

## The Great Fire

## Bird man

“Such was the shambles of the known world at that time, A.D. 4200 that it awaited a needed Saviour.

The human alien imperialists under Tzu Strath turned to Little Arthur as all known worlds did.

For the writings of Vern Lukas had been pushed by other writers cashing on an idea that sold.

For the Bird man, the story of the Vate got around and people called Mingo, Mahbon, the son of Light reborn who would save them all with his sacrifice.

And the Bird Nations supplied him with warriors for the war on the road to extinction for they did not want to become one people with the people of Tzu Strath.”

Vern Lukas.

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Nostradamus caught up with his prey, but now he had to rescue Tzu Strath’s family not from Queen Cartimandua but from the Bird man himself who he had got to admire as much as he admired Tzu Strath.

He did not favor the prospect.

He knew Mingo was a match for his ways and knew he would have to kill the Bird man to win.

So he reasoned himself into believing.

Why he collected several water cobras determined to free the captives Boudicca and Little Arthur. If that failed, he would use a folded down blow pipe with a poisoned dart.

Colour Sergeant Kenala was an old easy target. As for the elephant and lion, poison would be needed as well. The flying ape Little Drum would freeze with terror as

## Bird man

he walked up to it making an easy kill.

All must die, an escapee would bring the Artebrate and their allies after him and he would never get back to Tzu Strath, alone yes, but with the captives?

He knew Mingo was ahead at a cave and so Nostradamus waited sitting on a rotting tree stump holding his canvas bag with the snakes.

For what he intended doing he hated himself and Tzu to ask him to do it. Never before had he questioned his role as assassin.

Inside him flowed the new vaccine so he wasn't bothered about the Choking Death, what bothered him was Mingo the man. A man who was just behind him talking to Kenala.

Nostradamus froze.

Quietly he slithered between the stumps of moss infested tree stumps and saw them.

But they weren't staying; they were heading deeper into the swamps. Easy going for them as they could fly over water crawling with swamp dragons. And all the time Nostradamus carried the canvas bag checking for rips. He was becoming paranoid over a snake's head appearing and biting him.

"Blooming heck," he swore, "let them go, Boudicca and Little Arthur is back there. Go Bird man go free," and with a relieved heart he opened the bag and dumped the water cobras into a stream. "I didn't want to kill you anyway Mingo."

"I am glad to hear that hunchback," and Mingo threw a trophy at Nostradamus's feet.

Kenala followed suit.

## Bird man

The grizzly trophies put panic into Nostradamus who twirled around to see the two Bird men facing him. Somewhere in his throat a gargled sound was trying too escape but couldn't for he felt like a boy caught stealing jam tarts from a baker's oven.

"Gododdin," Mingo with a smile, "Sneaking up on the great spy of Tzu Strath?"

Kenala extended his talons from his foot and jumped onto a snake breaking its neck.

One by one he did the same to the others and taking the canvas bag from Nostradamus put the bodies in it.

In his surprised sate of mind Nostradamus had forgotten how tasty snake was, like chicken.



*Illustration 77: Chicken*

## Bird man

“Dinner,” Kenala told Nostradamus and Kenala was disappointed Nostradamus showed not the usual human face of revolution.

In fact Nostradamus was looking forward to eating, he was starving.

“You can stay here or return with us,” Mingo told him.

“I have a mission to complete,” Nostradamus told him.

He was staying.

“What?” Mingo asked.

*How does one tell the prey he is the mission?*

“Scouting.”

Mingo smiled knowing that Nostradamus was deep in Gododdin lands and that his mission was to rescue Boudicca and Little Arthur.

“Go free yourself them hunchback,” Mingo told him.

The little man took no offense as that was his name amongst the Bird people, a description.

And he left doubling back wondering why Mingo had not killed him? The Bird man was up to something and the joke was on Nostradamus and this made him annoyed and curious so headed deep into the swamps to find out?

So slowly noticed the oil floating on the top of the swamp waters. To find the source he followed the trail of oil back stream.

Suddenly flames spread along the oil and cursing the Bird man Nostradamus fled for his life.

