

## The People Of The Throne

In the beginning there was nothing but the cloud slung low on an empty plain, pockmarked with old structures and withered wintering hardwood trees, vying for room in an infinite space. And in this infinite space awoke the people. On their backs as they were their newly opened eyes saw first the greyness of the sky, and their hands felt first the prickle of the cold. But before they knew where they were, they first knew who they were, for each was born knowing their name and their life, but knowing not how they had come to be. Second, as they looked around they saw each other, and knew that they were each as different to each other as they were all to this cold grey land and the shrubs and trees and animals that preceded them. Or perhaps not, for none of them could say if the land had been there since before they had awoken, or had unfolded before them only when they had opened their eyes to see it.

Each of them, being able to speak, stood and sought those closest to them to make introductions. Some found quickly that they had much in common with their new acquaintances,

such as Joey the Spy and Jimmy the Spy, who were both from England. Others were as different as two people can be, like the talking phone i-Mario and Tick-took the clock from the world of cuteness. The only commonality they all shared was that they knew who they were, but not what they were to do next. That problem was quickly solved however, because as with any social gathering, there was... that one guy.

Before even everyone had a chance to introduce themselves, some had already had their lives threatened. A man named Mansu, a professional assassin with a metal face and a cold heart made his introductions the only way he knew how, by threatening and intimidating purposefully, each of the members of the community he met. To each of them he spoke in turn with the same phrase. 'You will die tonight'.

I ask you dear reader to consult with yourself what you would do if, gathered for a playdate or a cocktail party you were told in no uncertain terms to expect your own murder? Would you call your bold assailant out on their words, or would you

simply slink away, make your excuses, and sleep with the lights on that night?

Needless to say that whatever you might yourself do, there was more than one person that Mansu threatened who took the first route and quickly a debate spread outwards from him, leaping from person to person like lightening from a cut cable, or perhaps like a plague in a room of people who never cover their mouths when they sneeze. Soon, everyone knew that Mansu wanted to kill them, and the next logical question was of course 'should he be allowed to?'

It may seem an odd leap to those who are protected already by the law of their land, but this land had no laws, for until now, there had been no people to make them, and no-one was quite sure what should be done if one of them were to murder another. Should any homicide be matched with the culprits own life? At that rate it was obvious that they would all have to off each other in turn and soon the plain would be empty again, and the mist alone. Indeed were that to happen the very world

itself may end, as far as they were to know, and so it was put in the maybe pile.

By now, the community was divided roughly down the middle, into people who saw Mansu as a threat to their young peace, and those who agreed with him, whether because they wanted blood on their own hands, such as Rhite; or because they simply believed that to force one person to do or not do something against their will was beyond the powers of the community. Soon the debate was not between individuals, but between factions, militias. It was no longer a discussion. Now it was diplomacy.

Mansu, riling up his supporters with the violent rhetoric they clearly craved, declared that if he won, he would not turn on them, that those who backed him would be rewarded with the right to hunt the saps who clamoured for peace. Across the table, a search for a similar leader was underway and two were thrust forward, Frankienstine, who was well versed leading other people, and a brash superhero named Bullseye, one of only a few who could match Mansu for strength.

Speakers from both sides spoke passionately about how they would resolve this conflict, but no single person could unite the fractured audience, indeed, when Bullseye suggested killing all of Mansu's followers first, so as to establish a future of peace, his supporters actively distanced themselves from him. Only a small few wanted to involve themselves in the costs of violence. But there was little they could do. When it was firmly established that nothing either side could say would placate the other, one of Mansu's followers suggested that, well, they wanted to fight anyway, if they declared a war on the other side, there was nothing more to be said, no more words to stall with. And so, as one, they attacked.

Before she was even named, the land saw bloodshed. The fighting raged on and across the plain, indifferent to the lives it swallowed up. For many, like Caitlyn, only twelve years old, still in school the poor thing, this life was quite divorced from their idea of justice. In the confusion it became hard to know who was fighting for which side anymore because, in declaring war, Mansu has made his point very clear, there would be no room

in his world for the pacifistic. For many, the choice was short lived: those who were not strong or dangerous, who lived by what they knew rather than what they could do. Bobby the Book, who had lived his life in his book store and had never intended to hurt anyone, never did.

Historians will agree that those who achieved glory in the war did so by virtue of a combination of traits: Those who were strong enough to overcome their opponents, and those who were sturdy, who had the constitution to withstand any onslaught won many battles on their might alone. Those who were swift of foot, or who could fly through the skies, led many assailants to their doom. Those who had special powers: magic or lightning or fire, who could command the elements to their will used their gifts to dominate the battleground. And lastly those who had the talent for dance, who could shame the enemy horde with slick moves and panache, would whip and nae-nae and mosh and skiddoo and do the worm when others fell with their legs tangled. Until only two remained. Bullseye, a jack of all trades but a dark horse on the dance floor, and Mansu himself, who

had led his army from behind, but was a dangerous fighter nonetheless.

