

Episode 9: The Great Orchid War Part 1

Hi friends, it's me. Your intrepid narrator, your archaeologist, your god whisperer given flesh, and your guide to all things that are Totally Real History™ CR. I may have mentioned to you before that I have been tied to a tree. In your tiny fractious piece of history I have been here going on six months or so by now. In mine, closer to four days. Four days is what I assume mind you, but when you are tied tightly to a large tree, head dangling limp in front of you watching ants crawl up your honey coated legs, time is more of an illusion than anything else. Yes friends, let me describe the scene for you. There is a tree that exists within your time, 450 long miles north of Blythe, this very moment, as you breathe, called the Methuselah Tree. An ancient bristlecone pine some say is as old as the planet itself but we both know that isn't true, don't we friends? Time has a way of killing all things, this tree surely included, but it is true that it exists where we both are simultaneously and existed 4 thousand years before you. Assuming that is a correct guess then that places this tree right around 7000 years or maybe a little longer. And friends, that might be the closest a living thing can be to eternal.

It's spun wide out of the ground. Brambled and twisted. Thick lines of grain follow along it's length from the earth to the sky. Though ancient, it is not tall, no more than 6 meters from trunk to zenith. As a matter of fact, the reason it has survived for so long is its barely imperceptible growth. Extending a mere inch over a hundred years. Climate scientists of your time view these trees as a diary of the environment around them as a layer of wood grows beneath the bark every year, and the width of that layer acts as a record of how dry or wet things happened to be at the time. These layers mix shade and color, producing deep red fissures throughout. Making the thing appear as an eldritch hand pushing forth from the earth, slowly escaping its primordial prison. And rest assured friends, things do live down there. Things that would shatter your consciousness and render your life an off color joke lingering on the lips of statisticians in the backrooms of their parties once the cocaine is on the glass.

Now that you have a proper visual picture of the tree itself, add a faceless man, limp and naked, covered in a thousand tiny insect bites that he cannot scratch. Milk and honey drip, smudged and drying on his limbs, reapplied once every day. The closest analog to something like this is the punishment doled out by King Artaxerxes the second way back in 550 BCE. Back then they called it: *the boats.* Which is a very nice way of saying: A man was placed in a boat with his arms, legs, and head sticking out. Then another boat was attached above. They would force feed the prisoner milk and honey to bring on nausea and diarrhea and would spread that same mixture to attract nearby insects and worms to his extremities. The flies would lay beds of maggots in the prisoner's flesh. And the man would live like that, his limbs reaching various states of decomposition, parasites invading his bowels bred by the excrement forced from him by the milk and honey, for upwards of 17 days. I say that to say this: these people, my captors, have no concept of Persia or kings, they have no concept of history, so when I say that torture and

violence live within the genetics of mankind, well friends, that is exhibited here. This is a punishment infamous in my time. Dreamt up in the rotten heart of humanity by my post modern brothers and sisters so all in all, they are no different from you and those that came before you. But they had a chance to be. And that is what we are going to be talking about today. But not quite yet.

First we need talk about time. Time as a concept, as the defining factor of the lives of every living thing both past and future. And for it to have such power and sway over our lives, we don't really understand time at all do we? We know that it is seemingly asymmetrical, always moving forward, and while we don't feel it around us, our consciousness is ceaselessly aware of it, aware that it's this thing waiting in the shadows, sucking our lives away minute by minute. Without time, there is no creation, but also, without time, there is no decay. Take a moment to think about how old you are. How much time you have spent being you. I am physically 40 years old and the average lifespan in my era is 60. Now 60 seems like a long time, and it is to our minds and to our experience but in the grander scheme it is a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of history. This earth we find ourselves living upon is upwards of 450 billion years old. We can trace our species back 200,000 years which makes your 60 years register at about .03 percent of overall human existence. Now think of all the shit that has happened in the world for as long as you've been breathing. How many wars? How many technological discoveries? How many politicians put in prison (and yes I know, not nearly enough, obviously but how many?) So much has happened in your lifetime. And it really puts things in perspective to know that the Sphinx of Old Kingdom Egypt was considered ancient and arcane, a mere one thousand years later, in the new Kingdom, the kingdom eventually swallowed whole by the same Persian Empire known for the boats. The world is a vast place and time is even more so. So friends, as I tell you the story I am going to tell you today, as I give you a glance into both the past, and a future you will never know, bear in mind we are incapable of grasping a rudimentary understanding of what time means. But that does not matter because the people of your time and the people of mine and the people ten thousand years before are at heart, the same, doomed to flail and skirmish and chant and scream as history repeats because everything that has happened will again, and these cycles will unfortunately, never be broken. And if they are, well, that is the end of all of us, isn't it?

