

## Ghost Technology from The Sun

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Master told us that the earth was hollow, and that we lived on the inside of it, clinging to the top of the crust. Below us was another world, a world inside the world, a glowing bright sun of a place. What master called the summerlands. That is where the dead live, he said. That is how we can talk to them, he said. They send us signals across the air, and the mediums pick them up and drink them in.

And when the words came in, we had to speak them. We cannot deny the dead our voices- the dead would be angry if we did. And nobody wanted the angry dead to fly their zeppelins up from the sun and attack us crust dwellers.

That wouldn't do anyone any good.

Master knew this because he is an ambassador to the land of the dead. At night he walked through the door of the dead, and it beamed his body down above us, into the summer sun inside of the earth. That is where he talked to them, worked out trade between our two peoples.

The dead have a lot to offer the living.

He came back with schematics.

Ways of building circuit boards.

Ghost technology from the sun.

#

I remember when Ma first drank in the voices of the dead and talked with the tongue of paper and fire. We'd only been here a week or so and I was frightened of what was going to happen, having heard stories of horror from different members of the God's Foot Spiritulists. I kicked and screamed, refusing to go with her into the lodge, refusing to let her destroy herself for religion.

Eventually I gave in.

They took us into the Dead Man's Tongue. This was a lodge built for dead drinking. It had no windows and was covered in paintings of ghosts and the summerlands. It was lit entirely by the Master's halo, blue light bouncing off of the walls and illuminating the circle of faces in an eerie chilled light.

I remember clearly the shadow chanting and the fingers moving and the feet pounding out that rhythm. Ra-tat-tat. Ra-tat-tat. A hum of sounds: ah-m-m-m-ah. Ah-m-m-m-ah. The air thickened, and we could hear a clear barrage of whispers. Like everything started whispering around us, the trees, the lodge, the

stars and the sun. Everything had a voice, and everything spoke in hushed tones.

Mother rolled her eyes back in her head, the marble white of her pupils reflecting the cities in the sun. Her mouth opened wide and out came fire and words and long streams of paper snakes. She danced and spat and spoke, she revealed her breasts and screamed. The chosen inscribers jotted down everything she said into small red and black notebooks.

It is said that past the gardens and into the woods there is a hidden library filled with small red and black notebooks. It is said that the Master goes there every night and reads them. Over and over again. Never sleeping.

“The dead don’t sleep,” he once told ma, “And neither should I.”

#

The Master was handsome.

The Master was tall.

The Master was a bone setter and an electrician.

We called him he who walks among the dead.

When I turn fourteen I want to marry the Master.

I practiced writing my name and his in a small red notebook. I would run the names together, combine them into new shapes and new words. I hoped that the truth in ink would become the truth in flesh.

I wandered through the garden at night, in hopes I could see him as he returned from the hidden library. I always tried to strike up some sort of conversation with him, flirting with him a little. He acted nonchalant but I could feel something there- a spark, a chemical connection. A magnetic pull from his eyes to my heart.

#

I am scared for the Master when he beams down into the undersun. The cave made so much noise. The screams of the dead, wailing as he walked between dimensions. I was afraid that he would never return.

And then where would we be?

Lost and haunted by the dead.

With no one to lead us.

#

I was so lonely in God's Foot, being the only child there and with no one to play with. Most of the people in our commune were women, and they were all pregnant with the Master's kin. He called these women the Blessed, and he said that they carried the weight of Angels inside of them.

Last week I noticed my ma's belly was full and shaped like the moon below us, and I asked her if she was Blessed. She said she was, and she said that in a year or two I could become Blessed as well. That made me so happy, I bounced around for the rest of the day. I made extra certain that the master noticed me, and tried to look my best every time I went out to play.

I wore my blue dress and tied gold ribbons in my hair. He saw me twice, and both times he mentioned how pretty I was and how happy he was for me to be here, living amongst such fine folk. Just hearing the deep rumble in his voice made me feel so happy.

Imagine that! Me! Blessed!

What a wonderful day that would be.

#

The garden was pretty at night.

So blue and full of shadows.

Master said the sun had two sides, one blue and one yellow. It spun beneath us, and that is why we have night and day. And all those stars and clouds- those were voices of the dead, moving through the ether for us to bring into our bodies and interpret.

We used the séance in order to drink in the words.

Our bodies became balls of light.

