live under the laws of the natural living things. The Nomads have always used nature to help them survive. They live with and in the gifts of the natural. This is how they could fend off Valindor and her armies for so long.

"I was in the district when the shift occurred." "There was great turmoil and confusion then."

He tells of how he was at the wall of names when it hit and the wall shattered. He picked up three long triangle pieces of the wall and made a shaft of them. Then he went and found the yellowing parchment of old ones who founded this land and placed it inside the shaft. While trying to leave the district he came across the diamond of Hope and put it on top of the shaft. It sealed the shaft and fused everything together. On the way out of the city the monument of Lincoln came crashing down. Walker took the finger of Lincoln and placed it over the diamond of hope. It locked everything together.

There was much rioting and looting going on and Spirit Walker was afraid some one might take the scepter he had made so he buried it under the symbol of heros hoisting the flag. It has remained there until the Nomads went to retrieve it and bring it to the land of piece where Spirit Walker lives. Only Spirit Walker can unlock it's power. The shift wiped out over 90% of the humans and they were left struggling with life for many years. Only those who had the skills of growing food and building shelters survived. They were weak and when the new species came it was easy for them to take control. The Host built an army of strong ones and took over the land. Valindor became his commander and reeked havoc on the land. Now the humans are used to feed and build for the strong ones. They have no control over their lives and are slaves. Kizatta listens to all of the stories of the old land and how man had built a system of information that contained all their knowledge. The disk of knowledge were stored at a remote location in the district and one was stored in the land now called the wilderness. Spirit Walker retrieved the disks in the wilderness before the great war and has them hidden away.

"Why don't you lead the Nomads to the district?" "You have such great powers and surely you could defeat the Host your self."

"I am old, as old as the new land and before. " " I can not leave here for if I do I will wither and die." "This land of piece is what gives me strength and I must remain here to be able to teach the people after they are free."

The dancing lights grow restless and flutter around in mass spiraling up to the edge of the structure.

"Ah, they have come."

Kizatta grabs her saber and spins around looking for some enemy to challenge. She hears nothing and sees nothing. The dancing lights spin faster and faster creating a bright glow all over the walls of the structure. The old man is amused and laughs brightly.

"Kizatta, put away your saber, no harm can come to any one here." "This is the land of peace, if you have anger you find yourself all alone with no one to battle with." "Once you regain your self and let go of your anger or fear then you return to the beauty of this place, free to enjoy all the bounties it possesses."

A spot in the wall turns to mist and three men appear. They are not tall, about five feet and a half, dressed in clothing that matches the natural surroundings. The first man has dark hair and eyes that enter you, searching out the truth of who you are. The other two stand behind him one is carrying a long leather bag.

"You have a guest, perhaps we should return another time."

"No, this is Kizatta, the girl I told you of." "She has the power of dragon fly and will lead you to the district." "You have the scepter?"

There is a distance in the eyes of Jambul, leader of the Nomads. "It was a costly journey."

"We were attacked three times by Valindor and her armies, lost two of our honored ones."

The glimmers of light spin and spin, then press onto the walls of the structure. The lights change to the faces of the two men and seem to become engraved there. These honored ones will rest there for eternity.

The wall opens and seven Nomads on litters are carried into the structure.

Spirit Walker calls to Tarma, the healer. "Tarma, come, your healing powers are needed." Out of the dancing lights a woman, soft and pale comes. She has hair of strawberries flowing long and soft. Her eyes pour out love to all who she gazes upon. Tarma goes to where the black water flows and waits for them to put the wounded down.

"Lay them there by the outlet to the black water." Spirit Walker directs the litter bearers to where the white water pours to the black. "Tarma will give them the healing powers of this blend." He points his finger to the hole in the earth and the white water begins to flow toward the wounded. They are engulfed in the cool soothing water and begin to moan softly.

Kizatta is intrigued by the site and watches intently. Tarma touches the shoulder of each of the wounded and they float on the flowing water not moving but suspended there by some unseen force. Their wounds begin to fade and soon they are healed.

Jambul is pleased. He turns to the man with the leather case and hands it to Spirit Walker, he opens the case.

