

The Ruins of Phoenix: The Classic Flotilla

The lead truck with its precious cargo of Nueguan Sisters and a new Apache Trader, moved out of the Camelback Mountain encampment at dawn, heading south and east, until Highway 101 due south, the direction of the Kierland Golf Club, the last known administrative center of the Sky Wanderers. It was a 1948 Ford F1, fitted among other things with a Marmion-Herrington four-wheel drive system, stainless steel wheels, and solid rubber tires courtesy of the Sepulvedas of Socorro, New Spain, the only noble family that dealt openly with Apacheria.

Truth was every noble family and person-of-commerce in New Spain had bartered, dealt with, or partnered up with a similar type individual in Apacheria; it was just common sense if one wanted to stay in business. For a simple example, Apacheria needed cotton goods, and New Spain needed cheap beef to feed its rapidly growing population. This type of medieval bartering had worked for centuries after the One Hour War until more exotic materials were needed by both. The only way to obtain said materials would be to plunder the entombed Sky Wanderer cities, where untold wealth of every kind from that bygone era was there for the taking.

Except for the plagues the Sky Wanderers kept hidden in their most protected treasure troves; never the same plague twice, as if the what the superstitious New Spaniards claimed was true, that demons and witches hid in those buildings, waiting for the unwary adventurer.

Most of the educated citizenry of the Empty Earth thought these stories to be only myths, until a posse of starving Western Bandits decided to break into an out-of-the-way coffee shop located on the grounds of the Kierland Golf Club. Using carefully hoarded and extremely rare ceramic blades, they were able to cut their way into a small shroud no larger than a normal doorway, to get to the preserved food inside. None of them survived the attempt, nor did any Old Human--Western Bandit or Apache--who lived within a fifty-mile radius. The plague ate through flesh like fire, leaving the first sufferers to die in minutes. Ten years later, simply walking on the grounds of the Kierland was a death warrant.

All this changed with the election of Sister Alatheia, Healer of Clan Tiala as First Among Firsts. She decided to form expeditions of selected Sisters to venture into Phoenix, under the watchful eye of Finds-Water, First among the Seven Apache Traders. To prove her commitment to the rest of the Nueguan people, she had enlisted her own eldest daughter, brilliant and beautiful Rintiala, to accompany her, along with an Apache who desired his scattered people to become united into a new Tribe, the Phoenix Apache. His name was Hunts-The-Ruins, and he had lived near the Sky Wanderes cities all his life, pilfering valuables made of glass and stainless steel.

“That's a great introduction,” Hunts-The-Ruins thought to himself. “I'm just about ready for my acceptance speech.”

“Are you done mumbling to yourself?” Dianire Redourine asked Hunts-The-Ruins, as she stretched her long legs in the box of the truck.

The Healing Sister--Alyria of Clan Tiala--crouched beside her began to whine. “I can't see why I couldn't have ridden in the cab. This truck is making my clothes all dusty and dirty.”

“And bumpy,” Dianire added. “This highway is making my teeth ache.”

“Apache males are uncomfortable in close quarters with a Nueguan female,” Hunts-The-Ruins explained matter of factly to Alyria. “I know from experience that crazy things can happen. When we get to the Kierland, you can have all the hot baths and clean clothes that you want” he added.

“Is it true that the synthetics think that we are returning Sky Wanderers?” Alyria asked. She was very young, a Second Sister of perhaps seventeen years old, a head full of auburn curls flowing out from under the hood of her poncho. Hunts-The-Ruins thought of her as the Nueguan ideal: delicate beauty combined with overly-large breasts. Not his ideal of Apache female perfection at all.

“That's what happened two weeks ago at the Sanctuary.” He replied.

“Yes, and look how that turned out,” Dianire objected. “Now, there's a monstrous evil metallic flower towering over Phoenix, and most likely an army of Sky Wanderers ready to swoop down in vengeance.”

“Except they're pretty slow at swooping,” Alyria noted. “Wouldn't their machines have attacked already, even if the Sky Wanderers didn't come themselves?”

“That's a good, brave answer, Alyria,” Hunts-The-Ruins agreed. “But nobody really knows for sure.” He stood up a little from his crouch, to look over the top of the cab. “Until then, we've got work to do,” he said, shouting into the breeze the truck was creating.