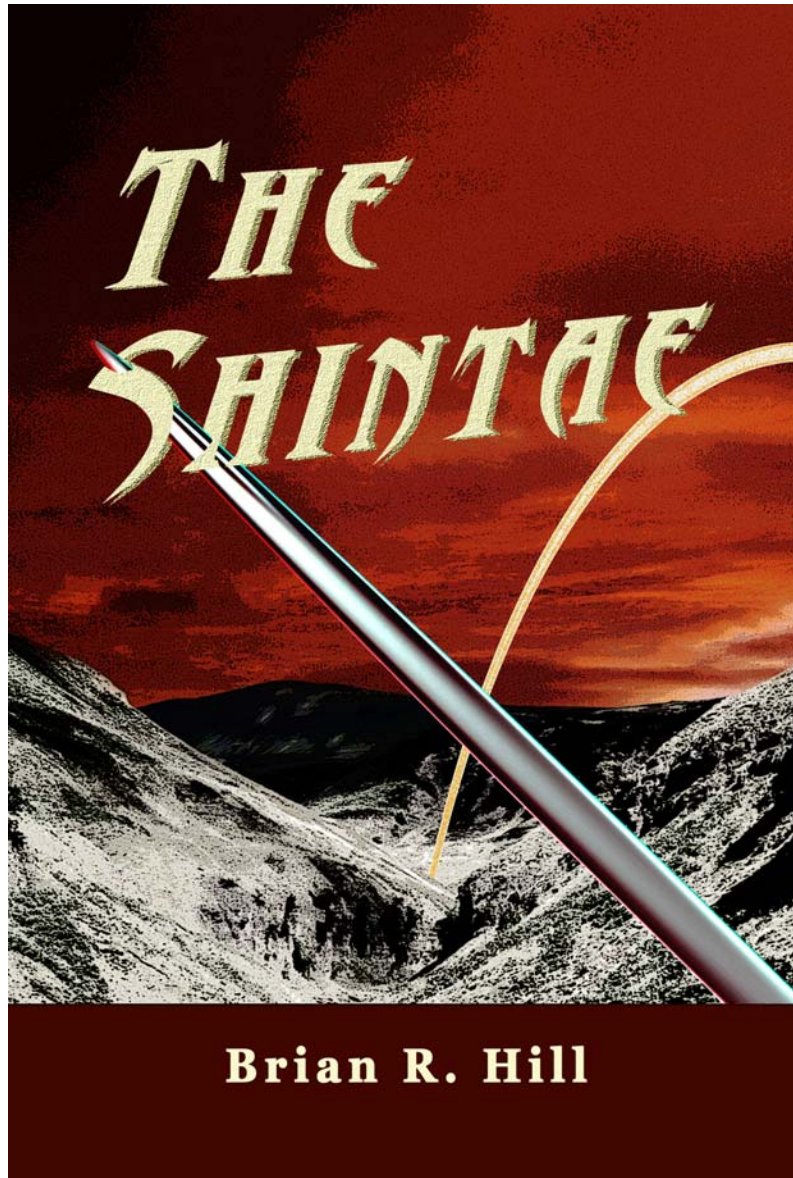


THE SHINTAE

By
Brian R Hill



ISBN: #1-4137-8324-4

...about two heroes and a heroine, two opposing nations, an enemy steeped in evil, adventure, all-out war and The Shintae, the Stone of almost unimaginable power. Only one nation can survive...

Synopsis

After recovering The Shintae, an ancient relic of mystical properties, the Maraén warrior Kaér is surprised by the enemy and left for dead. Surviving his injuries Kaér is once more charged with retrieving The Shintae and, with his companion Angharad, travels deep into the Cantaén Mountains in search of the object. Together and separately, Kaér and Angharad face great danger, adventure and all-out war before their arduous task can be completed.

Standing in Kaér and Angharad's way is Sartae, an antagonist whose evil ambitions know no bounds. A leader, whose cruelty and hatred is known and feared throughout the lands. As the mission progresses, Kaér and Angharad receive help from the most unlikely of sources but in the end, they must use all their skill and knowledge to keep themselves alive. As the venture races to its explosive climax, even this may not prove sufficient.

