

The Time-Travelling Magician - Story 2

By Shi-an

Submitted: February 22, 2017

Updated: February 22, 2017

2nd Story is about the last survivor of the Independence Culture (I). A Proto-Inuit civilisation who lived about 4000-3000 years ago.

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Shi-an/60463/The-Time-Travelling-Magician---Story-2>

Chapter 0 - Prologue	2
Chapter 1 - The Last Man on Earth I	3
Chapter 2 - The Last Man on Earth II	4
Chapter 4 - The Last Man on Earth III	5
Chapter 5 - The Last Man on Earth IV	9
Chapter 6 - The Last Man on Earth V	11

0 - Prologue

- Prologue -

This is the story of Apsida, a female magician of the Sputnik breed. In a world where several millennia of interbreeding have caused the disappearance of pure-blooded magicians, she is a rare example of someone who is 75% or more of a single bloodline. The unfortunate thing for her, though, is that this 75% is Sputnik. Each magical breed has a different speciality, and for the Sputniks it's time travel. Apsida works as a freelance time traveller, performing odd jobs for anyone who requests her services. This is quite rare for a Sputnik, actually. Most of them either ignore their magical properties and live and die like normal human beings, or train themselves in generic magical abilities so that they can take some sort of unspecialised magic-based job.

You see as a sort of cost, or compensation for their amazing ability, Sputniks are doomed to a life of mediocrity: Nothing they do can ever be of much importance. People would pay billions for their services—assassinating political enemies, going into the future for advanced technologies, preventing people's deaths—the Sputniks would probably be the most well-paid breed of magician, if only there wasn't this restriction which means that no matter how hard they try, they are doomed to insignificance.

Fate enforces this restriction. It will step in whenever a Sputnik tries to do something important—usually just hindering them in some way, like getting them lost or making the trains run late, but when there is nothing else it can do to prevent a significant change in history, it will have no choice but to kill the Sputnik.

There is one loophole, however. Fate has trouble distinguishing what is important in terms of emotions. If a group of people show a wave of happiness or anger or sorrow it can tell that this is a significant change that must be stopped, but since what is important and unimportant to individuals on an emotional level is a very personal thing, and is often not all that important to the world at large, in these situations Fate does nothing to stop it.

Taking advantage of this loophole, although it is difficult to tell whether she herself is fully aware of it, Apsida goes out and helps all kinds of people with their problems, regrets and curiosities that only she as a time traveller can do. To the world what she does is insignificant and paltry. To the people she helps, it means the world. This is her, and their story.

1 - The Last Man on Earth I

My name is Thuluk. I am 35 years old. I have dark-brown hair and brown eyes. I have a stout build and a thick beard. And I am the last man on earth.

2 - The Last Man on Earth II

The spirit appeared to me on a day near the half-moon. It was the warm season, when the summer spirit shines upon the glazed snow and ice with new ferocity after the dark, dark winter moons. I still had some rations remaining from the musk ox I had killed at a nearby feeding ground, but they too were running out, and I was carving a section of its horn into a memento for my daughter when it arrived.

I remember my people telling me of an “apparition”, so called because it appears and disappears in an instant, so that any who saw it thought themselves mad. But it was not a legend like those passed down from our forefathers. It was more like a rumour or gossip, for almost every story explicitly states that it only began to appear after the Tholnyar, which was not many generations ago.

My mother’s told me a tale of a foolish ice-shaman who claimed he saw a glistening afterglow, similar to that supposedly made by his kind when controlling water and ice, for a short while in the direction where the apparition appeared to him. He claimed that it was a shaman who had attained some special power, toying with us with its unique ability. But nobody believed his words, and he was ridiculed. I do not know whether that tale was a legend or a true story, but either way it does not matter, for it has already been proven wrong—the last shaman in existence died two generations ago, but apparent sightings of the spirit still continued.

