



## HIRUKO'S DREAM

by Tell Payne

Sweat drenched Hiruko as he sat in the dark. His heart beat frantically as his lungs gasped for comfort in the dark. He held his face in trembling hands as he tried to shake the dream from his head. This dream had haunted him for nearly two months now. Every time he managed to fall asleep the dream would assault him, yet he could never remember many of the details. All he was ever able to recall was an image of an ancient tree in what seemed to be the Empty Lands.

Why? What could possibly be drawing his dreams there? He felt as if something important awaited him, but he could not say what or why. It felt as though life was fleeing him when he woke from this dream, yet he knew the only way to be rid of it was to find out what would happen at this tree. As long as he couldn't sleep, he would become a prisoner, he had to leave. He had already made the arrangements.

Hiruko finally gained control over himself to light a candle. Shadows raced away from the dancing flame, revealing a nearly empty room. Hiruko had gotten rid of as many of his belongings as he could. He wouldn't need them, but he may need the money to help him on his journey. All that remained in the room was his bedding and a bulging traveling pack.

He quickly rolled up his bed and tied it to the pack then sat back down on the floor. He was still anxious about his trip, but he could put it off no longer, he must be rid of this dream. Whatever awaited him at this tree, be it an answer or death, at least he could finally rest.

Shouldering his pack, Hiruko walked out into the dark night. Even in the pitch of night, the silent weight of the Illuminated Peaks could be felt. Hiruko said a silent prayer asking that he would be able to return to them one day. He stood for a moment longer breathing in the symphony of night, letting slip the last grip of the night's dream, then he picked up a walking stick and set out.

"It's time for answers."

Hiruko turned around but saw no one. "Who's there? Show yourself!"

He kept looking around. The voice had come from behind him, or perhaps to the right? Hiruko wasn't sure, which only made him more anxious.

"I am here," the voice said again.



*Hiruko*

Hiruko turned around again, but saw nothing. He shook his head; perhaps he was beginning to hear voices from exhaustion. “Hiruko, you’ve just got keep moving, outrun the dream demons. Go out into the detestable Empty Lands, where nobody in their right mind would go, and be rid of them,” he told himself.

“Ha ha! If you keep talking to yourself, people will think you’re crazy,” said the voice.

Hiruko almost stumbled. “Please, leave me alone wherever you are, or come out where I can see you.”

He stood still, waiting for someone to appear, trying to keep his wits together. He turned to look behind him and saw nothing. Taking a deep breath to steady his nerves, he turned around again, and then fell to the ground.

Before Hiruko there stood a raven. It was a large raven, larger than average with a small white blot on its chest. Its eyes locked on Hiruko with an intelligent stare.

Hiruko remained on the ground staring at the raven. He tried to calm his breathing, but his heart beat too forcefully.

“Are... are you the one who spoke? No, couldn’t be. Could it?” Hiruko stammered.

The raven hopped away from Hiruko and flew off, leaving the disheveled man lying where he had fallen.

With a relieved chuckle, Hiruko stood up and brushed himself off. “Now you’re imagining talking animals, Hiruko. Let us hurry on our way before sanity takes leave completely,” Hiruko said to himself.

A gently downhill slope made easy work for Hiruko’s walking. The dark, sleeping world lay silently on all sides like a blanket, comforting even Hiruko as he walked. Walking in the dark was much more peaceful than nightmares in one’s sleep.

He had walked peacefully for a few miles when the sky began to lighten with the dawn. Chirps from early rising birds filled the air, a cool breeze stirred the trees, and the faint smell of cooking fires mingled with the waking morning. It was beautiful, and Hiruko knew he would miss the Peaks immensely.

As he stopped to take a drink, he prayed to the Spirits to watch over him once more.

“They won’t help you, they’re too busy.”

Hiruko’s heart jumped. It was the same voice from earlier. He looked around but couldn’t see anybody.





*Hiruko*

“Leave me alone!”

He heard a chuckling noise behind, but when he turned around, all he found was a black feather.



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