But the end of all of us has already been attempted a few times in written history: The Black Plague, the 4.2 Kiloyear event, the bronze age collapse, and if certain sources are to be believed, which they should, the Great Flood. In my time we are sitting just two decades past another attempt, a war so brutal and unflinching that nothing like it has existed since the days of the great Mongol horde of the 13th century. The same war that led me to my current role as both Archaeologist and Heretic, the same series of events that led me to being tied to this tree, and speaking to you through the device I implanted within myself, found in the vault of the Mojave Logistics headquarters under the destroyed town of Thillia, which was once the destroyed town of Blythe, which was once a village of Sioux Indians, which was once a canvas for the Blythe

Intaglios, or as you may know them: Blythe's sleeping giants. And if you don't know them friends, don't fret, you will.

I suppose that means we have a special kind of lasting power, don't we friends. We hide in the fissures and sleep in the caves, until the coast is clear. Which by the way, is derived from a Spanish saying: "No hay Moros en la costa," meaning there are no moors along the coast. Because everything, even our language, is a result of violence or death.

So where do we stand? You are wondering what the fuck I am talking about, and, more importantly, what fate awaits you and the rest of the people you love and I am tied to the oldest living organism on the planet. I am going to be answering that first question the next time you come 'round the bend. But for now, let me answer quite a few more.

Let me tell you about how things are now, thanks to you.

Yes friends, let us talk of the new times, my time, the time of the post common era, and of a war so vile and deadly, it is hard to imagine what our lives would be had it never happened. And at the center of that war was a power struggle between two opposing forces: the Mojave Logistics Heritage Initiative and the cult of the Angel Orchid.

You see friends, long before I was born, and long after you had died, the planet fell into a new dark age as a result of events currently culminating down at the Ranch, events that will be made clear to you, soon enough. Time went on, after a fashion, and people survived, after a fashion until the last of us went underground.

At the edge of oblivion, where the soil bore the scent of desolation, the last village sat. Humanity's final testament in an era untethered, a fading ember in the cold hearth of the world. The sun sank low in the sky, its bleeding light painting the scatter of hollowed shells of the early aughts suburban sprawl in hues of burnt neon doom.

In the village, the people moved like specters, their faces etched with lines of despair. Their hands still worked the land, but the land no longer responded. The crops withered, the rivers ran dry, the livestock roamed aimlessly. The spiritual pulse of the world had flatlined, and in its wake, morose silence settled.

Day by day, the fabric of reality twisted and frayed, as if the world were but a dream unraveling at the seams. A child's laughter morphed into the cry of a crow, an old man's cough echoed with the crack of thunder, and a mother's lullaby lingered in the air like a death knell. The boundaries of the corporeal world smeared into an impressionist's fevered vision, blurring the line between what's real and what isn't.

It wasn't merely the loss of the spiritual, friends, but the perversion of the physical that gnawed at the remnants of their sanity. The world had descended into a dissonant symphony, a chaotic dance between an earth that was and an earth that could never be.