4 - The Last Man on Earth III

When the spirit came up to me it had the appearance of a young girl of about 16, with pale skin, wavy, dark-brown hair and yellow eyes. It was dressed in a thick black coat lined with fur I had never seen before, a strange pointed and wide-rimmed hair-ornament made of cloth placed on its head, and brown boots. I knew instantly that it was powerful, for it had a staff made of clean and well-carved wood nothing like that which is found drifted upon the shore, and on the bottom end of the staff was a collection of what seemed like twigs of a bush meticulously crafted to be straight and gleaming.

Its appearance was awe-inspiring, and it was only when it was right before me, that I realised nobody actually knew what the apparition looked like. In fact, I was not even sure if the spirit that stood before me was the one talked of in the stories—those stories were more for amusement and gossip, and had little, if any, cultural significance.

However, there was something about its appearance. Not just its strange clothing or its unaccountable materials, but something of the way the spirit conducted itself, which indicated to me that it was not of this world, and which reaffirmed the realisation I had come to long ago, that I would never see another human being again.

The spirit began by waving at me—a gesture I had not seen since my teenage years hunting with the other men of my tribe. I had almost forgotten its meaning, but my memory soon sparked alight. The men would wave in different patterns to communicate about keen-eared animals and their locations in a noiseless manner, to avoid detection. It did not take me long to remember that current pattern indicated a hare hiding somewhere close by.

It confused me somewhat that the spirit only waved when it was directly next to me, but if this was a chance to finally get some more food, I had no time to waste. I grabbed my spear and scanned the landscape for the hare. To this the spirit made a noise of discomposure, shaking its head and pointing at itself, then bringing its hand forward with one finger raised.

I understood now it was pointing to the sky, and although it could not be seen during the day, the spirit was referring to the constellation of the hare, and introducing itself as the spirit of said constellation.

I lowered my spear and apologised profusely, and the spirit, magnanimous as it is was, simply nodded, sat down on the cold snow, and began talking. It spoke a tongue of strange, foreign sounds, but with a tone soft and sweet, if a little unemotional, that somehow reminded me of my own daughter.

Then I heard another voice. This one was harsher, croakier, lower, with a sound like a young man. I was not sure what to make of this.

The spirit nodded once towards its staff then looked at me. It took its open left hand, pointed at itself and said; 'Apzida', then pointed to its staff and said; 'Kortl', and having done that, pointed to me.

It took me a moment to understand what the spirit desired from me. If I had been a shaman maybe I could have communicated in the heavenly tongue of the spirits, but alas I was not born so. Still, I could understand it was introducing itself, so I too said 'Thuluk', as I pointed to myself.

The spirit smiled slightly—ever so slightly, in a dignified manner that both made me feel so small yet put me at ease.

'Great spirit, I offer you this,' I reached my hand out towards the spirit, revealing the musk ox horn fragment that I had been carving.

'It is unfinished, I am sorry... but it is a memento I was making for my daughter. Thoyu, she was called. Thoyu... why, she looked a little like the form you have taken right now (I realised then that the

spirit must have taken on such a form to put me at ease) and I loved her... I loved her so much.'

The spirit took the memento in both her hands. 'Thoyu', it repeated, and again smiled.

I was happy to find that the spirit seemed to be in a good mood thanks to my offering.

'May... May I ask, oh great and wonderful spirit... What was the reason for the Tholnyar? Why did we have to die out? And... Am I really the last person left? I... I can't help but wonder if there are other tribes out there still surviving...'

The spirit stared blankly at me for a moment, its yellowy eyes staring deeply into mine, before shaking its head in a manner which conveyed such sincere regret, that I was no longer able to continue.

We remained in silence for a while, and the spirit turned away, creasing its face slightly as if in thought. Finally it began to draw a circle in the snow, with a single vertical line sprouting from the top which divided into two perpendicular lines, which then in turn divided perpendicularly again. At the end of each line it drew a circle, and pointing first to the left circle it said "Afilya", then to the right it said "Perigey". Finally it pointed at the original circle and said "Apzida".

After repeating the naming once more, it began drawing the same diagram in the snow beside the first one, only this time pointing only at the original, single circle closest to me and saying "Thuluk".

