

Deleted Scenes and Short Stories from *Free Time*
by Brooke Shaffer

Scene 1:
Jerry and Saul Talk

It was hell trying to track down Saul. The Krydik were a rather elusive and reclusive people. Their reservation didn't technically exist, and the address they all used only traced back to a single, almost-abandoned building they used as a sort of office and barracks for whoever was working at the time. They all used the same last name—Wolf—though relations could be scattered. They had all of two telephone numbers that could be used to reach them. Anyone would have better luck trying to get a hold of the Amish.

Sometimes Jerry wondered whether Saul would even notice if he wasn't called back for camp. Would the man complain or rejoice? Sometimes he thought about just not calling him back at all. Saul was a bad-tempered old wolf. It was a wonder he'd become a camp counselor in the first place. The only reason Jerry did call him back, or attempt to, was because that was the agreement of the camp. True, it was officially run by the Shawnee, but preference had to be given to Native Americans of any tribe, be they staff or campers.

Maybe it was just luck that Jerry happened to catch someone at the phones in the Krydik office and that Saul just happened to be in the office as well and Jerry just happened to be less than ten miles away. He didn't particularly want to talk to Saul in person, the surly bastard, but important news demanded interpersonal contact.

It was a remote location, the office something of a renovated cabin that probably used to belong to some hermit or miner in ages past. Only a small garden gave any indication that the place was visited regularly, if not lived in. The road was not paved, and the parking lot was little more than a grassy spot where some of the grass had been flattened by vehicle tires. There were two vehicles in the lot, a car and a truck, both average for the area with nothing to make them stand out, not an official tribal license plate, not a decal, not even a bumper sticker.

Inside the old cabin, not much had changed since the pre-Civil War era. The single bedroom was made a little smaller than originally intended as one bed was turned into two. A cast iron wood stove was still very much in use for both heating and cooking. There was a wash basin and a few cupboards to constitute a kitchen, a tiny table with two chairs for a dining room, and the bathroom was out back. Only one small corner gave any sense of modernization with a desk, a computer and other assorted accessories like a printer, and a landline telephone.

Jerry guessed the man at the desk was Paul, whom he'd spoken to on the phone. They nodded politely to each other and Jerry turned his attention to the other man in the room.

“Calling for camp?” Saul asked. “Or to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?”

He didn't look up from where he sat at the little table, reading a book.

“I am here about camp,” Jerry said levelly. “I have some news.” Pause. “Joe isn't coming back this year.”

Saul blinked. He closed his book and stood. “What do you mean he's not coming back?”

“His mother took a turn for the worst. He had to quickly pack up for Houston and fly out there to be with her.”

If the man felt any sympathy for his long-time counselor assistant, he didn't show it beyond a frown and a look of mild confusion. Jerry could see the wheels turning. A Marine was never surprised and always improvised.

“All right,” he said finally. “I suppose I will have to manage alone, then.”

“Not quite,” Jerry told him. “I'm hiring a new guy to help you. I already have my candidate picked out.”

Saul folded his arms. "A transfer I might understand; at least he would know the camp and know my boys. Hiring someone new is only going to end in disaster."

"His name is Tommen. He's sixteen, from the Charleston area."

"Oh, a teenager, that's a wonderful idea." Saul rolled his eyes. "Because I really need that kind of drama. And a city teenager at that. Fantastic." He shook his head. "He's going to get me killed if I end up having to babysit him, too, on top of all the other kids."

Jerry did not back down. "He comes across as a mature, responsible young man. And anyway, this wasn't a discussion. I'm simply trying to keep you informed of what is going to happen."

"Was this a requirement, or your own idea?"

"I'm trying to help you out. You're welcome."

Saul grunted, obviously displeased but knowing better than to talk back to a commanding officer, not that Jerry would ever presume to give Saul orders. Finally he said, "All right. Fine. Worst case scenario, he's just another one of my campers."

"Please don't eat him alive. That's all I ask."

"I won't have to. The boys will do that for me if he shows any sort of weakness. And if he does annoy me too much, I'll just feed him to my wolf."

