

## **Epilogue: Supper In The Green Lake Room**

While luncheon was subdued, supper was lively indeed. As many in the room were in shock and denial, an equal number saw an opportunity to advance their private causes, and with them, the fortunes of their respective peoples. Apache Traders and Western Bandits were busily recreating Scottsdale Arizona using pastries and condiments, planning out battle strategies together. Flagellantes were discussing evacuation plans with the nobility of New Spain. Individuals who had not darkened a church door in many a year were buying rosary beads and learning how to use them.

A chamber quartet has playing Heitor Villa-Lobos' 'Bachianas Brazillerias' on a raised platform over the Green Lake. Don Antonio thought its somber and sweeping melodies oddly apt for the occasion.

“Finally, we're getting some real food,” Don Antonio said, helping himself to the white meat of a gigantic roast turkey, whose weight made the table groan when the monk servers set it down. “Sepulveda wines, too,” he said, raising the glass, and examing the color of his favourite merlot.

“Would you mind if I join your distinguished company?” Abbot Gaudentius asked, inviting himself to the supper table of the Sepulvedas and Bacas

“Of course,” Don Baca replied. “It would be our pleasure.”

“If it is not too much of an inconvenience, might a place be set for a sixth guest?”

“We'd be delighted,” Dona Baca answered. “Who is it?”

“Like Don Antonio's wonderful merlot, it's best if it kept a surprise.”

“Hear, hear,” Don Antonio agreed, draining another glass.

Dona Carmencita, seated closest to Abbot Gaudentius, leaned over and asked in a conspiratorial manner. “If Rintiala's story of the events at the Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain are true, why hasn't New Spain been destroyed by the Sky Wanderers?”

“Dona Carmencita!” Don Antonio, Don Baca, and Dona Baca all cried together in shock.

“It's quite all right,” Abbot Gaudentius said smiling. “I rather expected such a question from one of you, sooner or later. First, let's list all the known facts of the Sky Wanderers. We know that the Treasury at Los Alamos is real”

“And so is the Shrine,” Dona Carmencita added in a solemn tone.

“Sadly true,” Abbot Gaudentius agreed. “And also sadly true, Albuquerque is still infected with the Sky Wanderer's buildings, covered in their poisonous shrouds.”

“I do a great deal of business with Apacheria,” Don Antonio said. “I'm inclined to believe their reports of an endless wilderness to the west, filled with the dead cities of the Crowded Earth.”

“I fought with the Comanche in their last war, and after they were defeated, and agreed to live under the Queen's peace, I did business with them. They say the same thing about the lands east of the Inland Sea.” Don Baca added.

“If the Sky Wanderers came soon, what could New Spain do about it?” Dona Carmencita asked.

“An excellent question, but I will parry verbal swords with you this one time,” Abbot Gaudentius said. “What has kept them away for the last fifty years?”

The two Dons looked at each other, about to speak, and smiled. Don Baca indicated with his wine glass that Don Antonio speak first.

“I think they're too busy fighting amongst themselves.” he said.

Abbot Gaudentius leaned back in his chair and laughed, while he poured himself some of the merlot. “That's my opinion also.”

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The meal had come to its end. When all were standing up, leaving their tables, and preparing to leave, a single Apache Trader came to their table. He was about thirty years old, medium height, and very muscular in build. He wore a poncho of a silky blue color that reflected and manipulated the light of the bronze torches in the Green Lake Room.

“Good evening to you, Abbot Gaudentius,” the Apache Trader said cordially.

“And a good evening to you,” Abbot Gaudentius replied. “Dons and Donas, I would like to introduce to you the man who walked out of the desert, carrying the truths of these stories of First Sister Rintiala.”

The Sepulvedas and Bacas rose to greet their new supper companion. “I am very pleased to finally meet these two great families again. It has been a

long time."

"Again?" Dona Carmencita asked.

"Yes. Please allow me to introduce myself. My family name is lost to me now, but you may call me 'Hunts-The-Ruins'.