

Tzu Strath Great War Lord stood by the lakeside with Conchobhar, Emperor of the East at his side who had come seeking an alliance against the Madrawts.

Tzu Strath knew this made good sense.

There was no such thing as the stability of the empire any more; but what Conchobhar wanted, Tzu Strath would not give.

To recognize Conchobhar as the sole inheritor of the old imperial throne of his deceased father Vortigern. To do so would be to jeopardize Arthur's life that was thanks to Vern Lukas a great threat to Conchobhar ambitions.

It was not Conchobhar who was to bring the golden age, *but a beast boy with wings*.

Yes Tzu Strath loved this grandson with wings, this he must thank Vern Lukas or perhaps he did see Arthur as Conchobhar did!

And called Maonos Tara 6 still.

And stopped ranting about Bird seed had infected his lineage.

The boy Arthur was famous, that meant people knew who the grandfather was too, that helped to wipe away the Bird stain of Mingo Drum, didn't it?

It was a fledging human world; forget the Bird people who went back millenniums.

And Conchobhar's presence reminded him of the Peace Marriage that brought bile to his throat and Conchobhar to Tzu represented Vortigern, the instrument of that marriage and here was Vortigern's whelp demanding loyalty.

Enough, that Peace Marriage had brought Mingo Drum Vercingetorix a lot closer into his life than planned.

Bird man

As for Arthur he was a real menace these days dive bombing his troopers and all sorts who didn't keep one eye glued to the sky.

"Ratta tat tat," the boy would scream and drop a few chicken eggs.

No one hated him for his aerial antics, it brightened up the day, people sort of got used to the lad and admired with longing eyes the loop the loops.

He was Boudicca's boy and the old man's grandson, and that's how they saw the scamp.

"I will help you fight the Madrawts but I want something in return," Tzu Strath told Conchobhar who was taken aback, times had indeed changed, Conchobhar was an emperor, Tzu a low life general who had forgotten his place.

"What?"

"Galaxies."

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Old man Vate was smiling when he appeared to a little boy who had long ago stopped bawling for his mama because he had shinned his wings flying amongst shrubs.

He had been naughty and wished he hadn't broken her rules by flying out side the garden.

He really did need a hug and cuddle.

The boy eyed the older man suspiciously.

He knew all about dirty old strangers.

Especially ones that lived in moldy spider infested caves.

He knew he was about to be offered sweets.

Bird man

He would fly and hover in front of the old man and claw.

He had Bird blood in him that surfaced quite a lot and just as well a grand dad didn't know or grand dad did take a fit!

Anyway the old man was smiling for Tzu Strath had just obtained for the boy the base of his future empire.

This boy would need those galaxies for the final battles against the evil that was **Madrawt.**

"Little Arthur," the old man Vate said smiling.

Arthur the boy tried to figure out who this man was. He remembered him from the cave, he hadn't hurt Arthur then, and maybe mama had sent him to find him?

Whatever the old man squatted down and rubbed the shinned skin and made Arthur happy even though no sweet sweets had been produced, he could do with a good chew.

The old man told Arthur about a story of a boy king on a far away planet called earth, how this Arthur had been chosen by destiny to be a Saviour of his people.

"Like me?"

The Vate smiled.

Arthur knew all about Vern Lukas, you couldn't keep a thing like that quite, especially in an army camp.

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A thousand cold barren miles north in the lands of the Bird Nation Dalrida, Mingo Drum Vercingetorix was preparing for what he called the final battle against the Madrawts.



Illustration 84: Dalrida the cold barren north

Before him was a vast Bird man warrior horde of varying ages and sexes and of course, ant phalanxes.

In fact anyone strong enough to thrust a probe spear held one and was here.

Anyone able to thrust a short sword up and further into a Madrawt chest was here.

And these anyone's looked at Mingo as if he was a god, Mahbon reborn come to bring back the golden age of the Bird peoples.

Little Arthur was not in the minds of these anyone's.

All these anyone's knew Mingo's son by Boudicca was not called Arthur, but Verica and he was a boy called Arthur who was for the human golden age which meant *the end of the free!*

Bird man

Mingo had a new son by Queen Cartimandua, Cuchulain; and the gossips had it that Cartimandua was again pregnant and it was not Mingo's.

Although happy with his pure bred son, he still loved Verica and cursed Tzu Strath and Boudicca for removing him into a purely human world.

“Two names isn't right, the boy doesn't know who he is?” Mingo had shouted at me as if it was my fault.

He did this when he was drinking and he did that a lot these days and I just saw him as a sad old father who had lost too many children.

It was difficult to hate something you had made a legend but easy to be jealous for he had

FLIGHT,

Freedom of will,

Free to go where he pleased in his lands.

Freedom from silks and too much cosmetics.

Free to be savage away from civilisation.

Freedom to live heroically.

