

# **THE ALIEN OF THE EAST**

By Kaleb Stone

## **PROLOGUE**

### **FIRST CONTACT**

The Tejina family always eats dinner together, and Jin Tejina was eating in his room alone. He savored the taste of his plain white rice as he stared blankly at the window below him, overflowing with light. He took a bite and the window cheered; he took a sip of his tea and the window clinked as if toasting him. His gaze strayed slightly to look at a gray stone monkey statue, one of many. As he stared into its purple gemstone eyes, it stared back at him, and he felt companionship. The eyes seemed to look into his very soul, similar to his sister's Third Eye, the same Third Eye that he painfully lacked. He took another bite, the window cheered, and his gaze moved back to it. The Tejina family was eating dinner together, and he was content.

By the time Jin woke up every day the sun was already high in the sky. His younger siblings, on the other hand, were required to be up at dawn for training, and they were in the middle of their tutoring sessions by the time he awoke. He usually saw them wrapping up on his way into the library, where he always went early in his day. It was a hassle back when he had to do all that, so he was honestly quite glad to be done with it. Getting to laze about all day, soaking in the midday sun, and doing absolutely nothing was enough for Jin. He would tell himself that every hour of every day, in hopes that eventually he'd believe it himself.

If there's anything that could make Jin glad that he was part of the Tejina family, it was the fact that Hagukokoro had one of the greatest libraries in all of Yamato. Just because he couldn't fight didn't mean he couldn't learn. The Tejina family had always held knowledge and intellect in extremely high regard, so it may have been his last hope for being useful. The

library's books taught him many things: recipes, blacksmithing, tigers, anything he wanted to learn really. Despite his pretenses of trying to be useful, he did end up spending most of his time reading stories instead of learning anything worthwhile. His tutor – his sister's tutor now – told him that any sort of reading involves learning, so he would grasp firmly onto that fact as he read all through the evening. To escape his reality, he would drown himself in words every single day.

“How are you feeling by the way? It feels like we never really, uh, talk anymore,” Atsuko whispered. Atsuko was Jin's younger sister and the heir to the Tejina family. Fifteen years old, and she'd already formed a contract with Satori, which was necessary since their father died. Having just finished archery practice for the day, she wanted to do some extra studying, so she and Jin ran into each other in the library.

“What do you mean?” he responded, confused.

“Well, you always seem so – so lonely. I just... wanted to check in on you is all. And...” she trailed off as glowing pink lines streaked across her face. The mystical lines converged in the center of her forehead, forming the symbol of an eye.

“Your mind feels... hazy?” she stated questioningly after a long pause. Jin began to feel uneasy. He never really got used to having his mind read, even though their father would do it to them all the time.

“I feel perfectly fine, thank you for checking, though!” He said, trying his absolute best to sound cheerful as he waved her off. She didn't buy it.

“But... your mind is like a... a black cloud,” she said, her voice quivering with deep concern and a hint of curiosity. “And... I can't see into it.”

Jin looked up at her with a smile as bright as the morning sun and reassuringly said, “as long as you continue to worry about me like this, I’m okay! You should probably get back to studying though.”

The Third Eye appeared on her forehead once more, she squinted at him, and then it disappeared once more as she nodded. She seemed pleased, yet still concerned about the dark fog within Jin’s mind. She had never seen that before, and her dad hadn’t told her about it either. “Okay, fine, but if you ever need anything just ask!”

“I will, thanks Suko!” Truly, as long as she fretted over him, as long as he still knew that he was a part of the Tejina family, he would be okay.

“Excuse me Jin-sama, Kazuko-sama is requesting you,” Jin and Atsuko jumped slightly, not noticing the servant’s presence beforehand. As Jin got up and walked over to follow the servant, he glanced back at Atsuko one more time before leaving the library.

I walked into the majestic throne room. Monkey statues with amethyst eyes lined the path to the throne, one of them missing an arm, and the room lacked walls in many places, allowing the Lord to view upon their kingdom. Seated on the throne was Kazuko Tejina, Jin and Atsuko’s mother, and current Lord of Hagukokoro. She was looking down, so Jin couldn’t see her eyes as he entered, but he swore he noticed small teardrops when he got closer.

“What did you call me here for mother?” Jin asked, with a vague hint of nervousness in his voice.

“Get out.” The cold judgment landed directly on Jin’s shoulders, and it was simply too much to bear.