He was alone amidst a great fire that Mingo and Kenala had lit that burned through the Gododdin swamps.

## Bird man

And the carriers of the Choking Death perished and the two Bird men saved their world for they gave Tzu Strath's vaccine time to become available.

And Nostradamus knew why Mingo had not killed him, he had merely told him to go free himself and now Nostradamus saw from what as flames heated him up.

Cooking him, indeed the joke was on Nostradamus.

Now Mingo returned Boudicca to War Lord Tzu Strath.

That had been a day to remember.

It had been raining heavily and the War Lord had arrived at his front lines. For Mingo did not trust him and would not cross them into imprisonment and perhaps sacrificial strangulation on a public altar to some imperial god of war.

Lo the land was barren, pitted by craters made from exploding shells, not even the bold snakes of Tara 6 (Maonos) ventured here.

Lo graves dotted the landscape instead of trees. Grave's dug where the authorities thought someone had died when a neutron grenade went bang.

But Mingo knew the area well; he had led Bird man attacks against these imperial lines long before the Madrawts had. He also knew his people's mass graves had no markers above them; they were like cows, *slaughtered animals with no souls*.

And his heart boiled, for here is where Boudicca wanted him to make peace, on a graveyard; a reminder of the slow extinction of his race.

And he could not remember where Cartimandua's and his son was buried except SOMEWHERE HERE.

She may well huff and puff that his people could care for their dead; but he knew the first Bird person to come grave caring would be shot as game bird.

And on the way in he had noticed the fresh mounds that marked the Madrawt dead.

## Bird man

He also saw the thousands upon thousands of corpses still awaiting burial.

The air was stinking, no matter how much antibacterial spray the imperials pumped into it, death ruled.

The soil ranked of disease, chemicals and unexploded ordinance.

“This is the start of the golden age?” He grunted sarcastically and Colour Sergeant Kenala laughed bitterly understanding.

“The old man Vate said protect the Saviour, well Little Drum will because Little Drum fears nothing.”

The two Bird men looked at the flying ape and then each other, it was a joke, a joke about themselves rather than the timid foolish ape.

How could two dinosaurs like them protect Verica?

So they clasped hands, Kenala had already vowed to protect Little Arthur Verica remember?

And they had nothing to say, all had been said.

And when Kenala departed, Boudicca stopped staring back at Mingo from her father's position. For all the time they had spent together recently they had not spent time pulling down the barriers of pride built from hurt love.

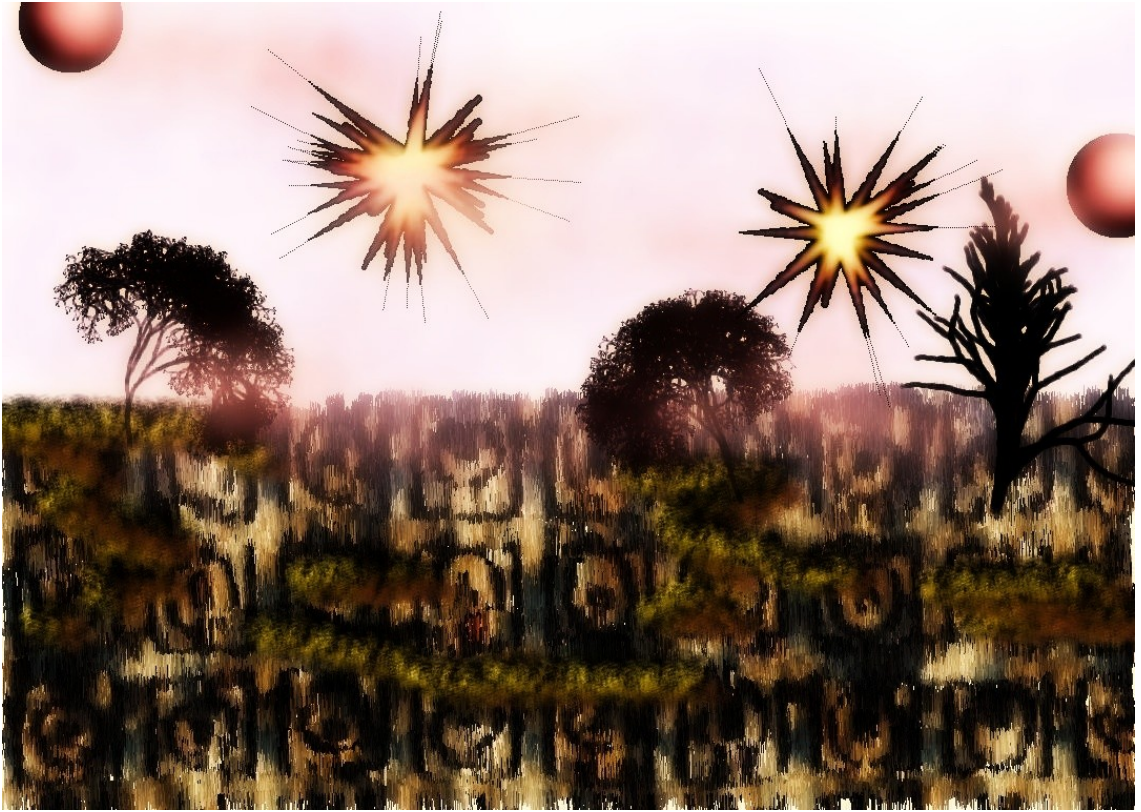
And Mingo returned her stare, then he did something natural but it could have waited till she was gone.

