

**A** SULTRY TWILIGHT IN THE HOLT, DURING AN ESPECIALLY HOT SEASON OF "THE GREEN"...

WELL, BLOOD OF TEN CHIEFS...

WHO KNEW THE FIRST OF YOUR CUBS TO MAKE YOU A GRANDSIRE WOULD BE THE ROUND-EARED ONE?!



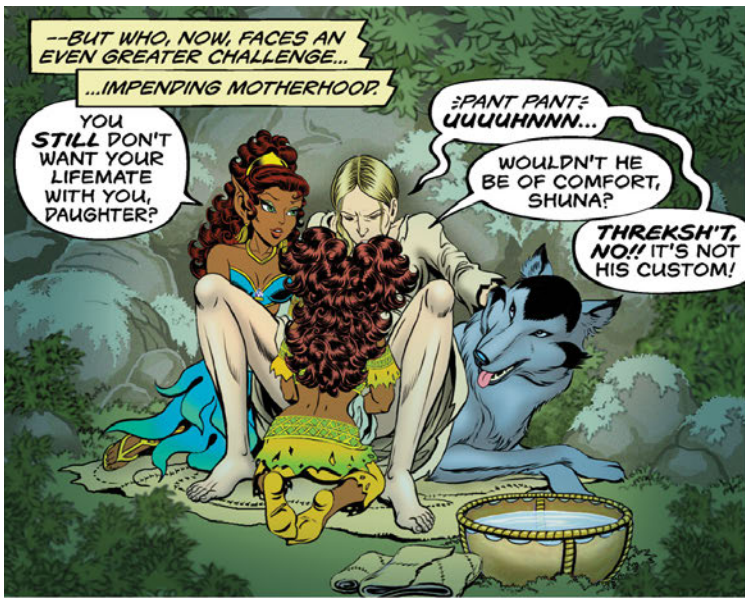
SMILING WITH EYES EVEN OLDER THAN HIS FIVE-HUNDRED-ODD YEARS, HE SAYS NOTHING. THERE IS NO NEED.

HIS SECRET SOUL NAME IS TAM. HIS FOLK, THE WOLFRIDERS, CALL HIM BY MANY NAMES--

--"CUTTER" FOR HIS SKILL WITH A SWORD... "KINSEEKER"... "BLOOD OF TEN CHIEFS"... "CHIEF OF CHANGES"...

EVENTFUL, INDEED, HAS BEEN HIS LEADERSHIP OF THIS ELFIN TRIBE-- A TRIBE THAT INCLUDES ONE HUMAN GIRL WHO HAS HUNTED AND FOUGHT BESIDE THEM--





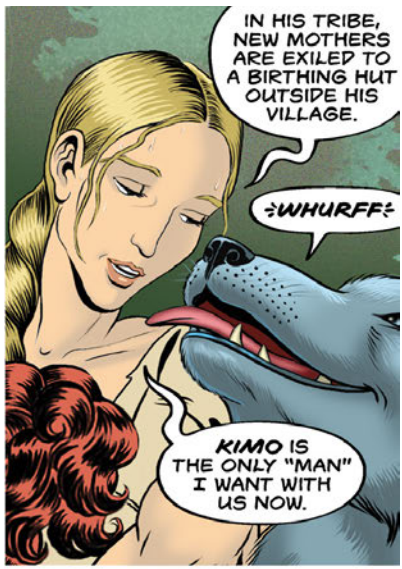
--BUT WHO, NOW, FACES AN EVEN GREATER CHALLENGE...  
...IMPENDING MOTHERHOOD.

YOU STILL DON'T WANT YOUR LIFEMATE WITH YOU, DAUGHTER?

≡PANT PANT≡  
UUUUHNNN...

WOULDN'T HE BE OF COMFORT, SHUNA?

THREKSH'T, NO!! IT'S NOT HIS CUSTOM!



IN HIS TRIBE, NEW MOTHERS ARE EXILED TO A BIRTHING HUT OUTSIDE HIS VILLAGE.

≡WHURFF≡

KIMO IS THE ONLY "MAN" I WANT WITH US NOW.



WHEN ALL'S WELL WITH US, WE FEEL ONLY PLEASURE IN THE WORK OF BRINGING LIFE.

≡GASP≡  
UUUHHH!

WON'T YOU ALLOW ME TO--?



GREAT SUN, LEETAH! LET HER FEEL THE PANGS A BIT!

≡PANT-PANT≡ AUNT SHENSHEN'S RIGHT! WE-WE HUMANS ARE BORN TO THIS...