“...what?” he squeaked.

“I said get out!” his mother screamed. Dressed in her regal robes, she appeared to him a vicious demoness. He fell back from the force of her verbal blow. His vision blurred, and he was struck immobile.

“You useless fuck! Two years now you’ve simply leeches off of us, doing nothing but shaming our family’s name. I am done with you!” she spat her words at him, and they struck his chest like the sharpest shuriken. He tried to scream in shock and terror, but he was too frightened to do even that much. His blurry vision overflowed, and he felt the wetness streak down his face. He was utterly speechless. As she broke down into tears of her own, tears of a drastically different variety than Jin’s, he slowly backed out the door and left.

“Hey what happened in there-“ Atsuko, passing him in the hall, tried in vain to ask. With one look at his face, she realized, not even needing the Third Eye to check.

“Wha – what do you want me to do? I’ll help you with whatever you need!”

“STOP!” He yelled, the first thing out of his mouth in what felt like a century. She jumped back, fear in her eyes. Nothing remotely close to what he had just felt though. Any other day, he’d feel remorseful and immediately back off, but that day her anguish felt to him less than hollow.

“JUST... BACK OFF!” He yelled once more, surpassing the limits of his vocal cords. Wind rushed by him, as he sprinted away from her, desperately trying to run from his own failure and hatred. Atsuko, his loving sister, the last actual family member he had, was left limp against the wall, staring off into space, and wondering what she had done wrong.

The pouring rain masked his tears as he sprinted out of Hagukokoro as quickly as possible. He thought he heard Atsuko cry out for him one last time in the distance, but he ignored it. His head pounded as if his mind was attempting to escape his unfortunate body, and frankly, he couldn’t blame it.

Arms over his knees, and knees touching his face, he sat in agonizing silence. The tears of the sky continued pelting him and adding to his immeasurable misery, and all he did was stare thoughtlessly at the droplets in front of him as if trying to count to infinity. This continued until his stomach drove him to slink back to Hagukokoro and beg like a dog.

The guards looked at Jin with sad eyes as they refused his entry. They said his mother had told them to keep him out, and he said that he would starve to death. When one of them eventually went inside out of pity to get Jin something to eat, he slumped to the ground. The wet grass bent beneath his weight, dampening his bottom even further. The rain itself was mostly gone for the moment, but its presence lingered. Shortly after sitting down, he saw a bundle wrapped in cloth across from him, placed gently against the stone walls. The cloth was a pale pink, decorated with a dark purple eye in the center, and a pink heart in its iris. Jin smiled the happiest smile he could muster, and almost began to weep once more. He left before the guard could bring out the promised food, carrying with him a basket of love.

Jin didn't know what to do. He wanted, more than anything, to avoid thinking about that at the moment. So, basket in hand, he marched out of the city. The only impulse he was running on was to get away from Hagukokoro as soon as he could. The more distance he made the better, then he could sort the rest out later.

Moonlight bathed his lonely figure as night fell on the Shoushin Region. The clouds from the last storm were long gone, but a new wave of them lurked just above the horizon. He needed to find shelter before they arrived. He scanned his surroundings like a hawk as he trudged steadily through the flat rocky wastes. Nothing but boulders, pillars of sandstone, and the occasional Sakura tree entered his vision. He tripped on nothing, landing face-first onto the dusty

rock. He sat back up, clutching his face in his hands. He presumed his nose to be broken. The basket fell behind him, some of the contents falling to the ground. Crawling over to it, he hastily stuffed the thing most important, the pink cloth, into the folds of his kimono. Tears began to make their way out once again until something caught his eye.

Jin looked up and saw a glowing rainbow streak moving across the sky. It was... gorgeous. Utterly mesmerized, he stared at it until he realized that it was getting closer. Whatever it was, it's about to land right by him! He flailed around to get back up on his feet, then ran away as his life depended on it! He slipped a few times on the still-wet rocks, but he managed to make enough distance that he felt comfortable turning back around to take another look at it. He looked just in time to see it crash into the ground a few hundred meters from him. The shockwave knocked him over once again, and he shielded his eyes from the water and dust kicked up by the impact. Once it all settled, he got back to his feet and tentatively walked over to see the aftermath.

