



Long ago on the edge of the world, between the blue sea and the outer darkness was a great empire called Lul-kismar. The land was beautiful and bountiful and the people were peaceful and prosperous and filled with magic. All worshiped their Emperor, Ayay-nehu, who was the direct descendant of Ehehsus-tetas-tetenaiai, he who placed the Sun, Moon, and Star in the sky. Anything that Ayay-nehu commanded would be done. His word was law, and his law was wise.

At every rising of the sun, Ayay-nehu would stand on his dais and people would come to him. Those with disputes would come to him because he was just. Those with troubles would come to him because he was wise, and those with sorrows would come to him because he had sympathy.

Because Lul-kismar was on the very edge of the world, the Moon passed near overhead once for each of its turnings. One night while Ayay-nehu stood on the roof of his palace regarding the Moon which filled the sky and obscured the Star, he said to himself, "Who is the Father of my grandfather's grandfather? Am I not the son of the Creator? Am I not like Him in wisdom and in compassion and in greatness? Do not the people of the Lul worship me?"

He stretched his hand upward, and imagined himself caressing the face of the Moon. "But I do not create." said Ayay-nehu to himself. "Perhaps if I could touch the greatest and most beautiful of the creations of the Father of my grandfather's grandfather, perhaps I would learn how it was made. Perhaps if I touched the Moon, I would acquire the power of Ehehsus-tetas-tetenaiai."

Ayay-nehu kept these thoughts in his mind for a full turning of the Moon, but

on a day when the Moon was large in the sky, Ayay-nehu called his advisers, and said to them, "Find the best designers and builders in the Lul, and bring them to me. My will is to build a tower that reaches to the sky. My will is to build a tower that touches the Moon. Make my will into action."

His advisers spoke among themselves, wondering why their Emperor would ask for such a thing, for his palace was already the largest and most beautiful building in the known world. But hearing his word and knowing his will, they obeyed, and sought far and wide for skilled architects.

One by one, the most talented architects came before Ayay-nehu and presented to him their plans for his tower.

"I can build you a tower nine times the height of the highest spire of your palace." Said one. But Ayay-nehu frowned. Such a tower would bring him no closer to the Moon.

"I can build you a tower which will rival the highest mountains" said another. But Ayay-nehu shook his head in sadness. If one could touch the Moon from a mountaintop, touching the Moon would be no feat at all.

"I can build you a tower higher than birds can fly." said another. But this did not satisfy the Emperor. A tower that stretched above the reach of mortal wings would be impressive, but would it be tall enough?

At last a young architect named Didi-un was brought before Ayay-nehu.

"I can build you a Tower to the heavens." said Didi-un. "It will leave behind the mountains and the clouds, and the Sun, Moon, and Star will be its peers. From its top you will see the whole of the sunlit world, and all the people of the world in every land and in every place will see it from afar and know that Lul-kismar is the greatest empire in the world, and that the Emperor of the Lul is the mightiest ruler under the sky."

Ayay-nehu smiled, for this is what he desired. He embraced Didi-un, and offered him riches beyond measure.

"There is more you must know." said Didi-un. "The foundation of this Tower must be broader by three than any city every built. Every able hand in the Lul must be employed to raise it."

"It is my will, and it will be done." said Ayay-nehu.

"This Tower will need bones stronger than stone." said Didi-un. "Metal must be mined and refined, more metal than has ever been worked in the Lul."

"It is my will, and it will be done." said Ayay-nehu.

"This Tower will not stand without the aid of magic." said Didi-un. "A chorus of magickers must toil night and day to calm the winds and suppress the storms and weaken the pull of the Force of Falling. Their song and dance must continue ceaselessly for as long as the Tower is to stand."

"It is my will, and it also will be done." said Ayay-nehu.

So the flat plain between the mountains and the capital city of Lul-kismar was

chosen for the foundation of the Tower, and from all across the Lul, every able bodied man, and every strong-handed woman was summoned to the building. Only the young and the old and the infirm remained behind. Many great forges and quarries were built. Metal and perfect stone were carved from beneath the mountains. Skilled magic-users were summoned to devise the spells that would be needed to protect the Tower from the elements and exempt it from the Forces.

And Ayay-nehu watched with pleasure from the heights of his palace as the shadow of the foundation took shape on the plain.

Still, at every rising of the sun, Ayay-nehu would wait on his dais and people would come to him with disputes and troubles and sorrows, but there were not so many as before, because all the empire was busy making his will into action.

The people of the Lul toiled, and the foundations sank into the earth and the Tower rose into the sky. Stone upon stone, pillar upon pillar, lever and pylon, marble like ice, mortar like water. The whole valley around the capitol was filled with the tents of the workers, a sea of humanity. Every other city of the Lul was emptied.