Was the spirit testing me? And if it was, then for what reason? I considered the diagrams, these two names supposedly connected to the spirit of the hare constellation, a separate diagram with only my name attached to it. I do not mean to boast, but I was quite well-known throughout the tribe for being quick-witted. Perhaps that was the reason why I was the only one who survived—more of a burden than a gift now—but it allowed me to realise that I was looking at a diagram showing lineage.

I originally questioned my theory because lineage is followed only through the father's side—the mother's role is secondary in the birth of a new life, and it is the father's skills, personality and position which are inherited by his children. However, there was a high probability that the spirit had only taken the form of a young girl like my daughter to put me at ease, and was in fact male, and furthermore the hare constellation consisted of three major stars—the brightest star as the father and the lesser ones as children.

From this I could deduce that the second diagram, with only my name attached to it, was incomplete until I filled it with the names of my own children. Indeed the fact that she knew I had had two children and drew the right amount of circles for me was evidence enough that my theory was correct.

I pointed to the left circle and said "Thoyu", and the spirit remembered the memento, raising it for me to see as if to seek confirmation.

'Yes,' I said, 'Thoyu is my daughter whom I was carving the memento for. She was an energetic and bright girl, although not so much towards the end...'

I could feel the tears well up in my eyes. To prevent myself from crying, I quickly began describing my second child.

'My second child was Nagl. He died when he was only six years old. There was a period of extreme cold during the winter, and many of the weak, young and old died. So many died that winter. Of course not as much as the Tholnyar, but it was then that I vowed I would never lose a child again...'

To my great disgrace, my emotions got the better of me. I attempted to cover my eyes, but it was too late—the spirit had seen the tears sliding across my cheeks. The spirit, magnanimous as it was, attempted to console me, although the manner in which it did so was peculiar. It raised the fourth finger of its left hand and said "wan", then its third finger as well and said "too". Then lifting its second finger it said "tree", its first finger while saying "for", and finally it stuck out its thumb and said "fyve".

Seeing my perturbed look the spirit pointed at the sky and said "skiy", then at the ground while saying "snow", at its leg while saying "laig", at its chest while saying "heart", and continued to point at things and say something different each time.

Finally I understood—The spirit was attempting to create a mutual understanding of vocabulary, by

pointing to things and naming them in the language of the spirits. It in turn wished for me to name them in my language.

I began pointing at the things that the spirit had, reciting their names as I went. We continued this way, and I later found out that the spirit was attempting to find out how I count from one to five, when it was raising its fingers earlier. I told it how my people counted, to which it appeared to be very pleased. I soon forgot my position, and got incredibly excited in explaining and describing what things exist in this cold, deserted land. In fact, I had never thought I could become so enthusiastic about a world so barren and unforgiving. Being alone for too long does strange things to a man.

After some time of doing this, the spirit stood up and began a small speech which somehow, despite the difference in languages being spoken, I could tell was one of thankfulness. Then, having done that, it a little too hastily turned around and began to walk off.

I grabbed the spirit by the wrist. At first I was unsure myself why I had done such a thing, but something in the back of my mind told me that I should not let it go.

‘A... Are you leaving so soon, great spirit? There is still much that I wish to ask you, much that I can learn from you, much that I...’

My voice trailed off when I saw the spirit’s face. I cannot hope to properly describe it, but if I may at least attempt to, it showed something of regret and concern so strong, that I could not help but let go of its wrist, and turn my face away.

What really struck me was it was not a look of sorrow arising from personal plight. It went deeper than that—it was a face of pity. An abyss of sympathy for some perceived horror that it had no hope in saving. Like it was looking straight into the eyes of a dying child. In fact, it looked just like my daughter did, as I held her in my arms, and her breath faded away.

When I looked up again the spirit had gone, and it took a while for everything that had just happened to sink in before I realised what it was that both of us were so afraid of—it was the loneliness.

There was no one left in this icy wasteland. That was probably the last person, spirit or otherwise, whom I would ever meet. I am the last man on Earth. The loneliest man on Earth. People in the past have complained of being rejected, disregarded, left out and marginalised, but there is no loneliness, no unadulterated solitude which exceeds that which I am condemned to.