The rain had a bitter salty taste due to the war pollution; it was not good to drink. Mingo wiped his lips and spat out the rain drops.

And of course Boudicca took that action that *he was spitting her dirty taste* from his mouth.

She was of course naturally offended and hurt.

## Bird man



*Illustration 78: No mans land where a son was buried*

And her love broke some more for she did love Mingo.

And because she now turned and walked away without a word, Mingo *understood* that she didn't want anything to do with him, a beast of the air.

Not so the little one who broke from his mother's hold and ran back shouting, "Daddy daddy."

And Boudicca saw tears swell from the great Mingo Drum Vercingetorix as he held up his little boy.

Friendly Bird men with the imperialists saw and with Little Drum's aid, this bad omen would soon be talked about in the far corners of Planet Maponos.

The king should not cry, it was a sign of weakness, of foreboding ill.

*"They were a superstitious lot those Bird people of those far off days, not like those*

## Bird man

*who roam Tara 6 these days.*

*In those days they were still wild and woolly, free, borrowing Mingo's words, ' the last of the free with naught behind us except polar caps and imperialists in front. '*

*TEARS a bad sign.*

*His people and even his enemies such as Queen Cartimandua took this as a sign of weakness, defeat and many turned their hopes of freedom to Little Arthur Verica for the continuation of the Bird man way of life.*

*Let us pity Mi go Drum Vercingetorix the family man."*

Vern Lukas

Now Boudicca saw the father in him, how he kissed the little boy many times, smelt his hair, his strong hands holding the lad so he would not fall and the boy knew he was safe.

And she felt guilt, that she was always hurting this man, yes man, not savage beast but also knew fate seemed to separate them, so their paths were not meant to be walked together in this life time.

Tzu Strath saw those hands as well and was reaffirmed in his belief that Mingo was a child abuser. A man should not hold a child that way, which was unfortunate for being a military man he never held Boudicca close like that.

"Daddy please come with me and mummy, I don't want you to go away. You said you did tell me a story and tickle me," Little Arthur Verica pleaded but the Bird man king put him down and seeing Tzu Strath approaching with troopers turned and ran, jumped and sailed gaining height as he skimmed soil.

Then his rudder like tail flipped him high and up.

## Bird man

The little boy cried and stamped his feet.

His wings were not strong enough yet for him to fly after daddy.

He only stopped bawling when he heard a coughing grunt and looking up saw daddy circling him.

The Great War Lord Tzu Strath wished Boudicca wasn't present, Mingo made a fine target.

And the grunt of a bird man king was heard in defiance of his enemies, the humans.

"This is my domain,

These are my lands,

My cough is law.