One of the Emperor's advisers came before him carrying warning. "The whole strength of the Lul is here with us. Who will feed them? The fields are being sewn by the children. The plows that till the earth must be pulled by dogs, for all the oxen toil in the quarries."

Ayay-nehu was unconcerned. "Our fields are fertile." he said. "Even children and dogs may raise up a crop from them."

The people toiled long and hard, from the rising of the sun to the setting. And the children toiled in the fields to feed their parents. Life was hardship, but the people were strong, and their souls grew hard like roots seared by flame. There was no word of complaint spoken, for they knew their Emperor was wise, and they were in awe of the greatness of the Tower they were building with their own hands.

At each rising of the sun, people would come before Ayay-nehu with their disputes and their troubles. But they no longer brought him their sorrows.

One day when the shadow of the Tower stretched across the whole of the empire, Didi-un presented himself to Ayay-nehu with a trouble.

"My Emperor. We have mined all the metal from the mountains. We can delve no deeper. The bones of the mountains have been sacrificed to build the bones of the Tower. We cannot continue, or the mountains will fall in upon themselves. There are other mountains, and other mines, but the Tower demands more, so much more. There is not sufficient metal in the Lul"

Ayay-nehu was gravely concerned. He called together his advisers and they discussed the trouble.

"The savage nations across the sea are rich in metal." said one adviser.

"Metal is like stones to them. It lies openly on the bare earth. They have so much metal that they cast it into blades which they use to wage war upon one another."

The Emperor pondered this. "Then we will take what metal we have, and we shall forge blades of our own, and sail across the sea and seize their metal."

"To take by force with blade and strong arm?" asked another adviser, "Would this not make us savages like them?"

Ayay-nehu rebuked the adviser and relieved him of his office, saying "We will melt the blades of the savages, so that they will never again be used for killing. It is our right to be the keepers of the metal, for we are a peaceful people who do not fight or hate."

And so for a time the work on the Tower was halted, and blades were forged, and ships were built, and Ayay-nehu watched with pleasure as a vast fleet sailed away across the sea toward the savage lands in the center of the world. That night Ayay-nehu celebrated, saying to himself, "I am bringing peace to the world!"

And at each rising of the sun, people would come to Ayay-nehu to settle their disputes, but they brought neither troubles nor sorrows to his attention.

In only eight turnings of the Moon, the fleet returned, laden with metal and tales of victory. The savage blades were melted, and the labor of the Tower was resumed. The fleet made many more passages across the sea, again and again collecting a tribute of metal from the humbled nations. The Tower rose high into the sky.

The winds challenged the Tower. The storms broke upon it like waves against a rock. But the magickers devised chants to calm the winds, and hold back the storms. A stone round was built in the heart of the Tower which slowly twisted moonwise, pushed by the hands of nine of nine of nine chanter. They turned it ceaselessly so that it never stopped moving, and when one chanter fell from exhaustion, another chanter would take his place to keep the stone turning, to keep the chant alive.

The turning stone amplified the magic, and from anywhere in the Tower the chant was audible. The winds were stilled, and the clouds in the sky parted and went around the Tower, daring not to touch it.

The Grand Magicer of the Towerchant went before the Emperor.

"Master, you are wise," he said, and bowed to the floor. "The chant lives, but it is too weak. It will not reach the top of the Tower, where its power is needed the most."

"What do you need to strengthen it?" said Ayay-nehu. "I will deny you nothing. Is nine of nine of nine chanters too few? Is the circumference of the turning stone too small?"

The Grand Magicer arched his hands in dissent. "No, no my master," said

he, "The stone needs to be no bigger. To truly bring the magic to the fullness of its life, it needs blood. One sacrifice on top of the turning stone for each turning of the Moon will amplify the power of the chant beyond what even nine of nine of nine of nine chanters could accomplish with words alone."

Ayay-nehu closed his eyes and thought long. One life was such a small price for so much magic. Only one life per moonturn, one life from so very many.

The first sacrifice was chosen by lottery, and the night her blood flowed down the stone, the voice of the chant rumbled through the whole of the Tower and beyond like thunder. The winds blew away from the Tower, and the waves on the shores of the sea changed direction as if fleeing the land. When the sun rose, the sky around the top of the Tower remained black instead of turning blue. Even the Force of Falling forsook the Tower, and those who climbed it felt their bodies grow light as breath.

The sun progressed across the sky, and Ayay-nehu stood alone on his dais. No-one came to him. He was well pleased, and laughed aloud with joy. "None come to me with disputes!" he exclaimed. "None come with troubles, None come with sorrows; For I have banished all evil from the Lul!"

