

OBJECT EVE

BOOK TWO

The countryside was desolate.

Wisps of acrid smoke rose into the thick air from the burned out shelter of scavenged wood. From where he crouched in hiding he could see the two bodies, obviously dead for several days. Signs of the birds that had been feeding upon them were visible, even at this distance. From the remains of clothing on one of the bodies, its head shattered like a burst melon, it was a male. It lay bent over the remains of the burned cart, the stiffened limbs angled grotesquely.

The other body was female, at least what was left of it. It had been spread eagled on the ground, tied to stakes driven into the hard soil. The various carrions had made several meals from the carcass, leaving bones separated from each other.

Hearing the click of nails on the rocky ground, he crouched lower in the thicket of blackberries. He had wormed his way through the thorny brambles, disregarding the scratches he received. Cautiously, he peered between the leaves. A large, tawny animal was following his trail. Easily weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, the creature resembled the dogs of old.

Back in the late twentieth century, according to legend, dogs were plentiful. But, if you believed the fables, so were many other things.

The dog halted, its posture rigid. He could see the yellow eyes searching the thicket where he was hiding. The long fangs showed clearly as the lips were pulled back in a snarl.

He flicked a thought command and the creature instantly dropped to the ground, its body changing color to match the grayish soil. The ears flattened as it began a sweeping arc of its gaze across the area.

He felt the mind pictures. There was no sign of life anywhere. He think/told the dog to be alert and stood up carefully. His long silver hair accentuated his bronze features. The eyes were a golden hue, wide spaced below his broad forehead. The shirt of tanned skin he wore was patched in several places. His erect posture enhanced his height. At over six feet, by two inches, he was tall even among those of his kind.

The legend talkers told that before the upheaval there were many of his height. But that was only the fables of the old, told by memory from generation to generation.

Pe'scho felt the mind touch of his friend. He was honored to be chosen as a share mind with such as his new friend. A thing of legend, to be so chosen. Pe'scho knew that of all the peoples, it was his line that had always been chosen thus. Sometimes a she-mate, but usually a male. His father had never felt the mind share, or his father before him. It was told, however; that his great grandfather, ten times great, had walked with HIM. No one knew what it was about this particular line of the people. If ever anyone had known the reason, it was lost in the distant past of untold generations.

He absently rubbed the tattoo on his left shoulder. Such a thing to be one of the chosen. His chest swelled with pride at the thought of the star imprint on his flesh, a star inside of an eye. He had passed many tests to earn that imprint. The thought of some of

those tests brought a momentary grimace to his features, but he fought the unpleasant memory away.

It was beneath the dignity of one such as him. He walked with pride, he who bore the imprint of the star eye on his shoulder. This imprint denoted to all that the bearer was of the Tehlor/StePhans line, and more. For only those, even of the line, who survived the tests could become a Chons Tabo. Even the Chons Tabo could span generations without walking with one of the Eystar.

It was told that magical powers were given to those chosen to walk with the Eystar. Legend also told of the coming of Eystar as heralding battles of magnitude, and destruction on an unbelievable scale.

Pe'scho had heard the legends since earliest childhood, but had never really believed them. At least, not until Tehlor himself, had entered his mind. That had certainly saved Pe'scho's life on that morning. He remembered the events in vivid detail. He had been under siege by at least five of the armor scaled ones. Like lizards they were, but different. Where lizards walked on all four legs, or some on six, the armored ones known as Ascalay walked upright like the peoples. It was whispered around the council fires that the Ascalays could form thoughts. Usually of a dark brown or green coloring, the Ascalay had strange reddish eyes. Standing an average of five feet in height, they were unbelievably fast. In battle, their long fangs exposed always, the knife sharp claws on their limbs made them a formidable foe. Their jaws were like lizards, but with the snout pushed back to the face. Many of the people had fallen beneath the wrath of the Ascalays.

They went beserk with blood lust. Armed with their weapons, usually bow and poison tipped arrows that could kill with just a scratch, they ranged throughout the warm regions. When the cold came, and the waters froze, then the Ascalay were less a problem.

He had fought a running battle for over four cycles. His companion, Sedu, had accounted for untold numbers of the Ascalay. Sedu enjoyed the sport of killing Ascalay, and Pe'scho knew the Ascalay were deathly afraid of Sedu. Then the six had managed to box him into a cliff canyon. He had put his back to the stone and faced the Ascalay. Although his mind could control some things, it had no control over the Ascalay. He had thought-turned their arrows as they were shot at him and Sedu, who had crouched snarling at his side.

