



Bloody Fingers: Book of Prologues

Chapter 4- Yorn

D&D based novel by R Jon Matrim from the Echoing Worlds series.

Bloody Fingers Trilogy book #1: Book of Prologues

Chapter Four: Yorn

Location: Western Cays of Laramidia

Year: 0

The young barbarian was completely still, pressing his back into the dune behind him- the wet mud and sand smeared across his body blending with the ground behind and beneath him. He ignored the itch and cramp and simply crouched- sand pulled up around his knees to help hide him. The sand hare he had snared overnight was barely moving now. Being staked under the hot sun had sapped the strength and will of the skinny rabbit. The evening tide was coming in and the waves had reached within a man's armlength of the little animal. Very soon, Yorn knew he would have to give up. The rabbit's fur had been coated with blood, and the salt water would wash that away. The dying animal didn't have the strength to survive being moved again. Yorn would deserve the ridicule if he returned to camp with barely enough meat to feed himself. It would be the third time this moon cycle that he had failed.

A quick shadow along the wave break caught his attention. Yorn glanced upward and behind him to check for birds, moving his head as little as possible. He saw nothing that would have caused the shadow. Perhaps the Red had rewarded his patience and finally called a small lizard to the bait. Yorn tightened his grip on the rope in his left hand, a rope that had been wrapped and tied around his forearm. He flexed his toes underneath the sand, trying to restore some blood flow to his legs. And then he remained still, keeping his breath slow and steady. He refused to let his breath match his quickened heartbeat and for a moment, his vision darkened. Soon, however, his heart fell back into rhythm with his slow breathing, and he waited.

The shadow appeared at the break two more times, but just as quickly it would fade off again into deeper water. It moved very quickly, too quickly, and Yorn could feel disappointment taking hold of him. Lizards were very fast underwater, but they didn't change direction that easily. It was likely a big predator fish, hunting at the break. The sand hare squealed weakly, and Yorn focused on it. The last wave had reached it, the cold water was waking the animal from death's grip and

causing it to struggle against the snare once again. The frantic movement of the rabbit plus the shifting of the wet sand pulled the snare tight. Yorn had anchored it against the palm stump with a sharp stick. As the next wave hit the rabbit and the animal was swept onto its side. It struggled in the water. A desperate kick hit the taut line, and the impact pulled the anchor free. The retreating water pulled the frightened rabbit with it, and the shocked bunny gave in to its fate. The water kept pulling, dragging the animal further. The dirty seafoam collected around its body, hiding the rabbit much like the barbarian had blended into the sand.

Yorn moved quickly, pulling himself forward out of his half-buried position- using all fours to ensure his numb legs didn't falter. He moved towards the soaked rabbit like an animal himself, crouched and almost crawling, his head low and his ass lifted high. If the bunny slipped below the water and was lost to the undertow, Yorn would be shamed for losing the snare. Failing to feed the tribe was embarrassing; but losing a tool was a true crime for any Anishinaabe hunter.

Yorn was almost within reach when the shadow again caught his eye. This time, the dark spot was directly out from his face, and it was becoming much larger. A mottled green fin broke the water first, followed immediately by an open fanged mouth with far too many teeth. It was a giant eel! Likely as fat as a grown man's leg and its head had easily lifted an arm's length above the water with the rabbit in its mouth. Yorn's feet slipped as he tried to throw himself backward. He had raised his arms above his head and arched his back to try and stop his momentum, but with his feet slipping it just put him into a slide. His forward motion finally stopped with his feet in the water on either side of the eel's head, the rabbit's blood splattering his legs as the eel bit down and shook from side to side.

Yorn scrambled backward like a crab, trying to create distance from the monster but his feet kept slipping. He was making more progress kicking sand in the moray's direction than actually escaping. The eel crunched down on what was left of the rabbit once again and shook its head violently- throwing more blood and gore over the barbarian's lower half. Yorn's right hand pushed down into the wet sand, and he felt the rope noose that had been buried under the rabbit's position. The trap had been ready to ensnare the legs of any unlucky water lizard if one had taken the bait. Yorn was quite fond of snare traps.

The eel finished swallowing the last bit of rabbit and then pushed its head forward and low. It bit at Yorn's left foot. With more reaction than thought- he swung down towards the eel's lowered head with his right hand still holding the rope. The rope slapped across the eel's face and the monster reared back up again, the noose falling down its serpentine body until it tangled on the large dorsal fin.