Free to have any woman, wine and song.

Freedom from the evils of civilisation.

He was tall, strong, a warrior out of the past.

Our past, our myths'.

Yet he had laws.

He was a conflict.

Did I hate or loath him?

Bird man

I think I needed to admit I was jealous of his ways but he was not human? I think that is what influenced my writings against him these days, what I created I could destroy; he was as villainous as the Madrawts.

But he was already a legend on the frontier before I had started writing; I had just taken over and could use the credit.

Now all my writings were in favor of Arthur and never mentioned his other name just to twist the dagger in Mingo for sure.

Many spies who would kept me informed of what Mingo was up to, Bird men who had settled down peacefully amongst the imperial settlers and adopted human ways.

And he did nothing to stop me; I suppose because Arthur was Verica whom he longed for back.

In Arthur perhaps he saw the deliverance of his people, although not in the same ways as I.

Mingo who could click a finger and take Cartimandua away from me, was it rivalry that influenced my pen against Mingo Vercingetorix?

Although he was no where near Cartimandua I saw him in her eyes and knew he must be visiting behind my back. *Love, lust and murder are all entwined are they not?*

I knew he loved Boudicca and Cartimandua was just a woman to be used when needed as is the way of the Bird man culture.

Which made me very angry indeed, Cartimandua was too precious to be used like that; it was the thought not actions doing the damage?

I was completely lost in Cartimandua and the most sensible course of action would be to leave her and seek another who would give me her heart.

All is fair in love and war.

Bird man

And here he was addressing his great host preparing his army for battle.

“We are the last of the free,” Mingo’s most famous line was coming alive again.

Then a shadowy figure appeared behind him.

It was menacing.

I tensed expecting the assassin’s short sword to cut his spine.

The entire host moved forward in anger.

Yet it was Nostradamus who leapt from his master’s feet and threw himself at the Madrawt whose sword pierced him.

He fell pulling the assassin with him and Mingo who had rushed to help was deliberately tripped by Nostradamus.

Why?

'BANG.'

The little man had forced the bomb around to face the Madrawt who took the full force of the blast so his body parts spiraled about us.

Now Mingo lifted Nostradamus and carried him a safe distance, Madrawts like lower life forms have a tendency to cling to life, so it was then that Mingo in my eyes did wrong by leaving his assassin to die a private slow death.

Not one warrior present slew the Madrawt, he had already prepared himself to meet his assassin’s goddess and so no matter what they did to him, he was happy dying the way an assassin should to gain entry to Heaven; in total agony.

“My word is law in my domain.”

He was more beastly than I wanted to admit for he was a beast. Like a snake attacks a lion that mauls the serpent and goes away; the snake expecting no help from the lion dies slowly in the hot sun an uncomfortable death.

Bird man

The lion suffers no remorse and sleeps well even though the doomed snake hissed loudly all that night venting its pain.

Mingo was indeed the lion!

And I found Nostradamus medically attended too and his wrists were gone.

He was full of the powerful pain killer Lithodrium *that allowed consciousness*.

Was this Mingo's *punishment* for knowing that Nostradamus would one day betray him to Tzu Strath?

I thought I was the only one who suspected.

Then I found out Nostradamus *had requested consciousness*.

"I am scared of the dark tunnel that awaits sinners," he whispered to me in gasps.

His flak jacket had saved his torso from serious injury, he was a lucky man.

"Saved the son of a bird didn't I?"

"Why?" I asked.

"He's everything I want to be but isn't."

PAUSE.

"I always wanted to fly."

PAUSE.

"He's got to live for Arthur's sake who is too young to take control."

PAUSE.

I felt a terrible guilt my writings had caused this upon Nostradamus who believed in them like the rest of the citizens.

It was my fault we were all here wasn't it?

Bird man

Nostradamus laughed, he was thinking of assassin's Heaven, the human one, not the Madrawt place, here to wine and dine women, marry whom he wanted and entwine with spirit woman in spiritual union, the equivalent of physical union; highly prized on the other side we all believe thanks to Dispater's religion and even the Bird men accept this. Makes dying for an emperor easier perhaps?

"I set the clock, he cannot escape himself."

Then just like that he died.

Later I stopped sulking and thought about what he had said, **"I have set the clock, he cannot escape."**

Dam the Vate for choosing us all.

Nostradamus to die now.

Myself to write.

Mingo Drum to kill.

Arthur to rid the galaxies of the evil that was

Madrawt.

Later Mingo came and spoke to me briefly.

"Conchobhar has landed an army in the north pole.

And in the south Tzu Strath has sent his army over our borders.

We are at war again."

But the war had never ended, just went low key, now it was official again.

He mounted a red ant and went to lead his army.

Then he stopped and turned to face and salute me.

I had won.

Bird man



Illustration 85: Ant phalanges on the march

He was riding to his death and knew.