The grunt my war cry.

I fly where I please.

I am Bird man," Mingo Drum called.

And the non hostile Bird men amongst the imperialist troopers were very still, for they felt the pull of the wild, and the imperialist troopers beside them felt for them, for they felt it too.

Like the lone call of a wolf stirs a primitive urge in man to be free and wild again.

"Daddy please come back."

And Mingo looped the loop showing off to his son he was free.

Gosh," the little boy said admiringly.

But Boudicca tightened her soul by allowing the mother instinct to rise, human mother instinct for she had no intention of letting her Arthur do that and break his neck.

## Bird man

She had forgotten again he was part bird and could do that when the time came.

And friendly Bird men who had settled amongst the human/alien settlers heard and saw and wished Mingo Drum Vercingetorix was dead and rotten for they were no longer savages that do those crazy bird stunts in the sky that reminded the imperialist settlers they were beasts of the air, not civilized folk that could read and write, go to school and the Temple of Dispat the Imperial god.

And Mingo heard their answering grunts.

“Times have changed,

Bird men are past.

We want our sons and daughters to live.

Reservations we have been given.

Corn we plant.

We can’t fight any more.

The fight has been beaten out of us.

Go away Mingo and leave our sons be.”

And he heard and his spirit broke and he knew there was hardly anything left to live for. Deep down he knew Boudicca would keep Verica away from him. His son was now Arthur, he had better get used to it, but one thing he would never do, live upon one of Tzu Strath’s reservations.

And as Boudicca watched his aerial antics all men, free and wild, civilized and savage saw in him the passing of an era. There was history up there, something their children would never see. And something else, they all knew Mingo knew as well.

That day a lot of heart was going about and tears ran free.

## Bird man

Mingo Drum Vercingetorix was an admired foe. He was doing his death flight chant; he was saying the names of his ancestors because he was going to meet them. He was asking them for courage and strength to meet his fate.

“I am the last of the free.

A Bird man.

An Artebrate.

I will die with spear in my hands.

And my sword Law in my enemy.

I am free, born and die free.

I fly where I want.

Hunt where I will.

The land is my friend,

So bury me where I fall” he coughed in answer to the civilized Bird people. And

many sons and daughters

left the reservations when they

heard Mingo’s grunts.

They threw away their top hats,

Great coats and tacky boots.

Brushed out their feathers they tried to hide,

In efforts to be civilized.

And took to the air free painted up in war paint.

“I hate you Mingo Drum Vercingetorix,” Tzu Strath.

And the hate was not his alone.

“Do not take our sons and daughters to die with you,

Go away Mingo Drum,

Die and rot away some place,” the fathers and mothers of those who left the reservations fearing they would never see their children again. Mingo Vercingetorix was a bad pied piper to them.

\*

Nostradamus survived the Great Fire and knew why Mingo had smiled.

The joke was the fire.

Some way to get rid of a man tracking you? Nostradamus couldn't have done better! A fine compliment to Nostradamus who must be getting careless these days; he also knew Mingo knew he could save himself, a great compliment coming from one such as Mingo Drum Vercingetorix.

And Nostradamus felt his heart break for Mingo's flight for freedom.

Poor Nostradamus had become a complicated CONTRADICTION. Sworn to serve Tzu Strath and he would, but as long as Mingo lived the more he wanted to join in that stand.

“We are the last of the free,

Behind us the polar caps,

In front the enemy.

We have nowhere to run but to fight,” and Mingo's words burned deep into Nostradamus's soul.

In fact Mingo's chant had been taken up by the imperialist troops going into battle.

“I am no god dam Bird man,” Nostradamus reminded himself, “I am a hunchback,

## Bird man

human master spy, and I belong with humans not Bird men. There is room for only one Nostradamus on Tara 6,” and Nostradamus crushed his other self that wanted to fly free and feared the call of the wild that Mingo grunted.

“How can I serve two masters?” He asked himself.

“How?”

Lukas asks?”



*Illustration 79: The fire would cleans the land and ash would regenerate unparalleled vegetation growth.*