Yorn continued to crab backwards, finally creating some room between himself and the eel- which was thrashing in the water as it turned to dive back into the next wave. The barbarian's breath was frantic, heaving gasps of air as he flipped over and started to run away from the water. After maybe fifteen steps he slowed and turned back towards the ocean, no longer seeing the eel. What he did see was the rope being pulled into the surf. A rope that was still wrapped

and tied around his left forearm. A rope that had just run out of slack...

The impact yanked Yorn from his feet and threw him back into the sand. He was now being pulled towards the water headfirst, his left arm leading the way as his face trenched in the sand. It was all just too much. Yorn began to rage!

His anger filled him with heat and pushed down any feelings of pain or fear. He smashed into the palm stump. His shoulder made a loud popping sound as his body stopped, but the Red didn't allow the pain to register. Yorn wrapped his good right arm around the short trunk and pulled his body into a sitting position, so he was straddling the side away from the water. Another hard pull on the rope yanked his deadened left arm down hard, jamming the muscle on the back of his upper arm into a sharp spike of wood. Yorn saw blood, but the rage still kept everything at a distance. Yorn knew pain was there, but he did not have to answer to it!

Yorn reached out with his good right arm and gripped the rope. He wedged his legs up against the base of the stump and gained some leverage to pull. He screamed in fury as he strained, extending his legs and leaning back- regaining rope. He squatted back down quickly, lessening the pull on his left arm for a breath. That quick movement allowed him to grasp the rope with both hands. His left arm was numb, bleeding, and weakened- but it still moved as he wanted. Yorn pulled again using his legs. This time, his arms coiled the rope he had gained around the palm stump. This helped anchor the rope, giving the barbarian time to breathe and think as the Red haze faded from his vision. The big eel would thrash and pull for a time, during which Yorn simply worked to hold steady. When the eel would quiet to rest, Yorn would again pull it towards the shore. It took time to finish, but the battle had been over the moment Yorn first wrapped the rope around the stub of the broken palm tree. Yorn pulled the large creature up onto the sand and watched as it gasped and died out of the water. It was longer than the barbarian was tall, and likely weighed as much as a large man.

Yorn felt the pain come back to the surface of his mind. His left arm hung awkwardly at the shoulder, and from the elbow down he only felt a burning. He cleaned his cut arm in the saltwater, wrapped it with cloth, then used part of the rope to tie his injured arm tight to his chest. He looked at the long carcass and sighed. The blood of a moray would make him very sick, so he couldn't drink after the ordeal. But its meat could be eaten if it was cooked. The eel could feed the entire tribe for a few days. Yorn took more of the rope and carefully wrapped the eel's head to cover the fanged teeth. If the teeth cut him, the wound would quickly become infected. Festering had killed many of the Anishinaabe hunters.

Gulls had already massed on the shore, fighting over the rabbit bits that had been flung by the eel's thrashing. The blood of a gull could be taken, but the taste was horrible. Yorn would wait and drink when he got to his lizard. He had left it on the marsh side of the dunes, where it likely would be hunting for fish and snakes.

Yorn cut the eel's flesh into long thin strips, placing those into two greased leather sacks that

contained salt and dried herbs. He wasn't able to take all the meat as there was just too much to carry, but he filled both sacks. He worked quickly, as he still needed to gather wood and build a fire before night covered everything with darkness. He expected a mostly round moon tonight, so that would help with visibility- but gathering wood from the mangroves with even a little daylight would make it all much easier. He packed his ropes and tools into his carry sack, and then using his right arm and his legs, he lifted the heavy bags of meat onto his good shoulder and began to walk north along the beach. He wanted to get some distance from the feeding birds and the moray's remains, to better avoid predators during the night.

He walked along the dunes until he found a small cove with a large growth of Sea Grape. The clusters of round fruit were a purplish red color in the dying light and eating them helped with Yorn's thirst even though they were still a bit tart and acidic. He spit the seeds into his hand to be saved. He would dry them and later try to plant them into a new area. The chance they would grow was probably small, but any opportunity to help the Green was always still required of the Anishinaabe. Before the world drowned, his people had lived along a great lake filled with cold drinkable water and red forests of Sweet Trees. They were followers of the Green then, trying to live in harmony with nature. They fished and hunted, planted, and lived in great heavy homes made of wood and stone. And then the oceans lifted, and survivors were either forced into the shrinking highlands or they had to hide underground in the great dark caverns of the earth- closing the access tunnels after themselves to stop the salty waters from filling those black empty spaces. The ever-dwindling number of survivors had to constantly fight to survive, and out of necessity the Anishinaabe embraced the ways of the Red. But the Elders always told stories which promised their children that seeds from the Green were hidden deep in the hearts of the Anishinaabe. And those seeds were just waiting to bloom once again when the world's anger had faded away.