Bullseye knew that his best shot was to lead Mansu into a dance-off, for the assassin was known to have two left feet. But when the time came it was Mansu who controlled the tide of the battle, forcing Bullseye onto his back foot with a fierce onslaught. Bullseye held his ground, Mansu's equal, but less aggressive, less ruthless. When the dust settled, it was the assassin who was left standing, the lone victor of the war, both in domination, and in ideology, for by forcing the hand of his enemies, he had made them all his supporters. He had made them all killers.

With dominion over the plain, Mansu declared himself the new Overlord. He set about subjugating the losers, and rewarding those who had proven themselves faithful to him. He established a government, christened The Mafia. Some were chosen for their strength, like Bob the enforcer; or their loyalty, like Yumi the scribe. And they became blind to the Ideology of the state, so privileged was their position. Even Happy Man, a kind and gentle soul whose power had been in

making people smile, overlooked the evil of Mansu in the hope that he may do some good. Instead, it was all he could do to pacify the restless nation. Alone together, they drew up the rules by which all the people would live. Seven Rules in all, and they were:

1: Live in Peace

2: Death Penalty used in extreme situations.

3: No Killing. Only the Government would have the sovereign right to kill.

4: Any Rebels against our Lord Mansu will be imprisoned for ten to twenty years.

5: Robbing is illegal.

6: Magic can only be used in emergencies and never within five miles of the government.

7: Knighthoods are a reward for "good" deeds among the populace, and would confer some status and power to those not already granted it.

Immediately, these laws were divisive. Those who had planned rebellion spoke out that it should not be illegal, and it was returned that, well, that's just the sort of thing a rebel would say. Silence fell. But also there was resentment among Mansu's

own ranks. He had once been the figurehead for those wanted to roam and murder freely, but now, only his government would be given this power, and many - like Phil the Tree Guy, who had been a vocal supporter before the war, - realised they had been duped. That they would be under the same yoke as everyone else.

Each of these new enemies was matched however, by a great many new allies, resigned to the government's authority, and realising that if they spoke out, they were likely to face repercussions. They put their heads down and set to work.

Pleased with what they had wrought, the government set about naming and claiming their lands, drawing up maps of their domain, a great undertaking that took them all over the plain.

And while this was happening a small rebellion began to meet, helmed by both Bullseye and Frankienstine. Slowly but surely, they were joined by other citizens who believed that Mansu was unfit to rule: Roary, an ailuranthrope who

could become at will, a giant lion; Polly Pig, giving up her dreams of being popular to stand up for what she believed was right; and Mr Snoodle, who just seemed to be along for the ride. Phil, the Tree Guy was met with some hostility when he pledged his support because many remembered him from the war as a vicious and dangerous warrior who had fought for Mansu's side. But resistances cannot easily choose their ranks. Each night plans would be drawn up and discarded. There was no shortage of ideas, but a direct assault on the government, however strongly many bayed for blood, would simply see the rebellion defeated. Their numbers were too small, support too weak. Mansu had surrounded himself with powerful protectors, creatures like the renowned Kitty Cat, who wielded mysterious magic and kept tabs on everyone supernatural. She had risen to become not only his chief bodyguard, but his most trusted advisor. If they couldn't get past her guards, they couldn't get to Mansu, and if they couldn't remove Mansu, they would never win.

It was at this point that they realised two things, first that Phil the Tree Guy was gone, and

that there was someone else in the room. She was called to step forwards, and she revealed herself to be Yumi, Mansu's scribe and a trusted member of the government. Immediately the room was in uproar. Many feared that the rebellion was doomed there and then, but Yumi calmed them. She declared that she had become disillusioned with Mansu, that he was unfit to lead her, that even though she was a member of the government, she wanted to see it toppled, and liberty restored.

It became obvious what needed to be done. Yumi would poison Mansu, for without its leader, surely the nation would collapse and perhaps then, they could rebuild it. So the rebellion set about seeking for a poison, and one was found, a fine powder that would burn up those who touched it. But before it could be couriered to Yumi safely and secretly, everything fell apart. Phil it seems had snuck away to tell the government of the rebellion, hoping that with this information he would earn Mansu's favour, a knighthood and be granted the license to kill he so craved. Mansu's police poured into the rebels headquarters, rounding them up and bringing them before the whole nation while

Yumi herself slipped away. They were accused of breaking the law, and sentenced to death. It seemed that all the planning had been for nothing. Many were in favour of an instant execution, but instead it was Kitty Cat who suggested that they be sent to the foreboding Malketrasse Prison to be tortured before their end. The idea spread, backed by Yumi, who knew that this would at least buy their scheme some time. She also volunteered to become the new warden of Malketrasse, but Mansu, beset on all sides by voices of suspicion instead chose from his government the man named Bob, steadfast as a rock, whom he knew would follow his orders exactly. Yumi would be delayed again.

