

## THE CHANGING FEYTH (PART 1)

By **Sharkchild**

I have turned against my brethren and entered a fate that cannot be altered. All that I have been taught—all that I have been trained for—is now the vessel of my retribution. My existence has become a granule glowing amongst the blackness of a lost world, and the life I once knew is but a tragedy of my decomposition. In prayer, I must believe I am capable to begin the movement towards the deliverance that will set light to the throne.

By the enlightenment and approval of my soul, I now speak these words into the heart of traveling winds, begging them to take this message into the ears of who would listen. The demand on my life is high, so there can be no hesitation; even doubt shall not be spared by the vengeance of my cause. I do not regret those things I have begun to do; I do not pride myself on their brutality or art, but I am sure of their importance. Though the pain and sorrow will always remain, I will carry out my task until I can no longer do so, or until it is completed; this is my burden and my burning promise.

I am a feyth. My name is Wayward and my death has not come. I have revered my kind, respected them, followed them. I have performed their rituals and joined in their song. I have been loyal to them and laid down my life for them. They have made me strong and they have protected me in my weakness. But now I must diminish them. I see and understand the horrific influence they carry and the authority they frivolously surrender to the worst of evils. Undeniably, their ways were not meant for this land, or any land. And it is more than simply living within their blood, from dawns to dusks, that has confronted me with difference.

Feyths are the livelihood of Tume and the kingdoms within it. If the feyths are content, then good fortune is believed to be had throughout the lands. If the feyths are feuding or dying, then the fortune of the lands is believed to be affected negatively. We are idolized and looked upon as nothing short of demigods. Our flesh is ash gray and its texture is of leather. Our eyes are as black as coal and our teeth are as sharp as swords. Our ears are large and so are our noses. We grow to be as tall as giants, but our bodies always keep the same slenderness, no matter what our strength or what we consume.

Our only master is The Almighty of Shadows and Shade and the religion that accompanies him. It is by his will that we are feared and venerated across the kingdoms because of a set of rules named The Immurements. It is these rules that control the feyths and give us our authority over the races of the world.

Only the ghost of a feyth has the power to kill a feyth and only with the knowledge of a feyth can the ghost be controlled. These rules guard the life of the feyth.

The first to slit a dead feyth's neck acquires its ghost, the second who drinks of what flows gains its knowledge, and the third, who to even glance upon it, dies. If the choice is made to take of both ghost and knowledge from the same feyth, then an eternal servitude to The Almighty of Shadows and Shade shall be the consequence. These are the rules that govern the death of the feyth.

Neither man nor beast is released from these laws. They bring balance and bind the world, plaguing it. The afflictions of their affect inflict the greedy with darkness and disease the kings with a power incapable of defeat, though it is this power that gives me the opportunity I shall need to fulfill my hopes.

My treason is not a simple matter, so let me tell of its birth.

Not long ago, the vast kingdoms of Tume rejoiced upon the arrival of my kindred. It was the Beckoning of Tides, the annual evening of return for the feyths across the lands to their origins of creation. It was a time greatly celebrated by the many races of Tume. And until this very night—this very Beckoning of Tides—I would have been just like any other feyth, caught with impatience for the awaited honors and festivities.

I, along with three others, was of the living feyths from the city of Exitus. Exitus was a vast empire of trade, housing hundreds of merchants and warehousing thousands of goods, from gold and fine jewelry to the best of metals and building materials. Its marketplace was the largest in the Harboron Kingdom and spanned the entire length of the Old Western Shores. Its location created a center-point of wealth and travel. Foreigners of all kinds made up as much of the population as the locals.

Having such a crucial economic stance within the kingdoms meant that the outer walls of the city were of the strongest and tallest ever made. Sentinels lined the walls at all times while barracks full of warriors rested at each side of the city: north, south, and east; the west harbored a fleet of several war ships.

Those feyths arriving at Exitus with me were Solitary, the leader of the Outer Rims, Interim, the traveling protector of merchants, and Cattle, the wild ruffian who kept to himself. Each of us had lived for no less than three hundred years, but only Solitary had lived since the dawn of the kingdoms.

The four of us arrived at the Temple of Betterment with a large mass of congealing followers, shouting and hollering in cacophonous appraisal at our heels. Since the gates had been lowered and our procession began, we had been overwhelmed and followed by a sizeable welcoming party, and it only grew larger as we walked down Purchase Road through the busy marketplace.

When we stepped through the grand doors of the temple and entered the magnificent sanctuary, the cheering of the crowds ceased. Surrounding us, huge stain-glassed windows lined the walls, covered in images of sacrifice and piety. The ceiling extended high until its surfaces became like the mysteriousness of fog in night, and small, glassed crevices within it allowed several beams of concentrated moonlight to penetrate the interior space, shooting down to create the symbol of The Immurements with their points. Spread throughout the ground of the temple were dozens of pews adorned with exotic cushions and rugs.

At the center of the temple resided the altar. The altar consisted of two black, upside down horns curved and connected in the creation of a table, which rested high atop a small mountain of stairs. Encircling the horns, was a ring of large, black candles, their flames burning thin and strong. Stains of different bloods and fluids saturated the floor beneath the altar. The gradient of color was vivid at the peak of the mountain and faded towards the base.

It was this scene that triggered the first occurrence of dissonance within me. Like a subtle nudge, my heart slightly twisted. I had seen this temple

hundreds of times, but it was only this time which transpired an awful creature of division within the gut of my being. The fetid aroma of the temple then encroached upon my senses and amplified the sensation. My brethren were not affected by any such nuances and remained within their usual calmness.

