

From Sky Above

I merged into the hawk's mind, body, and spirit; feeling the chill winds sweeping across its wings and a sense of exhilaration as its eyes, and mine, peer over the crest of the utmost mountain ledge at the series of three great waterfalls splashing down, one after the other, into the Atuwán River some three-thousand paces below. It was like sitting on the edge of the work.

"Go", I tell the massive, feathered beast with a mental command. I feel the stretching of muscle and sinew as its wings unfurl, spreading wide to easily catch the flowing air. I could feel the strength of the bird of prey as if it was my own strength. Jaws of the fierce beak spread to allow a piercing cry to break free, and then I lean forward and drop off the precipice in a dive.

Barren rock races past as I soar toward the break of the highest waterfall. Moments before reaching tall cedar tips I twist my shoulders back to pivot the angle of my wings. My body, or its body, changes angle and I begin moving sideways instead of downward, keeping the mountainside a safe distance to me left.

I angle myself toward the drop-off in the small river that created the highest of the three waterfalls. The chilly waters drop over an edge at least 10 paces wide. It is a very long drop to where the water hits land again. I soar over the falls and down toward the swirling pool of foam and spray another 100 paces below the breaks. I follow the trail of violent water as it passes through rough rock formations. I am careful to avoid the short cedars and high mountain brush. It's nearly barren up here. I only see a couple of rock goats. "Fortunately", I think, "there are no drakes in the skies this afternoon". I sense a nervousness in the hawk at the thought of it.

More creeks, seepages, and springs join this surge as small passes feed into the river's torrent. The river grows but soon encounters a great ridge that will turn the river in the opposite direction. The point at which the river is repulsed by a wall of sheer rock was a sight to behold. The water had dug a giant, circular pattern into the mountainside, but there was plenty of mountain left. The force of the water forced much of it high into the air against the rock barrier, the water raining back down over the entire area as it was a never-ending rain.

The sound of the crashing wetness was loud on my sensitive ears. I turn and soar toward the river's next drop in the distance. I flex my talons that are pulled close to my body. They feel so strong and sharp. Reaching the fall, I look up and see that the first water fall is nearly directly overhead now, but much more inset into the mountainside. My keen eyes spot flashes of two red foxes as they run between the cedars and scant green brush.

I am flying so close to the water that I can feel the cool mist of the churning water wet clawed feet, I mean my claws. I'm just feet above the rushing waters. I stammer in my breathing, this is

so exciting that my body nearly quivers. I feel as if I have chill bumps. But don't think birds of prey could have them.

I look down into the waters which are more white foam than anything, but can see occasional glimpses through the otherwise completely clear water to the underlying bedrock and boulders under them. Suddenly I am looking at water dropping far below as I fly over the crest of the fall. The water drops into such a spray that even my sharp eyes cannot see inside the cloud of mist.

Beyond the mountains are two rivers followed by a vast plain. The setting sun is bright orange now as it nears the horizon. Dark plateaus break the otherwise smooth plains on the horizon. The steepness of this mountain lessens and drops at a less harrowing rate. I begin seeing hardwood trees, grasses, and flowering plants.

Out from the cloud in a trail of blue and white the river is flowing again, this time directly away from the mountain. I sweep toward it and cry out in joy as I fly over it and glide just over the river between the green trees on either side of me. I veer to the left as I spy two grizzlies on the right bank slapping at the rushing waters. Just as I pass I see a large fish flung into the air and onto the bank. I see the fish flop once before I am past it and the two magnificent beasts.

The wind is rushing past my feather-covered face. It's still cool but much warmer than the point at which I started. Another small river from the south has joined this main branch and the river swells, beginning to become deeper and more stable. Yes, it is still moving quickly.

On my left, several deer are feeding just paces from the tree line. A high-pitched screech from me has them all spreading their legs into a quick-stance as their heads pop up, eyes wide, ears pointed. They bolt into the wood as I speed past them over the running waters.

The last fall is just ahead. The massive waters simply dropped out of site. Passing over the break I can see that the water doesn't simply drop like the last two falls, but runs and bumps for hundreds of paces over a rough, steep rock that had been chiseled into a giant trough by ages of the wet, rushing attack. The once smooth river had again become crashing waters and swirling foam.

I swing back and forth with changes in the waters direction until it drops over the last precipice which has now grown to one hundred paces wide. The water drops finally into a large basin where it begins the great River Atuwán. The new river breaks to the southeast and hugs tight to the mountain range. The mountains southeast of here will all continue to feed more water into its depths.

I fly away from the river and the mountain toward the plains that lie ahead. The ground has now become very green and is thick with giant trees and green growth. The air is now warm and the wind currents lift my body. After short while I see it, the River Atugian. It is fed in a similar way by mountains farther up the range to the northwest. Oddly they two rivers flow side-by-side for many leagues, but the Atugian will flow down the west side of our lands instead. The Atugian feeds my homeland in Veramon.

The river is wide yet is running smooth as I fly over it. Looking in front of me I see a tall, gray tower twice as tall as the tallest tree and built of mountain stone. My tutor says this is called “Rhone’s Sentinel”. Just beyond are more towers, but broken from war. Between the overgrowth of trees and shrubs can be seen remnants of stone walls and buildings of the abandoned city. Everwatch, my people’s first city in southern Terraneth, has fallen into decay.

I pass over and glide deeper into the plains. I can see my homeland. A series of tall plateaus break the flat horizon ahead. The rock of the sheer walls is bright red and I can see the Atugian river winding back and forth toward the rock giants that were nearly perfectly flat on top.

Looking down, my large shadow frightens a herd of Quizzles that are trotting across sands near the river. The tall orange and brown running birds with long necks squawk their irritating noise toward me as I fly over. No doubt jealous because they cannot fly.

The Plateau is getting close and I am too low, so I begin working for the first time with effort to gain height. Working my shoulders hard and fast now, I get higher and higher until I finally crest the edge of the plateau. I look hard for a moment and finally, yes...there I am. Rather, there is my human self. Sitting cross legged on a large rock, hands resting on my knees. My body clad in white shirt, black trousers, and my dark curly hair messed from the wind. My uncle Dink is standing behind me laughing and pointing at me. Me the hawk that is.

After circling overhead several times, not wanting it to end, I swoop down. Spreading my wings wide, I gently glide and land on a boulder that is only feet away from my own human body and my uncle. I look at myself through the eyes of this beast for a moment before I break the bond, then slowly let go.

I slowly open my eyes once again. Before me is a Storm Hawk on a boulder. I fill my lungs with a deep breath. My human chest expands. The huge bird before me is larger than most men, yet is sitting quietly observing me. It’s eyes blink quickly and its head darts about, but no other sudden moves. I realize I’ve holding my breath, so then exhale slowly. I glance at my arms and I see chill bumps from wrist to elbow. Sweat is dripping from my brow as if I had been cutting trees. “Go”, I tell my new friend, “It’s okay”.

As if understanding perfectly, the bird, colored a solid deep gray-blue like a storm cloud, turned, spread its wings, and took to the air with a large heave. I watch it as it rises higher and higher, eventually blending with the late afternoon sky. It flies back toward it’s home in the mountains. The mountain range can be seen at great distance on the horizon beyond the western river.

I feel Uncle Dink’s hand on my left shoulder. “Lad, you spirited that bird at an incredible distance. I’m very proud of you.”

“Uncle”, I say, “that was...incredible!”

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