

“The Shift at Clairvert”, a preview to “The Unfinished World” by Diego Valenzuela

THE UNFINISHED WORLD

SNEAK PEEK

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THE SHIFT AT CLAIRVERT

WAKING UP HAD BECOME more and more of a chore as the list of reasons to do so grew small.

It had been weeks since the beginning of the Shift, and with every passing day, hope continued to fade. Not just in him—as he was notoriously cynical, and an outcast for it—but in the rest of the citadel. Every morning he’d step out of his hut, he’d make the hour-long trek to his watchman post, and begin his vigil. That was depressing

enough, but in the past weeks, since the Shift began, he'd also have to give the same grim news to everyone he walked past, begging him to share his knowledge.

Yes, the monsters were still making their horrifying pilgrimage into the Asili.

If someone in Clairvert knew what was really happening, why the monsters in the outside world had begun to peacefully walk into the mountain, never to come out, they were keeping their cruel silence.

He could see, from his post so high up the mountain, through the window carved into the earth, the world stretching far away, forever. For days he would see up to fifty or sixty monsters, sometimes travelling in groups as they were wont to do, disappear into the fissure in the side of the mountain.

The larger ones shaped like monstrous spiders could not fit through the fissure, so they had to be brought in piece by piece. Their comparatively smaller comrades had never showed any sign of remorse in tearing them apart. They didn't even scream as they died. Solis had almost vomited the first time he saw the brutal deed.

At least they were no longer hostile. Some believed it was a good sign, that maybe the creatures were somehow leaving the planet, giving it back to the ones who inhabited it all those centuries ago. That maybe if they held on a little longer, they'd be able to tread the world again.

But most, including him, knew that wasn't the case—there was something far bigger and far more sinister behind the monsters' pilgrimage. After all, they had always feared the citadel of Clairvert, and it had to be some great faith that led them to the fissure right next to it.

He wished he shared any such faith.

Solis had been sitting at his post for six hours. It was noon. There had been no signs of any monster, wild or passive, anywhere near the mountain. He wondered why. Had all of them finished their trek?

If no more came today, it would be at least a little exciting to be able to go back home and tell the others that no monsters had been sighted; that should make a few people's night a bit brighter.

Solis rose to his feet, putting his little book of stories on the table, and looked through the window.

At first there was disappointment when he looked through the glass eye to find a creature coming.

But then his disappointment turned into confusion and even fear when he realized that, if that was one of the monsters, it wasn't of a kind he had ever seen before. It was too humanoid to be one of the laani, and far too big to be a human being.

What the hell was it?

The thing was moving slow, as if wounded, dragging its feet in the sand, large arms barely hanging onto his shoulders. It took it several minutes, even at its

tremendous height, for it to come close enough for Solis to realize that it was neither man nor monster, but something in-between.

It looked like a cloaked giant wearing war-battered armor. Its dark skin was covered in thick plates of silver, its head with a mask forged to give him an intimidating appearance. There was a pylon shooting upward from its left shoulder, and the base piece of another on its right, broken, maybe lost in battle?

Covering most of it was an enormous tattered cloth that fluttered behind him like a cape.

Had it been fighting the creatures? Maybe someone else?

It appeared to be coming, not to the fissure through which the creatures had been disappearing, but to the citadel’s small and well hidden entrance—the miraculous entryway that allowed no monster-sized creature in.

The armored giant stopped its exhausted walk and brought one knee to the ground. Solis looked down at it with his own eyes and it was hard to believe what he was seeing.

Pieces in the giant’s armor began to shift, particularly in the area of the abdomen, until they opened to a dark space.

Solis held his breath, terrified, when he saw movement, and a man stepped out of the giant which appeared to be left lifeless.

His extraordinary eyesight had ‘earned’ him his position as watchman, so he could see that the man who had been in control of the giant needed help. Like the huge thing he had brought all the way to Clairvert, he could barely walk, tired from what had to be a very long trip.

Solis stepped away from the window and approached the horns. There were three of them, each shaped to give the air blown a specific pitch and a specific timbre.

The red one—a menacing low note—would warn the people of Clairvert about an impending threat; the blue one—a higher note that sounded like the howling of a dog—would let them know that a survey troop had returned.

The green one he had never sounded. He had never needed it. No foreign human being had come to the citadel in decades.

He blew the green horn, and rushed down to help the man.

When Solis was back in the citadel, he had to fight his way through crowds of concerned, confused citizens begging him to explain what they had heard, why he had sounded the horn, and what that new and exotic sound meant.

“Who is out there?”

“Are my children in danger?”

“He’s just having a laugh! He’s probably drunk again!”

He ignored them as he always did, and was allowed passage into the atrium, the maze of narrow stone passages that separated them from the world outside.

Two armored soldiers were kneeling next to the man, and several others were looking outside, no doubt at the monstrous vehicle that brought him to the citadel. Solis approached him, just as he was asked his name.

“Thank you,” the man—who turned out to be very young, albeit physically large—said, accepting a drink from a soldier’s canteen. He was wearing a black jumpsuit, something military, no doubt. “My name is Akiva Davenport, and I need to talk with whoever’s in charge. We are all in danger.”