But there is also something more than that. My death is not just my death. It is the death of a culture, of a people—of all our hopes and dreams and beliefs and joys and love and everything that we have ever done and felt which will be swept away into nothingness like my bones will be by the icy cold wind. I carry the burden of taking the entire human race down with me when I die, and when the inevitable comes there will be no trace left of us. Nothing to prove we existed, and nobody to remember who we were—and what comes with that is a terrible truth. The truth that we are weak, that everything we have strived for has been for nothing. There is no better evidence than becoming extinct to prove that we are mediocre, that we are useless, and it would not even have mattered if none of us had ever been born.

That was what the spirit was trying to prevent. It was trying to learn about me and my culture so that even after our literal death, our figurative death could be avoided. But it too realised the futility of such an endeavour and turned away, making such an anguished face because it could not do any more. It is not its fault—there was nothing that it could do.

But then a thought crossed my mind. A naïve, presumptuous, wishful thought, which many of my ancestors would probably be infuriated with me for, saying that it misses out on so much—all the lives and stories and experiences that our people had gone through. But for me, in my infinite loneliness, in the desperation and horror of the burdens I carried, if my hope were to come true, that would be enough.

Even though our time together was short, the spirit had taken away a part of me when it left. This part it could still hold, to keep it somewhere, whether out in the open or hidden away in the darkness. I would feel happy—I would feel fulfilled, if every once in a while, or even unconsciously or without understanding,

the spirit, or not even it, but somebody—anybody—would remember the ivory thought that I hold true to my heart and which has kept me warm in such dark, cold lands. That is all I need. Just recognition of the thought. An acknowledgement of its existence. That is enough to keep me from dying, and that is enough to stop everything that we, my people, had ever done from being in vain. It is enough to prove that we existed, and that we mattered.

And with that thought still warm, I closed my eyes.

5 - The Last Man on Earth IV

Apsida knocked twice on the door then came into a small room lined on either side with rows and rows of books, where a lady in her late 30s with brown hair and wearing a green dress and black tights was looking through her filing cabinet.

'Ah, you're back! Good timing as I was just about to leave for the day. We can start again tomorrow, or the day after if you need some rest.'

'I talked to him.'

'You... what?'

'I found him and talked to him.'

The lady shoved the folders she was holding back into the cabinet, and staring at Apsida in amazement, sat down on the closest of the two chairs in front of the wooden desk before her.

'So you actually managed to find the last survivor of the Independence Culture?' she said quickly.

'Yes.'

'The Paleo-Eskimo race with little known history who lived in Northern Greenland 4000 years ago?'

'Yes.' Apsida took the other seat, and sat up straight with Cotyl resting against her legs.

'That's... Unbelievable. I mean it took you two days.'

'I'm not 100% sure, but judging by time frames from each jump and how many people I saw each time, he was probably the last of them.'

'When exactly was it? Is my estimate of 1600BCE correct?' the lady had a habit of holding her hands like claws and waving them around when she was excited, and she was making such gestures now, 'how old was he? What was his name? What was he wearing?'

'Woah woah! Hold on professor!' Cotyl spoke up, 'just before we talk there's one thing we gotta make sure of. Remember you can't intend to publish anything you learn from us. You can't even tell your friends or family. It's a huge risk to tell someone like you all this stuff anyway.'

The lady rose and went to turn up the nearby oil heater. Her voice became soft and stern, as if she was leading a lecture, as opposed to the chummy, excited voice she had been using previously.

'Of course not. I did my research on Sputniks before I called you, and I know how things work. I would love to be able to publish everything you find out, but I know that is not possible. But even while knowing I can never make the things you discover public, I at least want to be able to quench my own curiosities. In fact, that's why I began this research in the first place. I would gladly give up all hope of fame and honour for the truth.' She sat down again opposite Apsida and Cotyl and eyed them with a steadfast face.

'Are you sure you want to trust this person?' said Cotyl.

Apsida did not look at Cotyl, but instead answered by means of continuing with her story.

