

BACKGROUND OF SPEAKS WITH WIND

26 summers ago, a war party of the Black Rock tribe of the Thunder Mountain People freed five of what lowlanders call orcs from a group of lowland slavers. The orcs, being lost and with no way home, returned with the war party and were eventually adopted into the tribe. Nine summers later, I was born – the third son of Black Bear and Long-Tooth Woman, she being one of the orcs that had been liberated.

I was raised as any other child of the tribe – I was taught how track game, hunting and fishing, as well as the other skills a warrior needs. While I was no more talented at these tasks than were my year mates, I was especially fond of fishing and would often wander up the mountain to try my luck in a small beaver pond.

In my 8th summer, late in the Hunting Moon¹, I was at the beaver pond. A thunderstorm sprang up and I took shelter under a rock ledge. Suddenly, I felt my hair stand on end and then a bolt of lightning struck a small sapling not more than 10 paces from where I stood. The light and noise dazed me, and when I recovered my senses I saw a whirling mass of air and mist hovering over me. It spoke to me in what sounded like soft whistles and the sound of breezes blowing through the trees. While my first instinct was to run, I overcame my fear and attempted to talk with the whirling air. Unfortunately, it did not seem to understand me anymore than I did it.

MONTHS OF THUNDER MOUNTAIN PEOPLE			
Month	Moon	Month	Moon
January	Snow	July	Blood
February	Hunger	August	Thunder
March	Crow	September	Hunting
April	Grass	October	Falling Leaf
May	Flower	November	Beaver
June	Rose	December	Long Night

I then ran to my village and told all the adults I could find what had happened. Several warriors of the tribe returned to the pond to check out my tale. While they found the remains of the young sapling that had been destroyed by the lightning, they did not find any trace of the Wind Person, as I called it. Still, after that time, some of the members of the tribe began to call me “Speaks With Wind”, although “Lightning Addled” was also used occasionally.

Two days later I returned to the pond by myself. While examining the area where the lightning struck, I heard a whistling noise behind myself. Turning swiftly, I saw the same mass of whirling air and mist. Again it spoke to me. Rather than returning to the village, I attempted to communicate again – via loud speaking and pantomime. I managed to learn the Wind Person's name, Hssht and I gave mine as “Speaks With Wind”, as that seemed most appropriate. I attempted to convince Hssht to return to my village with me, but it was clearly adamant against that. Instead, we began to learn each others language.

I began to spend much more of my free time at the pond, talking with Hssht. While it would not appear

¹ September

if others were with me², we still spent much time together. I found that I had an affinity for the tongue of the Wind People³, and quickly became quite proficient in the language.

Hsht was a very friendly person and told me that he came from Sky World⁴, a vast expanse of sky, with little clumps of rocks, water and other materials. As I showed an interest and something of an aptitude, he began to teach me some of the magic of his people – he taught me how to unleash a flash of lightning around myself or to fall as gently as the breeze. This was in addition to occasionally throwing things at me to help me “improve my slow, earth-bound reflexes⁵”. While very fond of Hsht, I will not be upset if I never hear it tell me to “be the breeze, not the rock beneath it” again.

After about a year after first meeting Hsht, I was approached by Three Feathers, the Ghari⁶ of our tribe, about some advanced training. This was not unusual as many tribe children were tutored by Three Feathers in such things as reading and writing, healing and dealing with outsiders. It all depended upon a child's interests and talents. One of my best friends, Dawn Flower, learned healing lore from Three Feathers, one area in which I had no talent. Sometimes tribal politics would play a part; Falling Stars was a pupil of Three Feathers despite having no discernible skill as he was the son of the War Chief, Red Axe.

Time passed, as it has a habit of doing. I continued my studies with Hsht and Three Feathers. While I did not pretend that Hsht did not exist, I did tell my friends that he did not wish to meet others. Some of the tribe members accused me of making up stories, but this stopped when I leapt 60 feet down from a sheer cliff only to land as if I had fall no more than foot. A demonstration or two of my ability to unleash a flash of lightning, or to whisper⁷ to a person 100 feet away also assisted in proving my veracity or at least silencing those who called it into account.