There was now a large crater in the otherwise flat, rocky expanse. The edges of the rocky hole were lined with streaks of arcane green energy, coursing through the stone, like veins and arteries. No immediate sign remained of what could've caused it, but there was a cavity on the side of the crater, near the bottom, with translucent black smoke rising out of it. Jin was exhausted, his self-preservation could not be any lower, and his curiosity could not be any higher. Ignoring the possible danger, he slid down into the crater, towards the dark and mysterious cavity.

The fog was a bit smothering, but he could manage. It didn't seem to affect his eyes, and he could see through it just fine, especially with the help of the pulsating green lines. He thought he heard something in the depths of the humid cavern, but he was clueless as to what it could be. The sound was threatening, mysterious, loud, subtle, high pitch, and low pitch all at once. No

matter how hard he tried, he simply could not identify it. He continued onward tentatively, yet purposefully. For reasons unknown, he felt he absolutely had to know what was down there, even if it may be his end. As someone who had lost everything over the past few hours, the slightest hint of a purpose was enough to drive him forwards.

The cave widened into a space roughly the size of Jin's bedroom. He froze as soon as he saw it. In the center of the room stood a figure. The dark fog emitted from the figure, giving it a kind of silhouette. Besides that, Jin couldn't really say he saw it. His mind recognized that the figure was in front of him, but he failed to tell exactly *where*. More importantly, he couldn't tell in the slightest *what* it was. The outline seemed to refract light, as well as reflect it. The figure turned to look at Jin, but it also looked in every other direction. Its eyes stared into his soul, yet it had no eyes to see. It existed, and yet it didn't.

Jin was struck still for a few moments, during which the being stood completely still, seeming to stare at him. Tentatively, he walked towards the figure, and it too stepped towards Jin. Jin froze, and the figure did as well. Confused, Jin took a step backwards, and then the creature spoke.

**“Who- are- you,”** its “voice” echoed throughout Jin's head. Like every other aspect of this... *thing*, he was unable to exactly identify the voice, everything it said became difficult to make out due to the sudden stops after each and every word. If he had to pin it down, he'd say it sounded kind of like... his own?

“My name... is Jin,” his voice wavered, and for a moment he looked down sadly. He almost said “Jin Tejina,” but he decided against it. As he looked back up, the being in front of him seemed somehow sadder than it did previously. The next second he got the impression that he had imagined it.



**“Who- am- I,”** it spoke once more, again sounding as if its voice was reverberating throughout the entire world. It didn’t necessarily sound loud, but it sounded... infinite.

“You... are you, are you not?” The figure looked up at me. Jin felt its gaze pierce into him. Where that answer came from, he hadn’t the foggiest clue. He simply... felt it was correct. After a couple of seconds, the creature seemed pleased as well.

**“Yes. I- know- only- one- thing, and- that- is- that- I- am- me. I- wish- to- know- more.”**

“I wish I knew more as well,” Jin responded. This being of unending mystery seemed to be rather... friendly? Jin felt very much inclined to trust this creature, though he had no idea why.

**“Why- don’t- we- learn- more... together,”** the creature asked, extending its hand to Jin. He looked at it confusedly. What did it want him to do? Tentatively, Jin raised his hand similarly, and suddenly the creature grabbed his hand, and Jin make contact with nothing. It shook his hand up and down and said, **“nice- to- meet- you- Jin.”**

Then Jin saw darkness.

Jin woke up lying on his back in a rocky stone plane. Groggily, he looked around and observed, noting that the entire crater seemed to have vanished. Slowly, he sat up. He put a hand up to his pounding head, then, quickly, pulled his hand back and looked at it in shock and awe. A brownish aura surrounded his arm. He had magic! Finally!

“I- hope- you- do- not- mind,” the voice no longer echoed, still felt ethereal, and was more so confined to Jin’s head – a common phenomenon with spirit contracts.

“Don’t mind?! I love it! I’m not even gonna question what you did exactly, but- but you’ve saved me!” It was surreal. His headache was still pounding away, but he deigned to ignore it. His manic laughter echoed all across the expanse of nothing, fueling his own elation.

“I- am- pleased- you- like- this- arrangement. I- presume- you- may- also- want- to- know- that- I- have- learned- what- I- am- called.”

Once Jin’s giddy laughter died down to a reasonable level, he asked, “what is it?”

Though, for some reason, he felt like he already knew the answer.

“I- am- called- Nue.”