The words etched into our skin.

Last night I saw a rabbit in the garden.

I shooed him away, but he just smiled at me.

With a mouthful of human teeth.

#

One day the Master came out of the Door to the Dead with a roll of ancient looking blueprints. He unrolled them and told everyone to begin work on this right away. This would be our greatest achievement. By the end of that week the whole village was lit up with electricity, and we called him the light bringer. Some of the people even compared him to Prometheus or Hermes, stealing the light of wisdom and bringing it down to us poor mortal folk.

I remember the first night we had all those lights up, strung between the trees in paper lanterns. They glowed and hummed and I remember touching the wires, feeling the electricity sharp and alive inside of it. Master says that this was just the beginning.

He was working on something bigger, better.

#

Earlier today the dead came into me and made me paint them. The canvas was stretched out beneath me and dyed brown with tea. I felt a surge of power in my head, and the whispers of the dead in my ears. The air became thick, heavy. Like a wet blanket around my skin.

Then my hands moved and I couldn't stop it. At first I was scared, my body taken over by an outsider. I tried to keep the dead out, I did not want to drink it in. My hands moved anyway, my thoughts and motions no longer mine. My whole body felt numb around me, completely unresponsive to my thoughts.

I stopped fighting it, and just went with the flow. It was what the Master called the rivers of our soul, which the dead ride the like boatmen. They taint the water inside of us with their fingers as they ride, and we drink in this taint and become the words they speak.

I saw the summerlands as I painted.

I saw the golden sphere within the earth below us.

I saw all of the dead looking at me, their flesh rotting, their teeth grinning. I wanted to scream. The summerlands was no paradise. Not at all. It was all dark and dank architecture and filled with the bones of the dead. They wanted to pull me down, yank on the river of my soul and push it into the summerlands.

When I came too I looked down and saw my painting.

Red, red.

A crow in red.

And that rabbit. With teeth. And his bride in white right next to him, frightened and with a veil of the dead across her eyes.

And there, in the middle of it all was a sun.

Smiling, hungry.

Wanting to eat me whole.

When I was done I ran outside and threw up in the bushes. The Master came by and I was so embarrassed, and I knew he wouldn't want to marry me now. No one ever would. How could he love me when I smelled of vomit?

#

The Master praised my painting. He hung it in the Dead Man's Tongue with all of the others. He said that I had been possessed by Uk-Olak-Ken, the dead god of Atlantis. Gods die too, he said, and they also go and live in the summerlands of the afterlife just like the rest of us mortals.

He said that this painting was very special, and no one had ever been possessed by Uk-Olak-Ken before. He told me he had a secret job for me. One that no one else could ever know about. Not even ma.

#

I made dolls out of the corn husks in the garden. The dolls were very tall, about as tall as I am and I dressed them up in my clothes, and took them outside and dance with them. Sometimes I pretended they were real and they were my friends.

Some nights I could hear them whispering after the séance, and I wondered if the dead voices were trapped within them. As if they were possessed somehow. I meant to tell the Master or ma about it, but during the daylight hours I forgot.

There was so much work to do on the farm, and everyone had to help out. Even those who were Blessed.

#

I once lined up all of the corn dolls in the garden and dressed them in red and black dresses. I called them the army of corn, and made them ready for war against the trees around them. Out of the corner of my eye I saw something brown and furry dart between the rampion.

I stood and walked towards it, following it.

The air felt thick with dreams and whispers. Like it did during a séance. I heard the screams and howls come from the door to the dead, and realized that the Master must be descending again. Going down and above us, into that sun in the center of the world.

I saw a furry puff of a tail peek out from between the cabbages, and two brown ears slicked back onto a mangy skull. "Rabbit," I said as I walked towards it, "Rabbit, what are you doing in our garden? This is our food."

The rabbit turned his head and smiled at me with a mouthful of human teeth. "Get on my tail," he said.

"No, never. Go."

He hopped closer to me, the grin widening into a threat. "Come on. Follow me to the Door of the Dead."

I stepped backwards, frightened.

"Who are you?"

He hopped closer, and then stood up. His back uncoiled and he grew as tall as I am, standing on his hind legs like a human. His eyes were dark and troubled, and the center of them looked like suns stuck into his hollow head. "I am the keeper of doorways."