About the Author

A Yorkshireman, Brian R Hill was born in the UK in 1951 and educated at Aireborough Grammar School in Yeadon near Leeds. He has a grown up



family and three young grandchildren who keep him active. Brian lives close to the beautiful Yorkshire Dales National Park. A keen amateur photographer, musician - leader of a local orchestra - and composer Brian derives much of his inspiration from the beautiful countryside of the region. A stroll through The Dales can provide Brian with a chapter full of ideas, although the areas he includes are normally unrecognisable by the time the final draft has been completed - Yorkshire, for example, is not known for any volcanoes.

The story began one sunny Saturday afternoon many years ago when, after walking his dog through Spring Woods, Brian returned home to discover a typewriter, temporarily abandoned, resting forlornly on a coffee table. A blank sheet of paper was already in place and, sitting down, Brian typed in the immortal words 'Chapter I', and thus the tale was conceived.

Working with the old typewriter, now relegated to a desk inside a walk in cupboard over a staircase, the story began to take shape. Over a number of years with frequent and often very lengthy interruptions due to family and work commitments, transferring the manuscript to word processing and much re-writing, The Shintae has finally been completed.

Brian currently works full time and divides up as much of his evenings and weekends between writing, walking, photography and music as he can. He has started work on a second novel, which he sincerely hopes will be finished in what will prove to be a much shorter period of time.

www.theshintae.com

www.yorkshireimages.com

Reviews

Review for The Shintae

The Shintae, a mysterious stone with magical powers, is entrusted to the forest-dwelling Maraéns. The Cantaéns, the Maraéns' enemies living in the mountains, steal the stone to use against them. The Maraén hero, Kaer, manages to get the stone back but is ambushed by a group of Cantaéns and loses the Shintae to them. The race is on to retrieve the Shintae before the Cantaéns learn to decipher the words that will set free its incredible power. Brian R. Hill's fantasy tale is richly told. His characters are strong, determined and dedicated to their tasks. They face many obstacles yet refuse to yield to any of them. Mr. Hill's story takes the reader on an incredible journey through snowy mountains, the aftermath of an avalanche and into a long deserted city whose ghosts still watch out for the rare traveler that passes through. The most impressive description is that of Myssous, the Maraén capital. The Shintae is an exciting book that will draw the reader in from the moment they turn the first page. If you enjoy action, adventure and strong characters then read The Shintae. I highly recommend this book and am looking forward to Mr. Hill's next book.

Reviewed by Patricia Perry, author, Quest for the Source of Darkness (7/06)

Reader Views

The Shintae takes the reader to a distant time where survival of the fittest is the law. Mr. Hill pits the evil mountain people, Cantaéns, against the forest people, Maraéns. The quest is to find the Shintae, a stone of magic powers, and unharness the magic.

Kaér, "a native of the forest lands of Maraé", he was just short of six feet in height, he was tall for his race." He had found the Shintae and was returning home when he was caught unawares by the evil Cantaén warrior, Sartae.

"Sartae was a terrifying sight." Sartae's reputation for torture in the name of fun has reached Kaér, who only anger's the warrior by laughing in his face. Leaving Kaér for dead, Sartae and his troops return to their homeland to try and harness the magic of the Shintae.

Meanwhile, Kaér recovers and is joined by Angharad on a quest to recover the stone. Together they set out to recapture the Shintae and return it to Maraé. Separated during a blizzard the two each go their separate ways toward recovering the stone.

The detail of man vs the elements in this story is enough to keep the reader glued to the pages. Who will triumph in the battle for the Shintae? Will the Cantaéns be able to take over the Maraéns? Will the Maraéns outwit the Cantaéns?

Does Kaér recover? Does he have one last battle with Sartae? Do Angharad and Kaér meet up again? These and many other questions are only answered if you read the book.

As a first book, Brian R. Hill has a hit on his hands. I found it to be an easy read, yet one I had trouble putting down. The action begins in the first two pages and is non-stop right to the end of the book. I look forward to seeing more by this author.

