

Ancient Call

By Artreus

Philippe had been laying in bed for a while now. He had woken up who-knows-how-long ago but couldn't find a reason to get up yet. There was no magic in this mundane world. Only a place of work and sleep and he was having trouble keeping it up. He had found a way out, though. And all he needed to do was wait it out.

Eventually, he leapt out for a change of pace, leaving the covers in a heap-nobody would see them again until he crawled back that night- and made to clean himself off, only then noticing a flashing light on a nearby phone. Habit more than interest dictated he listen to the missed call immediately and he shut his dreary eyes as he shuffled over and hit the playback. The voice he heard, however, pried open his eyes in a hurry.

"Philippe? It's Christine... listen... I-I think it's starting," her voice was rushed and anxious, "Not now!" she snapped at an unheard voice, "Listen... just come over as quick as you can."

The call was only a few minutes old, how could he have missed it? The rest of the day suddenly became much more interesting, as all other commitments had been trumped by one simple phone call. Before long, he was on the road, speeding to Christine's place in a red Jeep Cherokee.

The events that had set this all into motion so long ago flashed through his mind, impatient to see if Christine was right. Long ago, when he arrived here, he learned that there was no magic of any kind in this world. It had all been stamped out and blocked and even its existence was ignored or simple forgotten by the people who lived here. In order to move on, however, he searched for any references that could give him back that ability and found legend of a curse in an ancient civilization. In that search, he had met Christine, who made a trip to the jungle possible and the truth was discovered.

There was no curse. Not in the basic sense of the word at least. Oh, they had found this lost civilization's secret easily enough, but they were now enslaved to it. He rubbed his stomach with his hand as he thought about it. There was a creature inside of him. A parasite. Aware of everything he did. Whatever had blocked out magic in this world, these worms were immune to it. And it could be his so long as he remained its host. But not while the creature remained dormant. If Christine was right... their wait may be at an end.

He pulled up to her place, a small simple house near the outskirts of the town, just on the edge of an expansive forest. He was out of the Jeep

practically before it had even turned off and was alarmed to see the door to the house ajar. He bolted inside, shutting the door and locking it behind him.

“Christine!” he called out, worried that something had happened to her.

The house was a mess. Papers and books were scattered about carelessly, a window was broken, a glass of water was shattered on the floor, drawers were either hanging open or lay tossed aside on the floor, and the phone she had used this morning was off the hook, swinging by its cord. All these things suggested a break in. However, one peculiarity caught his attention; the sofa was tattered and torn, ripped open. For that, he could think of no reason.

Before long he found a door, also left open, leading down into the basement.

“Christine?” he called down. It wasn’t the sort of basement that people kept clean and tidy for guests, rather the sort which was dark and forbidding, serving as a center of necessity that was rarely disturbed.

“Philippe?” moaned a soft voice from deep within. He made his way down the stairs to see her kneeling against the far wall, wrapped in a blanket on the damp floor. He walked to her slowly, not understanding.

“What’s going on?” he asked, everything out of place, especially with the once vibrant young woman now huddled and hiding in her basement.

#She is beginning to adapt,# A voice said from her... sort of. He recognized the psionic voice immediately as that of the parasitic race living inside of them; one in him and one in her. They spoke in unison in an eerie blend of male and female. He wasn’t even sure they naturally had a gender.

She looked up at him, opening and closing her mouth slowly, not sure what to say. She eventually pulled an arm out from underneath the blanket, revealing a long, hooked talon that had replaced her index and middle fingers. He suddenly realized what had happened to the couch upstairs.

“What are you doing to her!” he demanded.

#Your form is unacceptable and weak. We need protection. We have selected a species that would suit us. You must adapt,# the cool, calm voice of the reply only infuriated him further.

“And what species is that? Maybe you could have infected one of them to begin with if you weren’t satisfied!”

#We were unaware of this species until you witnessed it.# was the reply, to which an image flashed in his mind.

“You can’t be serious!” he yelled, even though it was the action of speaking the parasites understood, not the actual words.

“What is it?” Christine asked from down below, inspecting her claw. Philippe suddenly pitied her, having begun a transformation into some unknown beast.

“It’s a dinosaur called a Megaraptor. I was looking around on the Internet and saw one not long ago. It seems I wasn’t the only one watching...”

Christine’s face turned pale as she contemplated the idea “I’ve been hiding all morning because of a claw! We’ll be cut off from the rest of the world if we turn into dinosaurs!”

“Somehow, I don’t think the worms mind,” grumbled Philippe. He didn’t want to admit that the Megaraptor did bear a comfortable resemblance to a dragon, but until he left this world, he didn’t want to be *that* noticeable. He was only glad that the worms couldn’t read minds.

