

The waters lay still. Though they were often disturbed by the many pilgrims who sought their healing powers, the wind, and something else that may or may not be magical, today they didn't move. The massive toa stayed still as well. He eyed the tarn wearily. The last time he'd entered its waters had been less than a pleasant experience. Somehow he felt as though the stillness was a warning to him. It was eerie in fact, he'd never witnessed the tarn so reflective in all the times he'd visited. The lone cloud overhead was perfectly mirrored in the waters. The Icepick shivered, rustling his long feathers. An image of a small, still cub came to mind. Still as the waters were today. An offering stilled by his own paws. An offering of his own making through and through. He quickly turned away, looking instead at his very lively, very real brother whom he wished would be nothing more than a memory.

Khylus seemed to have no such apprehension of the waters. Of course, this was the phoenix's first trip to the tarn. He wasn't likely to notice anything amiss about the waters. The younger toa felt his brother's gaze on him and cocked his head in question. "What do we do next?" He could only assume The Icepick was waiting for him to do something and was once again feeling unprepared and incompetent.

The voice that answered came from a different phoenix- the boys' father who had left his post in Ilahaesa for once to join them at the tarn. "We enter the waters and bask in their healing powers. Come. We have much to prepare for and the tarn will help us. It is ever our ally." Tidalwave strode confidently towards the tarn. He also seemed unbothered by the stillness of the waves, though he might not show it if he was.

Khylus followed his father, bouncing towards the beautiful blue water. Both phoenixes entered and plodded further and further in. The water rose dutifully around them, covering their paws, their legs, their haunches, their backs, their necks.

Veritas stood in place, watching, waiting, holding his breath. He saw the water rise over their heads and the pair disappeared from view. The world was silent. The image of the cloud once again appeared unchanged, untainted by the bodies of ketucari. Anxiety crept through the toa. Had they been under too long? Had the tarn claimed them from him like it had his earlier sacrifices? Was this to be his divine punishment... or perhaps his reward? With Tidalwave and Khylus gone the army would belong to him...

The pink toa pushed the thought from his mind. Blasphemy! He might wish ill upon Khylus for being his annoying younger charge, but never against his father. Never against the great general.

To his immense relief, the great general himself rose up from the waters. The dark toa took in a long breath and then exhaled, he shook out his feathers as he headed back to the bank, looking bright, alert, and refreshed. He looked questioningly at The Icepick. "We don't have all day. A new war is on the verge of breaking loose. You've heard the reports, you know. We must prepare the troops and be ready to be on the move. I need my best fighter strong and revitalized."

At that moment, Khylus' head also popped back up and the younger phoenix took in a series of ragged but excited breaths. "That was amazing! We should come here more often! I feel incredible, like I could fight a mountain." the lighter toa suddenly clocked The Icepick still standing on the banks. "Brother! What are you waiting for, the waters feel great!" He looked at the pink toa expectantly.

The Icepick let out an irritated growl and mumbled something to his father about "Standing guard" as he passed, trudging towards the tarn waters. They hadn't consumed his family just yet. Perhaps they were just as annoyed by Khylus as he was. He'd spit the toa back out too.

The Icepick stubbornly walked into the tarn, head held high, attempting to drown out Khylus' splashing sounds as the other toa giddily clambered back to the bank. He took in a deep breath and let the waters fully cover him, diving further in. He felt their magic as he had many times before. The joints he didn't realize were aching were soothed. A warrior's invigoration filled him. The sounds of battle and the euphoric feeling of ripping flesh flashed across his senses. He felt assured in his victory, no matter the battle. The Icepick let out his breath and felt himself rising back to the world of the corporeal.

His head broke the surface and he took in a long inhale. So the waters had released him too. He bowed his head towards them reverently, thanking them for the strength they bestowed and for allowing himself and his family to go freely on towards their conquest. A wind blew through the clearing stirring the waters, almost in response. As The Icepick rose out of the tarn, rejoining his family on the shore the tarn moved once more. The Icepick felt almost as though the tarn was laughing at him. "We let you all out today...." it seemed to say. "But just as we give, we can take away."

The Icepick nodded solemnly. He knew all too well, perhaps more than most, how truly alive the magic of the tarn was.