

# Quazhdo's Round Stone Thing

## CHAPTER ONE

An old creature sat on a rock at the edge of a wide sandy plain littered with countless boulders of varying sizes. They all had the same whitish gray color, but they were studded with countless glittering crystals of iridescent blues, reds, yellows, and greens.

The creature wrapped itself in a blanket waiting for the world's sun-star to rise and warm the Morning World.

The leathery skin of the creature was of a brownish-red color. Stripes of metallic green skin marked each side of its face, disappearing below its neck — faded by an unknown numbers of years. It had short thin gray hair on its head, but there was no facial hair. The ears of the creature were remarkably large, and its hands and feet were long and wide. Beneath the blanket it wore a ragged, long, heavy coat.

And as it sat on the rock, it slowly turned a stone with its long spatulate fingers. This stone was very round, and only slightly larger than the creature's hands cupped together. Strange marks were etched in its surface, and the creature frequently stopped turning it to trace the marks with its old fingers. This went on all morning while the world's sun-star steadily climbed the sky.

And as the day wore on, the sun-star rose higher in the sky until it was straight above the Day World. Still the old creature thing sat turning and studying the stone's shape and weight — but it was most curious about the markings on it. Even the distant gurgling howl of some wild animal couldn't distract it.

Hours later, when the sun-star was finishing its flight across the sky and give way to the Evening World, a very large creature-thing stirred from its hiding place among the boulders nearby. Orange shaggy hair covered the thing from its head to its feet. The creature was quite tall — perhaps a little taller than five or six times the height of the old creature thing. The very large creature had been watching the old one all day, wondering what it was, and what its attraction to the round stone was. And as it watched, it thought of many questions to ask. And as it thought, it held its large orange shaggy finger to the corner of its mouth.

But rather than approach the old thing and ask its questions, the very large creature decided to wait behind the boulders a little longer and just watch. It remained there until the sun-star fell beyond the edge of the world. Now

began the darkness of the Night World. And to add darkness to the Night World, there would be no moons in the sky for most of this night. Still, there was a distant Green Star in the night sky. It was already up and framed against a black sky-sea, studded with thousands of smaller stars, and a great blue nebula cloud. The Green Star's light cast a pale glow over the Night World causing the boulders to sparkle with millions of tiny flashes of jade-colored light.

And besides being dark, the night also became cold. But the old creature thing didn't make a fire. The giant creature wanted to make a fire, but thought it best to wait in the cold so the old one wouldn't notice its presence. Besides, it was confident that it wouldn't wander off in the cold darkness. So when the large creature grew drowsy it nestled itself between a small fallen tree and a large boulder — and went to sleep. It considered the tree as its pet. It considered it as its friend.

It was in the deepest part of the night that a cackling voice awakened the large creature. The voice was that of someone old, but the voice was clear. "I must... Yes, I think I must do something. I, I must do something with this round stone. Maybe I must invent something for it. Or, or maybe..." A heavy sigh followed. "But I don't know. I, I just don't know."

Off in the distance, another chilling gurgling howl sounded.

The large creature rose from its sleeping place and stared, blinking into the darkness, but it could see nothing. It yawned, and scratched its hairy back, figuring the voice must have been that of the old creature thing. It waited a while to see if there would be any more sounds from it — but there weren't any. So the large creature settled down again between its small scruffy pet tree and the boulder.

Now, the only sounds heard from the Night World were the gentle whispering sighs of a light breeze washing over and around the boulders, stirring the brush and the grasses. Soon the large creature's eyes grew heavy and closed again as it descended into a deep sleep.

## CHAPTER TWO

The sun-star faithfully returned again to light and warm the Day World. The large creature rose and left its sleeping place, brushing the sand and dead grass from its hairy body, sending a few red hairs floating on the morning breeze. When it peeked over one of the boulders, it was surprised to see that the old thing was no longer where it had been the day before. The large creature grabbed its pet tree and jumped over the boulders, heavily thumping and lumbering to where the old thing had been sitting earlier. It bent low over the sand and stony ground to look for signs. It sniffed the spot where the old creature had been. There was a faint scent like that of someone old — not a foul smell, but the smell of something that had once been young and fresh, but now was simply... old.

The giant stood up again and continued studying the ground until it spotted a few long and wide foot impressions in the sandy ground. The large creature pulled its tree to its face and spoke slowly to it in a soft, deep voice. “So I did not dream it. Look at the sand. It *was* here.” The large creature lowered the tree close to the ground so it could see for itself, then pulled it up again. Several dead leaves fell off and drifted to the ground. “See what I mean?”

The footprints led across the wide expanse of sandy flatland, broken here and there by boulders, both single and in heaps. Dragging its pet tree, scattering several more dead leaves behind, the large creature followed the footprints that led toward a canyon off in the distance. Each of the large creature’s strides covered at least half a dozen of the old one’s footprints.

The canyon was long and deep, like a great jagged wound in the skin of the world. At the edge of the canyon the footprints stopped, and no others could be seen. The large creature kicked a rock over the edge of the canyon wall and scanned the river below. It stroked the dwindling tattered leaves of its pet tree as tenderly as it could with its great hands. “That old thing must have gone down to the river from here, but I do not think we want to go down that way.” It leaned over and launched a mass of shimmering spittle down into the canyon. A childish smile grew on its huge face. It marveled at the way the spit looked spinning and spreading as it floated downward into the depths of the valley.

Then, using its pet tree, the large creature scratched the back of its orange hairy neck. It tried to decide whether to slide down the canyon’s steep side or find a safer path to the river. It couldn’t make up its mind, so there it stood with its finger to the corner of its mouth, staring down at the river, petting its wilting tree. It was thinking of questions. And while it thought of

questions, it continued spitting over the edge — just to watch it fall. It held the tree out so it could marvel at the falling spit too.

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Later that evening at the bottom of the canyon the old creature carefully hid the round stone under its blanket. Then it walked along the edge of the river carefully searching for other rocks — rocks not like the round stone with writing etched on it. The rocks it was now looking for didn't have to be any particu