The people of the Lul wept as they lifted stone upon stone, and the Tower rose so far up into the sky that the soil of the Lul seemed like only a memory. Across the sea, every nation in the world watched the black tentacle intruding into the heavens, and they trembled. The soul of Didi-un was chilled as he stood atop Tower, looking down at the setting sun and listening to the throbbing chant. He repented of his place in guiding the creation of the abomination to the sky, and longed to cast himself from the edge, but he knew not even the death of the architect could stop the Tower now. It would reach the Moon in but a few more seasons.

The day came when the capstone of the Tower was set. The haggard workers fled the Tower. All in Lul-kismar was silence except for the droning chant of the magickers and the grinding of their stone.

It took nine days for Ayay-nehu to climb to the summit. He stood upon the capstone with his advisers and with his sons and daughters and with Didi-un.

The Moon was near. The Moon filled the night sky. The Moon dwarfed the world below. The chant droned on. Ayay-nehu raised his hand toward the Moon and waited. There was hardly a breath among the watchers.

The Moon slid closer, the air parted at its passing. Light glistened from the silver mountains, the silver forests, silver oceans of the Moon, wrapped impossibly around its sphere in defiance of the Force of Falling. As it approached, the Moon became a world upside-down.

Ayay-nehu stretched his hand upward, upward as the silver mountains and valleys slid silently by. Even the chant seemed to hold its breath.

And the Moon came so close. So close, like the distance between faces of

lovers in conversation. The tips of Ayay-nehu's fingers tingled. He stretched. But he could not reach. A peak of the Moon whispered past by the breadth of a word.

Ayay-nehu screamed. It had passed! It had passed and he had not touched it! And the Moon was still there, the silver world filling the sky, but there would be no closer point. There would be no lower peak.

Ayay-nehu screamed, and the chant throbbed.

"It will come again!" said a son. "In three of nine turnings of the sun it will come again!"

Ayay-nehu stilled his voice and turned his eyes.

"We need only one more stone. It will come again." said the son.

Ayay-nehu leaped from the capstone and shoved his son off the Tower. He fell away in a long, long, slow arc.

The Emperor shouted to the heavens "How dare you defy me! I am Ayay-nehu! It is my right to touch the Moon!"

The Moon receded in silence.

"Return to me!" commanded Ayay-nehu, Extending his hand upward again.

The Moon did not return.

Ayay-nehu trembled with rage. "Return! It is my will! Obey my will! Obey my will! My will is law!"

The Moon did not obey.

"Father of my grandfather's grandfather; Lift me to your Moon! Creator; Lift me to your creation!"

The Creator did not obey.

Ayay-nehu screamed with rage. "Arrogance!" he shouted, "Arrogance! I despise you! You are lesser than me! You who create with mere Divine Power; behold what I have created with mortal power!"

Ayay-nehu turned to Didi-un. "I will destroy the Moon!" he raved. "Make my Tower taller! When the Moon returns, I shall be ready for it! Build me a weapon to destroy the Moon!"

Didi-un fell to his knees and wept.

The Moon vanished.

All eyes turned upward. The sky was empty.

Empty but for the Star. The Star seized Ayay-nehu's eye and time stopped. For the time of a full day, nothing happened. The Sun did not rise. No living thing drew breath. The wind did not blow, and the waves of the sea were still.

Then at last, Ehehsus-tetas-tetenaiai spoke from the Star, "Son of my grandson's grandson; grace has departed from you."

Time flowed again. The advisers and children of the Emperor, and Didi-un also, were transformed into flighted birds and scattered from the Tower. Only Ayay-nehu remained, his eye still transfixed by the Star. The people of the Lul fled the valley.

The chant had been silenced. The magickers fell dead, and the turning stone moved no more. The winds crashed in on the Tower from all sides. The earth trembled, and thunder split the Tower vertically from foundation to capstone. For an instant, Ayay-nehu was held in the air by the strength of the line between his eye and the Star. The Creator spoke a final word which has been forgotten and released him, and he fell. Down, all the way down. Down to the earth which opened to swallow him and closed after. The Tower crumbled, and marble rained down across the whole of the Lul, a storm of stone and dust and shattered metal.

And when the Lul was blanketed in the ashes of the death of the Tower, the Moon returned, and resumed its patient passage around the perimeter of the sky.

As the sun rose across the world, the kings of every savage tribe moved as one, and a fleet that blackened the sea sailed for Lul-kismar.

But when they arrived on the shores of the Lul, they found desolation. They took pity on the starving people of the decapitated empire who's cities were crushed by the death of the Tower, who's fields were choked in the ash of its ruin. Though they had come with intent to slay every last living child of the Lul, the savages instead dealt kindly with the people, and helped them to replant their fields. Friendships were born, and when the armies returned to their homelands, many of the people of the Lul returned with them.

And the place where the Tower stood remains a desolation until this day, and no thing grows there, and no thing lives there. But if you go to that place and look, it is said that you may see one lone bird, who circles forever above the valley.

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To contact the author, mail Bob@HamsterRepublic.com

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