

The Silo

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

In the year 1895, the sheltered fresh water archipelago of Shintuknu Bay along the Fairfeather Peninsula was solely occupied by indigenous communities that hunted, fished and grew edible plants and medicines through the use of ancient methods and customs passed down for many generations. At one point in their early history, a large semi-nomadic tribe of _____s occupied Broad Island, erecting a longhouse surrounded by a series of teepees on a rocky plane facing the windy bay waters. One summer evening, a young warrior scout paddles back to his tribe in the dusky darkness. After his approach on a sandy part of the island near the main bonfire pit, he pulls up his birchbark canoe and jogs swiftly toward the fire.

"I spotted traces of the pale faced man in our bay waters. They landed on Circle Rock not far from Raven's Tomb. They had a strange vessel and were carrying many thunder branches." The young tribesman says in his _____ dialect.

"What were they doing out there once they disembarked?" A female chief inquires from the far end of the large campfire.

"They appeared to be planning to build something. Their boat had many small carved stones piled up in its stern... Along with the thunder branch guards were a team of builders that were using wheel carriers to unload the rocky materials on our undefended land."

Soon, the female chief and her group of elders head into the longhouse to discuss the encroachment of their prized islands, reported by the young warrior scout leader.

The next evening, after a strategic gathering to map out the witnessed invasion, a war canoe is sent out to the neighbouring waters of Circle Rock, to assess the enemy's proliferation. Setting out as the sun fell behind a small stand of cedars facing the open waters to the West, an expert group of twenty of the tribe's best warriors and messengers paddle quietly into the open waters, hugging part of the shoreline, on course toward Raven's Tomb, which added a rounded and vaulted profile to the horizon. "*Stroke, stroke, stroke!*" The short canoer seated at the bow calls out faintly in his tribal dialect over the darkened surrounding waters. After a half hour of intense paddling, the white and brown war canoe rounds a bend avoiding some the rocky shallows, before making an approach on Circle Rock.

"Quiet down! Let's stop here and keep watch!" A senior tribesman says from the middle of the war canoe while removing his paddle and resting it on the vessel's gunnel.

“See that! They’re building something out there. If you look closely, they’re starting to pile rocks just off the shore to the West.” The same warrior scout tells the other onlookers.

“If they have thunder branches, we’d better watch out. Those things can pierce our flesh and our sturdy war canoes.” The female chief says from close to the canoe’s stern.

“We need to send out our best swimmer Manakwan right now when the sun is sleeping. May the Creator protect our waters and keep you safe on this important mission. We’ll be camping just off the western shores, awaiting your return. Gather as much information as you can and report back.” A warrior elder says with a tone of urgency.

Shortly after, the tribe’s most prodigal swimmer, who had recently placed first in the annual swimming marathon at the Council Fire Games, dives off the bow of the war canoe. Upon entering the quiet bay waters through a slim ripple with barely any splash, Manakwan disappears under the surface for at least fifteen seconds before re-emerging about a hundred yards from the war canoe crew who were still gazing toward the light of Circle Rock from afar. Three hours later, with the paddlers of the war canoe still awake and gathered around a large east-facing bonfire, the dark moving silhouette of Manakwan approaches the small granite boulder beach where the large hundred-foot vessel is pulled up on the shore and flipped over with its small keel jutting out under the dark starry sky. Drenched from a long time in the water contouring Circle Rock and treading water close to the shore to observe the enemy, Manakwan approaches the members of his tribe assembled around the glowing circle crackling with the mesmerizing motion of its orange and yellow flame tongues.

“Manakwan! Come over here and rest, my boy! Tell us what you learned tonight about the pale faced man in our bay waters...” A gruff voice says from the opposite side of the fire pit.

“I circled the island about five times, trying to see how many of them were guarding Circle Rock. While most of the group had left the island in one of their boats with twin paddles, I still counted five of six guards with thunder branches resting over their shoulders...” Manakwan answers, warming his damp hands on a small corner of the bonfire.

“What are they building? It seems they took over Circle Rock to construct a stone tower or something...” The female chief says inquisitively in a medium high-pitched tone of voice.

“It appears they were carrying stones that came our Creator’s bedrock back but carved them into smaller pieces. They had stopped building by the time I was about half way around the island but I could still see that the structure was a cylinder. Judging by the

large size of the pile of rocks they might be building something at least ten to fifteen times my height.”

“How big was the base of the structure? Are they planning to build something like our longhouses but made of rock?” A third person from the group of elders asks.

“It looks too small to hold people. It could possibly be a watchtower or place to store war supplies.” Manakwan responds, seated on a log by the fire to dry his glistening damp frame.

“A watchtower or storage hut? They never asked us or got permission from the Creator around us to build here! These are our waters. Our kind was dropped here many moons ago when the great night-feathered raven first laid the foundation of our people throughout the water, rocks and plant soil you all see around you...” An elder and tribe storyteller says as a few glowing bits of ash dance against the darkened sky.

“It’s just a matter of time before the pale faced man occupies more of our islands throughout the waters of Raven’s Tomb. Let’s head back home to Broad Island to alert the rest of our tribe. We may soon have to prepare for war...” The female chief says to the group with her round countenance and grey braided hair dimly lit by the jagged moving blaze appendages in the large bonfire pit.

The next morning, at the sound of a solitary raven’s guttural croak, the same team of _____ tribe folk gather their things, flip the war canoe over, set it into the frigid bay waters begin to reassume their positions as paddlers. As the burly elder navigating at the stern finally enters the war canoe last, he pushes off and the group sets its sights on their habitations of Broad Island. Upon their return, the tribe starts to prepare their bows and arrows along with their tomahawk axes and wooden staffs for closer more ‘honorary’ combat.

In the distance of Circle Rock, the colonizers remained hard at work to build the eerie rocky silo which eventually would stand some twenty feet high with a flag of _____ fluttering in the high winds of Shintuknu Bay. It wouldn’t be long before more similarly constructed stone pillars were built on other islands, marking the advance and slow takeover of indigenous lands. Originally designed to hold supplies such as grain back at home, the Trojan-like hollowed war structures would soon become a symbol of conquered land and future enslavement of the _____ people. As the elders and tribes’ people of Chief Proudbeak were progressively captured and forced into small parcels of fragmented island land, their great spirit bird was rumoured to have left its once prized habitat to settle far off from the island and bays of Raven’s Tomb.

[The End]