

The far reaches of the universe are impossible to imagine. An infinite yet ever expanding volume of nothingness aptly called 'Space' with but a tiny proportion taken up by mere twinkling specks of light. Each speck of light – each star – was born and will die. They do this over the course of millennia with the most unfathomable power, ferocity and beauty. Each existing, when compared to the grand age of all things, within a single breath, and with all the power of a comparative sneeze.

Over the red horizon of a distant planet, an old sun rose. Its massive form, a horrifying, deep orange presence, looming above the barren wasteland. Deep within the sun's centre the core had gathered too much mass, and the rest buckled under its own gravity. The surface cracked like an egg, then crumpled inwards and disappeared for a heartbeat. Then it exploded. The blast released a shockwave of devastating power destroying, in a single sweep, all things in its wake. The orbiting planets reduced to dust as easy as the blowing out of a flame. Billions of years of existence eradicated, without a trace, leaving behind no heritage, no story.

And in the night's sky above the old man, a tiny speck of light flickered and blinked out. And nobody noticed.

The silent moon sat fat and proud watching over the canvas of dense forest below. From the forest a small mountain rose; cracked and weathered and bare of vegetation, dented and blemished with small openings and caves. Against the dark night and silvery moon, a pool of orange and gold shone from one of the caves, one where the old man's ancestors had sat before him. They were the ones who had carved the gods and hieroglyphs into the cold stone wall. The shapes and figures that now danced in the shadows of the flickering fire. A fire that consumed the blood of the old man. The old man who was one of the last men on Earth.

The old man knelt before the fire, his back towards the mouth of the cave. He bowed before the flames and the cold, carved gods. He prayed and he sang to them as his ancestors had once done. Then he rose and looked to the intricately carved wall. The hieroglyphs held no meaning for him, they were an ancient writing now void of all meaning or understanding. His tutor had passed down their stories and ideals, but that was during the old man's youth, now forgotten without being passed on. And so the ancient symbols physically remained, once representing an entire history of a people, now forever without interpretation or purpose; a civilisation lost.

However, he knew the four gods that he knelt before. They were Kukulcan; the feathered

serpent and god of light, Itzamna; the god of creation, Huracan; god of storm and fire, and Ah Puch; god of death. At one time he had conversed with the gods, walked with them and his ancestors under the watchful gaze of the moon. This had once been the meaning of the old man's name; he who walks with the spirits by night. He had brought healing to the tribe and wisdom to its leaders, but not so much now. It appeared that the tribe had no use for such things.

The old man's face was as square and cracked as the hieroglyphs, and as unfeeling. He hadn't experienced much in the way of emotion over the past decades, or if he had he didn't care to express it. Now, though, a single tear fell from his left eye and ran down his weathered cheek.

He picked up the needle of dark obsidian rock from the cold stone floor. He attached the cloth and prepared himself for the bloodletting ritual; a ritual he had performed countless times throughout his years as the tribe's Shaman, so many times that it had almost become as meaningless as the depictions on the wall. Though it still hurt, he was certain the effect had worn off due to over use. But tonight it shall mean something. It had to mean something.

The cold winds blew with a howl outside the mouth of the cave. The old man poked the small fire of paurotis twigs with the end of his spear and took his scarred tongue between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. With the right he pierced. He drew the needle and cloth through his tongue, collecting the blood before throwing them on the fire. He spat the blood spilling into his mouth onto the flames. It landed with a hiss.

This sacrificial offering once set him into a trance and he would see rising from the smoke a large blue serpent. A serpent through which he could converse with the gods. Recently, however, it had only given him a dizzying light headedness and terrible cough.

Now he leaned over the fire and took a deep breath. He choked, spitting out more blood onto the flames. He took in more of the burning blood and paurotis smoke and looked on expectantly, desperately. He saw nothing. No visions were granted to him and the old man's heart sank in his chest. Then an irrational fear gripped his mind; without the gods all is lost and the end of all things approaches. This feeling held no basis in anything he had learned or witness, but in everything he felt. Filled with panic he called out to the gods for a vision. Something, anything. The sound was agonising, as though his soul had been torn in two. He spat more blood and inhaled and sang, now more desperate for a sign that his gods had not left him, that he had not been abandoned.

Nothing came.

With an overwhelming cry of anguish the old man felt his heart break, and with it his faith. He cried out the names of the gods he had once known, mourning those who had been silent to him for so many years. They were silent as he withstood the tribe's mocking in *their* defence. They had deserted *him*, the one man left on Earth who still believed.

Or maybe he had come to realise that all he lived for was a lie. That all of his life he had served gods who did not exist. His legacy was one of foolishness when he boasted wisdom, too proud give in and see what the rest of the tribe had realised; that there was nothing more to this world than what can be seen and tested. Oh how the old man felt humiliated. There is no emptier feeling than doubting an identification, to turn your back on a lifelong belief.

Sobbing, the old man cried out to Kukulcan. Grant him a vision, grant him the joys of the faith that once lived within him. Give him the strength to persevere through this time of doubt. It had been so long since he had received a vision. He had forgotten the face of his ancestors.

In the large cave the old man knelt next to the tiny fire. Outside the cold wind blew with a slight howl. Nothing. He slumped onto his side as tears fell down his face and his sobs echoed in the empty space. That night he had realised that all hope had gone. He sank into deep mourning for the gods who, with their last true believer renounced, had surely passed to the grave, forever lost to the world. Forever meaningless.

A shadow lingered over his head as he kicked out the fire and descended the mountainside. A terrible freedom and a terrible hopelessness. As the last man of faith gives that faith up, and the last tribe of man ventures blindly into the darkness, the end of all things will draw near. And fast.

That night he walked to his bed weeping; hollow and empty. Tomorrow he would give in to the tribe's elders, for he was no longer a man of faith. The line of the tribe's Shaman ended with him. The last tribe had lost all faith.

That night he slept and he dreamed. And in that dream came the vision of The Lady.