

What Is The Sound?

They were found wandering the Eternity.

It was the routine patrol that located them in our orbit, their Flightcradle entirely devoid of power. The patrol itself circled Shamballa continuously, a routine Ozone cycle, their black hull forever visible in our green sky. Never had our kind encountered anything like them before.

They were fierce. They fought with all of their might but could not overcome our superior strength. These strangers looked much like us but were smaller in every dimension, slower too, and completely hostile, fearful of everything and everyone around them.

We took the strangers before the Hierarchy and the decision was made to allot them for departure. Many, including myself, wished for an in-depth study of their anatomy but it was decided best to prevent further aggravation. They had already managed to badly injure members of the patrol with their fists.

They seemed unable to comprehend our words and spoke in a language with which we were unfamiliar. However, as we left them in the Place of Departure, departing the first of the five, the others appeared to understand. They called to the departed stranger, their faces twisted. They seemed to despair at its lack of response. Three of them began to struggle on their podiums and made the most unpleasant of noises. They were departed quickly.

Conversely, the final stranger seemed to have prepared itself.

When the new arrivals first came down upon Shamballa, they had lost their sight as they looked to our sky. We do not know why this is the case but, inevitably, they became increasingly helpless and again lashed out at us; of course, their anomalous disability rendered them completely under our control and we apprehended them easily. Yet, as this stranger looked out with its sightless eyes, and despite the overwhelming power we held over it, I could see in them a strength unlike any other I had observed.

It appeared to be of the lesser physicality, its hands smaller and softer when compared to the other four, its shape narrower and curved. Its blanched eyes shone like the Sky Eyes that glowed from the Eternity, secreting clear droplets onto its face. It was then that the Lesser opened its mouth and a sound filled the Place of Departure.

It was literally otherworldly; unheard of; inexpressively elating.

After everything that has happened we still do not have a word for it. I can tell you that it was soft and defenceless, much like the Lesser itself, yet powerful and endless, spreading around us as it moved its mouth, forming unknown phrases that fluctuated methodically in pitch and volume; a pattern of four beats, then three, then four again, building forcefully before, unexpectedly, growing quiet.

A shiver rippled out through my fellow Shambalans before we immediately launched into debate: do we depart the Lesser or keep it sustained to study this phenomenon? The latter was easily agreed upon.

Our world was soon transfixed. The Sound was transmitted on all airwaves so that the planet could know of our discovery, allowing for discussions to decide the Lesser's uses to commence.

It was observed for a period of twenty Sky Eyes during which time an appropriate diet and exercise regime was designed. We tried to probe beneath the strange pale fabrics it wore but, at its sudden distress, we elected to postpone our investigation. Dissection was not an imminent requirement.

The Lesser seemed to understand why it had not been departed as it continued to emit this singular Sound for us on several occasions when we requested it, touching its mouth to indicate our request. The Lesser was held within the containment facility while we attempted to rectify its vision since it did not seem to regenerate like our own. This was to no avail.

Eventually, Shamballa wanted to see our discovery. The Hierarchy initially forbade such a public display, yet relented as the world protested. Millions gathered within the towering capital of Azgaune to watch as the Lesser was placed upon a plateau of our finest iron ore and raised to the sights of all Shamballa. The airwaves crackled with anticipation before the Lesser's Sound was amplified across the entirety of the city, and the planet fell silent.

A feeling unknown to the Shambalans spread like the dreaded fever, proliferating throughout the crowds as the Sound rang out. Several of us opened our own mouths and tried to replicate it – an act I myself once partook - but, alas, it seemed beyond our biology.

The Lesser was requested again and again, required to make the Sound during Hierarchy Inauguration ceremonies and important Birth Dates of our species, including my own for my involvement in the salvaging of the Lesser. This went on for a long and enjoyable memory.

Yet countless Birth Dates passed and the Lesser in my care, though well maintained, developed soft cracks in its face and found it increasingly difficult to remain mobile during the typical exercise regimes. These had to be made easier, the diet also being adjusted to meet the Lesser's decreased requirement of carbohydrates and fats.

I worried for its health, but it was still able to make the Sound for which it was so well known, though with admittedly less power. I told it as clearly as I could that there would be one more presentation, one final exertion, before it could rest and be prepared for dissection, the Sound safely recorded in the Archives – yet, as usual, the Lesser did not understand me. It simply sat there, mouth hanging loose, limbs motionless, its eyes staring into the blackness that forever veiled its sight.

It was the final presentation that changed everything.

The world gathered once more within Azgaune while the Lesser was raised onto the plateau. I prepared myself, aware I would have to inform my fellow Shambalans of the Lesser's retirement. The Lesser, as frail as a newborn, stood unsteadily upon the iron ore and opened its mouth one last time. The Sound rang out through Azgaune and Shambalans of all ages shivered with its power.

Then it occurred.

An adolescent Shambalan rose up onto the shoulders of the silent throng. Staring skyward towards the plateau, the young one's jaw opened and closed, a faint gargle rising from the throat. Shamballa turned to look. Even the Lesser's voice quieted, aware that something was different; that something was happening. Suddenly, with a look of excited fear, the Shambalan's mouth opened wide and uttered the very Sound for which the Lesser had been assumed totally unique.

A surprised cry rose from the crowds and they surged forward as one, greater and lesser together, demanding they be taught how to emulate the Sound. An unstoppable horde swept over

the doomed youth as the planet descended into violent chaos. Everyone fought, determined to reach the young one first, arcing jets of scarlet bursting into the air as Shamballa witnessed its first ever war.

A high-pitched screeching reached our ears as, to my own and the Hierarchy's mounting horror, the black patrol Flightcradle thundered down from the Eternity in a ball of convulsing flame. They, too, were desperate to learn the technique of the Sound, heard by them over the airwaves transmitted into the Eternity. As they descended, they hurtled over the Lesser's plateau, scorching plasma flooding the iron ore and heating it to an incredible temperature. The Lesser again produced the noise we had associated with distress and it seemed to raise its thin arms to its face before it was lost amid a wave of fire.

The Flightcradle smashed into the highest tower of all Azgaune and blossomed outwards, debris crashing into the chaos below and obliterating the entire city section surrounding the Hierarchy's palace. Both I and the surviving Hierarchy members fled, desperately trying to escape the spread of infernos and bloodshed that dyed the green sky a terminal yellow.

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My work has resulted in the end of our civilisation as suddenly as it began, aeons ago.

I write this in the containment facility where the Lesser was once held, listening to the carnage that is Shamballa, my world, outside. From where I sit, I can see the last remaining relic to our destruction: the clothing worn by the Lesser upon its first arrival, contained within a glass receptacle. Though torn and faded, the strange insignia poised above the left chest cavity remains visible. The unknown phrasing etched across this circular symbol had always eluded me, and would now forever do so: N - A - S - A.

Many of the Hierarchy have departed and I will soon follow – there is nothing more for me here, other than the pursuit of the Sound to which I cannot bear witness anymore.

I leave this as a record for any who may find it; for any who may survive: do not pursue the Sound. If you hear it, do not listen. Flee.

You cannot stop it.