

The End of Days

By Michele Dutcher

The night was darker than any of the three remembered, even the elderly wizard.

“This kind of darkness makes no sense,” raved the young archer, angrily throwing another twig into the fire as if this would make the black world brighter.

“At least we know the Sun will appear tomorrow morning, if never again.” The old wizard blew some dust into the fire and it blazed purple before shimmering into a hundred falling sparks.

“Cheap tricks,” scorned the woman standing beside the fire.

The Archer looked at the female, her body barely covered with a metal and leather dress. “You should know about 'cheap tricks, Jezebel,” he scorned her, snickering loudly. He stood up from where he had been kneeling, facing her toe to toe. “I have no idea why Pag decided to bring you along.”

“Relax, archer,” said the old wizard softly. “It's not as if you have never darkened the doorway of a brothel.”

The young warrior thought a moment, shrugged and sat back down. “I'm pleased that you are here with me at the end of the world,” said the wizard. He looked first at the madam and then the warrior. “Both of you.”

“When shall we reach the Pond of Light?” asked the woman. “It feels as though we have been walking for weeks.”

“It will need to be tomorrow,” answered the wizard. “The night is so dark because the flame has gone out completely by now.”

“I shall rekindle it with my flaming arrow and the world will know summer again, and life...” he glanced at the woman... “and love.”

“Love can still be found, warrior. For a price.”

The warrior looked at her, measuring his need against the amount of gold in his purse.

“Better if we could all stay focused,” the wizard reprimanded them, and then relented with a knowing glance. “Even the straight arrow needs a crooked bow.”

The Archer stepped around the campfire, placing his hand on the woman's waist. She leaned against him slightly, lifting her emerald eyes to meet his.

“I always envied your enthusiasm, young warrior,” said the wizard, remembering his early trysts. He grew solemn before continuing. “I’ve read that in the last moments of the world, there will be a blast of light like a hundred super-novas.”

“You talk like a book, Paganel,” laughed the madam.

The old man looked at the stars, and then at the satellite hanging in the azure sky. “Our twin planets are dying, this much is certain. There are only 10 kinds of people – those who understand our binary system, and those who don’t.” He laughed at his small joke and looked at the young people, who returned his stare blankly. He drew his cloak around his shoulders. “I’m getting cold. Let us sleep. We’ll need what’s left of our strength for the journey tomorrow.”

The archer and the woman nodded before moving further from the fire, igniting a flame of their own.

Sunrise - The Last Day

The Archer and the madam awoke to the smell of meat frying over a maple wood fire.

“That smells heavenly,” said the madam, shooing her auburn hair from her face. She arranged her blouse and skirt before stepping out of the embrace of the sluggish warrior. He began to wake only after she was eating beside the campfire.

“I walked to the top of the ridge while you slept, and the Pond of Light is there, in the next valley.

“Then the world is saved!” announced the archer, finally standing. “I will shoot my flaming arrow into the sacred pond and re-ignite the oil and the Sun shall blaze up once again.”

The wizard merely shrugged, as though tired of the cycle of life and death and life again.

The pale sun was peaking over the edge of the furthest mountains when they finally crested the ridge and looked upon the Pond of Light. It was as the wizard had told them: the flame had been completely extinguished.

The sorcerer pointed towards small thatched huts in the valley. “There is a village surrounding the lake. If we set fire to the oil in the lake, the houses will burn to the ground.”

The archer took out his bow and quiver. “Better they should die than the entire world cease. Let the glory of the mighty be built upon the ashes of the weak!” He drew an arrow from his quiver and set it to flaming with a match, but the old magician touched his arm before he could raise the bow.

He looked at the hero before him, as though for the first time. “There was a period in my life when I would have agreed with you, my friend. But it seems to me now that their lives are just as valuable as my own. Perhaps it is time for me to leave and my descendents to take my place.”

The wizard drew a knife from within his robes, its metallic blade shining in the early morning light.

“Don't do this...” the woman shouted, but her screams were cut short as the laserblade eviscerated the old man. The archer and the madam fell dead as well.

Inside the city, the medical technicians looked away from the window overseeing the orbital's river and valleys. “The avatars have died,” the youngest one told the other. They looked at the body of the ancient man inside the crystal coffin. The feeding tubes were beginning to pull away from the frail flesh.

Inside the mind of the great man, the outer edges of the galaxy were beginning to disappear, then the Oort Cloud, next the gas giant planets, till the mind came to rest upon the one small coffin inside a Bernal Sphere Orbital circling Titan. Suddenly there was a burst of light inside the mind, brighter than the illumination of one hundred exploding super novae.

“It was a good death,” the older doctor said. “A hero's death. I'll need to remember this Avatar Fantasy Scenario when it is time for my passing.” Before the foggy solution began to dissolve the body, the doctor noticed the ancient man had died smiling.

The End