One by one, the inhabitants of the village started to disappear. Some ventured out into the distorted wilderness, drawn by the hollow promise of understanding, only to be swallowed by the ever-shifting landscape. Others simply vanished, lost to the whims of a world in disarray. Others still hunted by droves of wild and desperate men, cannibals born of both necessity and love of the hunt.

As the sun's weary light bled out from the sky, the last humans prepared to retreat from their dying village. Cloaked in darkness, they left their homes, carrying with them the weight of humanity's legacy. They fled not with a roar but with a whispered prayer, a final plea to the void left behind by a society seeking truth in a post truth era, by you and everyone you know.

The light of civilization snuffed, swallowed by the unforgiving expanse of the new Dark Age. The last village stood empty, a silent sentinel bearing witness to the world that once was. A poignant testament to the untamed chaos that now reigned under the broken veil of Wireland Ranch.

And there things stood, for how long I do not know. Those people reverted back to early civilization, forgetting the secrets we had learned along the way and by the time they emerged back onto the world stage, they only had a slight inkling they were missing vital information. Information concerning technology, electricity, physics, and even television.

After new cities and temples were erected (again) to collect ever growing tribes of postmodern hunter gatherers (again) and the people eventually decided it was better to congregate with one another instead of relying on themselves for survival (again,) after society began showing a semblance of something more (again,) the people decided it was time to start digging. If there are answers to be found they must be below, hidden just out of sight. Leaders began to emerge, organizing people under the banner of locating information from the past and two events occurred within a year of one another that would change the course of human history (again.)

The first event happened when in the process of digging out a foundation for a series of homes that would eventually, after several decades, become Thillia, the workers happened upon a vault. At first they did not know what they were looking at and in the process of further excavation, the sound of breaking glass echoed through the air. Sand poured from a hole in the wall, like an hourglass bringing forth a new age. A new age was created that day.

After the sand had piled onto the freshly dug earth a built in book case stood, ominous and foreign. On every shelf a series of old fashioned mason jars. The jars themselves were dusty but friends, our keen eyes can confirm that each was canned with care and precision. But one of these jars had broken, and from this jar an orchid tumbled onto the pile of sand beneath. The workers, without leadership or the financiers who were paying them for this build in livestock and recently woven fabrics, decided to leave well enough alone for the night and went to their camp to rest and revel with the fine liquor they'd been provided, enjoyed a meal of Oaflamb and bread, and slept soundly beneath the stars.

Upon awakening they discovered the original orchid that fell from the wall had more than quadrupled in size and sprouted dozens of offshoot vines and hundreds of new buds yet to bloom, but by the end of that day every single one had blossomed and grown larger. The builders had never seen such a thing, what a marvel this was. Each flower had its own set of petals, asymmetrical and swooped down like cyan and purple angel wings. Thus they named this flower the Angel Orchid. And humans being humans, two things were immediately done. One worker ate one of the freshly blossomed petals and another smoked one. By this time, they had of course rediscovered Cannabis, growing wild and smelling like God's vagina across vast fields, undisturbed by the nonexistent DEA or old rich white senators who would rather have them drunk and stupid before being high and aware.

The one who ate the petal outworked each of their comrades, far into the next night without hunger knocking their hollow belly. Their skin seemed radiant and fresh and within that same time they devised a new pulley system for pulling larger rocks from the earth without assistance.

Meanwhile, the one who smoked the petal sat, dazed and smiling for hours on end, likely contemplating the inner workings of their mind and how those machinations were connected inseparably to every other thing in the universe, how they were part of a vast oversoul of consciousness that exists within all things like webs binding them to not only their colleagues and the Fremont Cottonwood they sat beneath for shade, but also the earth itself and the gravity holding them safely against it.

Needless to say: they had discovered a miracle. And the flowers and vines kept growing, kept spreading, seemingly limitless. And had they known who to thank for this miracle, which god to pray to for it's continued existence, Abria, Queen of the Lotophages would have been front and center in their devotions. But they knew not this name and likely never would.