The priest of The Almighty of Shadows and Shade welcomed us at the base of the ascending altar. Words of approval left his lips while he conjured an ethereal spirit. The flames on the altar's candles flattened as would heated metal under the blacksmith's hammer. Then the golden discs of flame rose from their origins and ascended upward towards the ceiling while spinning to meet the beams of moonlight. Once each of the beams held a disc of flame, the discs descended upon the line of the beam until they each rested at a point of The Immurement's symbol.

The priest ascended the steps of the altar's mountain and was met at its peak by a hooded cleric holding a pig. With the pig transferred into the priest's hand, the priest produced a very thin knife and stuck it swiftly into the animal's neck, and just as swiftly, retrieved it. The pig squealed briefly and was then placed on the ground where it fell to its side. Blood began pooling about it from its wound and seeping down the sides of the stairs.

"May the tides of The Almighty of Shadows and Shade wash upon us and cleanse us," spoke the priest.

We bowed our heads and left the temple.

As soon as we exited the Temple of Betterment, the crowds awaiting us outside erupted into roaring cheers.

"To each of you the best of tides," said Interim, and then he vanished into the crowds, creating a wake of people that followed him to wherever his destination lay.

"As with you," returned Solitary, who left in a different direction.

Cattle, without a word, hastily jumped into the crowd, brandishing his sickle while yelling in glee. He swung his weapon into the air and twirled it in such a way that caused a harmonic whistle to resound. Several people fell beneath his landing and those left standing only shouted all the more loudly.

I walked my own path into the celebrations.

In the later hours of the next morning, after most had retreated to the sanctity of their homes, I wandered the streets of Exitus. On the sides of the roads, debris from the festivities lay about: flags were spread in tattered disarrays, empty mugs of ale rolled around, and pieces of meat and blood splattered most surfaces. A small crowd still followed about me, celebrating continuously until they could no more, but I paid them no attention. My mind was already growing deep in its new and foreign disgust; my changing was even further underway.

I had walked for close to an hour before I heard an array of cheering and screaming not far from my location. With no agenda, I made my way in the direction of the sounds.

When I came upon the source of the excitement, I was horribly surprised. A small circle of people had formed in the center of the road and Cattle was in the middle. At his feet, lay the remains of at least four children, their limbs sliced clean from their bodies. He held a girl who had already lost her arm. Blood coated her clothing and skin, and her breathing was beyond fatigued and

full of terror. She tried to scream, but she could not. The crowd watching chanted at the feyth and the girl, yelling prayers relentlessly.

“May the tides bring me safe travel!”

“May the tides give me fortune!”

“May the tides heal my wife!”

And in return, Cattle proclaimed, “The Almighty of Shadows and Shade hears your plea!” before slitting the girl’s throat and letting her fall to the ground.

The rejoicing heightened.

When my eyes began to pulsate with repulsion and hate, I at once realized that I could not bear the existence of such sickening debauchery any further. Such acts were not meant to occur and life was never meant to be degraded and mutilated in such grotesque manners—let alone any manner. I had been a part of it for too long and my soul could not contain the evil any longer.

My mind warped and fluctuated. My consciousness rippled with new awareness. The nerves beneath my flesh fired and sent uneasiness throughout me.

There was no explanation of my change; there was no way to isolate or define it. All I could do was believe that the world had reached a threshold of which it could continue from no longer and that I had been chosen to reconcile it.

I could not kill Cattle without the aid of a ghost, but I could definitely stop him from continuing his revolting show.

The clip on my belt snapped loose as I flicked it with my finger. The coil of my whip fell to the ground and its blade-end clinked as it made contact. Just as I did so, Cattle retrieved another child that the crowd had given forth.

“What do you ask from The Almighty of Shadows and Shade? What gifts do wish to receive?” Cattle shouted.

“There will be no more sacrifices!” I challenged in a voice full of rage.

“You oppose, Wayward?” asked Cattle. “Do you wish me to deprive these people of their blessings?” The crowd condemned me with expressions of disfavor.

“If the only way those blessings can be given is through those children’s lives, then yes, I do wish to deprive them,” I answered.

Cattle started into a laugh of hideous degrees and raised his sickle to begin his ritualistic carnage regardless of my request. But before he could swing it, the crowd gasped at the sight of my whip’s end stuck deep into his head. I yanked the whip free and lashed it out again, this time sending its end into his hand that was holding the weapon. The sickle fell to the ground.

“I told you there would be no more!” I declared. “It was not up to you to decide.” I ripped the whip back to me once more. “Go home!” I demanded the crowd that remained gathered. “Go home!”

At first slowly, but then rather quickly, the people left and disappeared into the dark. I was left with Cattle.

“It is too bad you cannot kill me, Wayward, for your petty games will not stop my ways,” Cattle said even as the pain of his wounds coursed through him and wearied him. “The temple will not like to hear of what you have done. It will be a pity to see you cast from our fellowship.”

“That will be their issue to discuss, but you will not be the one to tell them,” I responded.

I released my whip, sending it across and through Cattle’s neck, severing flesh and bone. He fell to the ground, gripping his neck.

“I may not be able to take your life, yet, but I will have your skull until I can.”

I walked to his side and pried at his head, pulling it from its connection to his body. Physical and spiritual flesh quickly bridged between his head and body in attempts to stifle my action. So, in haste, I picked up the fallen sickle and sliced at the gap, over and over until the binding efforts of his body could overpower me no longer. Eventually, his head came free, and I gladly took it, leaving his body to spasm in bloodless wreckage in the middle of the road.

Before the sun had begun its ascent, I had left the boundaries of the city, passing through the gates to the north and leaving before word of my treachery had been heard. I carried with me a thick sackcloth bag containing the head of my foe. I could hear the muffled wheezing of his breath, as he suffocated, but could not die.

Once I was beyond the sight of the sentinels, I pulled the bag I carried to my mouth and whispered to it, “This is only the beginning, my brother.”