≡MAMNH≡ LIKE ALL ORDINARY CREATURES.



THE CHILD IS READY TO SLIDE OUT INTO BREATH.

BE THIS LASS OR LAD  
≡GROAN≡ I-I FEAR I WON'T...WON'T BE UP TO...



I, TOO, WAS AFRAID...

...AFRAID MORE WOULD BE ASKED OF ME THAN I WISHED TO GIVE.







"BUT WHEN *SUNTOP* AND *EMBER* WERE BORN, THE LOVE IN MY HEART GREW AND GREW, PRESSING ALL NEEDLESS FEARS ASIDE."

WHO KNEW THE BIRTH OF A HUMAN CUB'D BE SOMETHING WE'D REJOICE ABOUT, EH?


DID YOU FORGET OUR **LITTLE PATCH, UNCLE?**



LITTLE PATCH...LITTLE... PATCH...

NEVER MIND. IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.

"CUTTER," FOR HIS SWORD SKILLS, YES...BUT MORE, FOR HIS POWER TO CUT THROUGH SECRETS AND SHADOWS TO FIND THE TRUTH.



TRUTH MADE OF COUNTLESS FRAGMENTS OF MEMORIES--

--HIS MEMORIES--

--OF GAINS--

--AND LOSSES--

--AND LESSONS HARD LEARNED.



MORTAL BUT LONG ENDURING, IF LUCKY, WOLFRIDERS LIKE HUNTRESS NIGHTFALL AND REPLANCE THE PLANT SHAPER LIVE IN THE "NOW OF WOLF THOUGHT."

PAINFUL MEMORIES FADE ALTOGETHER, WITH TIME--



--BUT SO, TOO, DOES LEARNING IN THE BLESSING AND CURSE OF FORGETFULNESS--

--MISTAKES WOULD BE REPEATED AND WRONG CHOICES MADE--



--BUT FOR A CHIEF WHO WATCHES OVER THE BLENDED ELF TRIBES...



...SCATTERED THOUGH THEY BE TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE WORLD OF TWO MOONS--



--OR ACROSS THE VASTDEEP WATER, A CHIEF WHO CAN NEVER AGAIN COMPLETELY KNOW THE "NOW," FOR HE IS A CHIEF--

--WHO REMEMBERS.



BEFORE MOTHER MOON AND CHILD MOON ARE HALF FULL IN THE SKY, SUNSTREAM'S SEA CUB WILL BE BORN, TOO!

I'LL BE A GRANDSIRE TWICE!



WELL...

GET READY TO GREET YOUR FIRST!





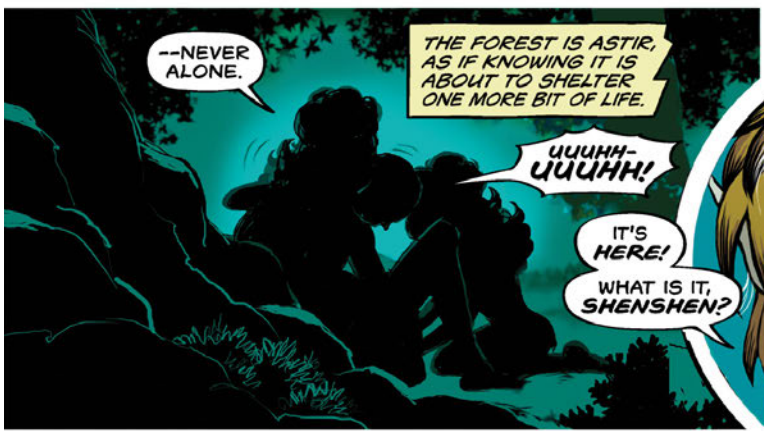


THE NEARBY BROOK BABBLES...DUSK BIRDS AND CRICKETS TRILL...AND GENTLE FLUTE SONG BLENDS SUBTLY WITH ALL.



REDPLANCE'S PLAYING...SO... SWEET!

YOU NEED NEVER FEEL LOST, MY CHOSEN DAUGHTER--



--NEVER ALONE.

THE FOREST IS ASTIR, AS IF KNOWING IT IS ABOUT TO SHELTER ONE MORE BIT OF LIFE.

UUUHH-  
UUUHH!

IT'S HERE!

WHAT IS IT, SHENSHEN?



ONE MORE POWERFUL, STUBBORN, FRAGILE BIT OF LIFE.

WAAAH...  
AWAAAH