Reviewed by Rebecka Vigus for Reader Views (2/06)

www.readerviews.com

FOUR AND A HALF BEACON REVIEW FOR THE SHINTAE by Brian Hill

...Shintae is a most fascinating book. Mr. Hill takes you on a vivid journey that allows the reader to get a feel of the landscape and surroundings of Kaér's adventures. He depicts the story in a way where this reader could almost feel Kaér's hunger pangs and weaknesses when he was exhausted from his travels, down to the picturesque black clouds and huge droplets of rain when the weather began to deteriorate.

The writing is full of creativity...The display of characters is brilliantly detailed making them practically light up in battle on the pages. I admired Angharad's strength and her bravery. When Kaér said he would be back for Angharad, it was a most tender moment. Mr. Hill keeps the reader completely embedded in the story until the final end and then some. The secondary characters complete the story keeping it smoothly flowing making this read a page-turner.

Reviewed by Linda at Lighthouse Literary Reviews (1/06)

www.lighthouseliteraryreviews.com

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ADVENTURE/FANTASY NOVEL THE SHINTAE RELEASED JANUARY 2006

Leeds, West Yorkshire (PRWEB) February 21, 2006 -- The Shintae (ISBN:1-4137-8324-4). Written by Yorkshire (UK) author, Brian R Hill (55) has now been released to the book industry.

The Shintae - Charged with recovering The Shintae, an ancient relic of mystical properties, the Maraén warrior, Kaér, is surprised by the enemy and, almost within reach of safety, he is left for dead. The object is taken from him and once more he must travel deep into the Cantaén Mountains. There, with his companion Angharad, he faces great danger, adventure, and all-out war before his arduous task can be completed.

Standing in his way is Sartae, an antagonist whose evil ambitions know no bounds, a leader whose cruelty and hatred is legendary. As the mission progresses, they receive help from the most unlikely of sources, but in the end, they must use all their skill and knowledge to keep themselves alive. As the venture races to its explosive climax, even this may not prove sufficient.

Reviewers have responded to The Shintae in a positive manner. Among comments made in published reviews "...As a first book, Brian R Hill has a hit on his hands. I found it to be an easy read, yet one I had trouble putting down. The action begins in the first two pages and is non-stop right to the end of the book. I look forward to seeing more by this author..." readerviews.com, "...Shintae is a most fascinating book. Mr. Hill takes you on a vivid journey that allows the reader to get a feel of the landscape and surroundings of Kaér's adventures....The writing is full of creativity allowing the reader to envision the forestlands... The secondary characters complete the story keeping it smoothly flowing making this read a page-turner. " lighthouseliteraryreviews.com.

Title: The Shintae, 2006, 230 pages, 6"x9", Publish America, ISBN 1413783244, Price at Publish America \$16.95 Retail price from \$19.95 at Amazon.com barnesandnoble.com, Borders.com, Chapters.com and from £11.75 at Amazon.co.uk, WH Smith.co.uk, at other on-line bookstores or if ordered through local bookstores.

Wholesaler information: The book, published by independent, traditional publisher, Publishamerica, based in Frederick, Maryland, USA is available directly from the publishers as well as through wholesalers: Ingram; Baker Taylor; Brodart Company and Lightning Source (UK).

Bio: Brian R Hill was born in County of West Yorkshire, England in 1951 and lives in the Leeds area. Mr Hill is available for interviews and book signings.

More information: www.theshintae.com
End

Press Release 28th Feb 2006

Dealing with Obstacles in Life Places Novel in the Running

Reviewers are captivated by the fast paced, not stop action of new novel.

Austin, TX (PRWEB) February 28, 2006 -- A tale of two nations, good versus evil, tells the story of Kaér and Angharad, the main heroes, and their adventures through the Cantaén Mountains in search of The Shintae...