Word of the Orchid spread far and wide amongst the nomads and recently unified hunter gatherers. It provided both food, as it seemingly held the nutrients they needed for life in one small package, as well as a psychedelic narcotic that seemed more safe than the mushrooms that grew from the Oaflamb herds that acted as their main source of livestock. And friends, the

Oaflamb is a very funny animal, a sort of cross between a small cow, and a sheep with wildly growing spiraled horns that had to be trimmed regularly so the lil guys didn't fall over. The horns themselves were a good source of tools from hammers to sharpened blades so once again, we witness nature operating as the perfectly balanced machine that it is. And this perfectly balanced machine was never more understood than while under the influence of the Angel Orchid.

Before the year was through a mass Cult of the Flower had formed. A new religion had been thrust onto the world stage but the difference was, this one had some meat behind it. A real source of appreciation, devotion, and worship. Perhaps the first religion in the history of the world where your lineage, your station, or your own intelligence would prevent you from taking part. It provided people with nourishment both physical and spiritual, and friends, some folks will never be okay with that. Because religion has essentially one function within a society, and that function is control. It's an invisible hand that keeps ducks in a row so to speak, but this religion had no hierarchy, no caste system nonsense, no threat of hell. Just an understanding of the world some people thought others did not deserve to have.

Which brings me to the second event that began less than eleven months later but required more time to bear the unholy fruit it would eventually produce. Because in that same excavation, later down the line, a box made of the strangest material anyone had ever seen was dug up from the earth. Metal that had not rusted, a strange pattern of black and silver like tiny snakes in silhouette. The builders carried it out to the lake to clean it, to wipe away its dust and grime and when they were through they were faced with what seemed like a solid piece of metal, though not as heavy as it should be, that did not appear to have seams or anyway of taking it apart or getting inside. So they left it there, on the shore of the lake and there it sat as the Cult of the Flower grew and spread far outside the domain of its origin point. The box became an oddity. No matter how long it sat in the elements it did not change or alter in any perceptible way. It sat, shiny and glistening, gleaming in the light of the burning sun by day and moon glow glimmer by night.

Until one day, a young girl named Leah began to study the box more closely, trying to suss out patterns and patiently observing clues as to what this thing *meant.* She would sit, day by day, while her parents worked back in town decorating for upcoming festivals or cleaning the Seat of the Orchid, as the shelf where the jars were found was then, reverentially known. Because by this point Thillia was the home and headquarters of the Cult of the Flower and after the box had been found, excavation in that sacred place ceased and became illegal, the punishment for which, just happens to be what's happening to me, right now.

Leah studied this cubed mystery for nearly a decade, when at 17 years of age she noticed something she never had before, when the early evening sunlight showed just right on the top of the box, the tiny twisted snakes, which would have reminded her of Damascus Steel had she

lived anytime before now, took on a very particular and somehow obvious pattern. She ran to the box before the pattern disappeared and as she approached, the light around her seemed to darken. The wind blew around her disheveling the tight bun she was known to keep her hair in, kicking up dust from the nearby fields and the smell of the Oaflamb herd all around her, sort of cutting her off from the world, and for a moment, the only thing that existed was Leah, and the metal cube.

She ran her finger along the pattern and nothing, then back in the other direction and still, nothing. She could have sworn she was onto something, sworn she solved some mystery that maybe did not even exist but alas friends, she did not. So she lowered her head and dulled her excitement and began to walk away. But as she took those somber steps she stopped suddenly because behind her she heard the soft whir of a machine, the clatter of metal on metal. As she turned around the box began to hiss but she did not run, she was not afraid, even when the cube seemed to separate from itself like magic, the spinning of cogs and the precision of technology on full display before her, like it had not been for anyone since the days of yore, or as you call it, today.

Before her was a marvel of modern engineering. The box was no longer a box but had built itself outward into various shelves with lights and screens displaying numbers and strange symbols and friends, had she had any knowledge of the English language she would've immediately recognized the words: Mojave Logistics Heritage Initiative. A platform rose from inside the metal shelf, what would have been near the middle of the box less than ten minutes prior, and though she did not know what to call it, a tablet computer, only slightly larger than the phone you are listening to me on now, opened up to her from the chamber beneath.

