



So, Divine Emperor, your humble servant has arrived at the end this tale! Cities have burned to the ground, kings have been made and broken, beggars have become magnates and merchants reduced to alms and an Empire has been made. So it was that the Jade Throne was forged in the blood of your Divine ancestors and set upon the Dais of the Four Cardinal Winds, from where You and Yours now rule. Let all who set eyes upon this marvel weep! Let all the Court bow as your most humble of servants, Minister of the Histories, Memory of the Emperor ends the tale of the Young Kingdoms now long gone, the War of Two Brothers and, now, at the end of all things,

the fate of Shin, Lord of the East Wind, grandfather to the Divine Emperor Li, Ruler of the Jade Kingdoms, Primus Magnate of the Wu-jen Lords.



At dawn, on the morning after Iwo-tae, which men now remember as the Last Battle, Shin stood and saw what his twin sons had done. Shin, Wise Master of Enoe, Author of the Three Books of the Celestial Way, and Spiritsmith of Lae, the Sword of the Morning, knelt before the red hills and wept. All day and all night he wept. And on the second morning he stood and walked into the East. So quiet was he, so swift of

spirit, that no one noticed his passing. Sun Ya and Kao Shan, having both retreated to their camps to plot further violence on each other, did not notice their father had gone for two days. Only when both called for him and he did not appear, did they worry. That dusk, they met by the Serpent Tree one last time. Both suspected the other had taken Shin for himself, but both knew the wisdom of the Elder Shin could not be contained by violence. So they met and all courtesy was broken and blood was almost spilt between them again. But Shin had gone and none knew where. In the coming weeks, they were to find their sister and her scrolls gone as well. And so, for sixty years, no one has seen either Shin or Yui. Some say he walked east with her and found the Door of the Sun into the Nurava, others say he became an ant to forget



his grief and still others say Yui lives with him in the vast barbarian forests beyond the eastern wastes.

But a story is told among the eastern peasants. A story told only in whispers. I, Tai Ming, have traveled as far as Muenas of the Falls, near the Cauldron City, and talked to old man and child and mistress alike and they tell this tale:

One morning on that long-ago winter of fate, when the sun was not yet ascended to the utmost heights, an old man and a young woman walked out of the bamboo forest and down the trade road near Muenas. He was old and white-haired yet lithe as a willow in spring; she (so beautiful that the



peasants stopped their work and wept tears) was clad in armor. The peasants say that as the two walked quietly down the highway, the cherry blossoms sprung into bloom and rained around them! So say all the people of Muenas. And should you buy an old man or two more rice



beer than the Texts say is healthy, they add one other detail.

As the old man and the armored girl walked beyond the village, they passed an old village man sitting dumbly on a stump by the side of the road. As they walked by, he looked up and asked,

"Leaving with your house in order, traveler?" To which the old man said - and this is attested by several farmers who were children then-"Many suns will rise and fall before anyone's house is in order. Let not the Hawk spin riddles at the Dove. Go back to where you came and leave us be. We must meditate. My daughter awaits the Blood of the Drake and I must forge yet more marvels. Leave us be, Lord of Things Unseen, leave us be. The Sword of the Morning will be claimed and One will be born whose blood will be fit for my daughter. He will shine white as the full moon and, in time, come to know my secret." And, shaking his head, walked on.



None live who understand this.

Strangely, no one can remember who the old man on the stump was.

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