'The man's name was Thuluk. He looked to be about 25 and had brown hair and brown eyes. When I first came he thought I was an enemy, and he looked hurriedly around with his spear ready as if searching for other people.'

'Fascinating!' The woman interjected, 'that could mean he was used to getting in scuffles with other tribes, or he believed there were still other humans somewhere in Greenland with him, or a myriad of other things!'

'After he had realised I was alone, he became much more friendly and even gave me a small item made of some bone which he called a "thoyu",' Apsida took out the trinket she had been given and

handed it to the lady, who in a melodramatic, professor-like sort of way, caressed it like it was a diamond.

‘His parents were called Thoyu and Nagl-‘

‘Oh, just like this artefact!’ the professor interrupted.

‘Yes, one of his parents was named after the item.’

‘You didn’t find out which parent was which?’

‘No,’ Apsida felt a pang of guilt as the memory came back to her, ‘I wanted to learn more about his lineage, but talking about it was too much for him and he began crying.’

‘So you never found out how he became the last of his people?’

‘No.’

They remained in silence for half a minute, the professor carefully looking over the bone trinket that she had received.

‘Oh, please, go on,’ she said finally, still eyeing the trinket.

‘Well, I did manage to go through a series of words—the environment, body parts and stuff like that—and learn what he called them in his language. I don’t have much experience with Native American languages, but at the very least I couldn’t find any cognates with any languages that I know.’

‘Oh please do tell me some of the words you learned!’ said the Professor.

‘Well,’ began Apsida, ‘for example the numbers from one to five were koh, eaksi, asnik, awat, and aksif.’

‘Yes! Yes! Fascinating!’ The professor once again began to wave her hands around, ‘there isn’t any other Native American language that even remotely resembles those in their names for numbers. A language isolate, perhaps! But please tell me more!’

It is not a wise use of time to relate here the rest of this conversation, as it has already been listed before what Apsida and the last man of the Independence Culture—Thuluk—discussed. Sufficed to say that the professor, eager and enthusiastic as usual, hounded Apsida with questions, and Apsida, to the best of her ability, answered for a good thirty minutes, before all questions had been asked. And Apsida was released so that she could make her way home.

6 - The Last Man on Earth V

Apsida stood on the steps in front of a large building and pulled her thick black coat closer towards her. The night sky was dark and foreboding, and the chilly winter air which periodically blew between the tall buildings of the university reminded her of the wind in Greenland, where she had been not two hours before.

'Hey, Apsida.'

'Yes, Cotyl?'

'Why'd you insist so strongly on keeping that bone thing? It's not like you to be so forward about something.'

'Would you have preferred it if I gave it to her?'

'No, but I was expecting that I'd have to be the one to tell her she can't have it, seeing as I'm the one who thinks those researchy types can't be trusted with anything. I didn't expect you to do it instead.'

Apsida looked down at the trinket—a crude, dirty musk ox horn half-shaped into some unknown form with no comprehensible purpose.

'I don't know... But somehow I feel attracted to it, like it exhibits some kind of warmth.'

'That's cause that professor was holding it so much.' Cotyl said sharply.

'No, I don't mean like that. I mean it feels like it's something valuable, something that Thuluk cherished, or at least her cherished the meaning behind it, and I should cherish it too.'

'You don't even know what it is. What's the point in you keeping it? For all you know it could be what he used to shave his armpit hair.'

Apsida did not even flinch. 'It could be something incredibly valuable to him, and he entrusted me with it.'

'You don't know that.'

'I don't. But I feel it.'

Cotyl sighed, insomuch as a broom could sigh, 'okay, whatever, if that's what you want.'

'I plan on putting it on the shelf right next to the bed in my room.' Apsida smiled.

'The same place you keep the only decent photo you have of your mother?' Cotyl asked sarcastically (as the shelf was in fact littered with all kinds of knickknacks), 'it must be REALLY important then!'

'Maybe it is,' Apsida replied, and placing the trinket into the inside pocket of her coat, she plunged into the iciness of the cold winter night.