

What They Told Us

~By Darius Gao

I kept my M4A1 across my chest, ready for one of them to come alive. The eerie quietness encompassed me. I kept my eyes on the slim, dark trunks, and finally, Sergeant Smith nodded for me to look at them. The trees were like a shifting maze. He then cautiously opened the van door. With his shotgun, he swiftly pelted the trunk's feet, shattering them in all directions.

THOOM. THOOM.

Two of them fell, splattering mud all over, but leaving a gap to make a break for. We ran through, and they tried to catch us with their branching hands, but we skidded behind separate boulders and crouched as they inched forward with splintering steps. Suddenly, I saw an idea flash across Smith's face. He motioned for us to follow.

Then, many of them moved forward with rustling steps.

"EVERYBODY HOLD!" Smith shouted. "DON'T FIRE!"

They crept closer as we fought the urge to shoot, our fingers twitching like ballerinas on stage.

Then, he did the strangest thing: he inched closer to them and touched a tree with the stock of his gun. The bark pulsed with glowing light.

"What do you see, Sarge?" I said, my voice trembling.

"No idea... It looks like it's some kind of symbol," Smith said. "It's something I've never seen before..."

One of them said in a crackling, fiery voice, *"You creatures don't belong here... Leave now or receive consequences that will make you regret living."*

I felt shocked. Secure Contain Protect Species (or SCP) had never spoken before – they only communicated in light pulses, gestures, or subtle hints. I looked over at the other soldiers; their faces were grim.

"We want to know more about you guys. We won't shoot unless you do," Smith said in an unsure, but firm voice.

"Shut up!" The molten voice boomed, "I've only seen you creatures cause destruction!"

"You stupid creatures think you know so much! But you don't!" In anger, the tree sparked into an inferno. Unexpectedly, the fiery humanoid tree reached over and grabbed one of our men, Marshall. Immediately, he was set aflame.

"HELP!!!" the man screeched, "HELP ME!"

My heart pounded out of my chest while I saw him cook right in front of me and go lifeless. I ran towards where he lay and tried to put the fire out, but the tree swiped at my back and burned my left shoulder. Smith pelted it with bullets so I could get away. I had to leave Marshall's body there.

"FALL BACK! GO! THE VAN!" shouted Smith.

Rodriguez was the first one to reach the van. He opened the door for us and shouted, "Go! Go!" pushing everyone into the back. "DRIVE!" Smith shouted as I dove in just in time.

"Private!" Smith yelled, "Is that fire thing following?"

"Negative, Sarge! But the damned trees are running!" I shouted back.

Smith cursed under his breath, "All of you, shoot!"

I grabbed my M4A1 and steadied my aim to fire at the trees. *Rat-tat-tat-tat*

The trees were shattered as we set them on fire with a grenade and pelted them until there was no more ammo.

For a moment, there was complete silence as we watched the trees scattered over the road and fade into the distance. I flinched as the van rumbled through the eerie silence, all of us wondering where that fiery tree SCP went. Were we being tailed?

The walkie-talkie finally started working, we were not far from base, *"Hello? Smith? Do you copy?"*

Wide-eyed, Smith reached out for it. "Hello?" Smith said, "This is Squadron 11, we're coming back. Over."

"Roger that, Smith. Any casualties?"

"One."

Silence for a long while, then, "Roger. Dr. Abara will be waiting for you."

Dr. Abara had been guiding our SCP missions for the last couple of years.

When we reached the base, Dr Abara stood with a steely look in his eyes. We got out and saluted him.

Without a word, we followed Dr Abara to a room filled with chairs. After we were all seated, he stood at the front of the room.

"Everyone will get to speak." Dr Abara said. "Please be honest and don't hesitate if you've seen something we didn't see, especially you, Private, since this is your first mission. Smith, you first. "

"Thank you, doctor. My crew experienced a lot out there. First, there was a symbol on those trees." Smith walked over to the whiteboard and drew it out. It looked like a fire with an eye in the center. "We don't know what it means, but I'm sure that it has to do with the fire tree that flew by and *talked*."

"Talked?" Abara said, eyes wide, "In English?"

"Yes," Sarge said, "The fire tree said *we're* the creatures that cause destruction." It told us to leave or else there would be consequences. Then it picked up Specialist Marshall and killed him."

"God rest his soul." Dr Abara nodded for me to speak next.

"No. I think-

A sharp and unimaginable pain shot through my shoulder and crushed my chest. I cried out and knelt.

Dr Abara rushed towards me, kneeling beside me. "You two," he said, pointing at Smith and Rodriguez. "Hold him down."

"Private!" Smith shouted and gripped my shoulders, his voice fading and echoing.

I tried responding, but the whisper grew louder, bringing a fiery sensation to my skull. *"We see you. You're the one."*

The burn marks on my shoulder pulsed with a strange, blue light.

Rodriguez stumbled back. "What the hell is that?" Dr. Abara's eyes widened as he watched the strange burn marks swirl all over my skin. He ripped off my Kevlar and cut open my shirt, "This... this is the same symbol Smith saw."

The whisper in my head grew louder. The room spun. The voice spoke again, low and menacing, unmistakably real.

It said my name. Slowly.

And then, the last words, sinking into my bones like a curse:

"You were never meant to leave."