The shaft is black with three sides tapering down to a point, on each side letters are engraved; these are letters from the wall of names. They spell out the word 'TRUTH', on the top of the shaft is a perfect diamond with clarity un-matched, it gives off a soft yellowish glow reflecting the parchment contained within. Holding the diamond down onto the shaft is a white granite finger, (the finger of Lincoln). Spirit Walker begins to tell of the power of the scepter.

"The shaft is Honor for the honored names on the wall, heroes of the lost war." The Diamond is the diamond of Hope, largest and most clear in all the land." The finger is from the statue of Lincoln, defender of the slaves of the past." Inside the shaft is the yellow parchment of the founders of the free land." The scepter is held by Honor, capped by Hope sealed with Wisdom and holds Freedom for all in the land." "It can not be held by deceivers for if it is the scepter awakens and repels the mind of its deception, boiling it to mush." "You must get the Host to ask for it from you, he must take it freely and; it is very important that you get him to promise to return it to you when he takes it."

"Why would he promise that" ask Jambul.

"He would do anything to have the scepter and lie to you if he thought it would make it easy." "The Host thinks the scepter will lead him to have all the power of the universe if he has it." "The power of the scepter comes from honor and truth; it must be asked for and given freely or it will have no power."

"So, his deception activates the scepter?" Kizatta ask.

"Yes, The power of deception is the key that unlocks its power," "One more very important thing; when the scepter is activated he will try to give it back." "You must not take it before he releases it fully, if you touch it while he is holding it the power will fade, Understood?"

The seven wounded are on their feet now and the white water withdraws to the hole. They are re-united with their love ones and looking with amazement at what were their wounds. There is great joy in the structure. Jambul, Kizatta and Spirit Walker go off to talk of the task at hand. The Host is in the great round room with Valindor. He is angry for the escape of the Nomads. "How could you let them slip away like that?"

"They are very hard to capture, slipping away in the deep swamps areas like lizards." "You know it is hard for the strong ones to do battle there!"

"I don't care how hard it is, I need that scepter." "Now get it or I will find a new commander."

"They will come back and when they do I will have many surprises for them." "I have the night dogs ready to hunt them down."

"I don't need details, just get me that scepter, understand?" "Now get out and don't come back without it."

Valindor leaves in disgust, her anger can be heard through out the great walls of the house of white. "One of these days I'll, I'll, one of these days!!"

Off she goes to the building with many rooms and scans her eyes to see if any thing new is happening.

"Jambul, the new moon will be upon us soon." "Your lands are almost ready for your people, the river of grass has returned."

"Yes, old one, the lake of the wind will be restored very soon and we will return home."

"First we must free this land of the Host."

"And Valindor!" Kizatta reminds them of her dangerous presents. "I can block her eyes but how will you gain access to the House of White and find the Host?"

Spirit Walker lays out his plan for the journey to be taken. Much depends on timing.

"Kizatta, you have the disk of mystic veils?"

"Yes, it is always with me." She removes it from her belt and displays the blue-white brilliance of a ball that has a life of its own.

"I want to add to the power of this for you." The dancing lights gather in a small ball and Spirit Walker points to the disk. The lights enter the disk and it spins faster and faster.

"What will they add to my veil?" Kizatta ask.

"The disk is now a holograph and can project images on command." "You will use this to deceive the eyes and they will think the Nomads are where they are not." "This should give you enough time to get to the Host." "Valindor will be very busy with all the reports of the Nomads locations."

"We will enter through the cave under the House of White." Jambul knows of the cave and has used it in the past to hide from the strong ones. "We are ready to leave in the morning, old one." "You are ready to prepare our way?"

"I have done this already." "I sent the dogs of the night to Valindor, she thinks they will hunt you down and will rely on them fully." "Kizatta, you will be very busy with all the flying back and forth, are you able to do this?" Spirit Walker chuckles watching Kizatta still gazing at the new powers of her veil.

"What!" "Oh, well yes I can as long as I get a chance to get my saber on Valindor and pay her the for what she did to my family." Her eyes show the anger she holds.