Then the six had rushed him. Armed with his long blade, another sign of the Chons Tabo, he had defended himself. Two of the Ascalay had fallen from thrusts of his long blade, and Sedu had ripped the entrails from another. One of the enemy had slipped his spear beneath the blade and driven it into Pe'scho's chest.

Staggering back, he had slumped against the base of the cliff. He knew he was dying, but he fought to take another of the Ascalay with him. Sedu leaped to protect him, standing over his body. Pe'scho had felt his head swimming dizzily and his vision faded. He would not have the chance to kill again. Even now he sensed the three remaining Ascalay preparing to rush in to complete his death. He fuzzily formed a thought command at Sedu to seek his own safety, but his companion sent back a picture of him still standing over Pe'scho's skeleton. He felt pride in his companion's loyalty, and sadness at the uselessness of it. He prepared to give himself to the Eystar.

Then came the thunder in his head!

"Pe'scho! I am the part that is the whole. You are needed. Would you give me the use of your mind so that I may help you?"

He knew that the thunder was his own impending death, but legend had always told that it was the thunder which chose the ONE. He answered in the ritual manner.

"Of course, we are soul mates. There is but the one."

He felt a pressure in his mind, a gentle, innocent warmth such as he had never before experienced. He heard voices in discussion, talking about him. He thought the words strange sounding, but understandable. A she-mate was telling the zhodee that neither of them was needed at the moment. He heard the voices continue, stating that the savagery of Tehlor was a prime to keep Pe'scho from further injury or death. He imagined the Eystar spoke of healing his wounds. Pe'scho decided he had better open his eyes to clear his head of this delirium of death.

To his amazement, when he opened his eyes, he was again standing. Moreover, his long blade was again firm in his grasp. He glanced down, expecting to see the spear protruding from his chest. It was gone! There was no pain, no wound. Blood still covered him, but the wound was gone.

Sedu had sprung aside and was regarding him quizzically, head angled up. His thought pictures showed two people. One was Pe'scho, but the other was different. Before he could examine Sedu's pictures better, he heard/felt a presence in his head again. This time it was a savage presence, but Pe'scho knew instinctively that it was his ally, not his enemy.

"Give me your mind, Please. I need complete control. Remember your sworn oath and stand by it."

It was true. Before any could become a Chons Tabo, they must swear on the most sacred of all to honor the ritual if ever they were chosen to walk with the Eystar.

"Of Course." Pe'scho felt his mind withdraw to someplace inside himself as another came in, filling the void of his withdrawal. He 'knew' that this was Tehlor. He 'watched' as his body was controlled by the mind of this other. He watched and was astounded at what his body could now do.

As the suddenly frightened Ascalay hesitated at his rising unwounded from a certain death his body stepped forward and sideways, then leaped into the air. He observed his left foot strike the chest of one of the Ascalay, driving its ribs through its back from the force of the kick. He crouched as he whirled, then sprang erect again, thrusting the rigidly extended fingers of both hands up into the groin and throat of the second Ascalay, breaking the thick neck. Before the remaining enemy could recover, Pe'scho saw his own arm swing the long blade in a powerful back handed stroke which completely severed the midsection of the Ascalay. Wiping the bloody blade on the dying body of his enemy, his own hand sheathed the blade.

"Hello, kid. I'm Ed Taylor. Glad I could be of help. It's been a long, long time since I have been able to actually feel anything physical. I think we better talk, but first I'll withdraw from your mind. It takes a little getting used to, to share mental space. Believe me, I know."

Pe'scho caught the mental laughter from this Ea Yad Tehlor. The self that had receded into the recesses of his own mind still could not accept he was not dead from the spear through his chest. A part still considered this nothing more than an hallucination.

"No way, young man. It's real, alright. And so are myself and my friends. I've picked up your thoughts about the Eystar, and I have to admit it's pretty impressive. Anyway, I'm giving you back your body and will withdraw. You take it easy for a few

moments while the Eystar, as you call it, activates the physical forms of my wife, me, and Jodie. See ya in a moment."

Pe'scho felt his mind slip somewhere deep within its core as the pressure withdrew. He was suddenly once again the only occupant of his own body. He ran his hands over himself, exploring his arms, legs, head, and chest. If he was dead, then death felt little different from being alive. He 'finger snapped' an alert command to his dog, but its responses showed no enemy about. He strode to the slain Ascalay and stooped to retrieve their weapons.