Jerry sighed and decided to make his exit rather than engage with Saul further. At least he was willing to work with someone new. That in itself was a small victory.

Scene 2:

Saul Speaks to an Ancestor

He managed to slip away from camp long enough to get to the ridge. The deer were plentiful, and he moved stealthily through the undergrowth, tracking the herd. He'd needed to get away. He felt freer now, since Jerry had fired him. He no longer had to care about the kids. He no longer had to care about the others. He might have felt guilty about it, as though he were turning his back on the camp, except it had become unrecognizable to him, a burden more than a blessing.

As he was reaching for an arrow, his back seized in pain. He fell forward into the grass, gasping for breath but unable to do so sufficiently. He squeezed his bow uselessly, wanted to move, couldn't figure out how to do so.

He might have believed this the inevitable culmination of his existing injuries, until he heard the footsteps approaching.

"The lone wolf strays foolishly from his pack."

He tried to move his head to look, but his body ached and his head was dizzy, even on the ground. Still, he knew Rifun's accent. He closed his eyes, tried to conjure up some kind of strength. He felt around, found the bullet in his back. He felt it more as Rifun touched it, and he cried out.

"When I warn you not to touch my apprentice, I mean it," Rifun hissed. "I don't like interference, Sabelu."

Sabelu opened his mouth and tried to form words, but the most he got was an angry burble of blood. He opened his eyes, tried to look, managed to catch just a glimpse of Rifun before having to close his eyes again.

"Let this be a message to any more Akarin who get in my way."

Rifun stood, but he did not leave.

More pain shot through his back and chest until it all blurred together into a white-hot supernova of agony. He tasted only blood. He could not breathe. His body screamed for air, an end to the pain, anything.

He opened his eyes again but could not make out anything except for vague distinctions of light and shadow. A figure approached, but it was not Rifun. As it got closer, he saw it was Anagalisgi, his grandfather's younger brother, now many centuries gone. Behind him was Yawi, though the wolf was

battered and bloody, as though it had been in a terrible fight and lost.

Anagalisgi got down in front of him where he could see.

“It's time to go, Sabelu,” the man said softly. He gently touched his face. “I will be with you, always.”

Sabelu let out what little air remained in his body and closed his eyes, content.

Scene 3:

Tommen and Rifun return to the burning camp

Original Chapter: 35, Hell on Earth

Once a fuel source had been consumed, fire moved on, so the hillside of the camp was pretty well burned out by now as the fire moved out in all directions, anywhere it could find fuel. The buildings were still smoldering pretty well, but the grass had all given way to black ash.

Tommen would not say he knew Rifun well. He hardly knew the man at all beyond a conniving lunatic with a flair for Shakespearean dramatics. But he knew people, and even the people with wild, abnormal personalities were human with human reactions, such as fear. Rifun watched the fire suspiciously, fearfully, as though it might develop a mind of its own and come after him. But then, with the volatility of fire in regular Time Bands, why shouldn't he exercise a bit of caution?

As they crested the top of the hill, Tommen considered taking off his jacket.

“Aren't you warm?” he asked casually, hoping to ease a tense situation and get Rifun to remove his hoodie first, that way he didn't feel like a loser wimping out. He could sweat a little.

“Tragically so, I'm afraid,” Rifun replied. The man made no move to remove his hoodie, although he did reach up to remove his gold chain necklace. Likely it was getting warm. As he fumbled with it, Tommen thought he caught a glimpse of scar tissue around the man's neck, but it was hard to tell.

“What was that?” Tommen asked. “Around your neck?”

“This?” Rifun wondered, holding up the necklace once he finally got it undone.

“No. That.” He nodded toward the scar tissue.

Rifun frowned and pulled the opening of his hoodie up closer about his neck, obscuring the wound. “That's what happens when you play with fire and it fights back.”

“Your first attempt at using the Akari on fire?”

Rifun did not answer as he paused in the middle of the parking lot and looked at Tommen. “Before we begin, let's see how much you remember from the other night. Show me an Akari Band.”