A wave of tension swept through his body and he heard a strange... *cracking* sound. Like the shell of an egg being crumbled off. He doubled over as he felt his sides stretching momentarily, leaving him gasping for breath in alien, expanded lungs. He lifted up his shirt to see the little hairs on his body flattened out and becoming more numerous. Scales.

Christine groaned, and he could see her writhe in pain. With slow and painful clarity, her face pushed out, her jaw becoming longer and taking her nose with it into a small but very noticeable muzzle.

#Your metabolism is too weak to sustain these changes. You must find food, # stated the voice.

“Well of course we need food, you woke us up before breakfast...” he mumbled. He then looked at Christine

“I’m sorry, there’s no food in the house,” she said through clenched teeth, talking becoming difficult for her already.

“I’ll have to go to the store, then. You’ll be spotted if you go,” he volunteered, “Just as long as you stop changing me long enough to go without being caught!”

#Adaptations will continue.#

“Wait! Your eyes...” Christine cried, then realized he couldn’t see, “They’re all yellow and... strange...”

Philippe nodded softly, “I’ll grab your shades from upstairs on my way out. I’ll be back soon.”

The car ride was not a simple one. The Jeep felt so... small. And it seemed so out of place to do something so mundane as going to the store when something so extraordinary was happening to him.

Nor was shopping for two Megaraptors-to-be. The mere sight of food made him ravenous, it was obviously very draining to have one's body transformed in this way. Credit card in hand, he collected anything that caught his attention: snacks, eggs, meat, nothing to drink, though, he wasn't feeling very thirsty at all.

It was when he was trying to decide if it was possible to have too many Swiss Cake Rolls that he felt another wave grip his body. Slowly, he inched upward, his legs getting longer and strong running muscles growing in. He could only watch in silent horror and hope for his life that they would not look *too* suspicious on a human body. A muffled "*pop*" shattered that hope as a claw poked through the back of his right sneaker. "*Pop,*" a second sprouting from the left.

He stood silently, staring at his feet in disbelief. He then straightened and looked around. Nobody was around. Looking back down, he lifted his foot, the shoe still snugly in place. He supposed that the change could be passed off at a glance, who looks at the back of anybody's shoes, anyway? Just the same, it was time to head back to Christine and stop pushing his luck.

Ever notice that the times you're in a hurry are the same times the checkout lines stop moving? This conundrum hit Philippe hard as he prepared to make his escape. He couldn't draw any attention to himself; so running wasn't an option, forcing him to wait in line like the rest of the people. To make matters worse, a mother and her kid were in front of him: the sort of kid that shouldn't be allowed into public places without a stun gun on hand.

Things went real well at first. The kid was simply fascinated by the candy always deployed at the registers. But then came another wave of tension as every muscle in Philippe's body was seized and another change was on the horizon. With horror, he soon realized what it was.

His spine tingled and started to stretch, ligaments creaking into new formations as his dormant human tailbone started to creep out. He grimaced in pain, but dared not make a sound as it grew longer and fatter, but not with enough power to break free. Instead he felt it curl down, following his body, and go between his legs, filling the seat of his pants and soon crawling up his front, the muscle strengthening quickly, making it feel awfully crowded down there. He was surprised that his pants didn't burst of that moment, the seams straining from the added mass. Just as the tension subsided, the worst happened.

"Hey, Mister!" the kid called up from down below. Philippe closed his eyes and pretended not to hear, "Those are some pretty cool shoes!" He

opened an eye and, sure enough, the kid was kneeling on the ground, entranced by the claws that had escaped his shoes earlier.

“Thanks, kid...” he growled, trying to be mean and unapproachable, but unimaginably relieved that tail had escaped detection.

“Hey, what’s that?” the kid asked as he got up.

“Come on...” the mother barked at the kid, dragging him away with one hand, groceries in the other. He protested the entire way until they were gone from the store. All that remained now was the trivial matter of paying for the hundreds of dollars worth of food.

He brought some food down to Christine, not sure of what he would find once he got down the stairs. Somehow, he didn’t anticipate what he saw waiting for him.

“Oh... you’re looking good,” he said through a nervous smile. For whatever reason, Christine seemed to be changing faster than he was. She was several feet taller than him, with very well developed three-fingered claws on each hand, the first claw being shaped like a long sickle, much like a raptor’s toe claw. Her face now sported a very reptilian muzzle, with teeth and flaring nostrils and no hair remaining. Her scales had barely grown in yet, but her legs was finely sculpted muscle fitting a dinosaur. Still wrapped around her were the tattered remains of the blanket and some clothes, though none did any good covering the creature underneath.

He offered her a steak, large and uncooked, which she eat greedily as he sat down against her, helping himself to some more of their bounty.