Yorn tried to remember those stories of hope as he gathered fallen wood to feed his firepit. He found some fallen branches among the Sea Grapes, which would produce a salty sweet smoke and would be great for flavor. He also gathered wood from the nearby mangroves. That type of wood burned slower and usually smelled a bit dirty, but if he used it carefully it shouldn't overwhelm the taste.

Yorn unbraided a small section of rope into smaller strings, which he then used to tie together branches and formed a smoking rack above his firepit. It was dark when he finished. But the low light was actually helpful as he worked a bow drill. He smelled the spindle start to smoke and then he could see a soft red glow as the ember started to form in the punk. The moment of ignition was made more dramatic, as the tiny flame struggled until Yorn fed it dry grass. The fire ate the grass quicky and grew larger. It was now stronger and hungrier. The yellow flame eating into the wood; growing and consuming until its light and warmth enveloped the young barbarian. Yorn extended his hands, soaking that warmth into his fingers and feeling it move softly across his face. There was something so primal and so pleasurable about the first few moments of firelight. His people referred to that feeling as the Hunter's Embrace. A moment filled with peace and pleasure and safety. It was something that was difficult to explain until it was experienced.

Yorn sat by the fire throughout the night. Feeding it branches and watching the smoke gently swirl around the strips of fish he had placed onto the drying rack. The wind had changed with the darkness, and the cool air rode in on the waves and crossed the sand- seeking the warmth of the land. Yorn was at peace. The sweet earthy smoke in his nose. The cool breeze at his back. The warmth of the fire kissed his face and chest. The moonlight shone on both the water and the dunes- giving everything a clean silvery glow. The big barbarian breathed in and out slowly and deeply. He ate to fill his belly while the breathing technique filled his soul. As he sat, he tried to whistle a soft tune. With the sound of the waves and the crackling of the flames, the extra noise wouldn't matter and Yorn felt like whistling- if he could just stop his lips from smiling!

Yorn had walked for only a short time at dawn before his lizard found him. He hung his bags as evenly as possible over the huge reptile's back and then mounted. He rode at a fast pace, and they moved quickly over the remaining dunes and mangroves before wading into the salt marsh. The young man shifted his mount on the great sea lizard, bring his upper body down low onto the shoulders and neck of the animal. This position made it easier for the lizard to move through the water by lowering the man's center of gravity. The lizard was more than the length of two tall men, and its movement in the dark water was primarily driven by its thick tail- but at speed its entire body swayed back and forth. The serpentine motion combined with the low waves of the marsh made the young man's head spin and his stomach clench. He hated riding through the water, but it was the fastest way to move through the sawgrass wetlands and it was important to get the meat to his people as quickly as possible. Smoking it overnight had helped to preserve it, but it would be salted and smoked fully once he returned to turn the dried strips into jerky. Thinking of food made his stomach clench again, and he vomited down the side of the lizard into the water. The vomit was red from the lizard blood he had sapped to quench his thirst. He had only taken a little, as he needed the lizard at strength to carry him and the two packs of dried fish quickly. The reptile's tongue flicked out of its mouth on the same side as the vomit, smelling the blood and slowing. Yorn felt embarrassed to have wasted the red, and he stretched his hand up the lizard's neck in apology. The animal recognized the blood as its own and disregarded it. A sharp hiss was released, further shaming Yorn for his weakness.

Yorn raised his head to check the dark line where the grasses of the marsh met the twisted dead trees of the swamp. They were almost there. He also swiveled his head to check for movement in the water behind and to the side of them. It was unlikely there would be another lizard as large as his mount in this water, but the Red could be a cruel god- often finding joy in misery. Yorn was eager to reach the swamp. The desiccated trees with tangled branches and roots made riding next to impossible. He would need to dismount and climb his way through on his own, which would slow him down but should settle his stomach. Snakes were common in the swamps, but if he stayed near his lizard they would not be a problem. The only real dangers he might encounter would be tentacled fungus and possibly other hunters, both human and Orc. The reach of the fungus bogs kept spreading each season, so hunters from different tribes were being crowded

into ever shrinking areas.