I stepped back and pointed at my dolls. "They are armed," I said, "With the voices of the dead."

They whispered then, the sound out of it filling the air with the smell of turpentine and rotten eggs.

The rabbit hopped backwards.

"Ah, then. I guess I'll be getting on. But I will return. You are far too pretty to leave be, and I need a wife sooner than soon."

And then he shrunk down and hopped off, leaving the dust of his footprints across the garden.

#

The master brought us all together before a séance one night with an announcement. He had brought new schematics from the land of the dead, and we will have new ghost technology in order to build and use. He laid out the plans on the grass and started pointing out different things that would need to be done.

"This will be," he said, "An amplifier to the voices of the dead. No longer will they whisper in the void between our worlds. This will take the ether between us and the summerlands and thicken it- making them louder and more audible to us."

The people cheered.

The Master is taking us into a new era of enlightenment. Humanity will evolve now- faster and more sure, towards the shores of the dead. No longer will we be separate, but travel between the worlds will be as easy as riding on a train.

#

I was possessed by Uk-Olak-Ken again. He came into my skull and ate away at my mind, forcing the rivers of my soul to become overflowing and flooded. I screamed in angst and my mother said I bit her on her leg. She showed me the rings of broken skin my teeth made, like red moons on her flesh.

I painted the walls of my room in the lodge while in the trance, red crows all over it and rabbit brides. I painted a large sun, grinning and hungry. I painted rivers of black slime and castles crumbling on the moonside of the sun. I painted the hollow earth, and a bridge that moved between it.

And I painted the zeppelins.

The skullish dead riding in them, ready to war with us breathing meatsacks. Their eyes glittered in my paintings, all hollow and holy and wanting to feed on us.

The painting frightened me.

Master said it was a good sign. A great omen. Uk-Olak-Ken had blessed us with this message. It meant that the dead will come to us soon, come and take us to the summerlands where we will be happy and no longer dependant on this crust of a world.

I felt sick and queasy as I realized Master was wrong. This was a warning. The dead are preparing for war. They want to destroy us. They were jealous of our flesh and lives and they wanted to take our skin and wear it, steal our beating hearts and use it to pump the blood of life into their dead bodies.

I slept in the garden after that incident.

I couldn't stay in the same room with that painting ever again.

#

There was a large gathering and ceremony before the Master switched on the newly built amplifier. The celebration started with prayers to the dead, and an offering to the doors between worlds. Then it moved to a séance, with fourteen people all becoming possessed and two whole red and black notebooks filled with the mad sayings of the dead.

He then went forward and turned the machine on. It looked like a vivisection of a robot, all metallic intestines and beating artificial hearts. On top of it stood a brain molded in copper, with black rubber tubes and a spine of bronze spouting out of it. The spine curved up and into the air, and shook and hummed when the machine was switched on.

It vibrated and sang while people celebrated. We danced to the music of the amplifier that night, the voices of the dead a chorus around us. The air felt thicker, wetter. A hot moisture dripping onto our bodies. We all felt possessed, and everyone one of us could hear the voices now, so loud and so clear.

And the smell.

The air smelled of sweetness and ripeness.

#

The next day my Ma was outside, laying on the ground in a mud puddle near the back of our house. The mosquitoes hung like a biting buzzing veil around us, hungry in the sticky air. My ma's belly was round and sticking out of the mud like a moon stuck in the center of the void below us. I wondered if there was a world inside of her stomach, with people like us clinging to the crust, and another world in the center with the voices of the dead.

Ma had mud all over her face.

Her eyes looked so tired.

All around us the voices of the dead carried on in conversation, forcing us to speak up a little louder if only to be heard. "Marybeth dear," Ma said to me, "Why did you sleep in the garden last night? I missed you."

I shrugged.

"That painting. It scares me. All those faces, dead faces, looking at us in such hatred."

She waved her arms in the mud, making mud angels. Her face looked elsewhere, towards the ether. So murky this air, I thought, so thick and deadly. "I can't sleep at night with you gone. Come and sleep with us dear. Or the Master will think something's wrong with you."

I sat down in front of her, the mud staining my blue dress. Tonight, I thought, I will take the ribbons out of my hair. I don't want to wed the Master anymore. "Maybe there is something wrong with me. This air is suffocating."

Ma laughed. It was a strange and deadly sound.