Download the full Press Release here:

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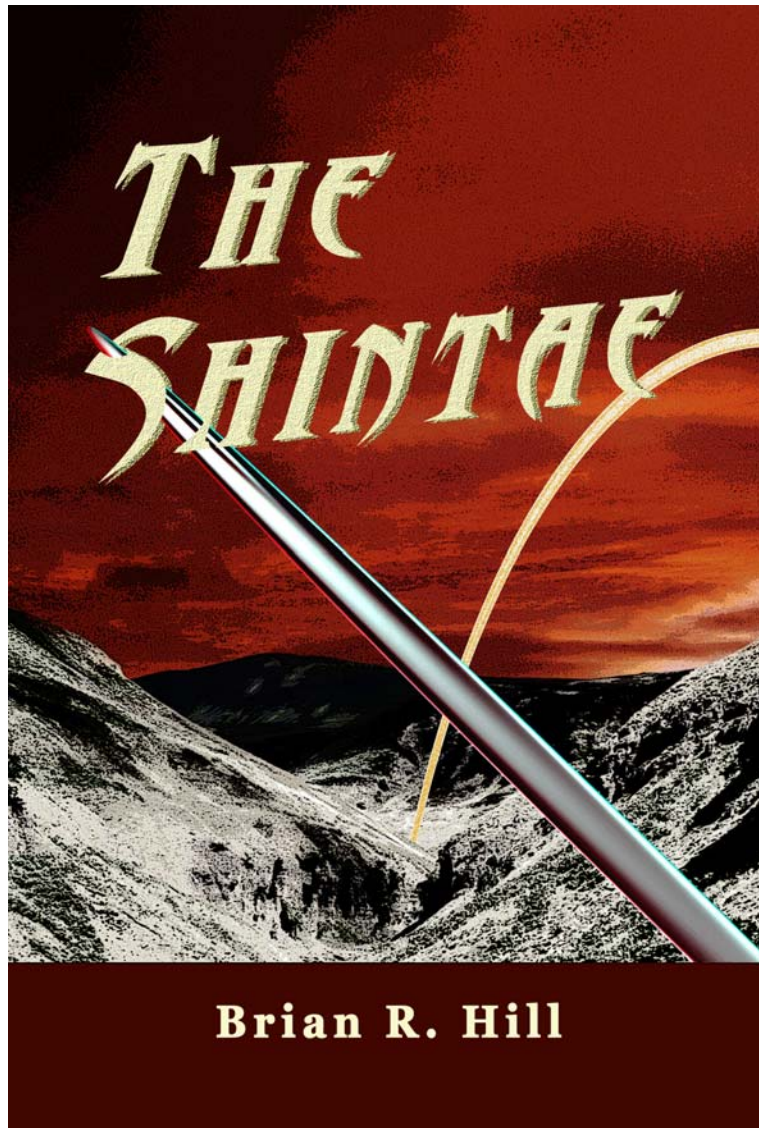
Interview with Brian Hill, author of "The Shintae" by Irene Watson – Reader Views

Download the full Interview here:

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THE SHINTAE

A Novel written by **Brian R Hill**



The Shintae, The Stone of power, the power for good in the hands of the just, or a terrible potential for evil in those of the degenerate.

Available to purchase at Bookstores Nationwide and Online by:
ISBN: **1-4137-8324-4**

THE SHINTAE

Chapter One

The sun's rays flickered and died as dusk stepped confidently into the glade where he rested. Only his eyes moved as he persisted there, cooled by the scented air drawn down from the surrounding wooded slopes, his mind far away on matters of great importance. He had recovered The Shintae. The long years of search and hardship had not been in vain and now, finally, the end of his mission was within his grasp. Allowing his mind to wander, he fingered the short sword at his side, remembering deeds and enemies slain in the valleys and amongst the mountains of Cantaé far to the west. Lying on the ground beside him was his trusty longbow, an old and valued friend that had saved him on so many occasions out beyond the edges of civilisation. Suddenly he stooped, gathered it from the still warm ground and turned towards a solitary timber framed cabin standing close by.