Yorn reached the edge of the marsh, and the lizard climbed partially onto a fallen tree. That gave Yorn a moment to slide off into the waist deep water. He slapped his hand to the lizard's neck to hold it in place, and then he retied the two sacks of eel meat- carefully securing them in a line at the base of the lizard's neck so they wouldn't impair the reptile's ability to snake through the tangles. It was a struggle holding and tying them with just one arm so he undid the binding holding his injured arm against his chest and managed to secure the knots. His arm tingled and burned, but it was still usable. He gave another quick slap to the lizard's neck to release it, and the big animal began moving forward again. It moved at a slower pace now that it was in the swamp, climbing as much as swimming. The lizard was still quick though, and Yorn had to work hard to try and stay within reach. At one point, the barbarian's foot slipped on a slick root and his weakened arm couldn't hold him in place. One leg dropped into thick mud below the tangle and stopped his progress. He tried to slap at the lizard but missed as it pendulated away from him. The reptile continued moving away as Yorn struggled to free his leg.

He cursed quietly. If the lizard got too far from him, it would eventually start circling to hunt- but once it was out of sight it would be hard to track in the swamp. As the great lizard climbed over another mass of twisted roots, however, it did stop. Its head lifted, and the forked tongue flicked out repeatedly. Its head rotated slowly back and forth, tasting the thick air. The lizard's big body tensed as it bellowed a deep rumbling croak. Yorn could see the vibrations it was making in the water. He pulled his leg from the mud and scrambled forward. He reached the lizard and placed his palm against its neck. It hissed in response, its head still moving slowly in an arc. The tongue flicking out quickly and repeatedly.

Yorn was confused. The great lizards had poor eyesight and a limited sense of smell. The one exception was the stench of blood and death, which they could track over great distances. When hunting, they simply relied on their size to flush prey near them and then used their speed to overtake it. Wild lizards would also happily feast on carrion, but those trained to be mounts were never fed anything that wasn't living. A lizard mount that hungered for dead meat could never be trusted to carry a hunter's harvest.

The great lizard hissed and rumbled again, its back arching as its forelegs pushed up and down in rhythm. Its strong tail thrashed behind Yorn, foaming the dirty water. Yorn rode this big lizard often. He had never seen it this agitated. The barbarian lifted himself out of the water onto a branch, bracing himself against the trembling lizard's body. He looked around, but the motion of the lizard made it hard to focus. He didn't smell anything. He also didn't hear anything other than hissing. The lizard pulled its head to the side, looking at Yorn with one eye- still waiting for its rider but not happy about it. Yorn climbed onto the animal and lowered himself into a somewhat mounted position, his body just behind the two bags of meat. He said a quiet prayer to the Red and slapped the reptile on its shoulder.

The great lizard launched itself into the dirty water, submerging from the dive and sliding along

the bottom for what seemed a very long time to the surprised rider. It seemed to have an easier time navigating below the water, as its body twisted and writhed around the trees and roots. The barbarian could see none of this. This water burned at his skin, and his eyes were squeezed closed to protect them. He merely held on to the ropes he'd used to secure the bags and hoped the lizard would come up for air. Something long and slimy slid across his face and body as they swam, but other than some intense stress he made it through unscathed. The big lizard came out of the water only as it climbed over fallen trees that blocked its way, but those moments did give the man a chance to breath. The pace was frantic, and eventually the water became too shallow for true swimming. The lizard kept moving in a sort of serpentine slide through the mud. The twisted skeletons of the trees thinned out and then stopped entirely as the great lizard raced into a bog. The thick rancid mud bubbled in places, and the stench of rot and decay overwhelmed everything else. The lizard was still sliding across the muck on its belly- but kept very quickly.

Yorn cursed silently at himself for allowing the lizard to move without any guidance. The dead bogs belonged to the fungus now, as those abominations were the only thing that could thrive in the poisoned mud. Even the giant toads had moved to new areas. The stinging tentacles of the mutant plant were too much for even those behemoths. But it was too late to change course now. Any action from Yorn would likely stop the lizard or at least slow it down as it tried to figure out what he wanted. Slowing here would be certain death. Yorn looked behind them to see what seemed like thick vines churning in the mud. The tentacles were feeling for the creature that had disturbed them, but the lizard had slid by so quickly they could only entangle themselves. The oblivious lizard soon crossed the edge of the bog and pulled itself up onto the adjacent grassland to continue running. Yorn knew that few would believe this story, and a choked laugh escaped his lips as his eyes watered. He blamed the wetness on the acrid stench, but he also knew that few would believe that either.