Spirit Walker is no longer amused. "Kizatta, keep your focus on the task, the lives of the Nomads depend on you." "You will leave before the rising sun."

The shadows of the wilderness are grey with the expectation of morning. Kizatta is at the end of the black road ready to depart. Jambul has assembled ten of his finest warriors for the task. Spirit Walker is ready and the vibrations go forth calling on the dogs of the night.

The path is long and hard but the Nomads push on along the river of black water north to the district. It is a perilous journey, passing through thick thorns and around the food lands, avoiding the humans working to produce for the Host. Kizatta has spread her mist before them and now is off west to set the trap for Valindor and her army of strong ones. She finds the valley of the mines and takes out her veil. There along the black stones that burn she projects the Nomads in view of the eyes of Valindor.

Valindor is awoken from her dreams by the alarm.

She rushes half dressed to the panel in the house of many rooms. The glow of crystal reflectors call to her. There to the west she sees the Nomads winding along the valley of the mine's and rushes out to assemble her army of strong ones. "Gordo, all the men need to be ready to leave right now!" We are heading to the valley of the mines, get the dogs of the night, hurry." "I'll not loose them this time." Her target was a day away and she would push her army like a demon possessed.

The dogs of the night lead the army with their howls, relentless in pursuit of the target. Valindor is certain now that she will have the Nomads captured and is pushing onward toward the valley. The Host has word of her adventure and can feel the power of the Scepter inches from his grasp. Under the district Jambul moves cautiously toward the House of White. The chamber leading up is dark and damp. The Nomads slowly make their way in silence. Jambul reaches the door embossed with the ancient seal of the eagle. Now it is up to Spirit Walker and Kizatta.

Spirit Walker sits cross legged in front of the flames with no fire peering in to the light. His eyes are closed yet he sees. The waves go forth to the dogs of the night. He sends word to Kizatta the time has come, she must rush to the district and make her way into the House of White. Time is critical now. The dogs turn in a frenzy and rush away from Valindor and her army heading for the district on a dead run. Confusion shatters Valindor's dream of victory.

Kizatta withdraws her veil and heads to the district. As she leaves the valley of the mines she spots Valindor. Her anger rushes up within her and she starts a decent toward her, filled with the visions of her families destruction. Spirit Walker calls out to her. "Kizatta, no!" You must keep your focus or all is lost." "Keep your focus, think of the Nomads Kizatta!"

Kizatta screams out. "Ahaaaaaaaaa" and in a trail of tears heads off to the district. Valindor looks up at the sound of the scream. "You, I should have known." With her army in mass confusion and tired she turns and heads back toward the district. Valindor, filled with rage, is in a panic, knowing she has been tricked now and pushes even harder to get back to the Host before all is lost.

Kizatta rushes to the House of White. Spirit Walker breaths in relief. The plan is not lost yet.

The dogs of the night enter the halls of the House of White scattering the guards who run in fear of their lives, dogs hot on their heels, hungry after their long run. The halls are left empty. Unaware of the events unfolding the Host stands in front of the window looking over his beloved district. His head is filled with dreams of more power. Soon he will rule the whole globe. The wall of the great round room slowly eases open and Jambul enters with his warriors. The Scepter is in his hands. The Host senses a presents and turns to look deep into Jambul's eyes.

Kizatta slips into the House of White, saber drawn. She waits just outside the great round room and readies her veil.

"Well, we finally meet, Jambul." "I see you have the Scepter." "It is a beautiful thing you are holding." "What is it I can help you with?" The Host eyes the warriors gathered in his private chamber.

"We come seeking peace with you." We seek only our freedom to live unmolested in the land of our grandfather's grandfathers."

"I can grant you this." The Host has not taken his eyes off the Scepter. "First let me hold that beautiful Scepter you have, then we will talk of this peace you seek."

"This is the symbol of the past, it is sacred to our people." "You will promise to return it to me after you hold it?"

"Yes of course I will, I only wish to hold it's beauty for a moment then I will return it to you." The Host is soft spoken and knows he will never return it to the Nomads. "Allow me to hold it and you shall have your peace."