Although the last faint glimmer of light had been extinguished long since, he had no difficulty in picturing the building with its heavy planked wooden walls and angular straw thatched roof supported by wooden cross-members. Narrow openings cut into the outer walls were covered by shutters, which, when pulled back, allowed light to enter. An arched doorway led into the first of three large rooms, with several smaller chambers at the rear. Highly intricate carvings and multi-coloured tapestries covered the internal walls, whilst a variety of woven and deep furred rugs were scattered over the wooden floor. Most of all, however, he recalled the stone fireplace in the main living area and how, on winter days, a roaring fire threw out its arms of all embracing warmth. Even on a warm summer's evening it felt good to be reminded again of such protection.

With this thought in mind, he moved around the house towards the doorway, which, to his surprise, stood open. Running his fingers around the opening, he found the shattered remains of the doorframe where the entrance had been forced. For a moment he stood silently, listening intently to the sounds of the night. Detecting nothing untoward and finally satisfied he was alone, he removed a tallow lamp from his pack. Using his tinderbox to spark a flame, he succeeded in lighting the lamp whereupon, shielding his

eyes from the resultant glare, he stepped carefully over the remains of the door. Halting abruptly he gazed numbly around at the scene of destruction that greeted him. Wearily he moved from room to room, but the whole building appeared to have been ransacked during his lengthy absence.

A native of the forest lands of Maraé, he was just short of six feet in height, tall for his race, with long brown hair flowing over delicately pointed ears down to broad shoulders. Brown, weather-beaten cheeks faded in to a wide and hairless chin, while piercing blue eyes gazed out from beneath broad eyebrows that angled down towards a finely chiselled nose. His clothes were old, faded and stained with constant travel. A creased brown tunic covered the upper part of his torso, hanging limply from a slightly hunched back. The garment was made to blend into the surrounding woodland, as were his deerskin trousers. A pair of stretched hide moccasins covered his feet, and a cloak the colour of grass was tightly rolled within a small pack on the floor beside him. Exhausted, he leant against a wall before sinking slowly to the floor, too tired to think clearly any more. Had his instincts not been dulled by fatigue, he would have moved on immediately; and then, perhaps, things might well have turned out so very differently. Instead, his head nodded once, twice, three times, his eyes closed, and he dropped into a deep but troubled sleep.

Silently, in the small hours, the intruders returned, a group of savage mountain men, Cantaén warriors from the far west. Taller than the average forest dweller, their heads were covered in dirty dark hair while unkempt beards, dyed ginger as was their custom, sprouted untidily. Over their muscular frames they wore tunics of dark grey, woven from rough and crudely spun yarn, designed to blend more readily into the rocky mountain sides than the forests below. The thick hide trousers worn by the Cantaéns were far more suited to the upper peaks than to the lower ground in summer.

The antithesis of the forest dwellers who, overall, were an honest and peaceable folk, the inhabitants of the mountains were evil, both in heart and mind. Just one glance into their dark eyes revealed the hatred that smouldered deep within their souls. An all-consuming loathing for most living things filled their daily lives, whether creatures of the wild or strangers from another land. Arguments and feuds were a part of daily life to them, the ones who perished during combat generally being the lucky ones. Prisoners, whether from elsewhere or their own kind, usually came to a hideous end, something that particularly applied to those from the forests.

The origins of this intense detestation of the woodland folk were to be found in the distant past when, centuries ago, the people of Maraé had come together and taken up arms against the invading mountain hordes. Driving them back to the foot of the Cantaé Mountains, they engaged in battle below the Cliffs of Sorealai, where a crushing defeat was inflicted on the forces of evil. Few Cantaéns escaped the ensuing carnage but those who did took with

them the embryo of The Hatred, which had now become instinctive, the young being born with it and the elders adding to it with their teachings.

Kaér, for that was his name, came violently awake, a sharp excruciating pain in his side. Rolling around in agony, he crashed into something and, upon opening pain-filled eyes, stared straight at a pair of dirty boots, the style and origin of which was instantly recognisable. It had never been in doubt that Cantaéns had wreaked havoc within his home, but for them to have remained nearby was beyond all understanding. If there was one thing that came a close second to their hatred of the forest dwellers, it was their fear of them. Few dared venture down to the forest and those who did never stayed long in any locality. The damage to the cabin was not recent; dust had settled quite heavily over his scattered possessions and he believed the despoilers had long departed. Extraordinary circumstances currently prevailed. Kaér had reclaimed The Shintae and the Cantaéns were desperate for its return.

