

## A Long, Long Time Ago...

The priest climbed wearily up the large hill mound through the dim morning fog. His limp frail body hung heavy on the crook under his arm. But, the pain was a distant sensation. He was anticipating a truly majestic day, provided all the calculations agreed. The old wooden bridge was damp and slowly being engulfed by thick forest ivy. Sitting on the far side at the door to the observatory was the priest's apprentice, Cawyn. The boy had observed the bright moon through the night as it weaved its path through the celestial bodies.

'Sire, it was whole last night, just as you predicted. Bright and white, with the large black rabbit engrained in its center,' Cawyn announced as the priest approached him over the bridge.

'And what of the point where it returned to sleep beneath the land?' asked the priest, already quite sure he knew what the answer would be.

'Again, sire, as you said. The moon returned to the earth directly opposite its earlier rising, at the point where the greatest sun returns to sleep.'

A small smile inched over the priest's usually dry face. He was now more confident than ever that the research of his forefathers was finally about to come to fruition.

'Just one more measurement needed now, boy,' he declared in an air of experienced calm as he entered the small observatory.

Inside the room was lit dimly by a single large candle on the wall by the entrance. As the priest moved past the light his accentuated shadow crept around the circular wall, briefly darkening the thin long slits that ran vertically through the brick work at regular short intervals. His shoulders hunched as his back bore the burden of many years of astronomical examination. He knew the season showed good fortune, as he had observed the sun pass through the great ruler of the scorpion for numerous recent rises. The records from the past had deduced that the great time would come when the sun consumed the protector scorpion, as it chased the setting moon's path.

The priest approached the large cylinder at the center of the observatory, to check Cawyn had set the cogs accurately from the night's recordings. The large wooden cylinder was made up of seven wheels set flat on top of each other with just enough space to prevent friction affecting their individual movement. Each wheel had a single polished metal handle pointing out towards the stone wall. It had been Cawyn's responsibility to maintain the condition of the predictor for much of his training time. The priest was pleased with the boy's care and undivided attention.



Approaching one of the slits in the wall the priest looked out over the morning gloom of the valley below. The darkness of night was gradually giving way to the iridescence of the dawn glow as an orange hue crept up over the black sky. Through the rising fog, the priest could now start to make out the sacred horseshoe as it bent its way through the valley. Vast and magnificent, wrapping round the sacred land of the druid order, where the largest observation temple had stood many aeons before the ice had come.

On a clear bright day the gleaming glaciated ice peaks were still visible far in the distance as they continued their slow retreat. The priest's great great grandfather had been one of the first men to restore this region to its former glory on return from the great exile. He had been a knowledgeable man, who had shared his ideas and learnt much from distant cultures that had been bought together in far flung lands at that time of heaven's fury. He was also part of the order that had returned to the valleys with the predictor and many fascinating claims.

'It's nearly time!' the priest declared as Cawyn entered the observatory, closed the door and blew out the single light. They both waited in silent anticipation for the last indicator of the Great Time. As the sun crept up over the distant horizon, the darkness above gave way to deep blue, and the sound of animal's cries began to penetrate the sky. Life once again returned to the hills and valleys as the dawn of a new morning aroused the inhabitants. As the lower tip of the sun's great disc appeared above the horizon, a slight beam of light shot through the observatory, across to the far wall. 'There, now!' the priest cried, as Cawyn grabbed the handle of the third wheel and pulled it around to point directly at the mark the beam made on the far wall. The beam of light left almost as quick as it arrived and was replaced by the growing light of the morning. But the time was enough and the observers had made their mark.

The setting of the final wheel had aligned a set of holes inside the cylinder releasing a small object from its core which fell through to the floor below. The priest crouched over under the mechanism and picked it up. The stone was a kind he had never seen before. Very black in texture, shiny and hard. It was shaped as though half an oval had been chopped and placed on an upside down cylinder. The priest looked at the front of the rock and saw the symbol he had been expecting for all this time. Almost a triangle but with the longest side concaving in at its central point. The great texts were memorised in the priest's mind and he knew there was nothing to confirm. This was the symbol of the Great Time.

He took a large shawl of white silk from out of his pouch and delicately wrapped the rock inside it. Then from within his coat he pulled out another pouch, braided with azure pearls and placed the rock inside, as instructed by the code. He stepped outside into the now bright sunlight of a new day, followed closely by his apprentice. As they crossed over the bridge, the priest turned to the boy and handed him the pouch. 'It's time!' he said.

Cawyn looked behind him as he galloped ahead and could see the raised mound and trees surrounding the wooden observatory shrink into the distance. The farmers working the fields looked up in interest as the young boy raced past. His excitement clearly showed and they sensed that something was perhaps about to happen. Children raced behind him shouting and waving as he approached the large gates of the hill fortress. Without hesitation the gates were drawn open and he was pulling up his steed in the large interior courtyard, leaping down before he had even ground to a halt. Stumbling as he hit the floor, Cawyn picked himself up and ran up the steps to the inner palace.

The minister was waiting in the large meeting chamber, dressed in his long green cloak and matching domed hat. 'My lord,' Cawyn proclaimed as he bowed his head, 'here is the result of the predictor.' He held out the pouch in his hand for the minister to take. A tall, gaunt man, the minister brushed his beard with thought, and leant forward to take the pouch. Carefully he removed the contents and unwrapped the silk from around the rock. His face showed surprise as he saw the strange looking object within, but when he turned it over and saw the symbol his eyes began to glow with intense trepidation. He looked up at Cawyn, thanked him, and dismissed him.

The minister walked across the large chamber, and through the hanging drapes against one wall, into a long straight corridor. At the far end he climbed the staircase to his Lord's residence, perusing what this rock really meant. He was from a line of men that had once procrastinated against the Great Time. A belief had arisen that the founding great temple of the sacred horseshoe plain had itself been destroyed by what it had sought to predict. The furious, powerful child of the moon, had not been the connection the druids had believed it would be, but a destroyer of the people. This was just one of many mythic stories of the last Great Time though, many eons before. Nobody really knew, but the fortresses now were all built high up overlooking the valleys safe from any potential threat.

Knocking at the wooden oak door, the minister was administered to his Lord's chamber. The room was sparse with little in the way of decoration. Against the back wall, a large poster bed was surrounded by silk sheets hiding the great man that lay within. Two servants stood against opposite walls of the room, in mute animated silence, waiting for any instructions. The minister looked over to the bed and could see behind the covers the large dark shadow of his Lord's head and matted hair. A deep bellow came across the room to him. 'What news my good friend?'

'My Lord, the rock from the priesthood's predictor has been delivered. And it er...' the minister stumbled to get out the words he knew his Lord wanted to hear.

'Come on! Get it out, man,' his Lord roared.

'Er, my Lord, it is the symbol of the fin. It is the Great Time!' the minister proclaimed in rhythmic tone as though in trance from the words he spoke.

The shadow behind the silk drapes grew as their Lord arose from his bed and leant forward. Immediately the two servants, as though activated mechanically, stepped forward with a bowl each in one hand. With their other hand they took a drape each and drew them back as their Lord's head broke through the now invisible barrier. His face beamed with excitement and a huge grin stretched across his face. Rubbing the sleep from his crystal blue eyes, he brushed back his matted sun-bleached locks. Then stroking his thick wiry beard he thought for a second and looked pensively around the room. Then in one almighty growl he instructed his servants.

'Bring me my gun!'

*All characters and events portrayed in this story are purely fictional.  
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