

Bob Hart

Bmhart1@student.fullsail.edu

Bob@bwbright.com

Horror (in the theme of Cosmic Horror)

Through the Ancestral Lens

“Heritage Link established. Commencing in three... two... one...”

The cool air that drew into Dr. Phoebe’s expanding chest melded with a warm breeze. Everything was white.

“Remember your training,” said a fading voice outside of her sight. “Once you’re in Ancestral View, recount everything. Stay grounded.”

The stale laboratorial air was replaced with the scent of dry dust. Her once pink lips were cracked like the desert that slowly came into view around her. There was a pounding; it was drums in rhythm with her chest.

“My heart,” she said. “So bright. My heart.”

“We don’t want to risk cardiac arrest,” came a reply. “Establishing Viewpoint before click. Tell us everything.”

The brightness vanished. The coldness of moisture ran down her chin.

“Thanks for the drink, guys.”

“Drink? Do you need some water?”

“No, it’s okay.”

She focused on the bowl that was in front of her. Someone else stared back from the reflection, someone who’s red eyes weren’t hazel, who’s white hair wasn’t black, who’s pale complexion lacked freckles.

“What do you see?” asked the voice again.

She looked up and an old man with long silver hair smiled back at her, adorned in yellow paint from head to toe. “A shaman, I think.” He spoke something to her as he motioned for her to drink.

“He’s asking if I’m still alright. I feel scared- I think I’m about to become a high priestess for some god?”

“Ah, good! This will be excellent for our cultural study. Who would have thought that your family was religious?”

Phoebe’s arm-hairs were standing on end. She stood amidst a village that encircled a fire beneath the vast sky. Fur-clad figures, adorned with bones and spears, chanted, and swayed to an eerie rhythm. One figure raised a tusk toward the stars, as if beckoning to something that lived among them.

“We’re not understanding the language we’re hearing on screen. What are they saying?”

“Well, they’re singing. It’s an offering to something. I’m not sure because it seems fuzzy?” she asked.

“We are receiving some neural feedback on our end. We dampened the effects so you wouldn’t feel so overwhelmed.”

“My heart’s still pounding,” she said. “I can feel the smoke from the flames they’ve started up, and it’s hot.”

“What do they look like to you? What are they doing?”

Phoebe looked around at the people who surrounded her. “I see a man, early 40s, showing some... lesions. I think he’s showing off what their god gave him?”

“Hm. Maybe some form of illness. What else?”

“I see a woman holding up obsidian, singing about the power *it* wields.” A shiver raced down her spine. “They said that their deity can ignite the earth around us.”

“Fascinating! You think they are a war tribe or something?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “But I told them that I don’t believe them, and they said that they will show me its magic.”

“Remember, you’re not actually there.” The warmth of a hand spread across her shoulder. “You’re here with us. Nothing they can do will hurt you.”

“Thank you,” she said. Something cold slid down her cheek.

Phoebe sat down at the edge of the flame. Approaching her was the old man who hummed a tune. He extended the bowl of liquid again. She refused to drink, but she was still a back seat driver. The concoction tasted foreign, like moldy bread.

“Sir,” one of the voices said. “Her voxels are going off the charts. I think we should cut the feed.”

“No,” the other voice replied. “Use minimal sedation if you have to but I want her Presentlog streaming.”

“I’m okay,” Phoebe repeated. “I’m okay.” Her words became quieter as the shaman held up a wooden staff to silence the village.

“Dr. Phoebe, can you translate what he’s saying?”

“Our god is not an idol. Our god feeds all life,” she said.

Another man stood up and she spoke his words. “I gave it my sight,” she repeated. He approached her.

Her jaw dropped. “He has no irises!” she gasped. “Veins where they should be! He says... He says not to stare at *it* for too long. You... you lose the color of your eyes!”

“Are you sure you don’t want out, Dr. Phoebe?”

“No!” she said as her hands pushed the man away. Something stumbled and metal clattered outside.

The old man began to whisper.

“It’s coming,” Phoebe said. “Watch the sky. He says that our god will turn the sky red.”

“Oh, like the apocalypse?” the voice outside asked.

“No,” she said, mimicking the words of the person before her. “It turns the sky red when it comes. It reaches out with tendrils when it’s angry. The sky will flare in colors when it does. We worship it so that it only paints the sky when it comes. It will be here soon.”

Music from instruments made of hide and animal horns played as Phoebe drank once more from the bowl.

She swayed, caught in the rhythm of the drums. The fire's dance was mirrored in the liquid she drank from, casting shadows on faces that have transcended time. The tusk, an offering to the cosmic expanse above, seemed to reach out to something beyond, and the sky grew crimson.

“I understand now,” she said. “It’s not just a god, it’s a living embodiment, a cosmic force.”

“What!?” the outside voice responded. “What are we seeing? What thing can make the clouds bleed like that? Is it really something supernatural?”

The sky ignited with an otherworldly brilliance. The voices fell silent as Phoebe smiled.

“Wait,” the original voice said. “Pinguicula, nourishes all life on Earth, night sky turns red in the morning. Do they just worship The Sun?”

“Truth unveiled in shades of sky,” she began to sing.