His mission was ended; there could be no triumphal return to Myssous, the nation's capital where the leaders of the High Council had originally charged him with the task of recovering The Shintae. He had failed them, for The Shintae was power, the power for good in the hands of the just, or a terrible potential for evil in those of the degenerate. This ancient relic had been the deciding factor at the Battle of Sorealai when wise men had transmitted its power to the warriors in the field. During the final moments of battle, the wise men had been surprised by a lone Cantaén warrior. Seizing The Stone, the warrior had fled towards the mountains, closely followed by Maraén troops determined to relieve him of his prize. Somehow, he managed to evade pursuit and disappear amongst the peaks, never to be seen again by mortals of either nation.

Although many searched for it, The Shintae had vanished without trace and, in time, both sides came to accept its loss. In fact, almost five hundred years had passed since any expedition had been organised to seek its whereabouts. The story passed into legend where it seemed destined to remain until, three years previously, runners had been hastily dispatched from the border to the High Council, warning of strange happenings taking place in Cantaé. From their homes in the foothills, lying deep in the shadow of the mountains, villagers had witnessed lightning bolts playing around distant peaks at all hours of the day and night, accompanied by faint sounds of thunder. Rarely were there other signs of a storm to account for these phenomena.

Immediately suspicions amongst the council members were raised, although none dared voice them aloud outside their chambers. Border Scouts were ordered to scour the mountains close by to gather what information they could. Returning from reconnaissance of the nearest territories, they brought news of heavily armed groups of Cantaéns flocking towards the central mountains. On hearing this, the council leaders commanded more missions be undertaken, this time to locate the exact

source of the lightning, but these proved costly as not one scout returned to safety. Then, six months after the first signs of trouble had been observed, messengers were racing again towards the coast bearing ill tidings. Columns of smoke were now billowing from the tips of the highest peaks, whilst huge flashes of fire had taken the place of the lightning.

Winter descended over the country, preventing further exploration until the following spring when, once the snows had melted, another scout volunteered to go and seek out the knowledge the leaders so desperately required. Months went by with no word or sightings of him and he was given up for lost long before he crawled, delirious and severely wounded, back over the border. Lapsing into a coma, it was several weeks before his broken body healed and he recovered consciousness. As his mind cleared and his scrambled thoughts regained some clarity, he told of how, after many weeks of hiding by day and travelling by night, he had worked his way towards the centre of enemy activity far away in the Subrat valley. Tracking a supply column along the valley bottom, the scout discovered a large concentration of enemy troops encamped beneath the towering peak of Mount Subae.

Taking cover on the hillside overlooking the area, the scout had settled down to watch. He soon located a closely guarded group of wise men operating in an open section near the centre of the encampment. For several days the scout observed as the Cantaén sages worked in relays, day and night, over what appeared to be a small stone resting on a pedestal in their midst. Backwards and forwards, they paced, muttering in ancient tongues whilst the object of their attention pulsed steadily. Occasionally, one would utter a special incantation and point his hand at some particular part of the valley side, or distant mountain peak. Forks of lightning flashed from the strange fragment of rock, spiraling briefly around the wise man, before darting down to encircle his extended arm and streaking away to where he aimed. Sheets of flame erupted from the intended targets, scorching vast areas around and sending clouds of thick, acrid smoke high into the atmosphere, leaving the heavy crash of thunder to reverberate throughout the valleys. One thunderbolt, landing nearby, had forced the scout to break cover directly in front of a passing patrol. Badly wounded, he had managed to evade capture; more by instinct than any conscious effort, he eventually found his way back home.