"I don't feel pregnant. Isn't that weird? It's like what's inside of me is a ghost. Like my stomach is haunted, or even that an insect is living in there, getting larger with time. And I feel like this whole place is a dream, and the dead are the ones that are really alive."

Ma then rolled around on the mud, coating her stomach heavily. It looked like a brown and sticky circle of flesh, hidden under the dark shadows of her dress. I wanted to reach out and touch it, to feel the ghost beating under her skin.

#

It's so hard to breathe.

The air is so fluid.

Like trying to breathe underwater.

And the voices get louder and louder every day.

They sound like shouting snowflakes in a blizzard of sound.

#

The Master changed. I don't know if anyone else noticed it, but he started glowing brighter. So bright that the daylight gives way to his glow. And his skin peeled and cracked. Beneath the holes in his skin more light throbbed and glowed, even stronger and more radiant than before.

He called himself Xansu.

Lord of the Lights.

And he would talk to people in half heard whispers. I saw bits of paper stuck under his fingernails, and I saw him at the library more and more. He must be constantly reading those notebooks.

He stopped going to the séances.

And the séances became more violent, more disturbing. Almost everyone became possessed, and they attacked each other, the ghosts burning holes in their eyes and poisoning their soul rivers with rot and plague. Yesterday Erica blinded her husband. Ripped out his eyes with her own fingers.

The dead made her do it.

The dead make us do everything.

Their presence is overwhelming.

#

Master came by to visit me while I played in the garden one night before I went to sleep. He looked at my corn dolls and smiled. Their voices are louder now, I realized. They are practically screaming in the language of the dead.

The Master's body glowed as he approached me, sending away the light of the moon with his own disturbing blue illumination. He held his arms out to me. The closer he got, the more disgusting he looked. His face had holes in it, and his eyes were falling out. His hair was unkempt and decrepit, and I wanted to scream at the sight of him.

Instead, I stayed silent.

"Hello, my child."

I nodded.

"I have a secret job for you."

I moved a little away from him. The corn dolls hissed at the Master as he moved, trying to send him away. Their voices clattered out insults, trying to move their corn husk bodies to get close enough to attack him.

"Don't you want to know what it is?"

I stumbled back.

Still covered in sweat. This heat was unbearable even at night. No reprieve from the thickness of air. "No, it's ok. You can tell me tomorrow."

The Master smiled.

"Tomorrow might be too late," he said, "I need you to summon Uk-Olak-Ken. I need to talk to him."

I shook my head no. "Why can't I do it during the séance tomorrow?"

The Master moved closer to me, his body gliding across the ground. "Too many people. I need to ask him secret stuff. Only stuff I need to know. Something is being hinted at in the notebooks. Something dark and terrible. I need to talk to him and learn what."

I looked at my corn dolls. I only wished I could give them life, let them move and protect me. "I don't want to. Have someone else act as your human puppet."

He grinned and then chanted and clapped under his breath. My mind swam and my body felt moist. I rolled in the rivers of my soul, falling over the earth and up below us into the undersun. I could see the curvature of the crust above me, and Uk-Olak-Ken taking over my body.

I fought and tried to swim up through my mind and back into my flesh. I did not want to be trapped in the cellar mind anymore. I wanted to be out and stopping him. The Master was doing dangerous things, and we are going to pay for them soon enough.

I crawled against the currents, and fought against the rebellion in my mind. I forced that Uk-Olak-Ken back into the sun, forced him back into the ether and the dank cities of the dead and out of my body.

When I came too I realized I was sweating, naked.

A light was flowing out of the Master. It flew into my body in streams of fire. I started to cry as I realized what was going on. The light of him spun inside of my stomach, weaving against the walls of my womb.

When he looked down he realized it was me in my body and no longer Uk-Olak-Ken. "My child," he said as my stomach spun inside of me, "You are one of the Blessed now. You carry my seed, and the weight of Angels inside of you."

I wiped my tears away with my hands.

"Did you get the information?"

He nodded.

"Thank you, my child."

Good, I thought. Maybe you will do something to stop this, stop all of this. We are in danger of being eaten by the dead, our bodies used as costumes for them to parade around in and pretend to be alive.

He walked away, and I felt sick to my stomach, and certainly not blessed.

#

The next day I decided to wander through the woods and find the library. It took me a few hours, but I eventually found the ruins of an old catholic church, and inside of it notebooks upon notebooks scattered in the pews. The walls of the church looked like old bones, bleached and full of holes.