With the rebels safely away the nation settled down, Mansu had no further need to invent rules and everyone was, if not loyal to him, content to live under his dictatorship. The people of the plain then began to embrace an uneasy sort of peace. A currency was created to celebrate the victories of the state, and named Mafipoly Money after the government that made it. Everyone was given a stipend, and soon businesses started to grow as the

citizens realised there was so much they did not have. Some chased the dreams they had held since before the war, like Penny the Penguin and Charlie the Orangutan, who became acrobats and charged the other people to watch their shows. Others, like Lauren the Cat were opportunistic. Lauren had been a spy, but she knew that in times of peace on the empty plain, she would have little work. So she set up a shop selling clothes, because everyone always needs clothes, and she, like many others became quite rich. Mansu was approached by an enigmatic figure named Doctor Pepper, who suggested that someone would need to manage the money for the government. Mansu agreed, because if they ran out of money, how could he collect taxes? More money would have to be made. Doctor Pepper was rechristened Miss Evil, and set to work in the Money Factory, ensuring that this economic boom period would never end.

The Man with the Muscle, who did not have a strong head for business, instead put his stipend to a different use. He tried to pay bail on his friend Jimmy the Spy, who had been thrown in Malketrasse for being mixed up in the rebellion.

There are always those who will take a bribe if you ask around tenaciously enough, and his ploy worked. When the government realised what had happened they were furious, and The Man with the Muscle was himself imprisoned for defying the will of the state. It is as this happened, that Bob, who was himself stuck in the miserable walls of Malketrasse overseeing the prisoners, realised that he was not being paid, and he wanted to buy himself a shiny new Lamborghini like his friend Flames Boy the businessman had. In order to correct this grave injustice, he abandoned his post.

The rebels seized their chance, and gathered together around Roary, the lion-boy, a romantic and gentle soul. Roary, living up to his name, let out a fearsome bellow and became a giant cat, smashing open the mighty walls of Malketrasse in one easy swipe. And just like that, the rebels were free.

They tore through the nation, across the plain their most powerful members joining Roary as they went: Electra Girl rained lightning down from the sky and the usually unimposing Mr

Snoodle became cloaked in white energy like St Elmo's fire, launching into the air and firing off shots into the crowd. Mr Bolma the other warden of Malketrasse had to stop hobnobbing with his government bosses to give chase. Every business was closed, every exchange halted, so urgent was the need to catch them. Penny Penguin used her acrobatics to corner and trap Polly Pig, her one-time friend. In the confusion and the chaos, Bullseye broke through and carried the poison to Yumi, risking capture and death to see their plan through. And then, wasting no time, allowing for no more violence, she made her way to Mansu. She was not turned away, and she emptied the sachet of poison upon him. There was a flash, confusion, purple fire and Mansu was gone.

The fighting ceased, the fleeing rebels halted. It was over. The plain, for as long as they had known it had been cold and windy, but now, the sun shone down upon it and its people, bright for all that it was low in the sky, at the ending of this era.

A conference was called, for now the people of the plain were leaderless. What would stand to

stop another Mansu rising in his place? Many voices rang out in unison, there would be a peaceful election. a simple way to determine how they would move forwards, together.

Yumi was thrust from the crowd. She was the hero of the rebellion, and there were many who argued that simply by virtue of Mansu's death being at her hand, that she was the rightful new Overlord. Everyone was hushed as she spoke. She spoke of peace, of non-violence, of a chance for them all to rebuild their lives. And when she was done, there was applause. Then, Kitty Cat, Mansu's long-faithful bodyguard and advisor, she stood up, and she took the stand. She argued for liberty, that each individual should have the right to do as they saw best, and there were many, both among the rebels and the populace who agreed, but she could not win over those like Bullseye, those who suffered most under the yoke of Mansu, and who would never trust another leader again, or those like Phil the Tree Guy, who refused to acknowledge any leader purely out of contrarian spirit and who vowed to become outsiders of any society. From these people sprang a small group who would vote

for no leader at all, instead arguing that in lawlessness we would find harmony, a gospel that rang true with people like the once bloodthirsty Rhite, who now held out for one single law: that nothing bad should happen again.

Still it seemed like Yumi was a sure winner, but as the campaign drew on, she became weary and listless. She had been a good scribe and conspirator, but public life was another matter altogether, and a lonely one at that. Kitty Cat meanwhile, who had always been stifled operating in Mansu's shadow, went from strength to strength, writing great speeches that slowly but surely co-opted Yumi's own platform of peace and unity, to win over her supporters.

The votes were tallied and counted, and after it all Kitty Cat was declared the victor, erudite and capable, she vowed to lead the people of the plain on to greatness. They would surely never again fall into civil war, for they had learned the costs of segregation and dictatorship. They looked now out over the plain as their shared home, a place they had not just conquered, but made their

own. And so together they erected a monument - a great throne - to tell the story of their struggle so it would never be forgotten, even after they were gone.

Many great rulers would sit, for the centuries to follow, on this throne. But they would not sit easy, for the throne alone does not confer the right to rule. Instead it asks: asks what would confer that right? Asks what actions would justify that right? Asks who really bestows that right? And it asks especially of those who sit upon it, as you dear reader one day may, what has given you that right?