“We can’t stay here much longer. You’re going to get a lot taller and the sooner we leave, the easier we can get somewhere else before being noticed.”

The reptile nodded and nudged a map over to him. She had already thought this out. Crater Forest was nearby, a forbidding place in a large secluded hole in the ground several miles across. A place was circled on a winding road, ‘abandoned cabin’ scrawled beside it.

“We better get going now, then,” he said.

Another wave gripped him, surging through his arms, the muscles bulging and changing. His fingers fused together, leaving only three left, the claws growing into place. With a load grunt, his tail demolished the seams on his pants, falling about his legs as it freed itself. Luckily, there was no more modesty lost between the two.

“Now... while I can still drive the Jeep.”

The trip was a silent one, Christine tearing up the seats in back, but it didn't matter. The Jeep's usefulness would be coming to an end soon, anyway. The cabin was dark, but large. There had been a large living room with a window covering an entire wall, now broken. The house may have been inviting at one time, but now it looked lost and forgotten. Just like they wanted to be.

#The wildlife here is unable to support your adaptations.# toned the voices once again.

“Are you still here?” he asked cynically.

#The wildlife must adapt for us. You must locate the water supply.# The voice stated. Philippe could only wonder at what that meant. He looked at the map, tracing a winding river to a waterfall at the Crater's edge. That had to be the only water source. Christine loomed above him and he gave her a reassuring pat.

“Looks like one last job for the Jeep.”

Philippe reached the Jeep just as another wave hit him. His legs bulged as a full set of talons grew in and another foot was added to his height. He looked at the Jeep and then at his very non-human limbs. In exasperation, he tore the door off and soon the driver's seat followed it. If he was going to make it on time, he needed the Jeep to do it, and he needed to fit inside.

He raced down the dirt road, following the river. Another wave hit him, pulling his face out and he recognized the saurian muzzle doubling profile. He didn't care so long as he managed to free himself from the demands of that worm. He could hear the branches scratching at the care, the undergrowth having conquered this road long ago. It bounce and shook over logs and rocks. Then he saw it!

Crunch, the care clipped a tree and mashed in a headlight. He was thrown forward against the steering column but the impact wasn't enough to cause the airbag to go off. Standing, rising to his full height, he contemplated the pool of water, the falls droning in the background.

“Alright... now what?” he asked.

#Enter the water. We have adapted you to secrete a growth hormone to adapt prey species.#

Secrete wasn't exactly an action he thought sounded very inviting, but if it would serve the worm's purpose, he would do it. As he understood it, once they were sure of their survival, the two of them would be left alone. And then he could finally unlock their mysteries.

He tore off his shirt and waded into the water, his scales shimmering as the water splashed on them, catching the light. He didn't feel anything, but he supposed that he was secreting whatever it was these worms had dreamed up.

He watched as deer slowly approached the water, seemingly oblivious to his presence. He watched in fascination as it lowered its head for a drink. It didn't take long for the altered water to have an effect.

The deer started growing, its body rounding out and its legs turning to muscle. The deer quickly turned into a pony, and the pony into a horse, gaining muscle, fat, strength, and power. Its antlers fused into horns and its teeth sharpened into fangs. Whatever this creature was, it was fierce enough that it looked like only a dinosaur could take it down. He wondered what he had just done. Ever animal in the Crater would drink this water. And every animal would be subjected to this "adaptation." He had just created an entire new ecosystem.

It was time to go, he knew, and he made his way back to the car, driving back to the cabin. His tail didn't quite fit inside the Jeep anymore and, as he was driving, another wave gripped him, his face losing all human qualities and his vision shifting. It began to hurt to be cramped inside such a little car. He was still growing! His haunches barely left enough room for him to sit in front of the wheel, and his neck was stretching out too. His body wasn't designed to curl up anymore, it was meant to be spread out and straight. He cried out in an exasperated roar, smashing the gas pedal and trying to make his way back blind.

It wasn't before long that he hit something and fell off the road, the Jeep turning over on its side. He was trapped inside, one of the most powerful creatures on the planet, and now being slowly crushed by a tin can. He tore at the inside with no luck, snapping his jaws in a futile effort. Suddenly, help arrived.

With the shriek of ripping metal, a large pair of jaws bit into the roof of the Jeep and torn it off, spilling Philippe out as his final growth spurts shot him upward, his head in the trees. He knew, of course, that the creature before him was Christine, having completed her changes before him. He nuzzled her neck, his new body aching as she guided him back to their sanctuary.

The lay together for an hour or so, not yet ready to explore their new realm. There was a certain serenity to it so, of course, the worms interrupted.

#We have studied your species. You reproduce by sexual contact between two genders. You are of different genders. You will reproduce so that we may form new hosts.#

Philippe looked at Christine grimly. They hadn't agreed to that.