In my sixteenth summer, Three Feathers met with me and and told me that he wanted me to be the next Ghari and wished to train me in that role. I told him that I was honored, although I thought Dawn Flower would be a better choice – she was a skilled healer and far more diplomatic than I. Still, I felt the choice was Three Feathers to make, so I began my training. Falling Stars objected, feeling that he should be the next Ghari. He spoke to Red Axe, his father, who brought the matter before the council of elders.

Before I knew it, much of the tribe was arguing about the next Ghari. Many of the younger people, who knew Falling Stars and I well, preferred that I be the next Ghari. They were joined by some of the elders who felt that Three Feathers should make the decision. Many of the tribe's proven warriors backed Red Axe. I found it distressing that the choice of myself for a position I did not want should threaten the comity of the tribe. Therefore, I approached Three Feathers to discuss a tactful way for me to withdraw.

Three Feathers suggested I go on a vision quest to seek guidance. I climbed up the mountain and fasted

2 Actually, a couple of Speaks With Wind's friends (Dawn Flower & Big Hill) did see them together from a distance.

While they did not tell anyone, they made efforts to make sure Hsht and Speaks With Wind were not disturbed when meeting and helped quash the name “Lightning Added”.

3 Auran

4 The Elemental Plane of Air

5 The reason he has the Reactionary trait. He wasn't bullied, but he did to learn to react quickly.

6 Medicine Speaker – the shaman.

7 Message Spell

for several days. While I was doing this, Hssht found me and asked what I was doing. I explained the situation to it, which the Wind Person found quite befuddling (and not a little amusing). Hssht asked me why I didn't just leave for a year or two until the storm passed? I had told it that I did wish to travel and see more of the world. Anyway, Hssht itself would be leaving, as it believed that it had found a way to return to the Sky World and it missed the company of its own kind.

While distressed that my old friend would be leaving, I bid Hssht a fair journey under favorable winds and saw him depart through a hole it cut in the sky itself. Despite not having a vision sent by my ancestors, I decided to return to the village. Technically, I *had* received advice from a spirit of sorts, and I found the advice to be sound.

So I returned to Three Feathers and it discussed Hssht's advice with him. Three Feathers said that he actually did have a quest I could undertake. While I was all for leaving quietly, he said it would be best to make a big production out of the event, showing that I was placing the good of the tribe above my own personal interests, etc.

So the tribe held a going away ceremony, where my friends gave me gifts to help me on my journey. Dawn Flower gave me Apple Thief, my horse, suggesting that I train it for war. Big Hill gave me my bow and my other friends provided me with other items that they believed would be useful.

BLACK ROCK TRIBE OF THE THUNDER MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

The Thunder Mountain people are a group of semi-nomadic tribes that live in a mountain area. While they do some cultivation of crops, they are primarily a hunter/gatherer culture. The Thunder Mountain is a very large mountain, noted for its storms in the rainy season. The Black Rock tribe has its primary residence in a village next to a large, black rock outcropping near the base of the mountain.

Not counting Speaks With Wind, there are approximately 300 members of the Black Rock tribe, including 5 orcs and 12 half-orcs.

Persons

Hssht – Intelligent Air Elemental, Wizard

Black Bear – Human father of Speaks With Wind

Long-Tooth Woman – Orc mother of Speaks With Wind

Three Feathers – Ghari (Medicine Speaker/Shaman) of the Black Rock tribe

Falling Stars – Son of war chief, choice of council of elders for position of Ghari. Named because he was born during an intense meteor shower.

Dawn Flower – Student of the Ghari, healer and sometime girlfriend of Speaks With Wind

Big Hill – Close friend of Speaks With Wind. Large and somewhat slow, but very strong.

Red Axe – War chief

Other names -

Hidden Stone, Black Hoof, Spitting Locust, Hook Nose, Talks Forever, Forest Spring, Bluebird Eye