The High Council had no option now but to admit openly their darkest fears were proven. The Shintae was recovered and lying in the blood stained hands of the Cantaéns. Dreadful though this was, matters could have been worse. Lightning bolts and sheets of fire, no matter how spectacular, were only a minor sample of The Stone's power. Although the Cantaén wise men might yet be unable to find ways of making greater use of its massive energy the fact that they would, given sufficient time, was a certainty the council leaders could ill afford to ignore. The Shintae must be retrieved and if necessary the old sayings used to exploit its full potential, for they had

records of all such things that the enemy did not. Once it was back in their possession, they need no longer fear attack.

Action was now a matter of urgency and the High Council sent word that Kaér should attend them with all haste. Whereas no others looked for The Stone, Kaér was the exception who had devoted much of his life to this quest. Now aged thirty, he had slipped away from home on his fifteenth birthday to commence his mission. The years that had elapsed since then had not been easy ones, the tales of his exploits spreading throughout the lands of both Maraé and Cantaé. He had, however, been left in ignorance of the events taking place in the west. His talents were unique and the council leaders had feared risking him too soon, but if anyone was capable of the task in hand, it was he.

Far to the south where the mountains met the sea, messengers had come up with him at his camp high in a rocky pass. Journeying up the coast, he had arrived at Myssous where the council leaders had apprised him of the facts, and, pausing only to replenish his supplies he had started out immediately for the border. A year of travel and dangerous adventure then followed, during which he had recovered The Shintae and made good his escape from Cantaé. Slipping secretly across the frontier to avoid Cantaén patrols, he was compelled to enter Maraé far away from any settlements, unable to call on any border scouts to act as escorts. Chance alone had dictated his route; a strange quirk of fate indeed that had not only directed his path towards his own home but had also brought him to his current predicament.

Through a pain-filled haze, Kaér's roving eyes steadied for a moment on the face of the form towering above. Deep pools of hatred gazed back as Sartae, head of the Cantaén Guard, struck him again and then ever harder, lashing out with vicious intent. Unconsciousness swept over Kaér as the agony of the blows intensified and his attacker, robbed of the pleasure of watching him suffer, aimed one final blow at the head of his helpless victim before turning away.

Many hours passed before Kaér regained his senses. The sun was approaching its peak and the forest was alive with the sounds of the creatures of the day. His face was swollen beyond all recognition, his eyes mere slits amid the bruising. A ringing noise filled his ears and his whole body ached unbearably, particularly where the ropes binding him dug deep in to his arms and legs. Despite his injuries, his initial thoughts were of The Shintae. There was, however, no need to feel for the pouch around his neck to know it would be no longer there. Rolling over in misery, he groaned aloud with the pain that greeted this manoeuvre.

"Sartae! Sartae!" screamed a voice from nearby. "Come quick! He's awake."

The guard's cry finally brought home to Kaér the gravity of his situation. Until then, his main concern had been for The Shintae, his own safety of secondary importance. Unbidden memories of the treatment he had seen

inflicted on prisoners by the enemy raced through his mind; the twisted broken bodies he had stumbled across during his years of wandering. Nevertheless, it was the fate of prisoners taken by the Cantaén Guard that occupied his thoughts the most. Far more skilled in the art of making death more painfully protracted than the average Cantaén, just to be captured by them alone was horrifying enough; but to find oneself in the hands of Sartae, their chief, was unthinkable. In a land where cruelty was considered a normal part of everyday life, he was renowned for his inhuman deeds. Forcing open his blood-encrusted eyelids, Kaér stared around the room in desperation, searching for a means of escape. Had he not been trussed, he might have tackled the pair of guards by the door and the others at the window; even without a weapon it was better to die fighting than by torture. In desperation he ignored the pain and struggled with his bindings.

"Sartae!" the guard called again, a note of urgency creeping into his voice, "He's awake and moving," he shouted, advancing upon Kaér with sword drawn.

"Stop!" came the word of command, ringing from the doorway. "You treacherous dog! Don't you know no one except me is allowed to touch him? Out of the way, fool," he bellowed, thrusting the guard to one side and striding over to a now, outwardly, indifferent Kaér.