Several winters past the fungus had first come to the cays. An Anishinaabe hunter had brought a tentacle to the camp. It resembled a water snake, mottled dark skin with grey and purple splotches. It had long thorn-like hairs that grew out from the thick vine, and if you flicked a thorn the tentacle would twitch and spasm. A woman had tried to cut into the vine thinking it had gone into the Black, but it jumped when cut and wrapped itself around her arm. The thorns injected a numbing poison that caused her body to stiffen and lock into place. Soon after, her tongue had swollen, and it had to be cut from her mouth as she was rolled onto her side trying to find breath. Her eyes were the only thing she could move and she spasmed from the terror. And then blood filled her eyes... And then blood leaked from her nose and ears... And then her tortured gasping stopped...

Yorn had gone to the place where the hunter had harvested the tentacle. There, he had seen the sickening vines wrapped around a big boar who had tried to wallow in that mud. The tentacles pulled its body to a central point in the bog where a funnel-like abscess opened and then slowly closed over the quivering pig, coating it with a thick mucus that made the flesh steam and start to quiver. Yorn came by daily after that and watched as the abscess seemed to darken and rot over time- causing many of the tentacles to also blacken and die. However, as the first pod sickened,

another abscess seemed to grow out from it- expanding even larger and adding its own growth of thick tentacles. The new tentacles twisted and churned the acids released from this process with the surrounding land, stirring and thickening the mud and growing the bog larger. The muck poisoned the healthy grasses along its edges until they too died and were made part of the disgusting morass. It was slow. It was terrifying. It was inevitable.

Over the next two seasons the bogs grew and multiplied, taking over more and more of the wetlands. Fire did nothing to slow them, as the wet muck refused to burn. The ocean blue could wash them away, but that only happened along the edges of the cays or when a churning storm would lift huge waves that could lash out over the small islands. Yorn had once seen lightning strike down into a bog and that killed everything, but the mud soon hardened into a dark scab, and nothing seemed to grow back thereafter. All Green had simply been taken from that place. Yorn believed in his heart that the fungus would eventually slaughter all the cays, and that anything still wishing to live would have to travel the Blue in search of a new home or to try and journey north into the Fey's Teeth. But that time had not yet come. The Anishinaabe avoided the growing bogs and lived as best they could- hunting, eating, fighting, sleeping, loving, and dying. Most hunters just went looking further into the swamps for prey. Yorn, however, went through the swamps to the southeast, and he now trapped at the very edge of the Blue.

As Yorn and his mount progressed over the final meadow, the great lizard finally started to slow. Moving without water was more difficult, especially with the added weight of the bags of meat- easily the weight of another small man. Yorn slapped its shoulder and dismounted as it stopped. Standing and then stretching his cramped muscles, the barbarian scrunched his face at the smell of the drying mud. The great lizard was still aggressively moving its body up and down. Its tongue desperately flicking the air in the same direction as home. Whatever was agitating the beast still lay ahead of them. Wanting to give it time to rest, Yorn used handfuls of sand and grass to try and clean the dried mud from their bodies. He finally switched to an edged stone to scrape it away, being extremely careful not to draw any blood. He took his time, but there was only so long he could delay, and the anxious reptile kept hissing in anticipation. Yorn hung a rope over the lizard's thick neck so it would know to stay close to him, and then let it lead the way as he walked just behind it. Of course, it was still moving in the direction of the tribe.

With most of the rancid mud gone, Yorn could smell smoke in the air. He was still too far away from the camp to smell the cooking fires, and he didn't see any plumes of smoke in the sky- but he knew something in the area had burned recently. Perhaps a lightning strike hit yesterday or the day before, although he hadn't noticed any storm clouds. The thought of a fire made him uneasy, as it would to anyone who lived on the meadows. Perhaps the smoke was upsetting his mount, although it normally didn't react this strongly to fire since it was raised around humans. Even the wild lizards lived primarily in the marshes and along the shorelines of the Blue, so fire didn't spread easily in those areas. Smoke just wasn't a threat any of the reptiles normally recognized.

Sunlight just started to diminish in the sky in front of him, but there were still at least fifteen

thousand steps to go before home. The lizard had moved much faster than Yorn had believed possible through the wetlands, and instead of having to stop again for the night- they would make it home in about two more hours. It would have been safer to travel during the day, but they were too close to stop now.