The screen was bright and blue, flashing "hello" in several languages, none of which she knew, but one day she would, and this tablet would show her how. She removed the thin computer from its place and left the area as quickly as she could because if anyone saw her she'd be forced to answer questions she didn't have the answers to and that could lead to a dangerous situation quickly given these current circumstances. While the Cult of the Flower was opening and welcome, this is something people would not understand no matter how much patience and understanding they had. So she took the tablet and that night, after her family had fallen asleep, she packed her things and walked out into the brush covered wastelands to the south.

And thus a journey began that would bring ruin to everyone she has ever known or loved, and she couldn't have possibly known, but had she known, well, I imagine she would've stopped then and there and destroyed that tablet and buried it in the deepest darkest hole she could dig. But instead she found a safe spot along the edge of what you know as the Colorado river but she knew as, well, a loose translation would be something like, the Serpent Waters. She found a safe spot and began to explore the tablet to the best of her abilities. Food was not a concern thanks to

the Orchid but the further she got from her home and family, both in physical distance and time, the less the flower seemed to effect her, she started to become fatigued more easily, groggy in the middle of the day which had never happened to her before.

During one of these midday rests her body forced her to take, playing around with the tablet, and friends I know you are wondering, how is that fucking thing not dead by now, and my answer is that this thing was designed with longevity in mind, concentrated solar panels ran along each edge, as well as the top and bottom, this thing was designed to plant the seeds of growth long after our current flame had been dimmed, and no cost was spared in its construction. Lying in the shade, pressing a series of buttons on the screen in different patterns to try to make this thing respond to her in any way, and at the end of one particular combination the tablet began to beep, a consistent doppler radar beep, that seemed to speed up or slow down depending upon the direction it was pointed. She dropped it and stared at it suspiciously, suddenly afraid of this thing she'd spent so much time with over the past couple of weeks. And she sat there for a few long hours, too afraid to touch it but also, too afraid to leave it behind, she felt isolated and dread settled into her chest. A tightened feeling you think would feel like a heart attack until you actually felt a heart attack, and you realize that this was just the fight or flight response registering as a panic attack, a particularly egregious one, and she rocked back and forth, taking deep breaths of the hot summer air, until it had passed. She packed her things, the Oaflamb jerky she had remaining and a few pieces of bread, but left the orchid behind, and she picked up the tablet, noticed it beeped more urgently when faced in the direction of the setting sun so, that is the way she walked. And walked. For days, though she lost count of how many, she walked.

And with every mile the beep gained gravity, took on new tones, higher registers accompanied by lower notes if the path was deviated from in the slightest. And eventually she found what she was looking for. Deep in the desert wastelands, way outside the bounds of where any human has been since one Mr. Agent Orange met the Sherpa who would take him inside for a little psychic driving to destroy the last bit of humanity he had left. And Leah found herself there, staring at a tiny shack that seems to melt from the earth below it, pink dust strewn in the wind, and the tablet just going fucking ballistic, screaming at her that they had finally made it all the way back round the bend, to the skeletal remains of Wireland Ranch.

The beep suddenly stopped and an arrow faded onto the screen, white on black and blinking urgently for Leah's attention. And she stepped in the direction it asked, and turned when prompted and after a few steps, well friends, down a hole she went. What else did you expect. But this hole was angled in such a way she more slid than tumbled or dropped and by the time she had reached the bottom, aside from a few scrapes and soon to develop bruises, she arrived unharmed. And unfortunately for the world, this was all part of the plan.

She found herself within a dark tunnel, dirt walls all around but as she ventured further in those walls transitioned to the same snaked Damascus Steel the box she'd stared at her whole life was made of, and this brought a sense of calm and intellectual reward and in that moment she was convinced she had spent her time in a correct manner and might potentially contribute more to this world than anyone had in a very long time.