An evil grin spread across Sartae's face as he stared down at Kaér. He broke the silence with a huge guffaw. The sound was not a pleasant one but the product of a warped and twisted mind; soon the room was filled with a dozen others all chortling in a like manner, as if at some horribly demented joke. Closing his mind to the sound, Kaér resigned himself to his fate. He had tried his best, but this had not been good enough and now the penalty for failure had to be paid. Wiping the tears of laughter from his face with the back of a dirty hand, the Cantaén leader glowered down at his victim, malevolence intensifying in his eyes with every passing moment. Towering over the still form, Sartae was a terrifying sight. His long ginger beard, surprisingly neatly trimmed, brushed against the huge green leaf of authority woven into his tunic of brown. His flowing hair stretched down to the middle of his shoulders while a band of black encircled his head, holding the colossal jewel of seniority firmly against his forehead. The splendour of the jewel dazzled Kaér as he returned Sartae's stare, forcing him to cast his eyes elsewhere as he began to speak.

"So be it," he said softly, his voice containing not the slightest hint of fear. "You've won for now, but I, for one, won't give you any pleasure in your games to come," for Kaér had suffered their "entertainment" before and knew that though his body could be broken, they could never break his spirit. "Don't for one moment think of this as anything other than a temporary victory," he continued, "others of my people will come and where I've failed, they will not. Your days are numbered, Sartae, may you be cursed forevermore!"

All the while his voice strengthened as the words echoed around the room. Then Kaér began to laugh; he laughed at these despicable creatures, unable to see, no matter how hard they tried, they could not subjugate the soul of his people. He continued to laugh, releasing the tension that had built within him over the months.

Sartae's face reddened and then turned white with rage at such open defiance of him. Never before had he been faced with anything like this. Prisoners, no matter how brave an act they had put on previously, cowered in fright when brought before him, so fearful was his reputation; but this, this insignificant wretch had the nerve to laugh quite openly in his face. His anger overflowed and, in a blind fury, he grasped his sword. Raising the blade to strike, he only just managed to control his temper and stop himself from killing Kaér outright. Naked hatred shone in his eyes as he slammed the sword back in to its sheath.

"Light the fires and bring me the irons when they're hot," he hissed to the guards behind him. His voice choked with the intensity of the moment. "And as for you," he addressed himself to Kaér, "your little ploy didn't work did it? Thought you could make me so angry I'd kill you without thinking, eh? By nightfall we'll see who's laughing."

Turning on his heel he stormed out of the room, almost trampling underfoot the guard standing by the doorway. Scarcely had he left the room when, from outside, came the sound of running feet as one of the outer sentries raced towards the hut.

"Sar-tae!" came the breathless cry. "We must hurry... there's a large party of armed...Maraéns coming this way," he paused for breath, panting heavily.

"How far behind you are they?" snapped Sartae, back in full control of himself. "Come on man, speak up!"

"They're about a mile away," replied the sentry, breathing easier, "but they aren't acting like they would do if they knew we were around."

"Quick, prepare to leave while I deal with the prisoner," Sartae commanded his followers as he turned and ran swiftly back to his helpless prisoner.

"As you doubtless heard," he snarled, glaring down at Kaér, "some of your friends are on the way to pay you a visit, but they're going to be too late. You'll be dead before they arrive. It's a pity we can't take you with us to continue our little meeting later on but, unfortunately, you'd only slow us down."

"I'm so sorry your fun's been curtailed," retorted Kaér through swollen lips, his voice heavily laden with sarcasm, able in his final moments to savour the disappointment of his enemy.

"Ha! But no! I've a far better idea," mused Sartae, half to himself. "I know what I'll do." He turned to Kaér again. "It's your lucky day today," he said, "I'm going to spare your life. Well, perhaps, you might just survive a day or two. Killing you will not slow your compatriots, but to leave you badly wounded will ensure they split their forces. They're bound to leave a fair

number to nurse and protect you. With fewer in pursuit we stand a far greater chance of escaping.”

Kaér was barely able to consider that the consequences of allowing Sartae a chance of freedom would be considerably worse for the world than those of his own death, when the blow fell and pain shot through his side and chest. For the second time that day, he left the world behind, sinking into a dark unyielding nightmare from which there seemed no hope of return.

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