The notebooks were mostly arranged by importance and relevance. Most of them had pages bookmarked, and some were impossible to read due to water damage. I flipped through a few them at bookmarked pages, and started to find an unsettling pattern.

Every bookmarked page mentioned a war of the dead. It mentioned fire from the sun, and the destruction of the crust dwellers. It mentioned war machines of unbelievable power, and of ways to travel between the lands of the living and the dead.

I felt something slick move in my stomach.

He knew all along.

And was going to do nothing.

#

It wasn't long before my stomach extended.

Fast, I thought, whatever it is, it grew fast.

I knew what ma meant- it felt haunted. More of a ghost inside of me than a child growing.

#

A night or two later I saw the rabbit again. He walked up to my corn doll army, staring at them as he went by. When he saw me he stood upright, his teeth shimmering in a grin beneath the moon. "Marybeth," he said, "Will you get on my tail and join me?"

I had nothing else to lose.

"Where are we going to go?"

His grin deepened, wide and wider still. "Someplace you need to see. The Door to the Dead."

I climbed onto his tail.

"Let's go then," I said, "And when we get there, if you still want me to, I'll marry you."

The rabbit turned his head almost fully round, his mouth full of human teeth. "I would and still might. But what grows in you is dark and deadly, and I will not raise it. Not I, not ever."

He turned his head and got on all fours, his body shooting out and darting with me on his tail towards the cave known as the Door to the Dead.

Above us I saw the light of red crows, dancing under the moon.

#

The cave was empty. The door was a chalk drawing, and the sounds of screams and horrible noises came from a cage full of geese that the Master poked with a red hot poker. Rabbit showed me these tricks, how he deceived the people. In the corner of the cave was a series of diagrams and maps. All these schematics, all this hollow earth- he did not get this from the dead at all.

He came up with it himself.

Using us to get information about the dead with his séances, never once putting himself in any danger.

I saw rituals described in other pages, tales of sacrifices and stones that make you immortal. I realized then what the Master was doing- that each of us would be used to make him live forever. Even if meant to bring the dead here, and put us in danger.

I looked at Rabbit.

"Thank you," I said.

He held my hand in his paw.

"I love you. Come back to me when you are free from this burden. I will marry you, and we will live together in perfect harmony, far away from this dead world."

Outside of the cave I heard the red crows cawing, and the voices of the dead getting louder and louder still. It was so full in the air, and it corrupted our thoughts and poisoned our soul rivers. Outside the moon became bright and turned into the sun, and the sun became bigger and bigger, like it was coming right towards us.

And I could see cities on the surface of the sun.

Bright, brilliant cities of light.

I held the rabbits paw in my hand.

So soft, so comforting.

"It may be too late," I said.

He nodded and then I jumped on his tail. Back to God's Foot we flew, fast and with the trees blurring around us.

#

In the sky above we saw the Zeppelins of the dead, flying from the sun cities to us crust dwellers. The voices around us floated in the air, angry, yelling. Wanting their light back. Wanting the stones of immortality back.

I searched for my ma when I got back, the rabbit following me, making certain I would be okay. The air felt like drowning, the water of it entering our lungs and corrupting our breaths. We could not talk, not over the voices of the dead being amplified in the world around us.

My head was filled with so many thoughts.

So few of them were my own.

Rabbit helped keep me calm.

Helped keep me sane.

The creature inside of my stomach swam through me, licking my blood and grating against my bones. I wanted to flush it out of my system, to destroy it whenever possible. I was afraid to give birth, fearing that it might rip me apart as it crawled out.

#

I found the body of my mother with the others. Her stomach a mess, her ribcage poking out from her flesh. They were all stacked there, back behind the Dead Man's Tongue. They had all died in childbirth, their bodies being destroyed by whatever lived inside of them.

I saw the shadows of giants as they slouched about town, and heard the voice of the Master screaming and singing songs to them. The Master seemed to be almost completely light now, his skin discarded on the ground at his feet.

I wanted to tear this thing from my stomach.

I did not want to die like that.

I turned and looked at the stack of bodies. Standing next to them, all in a row were my corn husk dolls. The dolls turned and looked at me, and spoke in unison.

"They are here," the dolls said.

"The dead have come."