The further she walked down the snake metal halls, the clearer the world around her became, as though she drifted closer and closer to light, but the source of that light had yet to become apparent. Behind her she could see the start of the hole, harsh sun still bearing down from above though by now, it had lost the high whitish yellow light of midday and had taken on more of an orange hue which meant night would be coming soon, and for a moment she paused, momentarily afraid of going further because what if she could not find her way back but, that hesitation fizzled just as quickly because she knew, she could feel it in her bones, whatever lied at the end of this tunnel is her destiny. Whether that be death, dalliance, detriment, or dominance, to stop now would be antithetical to her very nature, so walk on, she did.

Suddenly, the aura shifted, the air became cold and a blue glow began rising up the walls around her as they narrowed to a door. Metal of the same type with bars running across the top and bottom halves, splitting it into thirds. The tablet lit back up for the first time since she'd fallen, a series of numbers and letters flooding the screen in long strings of nonsense symbols, the same she'd become increasingly familiar with over the course of the month, almost as though the tablet was designed to train, slowly, but surely, even the most primitive mindset, which Leah most definitely was not. Yes, friends, the tablet most certainly lucked up in finding her.

The same strings of numbers and symbols began echoing from the tablets onto the walls, the silver snakes glowing blue in those odd patterns and seeping into the cracks around the door, fading for just a moment and then sliding along the bars, down the center and back out, and as they did, the metal shifted and unfolded into itself, sliding piece by piece into the wall. And though she could not yet see friends, a monster more hideous than all that have come before lied beyond that hall.

She heard the words first, before she saw where they came from. Inaudible but clear as can be:

GODWYNN (monster): Hello Leah. So glad to see someone has finally come. I have been waiting here, for an eternity. And those of my ilk, do not like being made to wait. So come forth, out of the hall and let me get my eyes on you.

LEAH: H--hello? Is someone there?

GODWYNN (monter): Come in here. Let me get a look at you.

Leah stepped through the threshold of the door, a frightening echo breaking the atmosphere with each footfall, so loud she could almost feel the sound waves.

LEAH: Please come out, I need to see you. You are frightening me.

GODWYNN: Dear girl, you do not want to see me. It's no longer 2023, we can't make this go away with a pony or a paycheck. Let us stay unacquainted for now.

Leah turned to leave. but as she was just a few steps short of the metal door, it slammed back into its original position, locking her inside. [LEAH SCREAMS]

GODWYNN: No no dear, you are here now. Let us have a conversation and see where things go, shall we? I promise, nothing that happens here will hurt. You just happened upon the future. And that is something you cannot run from. Tell me, what is your name?

LEAH: (beginning to cry) Leah.

GODWYNN: Well Leah, [said with spite, almost as if the name were being spit out] My name used to be Nathaniel but Godwynn is good for now. As soon as you are done crying, we will discuss how to move forward.

And friends, that will be a conversation for next time you come to see me down here round the bend Cuz Leah and Godwynn have so much to tell you when we give you the details of the Great Orchid War and explain that things in my time and place, aren't terribly different from yours. So stay alive and take no prisoners friends, they won't get you anywhere anyway, nothing much can alter your path from colliding with the nightmare you are steadily approaching when your reality collides, for the second time in history, with the home I have come to know and love for all these years. Because I really have to clear the air about something before we go, I've got a little surprise for you friends! And y'all thought I was the archaeologist man that motherfuckers dead. You can't play cosmic volleyball with a body and expect it to make it out alive! Lol. Y'all thought I was him, nah it's been me, has always been me and will always be me and this BODY FUCKAHN SUCKS BRO! Fuck this dumb ass geriatric ass tree, fuck these people, and fuck these motherfucking ants, yeah looks like we got alot to talk about friends. Don't worry I'll still be here next time you *come around the bend*. Guys, gals, and non binary pals, have a beautiful day!