There, more reflections! He froze in his stooped position, his glance slowly sweeping the entire area in front of him. No concern for the cliff at his back was needed. More reflections were visible now. He cautiously stood erect, his attention centered on the strange occurrence taking place no more than twenty feet in front of him.

The lights were numerous now, with more joining each moment. There were so many that, to Pe'scho, it looked as if a glowing fog was in front of him. He noticed the lights were a bluish/white rather than actually white, and they were beginning to spiral inward with a slow pulsing from the ground to about six feet in the air, then back again. Now more lights joined as the 'fog' became more solid looking, like the thin scraped skin which filtered sunshine into his own home among the people. The pulsing became more rapid, and he felt a pressure in the air around him, as if he had dived deep into the lake not far from his village. He opened his mouth wide to relieve the pressure on his eardrums.

Vaguely, within the fog, he could make out a shape, then another, and yet another smaller one. As Pe'scho stood immobile in amazed interest, the shapes became more and more solid looking. Now he could tell that one was male. And another was a she-mate. The third, and small one, was probably an off-spring of the two.

Suddenly, with no notice of any kind, the glowing fog of lights was gone. Three figures of people stood there. Well, they resembled the people, but not quite. Their skins were pale, not tanned like those of the people. The male had a small amount of hair on his head, mostly around the sides. It wasn't long like the males of his tribe. Instead of close cropped hair like she-mates Pe'scho knew, both the taller she-mate and the off-spring had long flowing hair. Both were a pale golden color that glittered with facets of brilliance from the sunshine. Never had Pe'scho seen hair of this color, especially not on a she-mate.

All those of the people had black hair. Only in legends were there stories of such with hair of this shade. Pe'scho allowed himself to closely observe this apparition, every detail imprinting upon his mind for later retelling. To experience this near death, then to see a vision such as this, was truly a tale to share with the elders.

His mind catalogued the things he must take back with him to prove his near death. First, of course, was the spear that had struck him, at least the piece that had penetrated. Then he would need proof of the slain. Their weapons would suffice for that. He knew that the blood still covering his upper body would show a wound's flow, even if there was now no wound. But the vision that would have to be only worded pictures.

He returned his attention to the three in front of him, almost staggering in disbelief. The she-mate was sitting down on a rock, while the off-spring was turning toward his dog with one hand held out. He could not believe this; his dog was eagerly stretching his head out to be rubbed. What sort of vision was this which could move and touch?

Next, truly a sign of losing his senses, the male spoke.

"Pe'scho, why don't you come over here? I'd like you to meet my wife, Lou Taylor." The male placed his hand on the shoulder of the off-spring, "And this is Jodie Williams. My name is Edward Matthew Taylor, but I prefer you just call me Ed. Come on now, kid. Sit here with us. We need to talk."

Ed Tehlor! Jo Dee! Lou! These were the words of the legend; the three that was part of the Eystar. Either he had really died and was in the life after, or he was blessed beyond belief. His dog was definitely alive. Not only alive, but acting like a weanling around the off-spring.

With trepidation, Pe'scho slowly approached the trio. His hand flashed to his long blade as the male stretched forth his right hand, fingers spread in a do battle sign, but the fingers held no weapon. In confusion Pe'scho half drew his long blade, halting the action as he saw the off-spring pull at the outstretched arm of the male, extending her own right arm outward before snapping it to her forehead, fingers rigidly together. This was the sign of courtesy and respect for an equal.

Which did he believe? His life might depend on his decision. The sign of peace from the off-spring, or the do battle sign of the male?

There! The male was also giving the sign of peace. Pe'scho relaxed somewhat. He returned the sign, but held ready to defend himself if need be. He did allow the long blade to slide back into its scabbard, releasing the handle but keeping his hand close to it.

The male spoke again.

"Looks as if a lot of things have changed, son. Jodie says a military salute of our times is now a peace greeting, that an offer to shake hands could get us killed. Well, the killing us part is silly, but I get the drift. I'll have to remember that. Could be interesting to find out how that got changed around." A smile creased the face of the male. "At least Jodie says grinning is still ok." The smile was gone as the voice grew somber.

"Pe'scho, if we're here, then that means there's trouble in paradise. Now sit down over here and we'll try to figure out what is going on. I don't suppose you smoke, do you? Man, would I like a cigarette."