It was frustrating for both of them. Yorn walked slower in the dark, trying to watch the ground in front of him for any hazards. The anxious lizard kept pulling ahead and Yorn was forced to slap it and stop him each time. Then, he'd restart the reptile behind him again. Eventually, the lizard stayed at the slower pace, only occasionally nudging the barbarian's back to try and hurry him. Yorn was being careful, so progress was slow- but they still kept moving.

As they neared the camp, the smell of ash was stronger, and a mixture of fog and smoke slithered in slow wisps across the ground- glowing eerily in the moonlight. Yorn's heart beat very quickly! His stomach clenched with anxiety. His mouth and throat were very dry, but his palms were wet. The Anishinaabe were a quiet people. Being so had helped them survive for generations. But Yorn should have heard something... Heard anything by now...

The great lizard suddenly leapt forward, and his rope was yanked from Yorn's grip. The beast dashed ahead into the thick smog before Yorn could touch it and it disappeared from his view. Yorn stood very still, listening. There was still nothing. No surprised voices that the lizard had returned without its rider. There were no sounds of life at all. The fog ahead was lit with a flickering red light.

Yorn dropped into a crouch and pulled a second noosed rope from where it had been wound around his chest. He wrapped that rope tightly around his left arm, leaving the noosed end hanging from his hand. He then put his edged stone back into his right hand. He crept forward, staying very low and moving with the quiet of an experienced hunter. And then he found the first body.

An older man was twisted in a heap on the ground. His throat had been cut, and there was a hole cut into his chest. It was an honorable kill. His blood and heart had been harvested. His killer believed the man's Red was worthy to be taken and consumed. The old man had died fighting and thus had earned the respect of his killer.

The second body was a child. Emaciated and sickly, it was a boy that had been born weak and had suffered greatly. The weak ate last when food was scarce. Over this last season the weakest ones had not eaten often, which only made them weaker. The boy's face had been crushed to a pulp and his blood was not drained, so he was likely hiding or running when he was killed.

A woman who had been thick with her own unborn child was next. A leather sling and an edged stone had been placed near her hands. Her neck was pierced, and her heart had been taken. Her child had been cut from her womb and laid at her breast. The baby's neck has also been opened, and its chest had a hole. Two massive green skinned men were laid below her feet. Thick cords of

muscle defined their chest, shoulders, arms and legs. They each had a pair of long curved teeth that extended out of their mouths like a boar. And dark tattoos marked their faces and necks. They were Orc raiders, and the woman had killed them before she died. The way her body was displayed showed that she was truly honored by her killers. They had even believed her unborn child was worthy of their respect and consumption.

Yorn found his breath coming in gasps as he struggled to stay standing, looking down at his dead woman and child! Yorn screamed out in anguish, a long animal-like cry broken into parts by his involuntary gasps... And then Yorn began to sing his people's Song of the Dead. He sang the anthem loudly, and with great pride- hoping his voice reached them in the Black.

And so it went over and over. Seventy-two corpses in all. Nine of the bodies were orcs, those were laid at the feet of the person who had killed them. Most of the Anishinaabe had been deemed worthy and treated with respect after death. Even a few of the children had been honored. The orcs who raided the village must have been bloated like ticks as they left. It was an end his tribe would have sung for; having embraced the Red fearlessly until the moment the Black took them. Yorn took time to look at each body. To interpret each visual story that had been left by the orcs. He sang the song over and over, still singing as his voice cracked and wavered. He still looked at the bodies even when his eyes were blurred by tears. He wanted his people to be remembered. He wanted to honor the Anishinaabe.

Near the end, Yorn realized his lizard had started following him. Its tongue flicked out over the bodies, as if the big lizard was doing its part to taste and remember them as well. The great beast waited when Yorn sifted through what was left of their burned lodges, finding nothing of worth until he searched his own home. There, he found a short flute he had carved from some type of ivory or bone that had washed up onto the dunes. The fire had not been given time to consume it. The orcs had likely thrown sand onto the flames once the wooden lodges were damaged beyond repair, to try and keep the fire from spreading into the meadows. The unique material of the flute had kept it safe. Yorn took his ropes and wrapped them around his chest again, this time braiding the flute into the rolled ropes.

The last of the Anishinaabe walked slowly from his home into the night. He was followed closely by a great lizard. As Yorn walked, he tried to whistle the dirge he had been singing. The extra noise no longer mattered and Yorn felt like whistling- if he could just stop his lips from shaking...