I stopped hating him at that precise moment, he was the brave beast I had always admired and written about.

“I set the clock, he cannot escape,” what did Nostradamus mean?

Later, much later, about a year after Mingo Drums Vercingetorix’s death I was given a sealed time container by a whore.

It was from Nostradamus and explained much and shows there is indeed honour amongst the working woman and especially when they know love, and this one like many had loved Nostradamus the enigma!

But for the moment. Mingo sent the master spy's body south to Tzu Strath.

Bird man

To the very front lines Bird men warriors escorted the body on an aerial float. I went too as Cartimandua had gone with her warriors to oppose the enemies of the free; it was as if they knew this was the final show done; The Battle of The Little Big Horn.

Anyway they were honoring Nostradamus for giving his physical life to let Mingo stay on this dimension.

Of course Tzu Strath saw things differently, Nostradamus had been murdered by Mingo and the Madrawts blamed to avoid Tzu Strath's anger.

I had a choice, to go with Nostradamus or Cartimandua.

I went with the body for Arthur was across the border with Boudicca.

A choice as Nostradamus had a choice, to live or to die.

And over a Bird man.

Mingo Drum Vercingetorix.

"We are the last of the free.

To the north is frozen ice.

To the south our enemy and slavery.

Better to die free than slave."

And I found a great wealth of love in my heart for Mingo Drum and decided to try not to hurt him any more; he was a man, not a beast, he could fly also.

No one expected what happened next.

A disaster.

A catastrophe.

Mingo had his battle with the Madrawts that much I did hear. That Mingo was captured during a heroic act by leading his Manticore Legion to free Bird men captives

Bird man

from the retreating Madrawts.

That Boudicca and Arthur had been captured by unknown spies.

So deserting Cartimandua I had arrived at Tzu Strath's H.Q. for nothing because my creation had gone and I feared the future. Cartimandua might dispose of me for leaving her for Arthur's destiny.

She only saw her beauty in the morning mirror.

And Tzu Strath upon hearing that the Bird men were now leaderless threw all his mighty divisions along with Conchohbar's upon the Bird men nations who fragmented.

The military genius of Mingo Drum Vercingetorix was not available during those days of darkness.

Would the nations ever recover?

*

"I would like to accompany Tribune Cedric Henry for his search for Arthur and Boudicca," I asked.

Nostradamus was needed.

And Tzu Strath looked me up and down seeing my silks replaced by frontier armour; he was impressed by the change.

Planet Maponos had made me grow up and hardened my outlook upon life.

"Double cross me with your idyllic writings and I will send assassins after you no matter where you go," it was his way of agreeing.

I accepted.

Bird man

I didn't want death anyway, apart from loving myself; Cartimandua had given me a daughter, even if she was half bird.

"He really is grateful to you for what you have given his Arthur," Tribune Henry meaning Tzu.

I gave him a puzzled look.

"Arthur an identity, an empire, a future."

PAUSE.

"Bird men don't have futures these days."

PAUSE.

As we left the city I saw what he meant about Bird men having a future. The friendlies aped human/alien fashion and the clothes did not suit them. **pic**

They looked comical in their black top hats and imperial battle fatigues.

Robbed of their noble lion clothes and torso armour.

Some didn't even use their wings but drove hover cars.

In their gardens an assortment of thrown out junk like broken fridges and televisions.

Some gardens had boxes of flowers, most had weeds and burnt out vehicles. The trash cans full of empty booze bottles and plastic takeaway wrappers.

Youths loitered around streets bored and aimless when they should have been flying free up there in the sky.

And everywhere trophies instead of mail boxes; Bird men or Madrawt heads, a human head would bring execution.

The Bird men weren't dumb, those trophies were hidden away.

Bird man

“Tzu Strath made them produce the human heads and gave them a mass burial, and hung a few Bird men to get the message across,” Tribune Henry watching me.

On each corner a sleazy bar and Bird women soliciting.

And I noticed many Bird people no longer had wings, cross breeding and the effects of The Star Dust Corporation that paid Bird people well to be experimented on.

Humans still wanted the secret of flight.

Here I saw **Nostradamus’s ticking clock** and hoped Mingo Drum would escape it and die free.

These friendlies were lost souls and made me fear for my daughter’s future; maybe things would improve, it was only the beginning and all societies’ needs were being ignored because of the wars.



Illustration 86: Statue of Nostradamus

Bird man

“Over there, that is where Tzu Strath is building a statue to Nostradamus. A lonely hunchback staring out into the Bird men Nations, the wilderness, I think Nostradamus’s clone will appreciate Tzu’s appreciation to a loyal servant, don’t you?” Henry asked.

I didn’t reply, the statue would encourage the clone to follow in the footsteps of the original, but would they be the same nature, perhaps the clone would have an artistic temperament and not spy!