Jambul looks to his warriors then holds the Scepter out for the Host to take. "Remember you promise to return it to me."

The Host wraps his greedy fingers around the shaft and pulls it from Jambul. His eyes fix on the diamond of Hope. The sweat beads on his brow as he calls out. "Guards, come here I need you!" The door to the great round room burst open and in rush twenty guards all over seven feet tall, their black eyes sunken deep in their bald heads. They each hold a long rod, blackened by the bodies they have beaten. They form behind the Nomads. Kizatta slips in unnoticed and hides under the ancient desk of Rodham, former ruler of the free land.

The Host is memorize by the yellow glow building in the diamond of hope. The shaft begins to vibrate and the room fills with the light. The nomads turn their backs on the Host and the guards vaporize into thin air. He cry's out "help me, guards help me."

There is no one to help him in his agony. Finally he calls to Jambul. "Take this wretched thing from me, take it now."

"I can not take it, you must give it to me freely. Jambul calls out to the Host.

"Yes, yes I give it to you." "Please take it now" A million thoughts spin in the Host mind.

Visions and cry's of all those he has enslaved and killed, tear at his brain. His eyes become blurred and he reaches out the Scepter toward Jambul. "Take it, please."

Jambul stands waiting for the Host to release the Scepter but he still has it in his hand. The Host knows if he can get Jambul to touch it he can be saved.

The Host sees Jambul reach for the scepter and waits for the hand of his enemy to touch it. When it does the Host releases his grip. The Scepter falls and Jambul catches it. Kizatta returns her veil to her belt and comes out from under the desk. The host, nearly blind runs to the opening in the wall and falls into the cave that flows under the district, screaming and blinded, his mind turning to mush. The Scepter returns to peace and Jambul and Kizatta leave the room with the warriors out to the beauty of this day. There is great jubilation, as the dogs of the night can be heard far off in the distance, chasing the strong ones to the land of ice, where they shall forever live.

Valindor hurries to gather up her crystals and flee the district. She burst out from the house

of many rooms and 'bam', runs right into Kizatta, knocking her backwards as she drops her saber. The razor sharp nails cut deep into Kizatta's side. She is no match without her saber. Jambul retrieves it and tosses it to her.

Valindor is cut deep on her arm and retreats to find escape from the burning blade. Kizatta strikes again laying a gash on Valindor's back. The cat woman spins and throws one of her crystals smashing one of Kizatta's wings.

Valindor runs with all her speed and flees to the north screaming in pain from the wounds. "Run where you will, Valindor." "The wounds from this saber shall eat at your flesh and fill you with fever." "You shall die soon, in pain for all the evil you have caused." "There is no place to heal you, no matter how far you run."

Jambul and his warriors take Kizatta with them to the wilderness and to the healing place where Spirit Walker awaits. There Tarma works on the delicate wings of the little one and soothes her pain.

"Jambul, now you and your people can return home." "The lake has returned and the river of grass awaits you."

"Yes my friend, we shall have our freedom again."

The Nomads begin their journey home to the land of the sun and once again they have defeated their enemy to find freedom waiting in the home of their ancestors.

Kizatta rest with Tarma and Spirit Walker, she has found a new family to share the joys of life with. This will forever be her place of piece.

Spirit Walker sits in front of the flames the dance with out fire and pulls the first disk from it's case. The knowledge contained can heal the nation and help the humans back to a full life, or it can send them back to the foolishness of their past and put fear back into the world. He contemplates how to deliver such power again to the world.

Spirit Walker rest heavy with this knowledge.....

In the city of giant vines Valindor lays suffering with her wounds, She knows she has lost one life and lurks, waiting for a chance to again lead an army, in control of the free land.

END

or is it?

Deep in the caverns under the district a dark figure sits in the chamber of knowledge and pulls out the first disk. He places his hand over it and the world of old speaks to his tormented mind. Soon he will have the power "Soon!"

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Rick Sweeting - Spiritwalker

Characters based on Jeff Fisher's 25th Century Warlords.