

A Road Called Hope

It is said that the destination is not as important as the journey. Hope Road has had a spectacular journey. It is a beacon of hope for the Manku people, but it did not always inspire hope, nor was it always a road. In fact, the legendary Hope Road arose from humble beginnings like you and me. Its tale is one of wonder, grief, and fresh starts.

Hope Road, and its predecessors, has existed for thousands of years. Eons ago it was part of a sand dune, for in its earliest existence Chube was a land drowning in sand. For miles, there was only sun-scorched earth. There was no sign of life, until the day they came: the Beings. It is not known from whence they came, but they arrived in droves. As more poured into the valley, it became apparent they were here to stay. They brought magic and technology. They found water sources for their farms and animals, and they had carts to transport themselves and their goods. They grew, creating small villages, farmlands, schools, a capital. Their constant travel eventually created a common, beaten path. This was the first appearance of Hope Road, but at the time it was called Broad Road, for it was the main path of travel to other towns.

The Beings who settled along Broad Road were superstitious, magical people. They were ruled by five powerful, benevolent Kutan who governed wisely and used their magic to help their people. After a thousand years of living in the desert, the Beings began to grumble. It was a waste of water sources to grow crops that were unaccustomed to arid conditions. The stifling weather conditions had also sent a ravaging fever throughout the population. The Beings demanded a solution from their rulers. Some of the Kutan suggested they move to a more fruitful location, others proposed magicking different crops better fitted for their desert home. The esteemed, wise Kuta Acha offered her companions a spell that would change the desert valley into a lush one with fertile soil and temperate weather. Even though her brethren were unsure of the unorthodox spell, she quickly won them over. That night, while their people lay asleep, they gathered on the Broad Road to perform their spell. As they chanted, the sky was torn by lightning and the wind whipped ferociously around the Kutan, enveloping them in a cyclone of sand. When they finished, the wind slowly ceased its frenzied screams. Acha looked down and saw the red, sandy Broad Road transformed into brown sediment. She knelt, rubbing her hands over the dirt, amazed by their successful attempt. She and her fellow Kutan commemorated the event by renaming the Broad Road, Hope Road. And spread hope it did. When the Beings saw the change in their home they were overjoyed. The milder weather conditions drove the fevers away. They grew more nutritious crops naturally, now with water to spare. The new conditions caused more population growth. To alleviate pressure in the land around the capital, select groups were sent away to populate other areas along Hope Road. The send-offs were meant to be solemn affairs, but as their people followed the Hope Road to their new destinations, the Beings were hopeful they would flourish.

Their hopes became reality. The Beings grew and prospered, quickly populating Chube. Even though they remained one people, the different groups gained distinct identities. They became tribes. There were five. The Krian were known for their colorful fabrics and their love

for the arts. Their drums and songs could be heard across the winds of the valley almost every night. Their vibrant, lively paintings could be found in almost every Being home. The bronze sculptures and utensils of the metal-working Dimani to the North brought them much acclaim. The innovative and intellectual Oladis were at the forefront of every new invention. Their creations made the Beings the most technologically advanced people of their time. They also managed to combine magic with technology, creating carts that flew on their own accord and artificial rainmakers. Even though the Beings had never fought a battle, the militant Murami educated themselves in the art of defense and war. All their members, even the children were taught the art of Riki, a martial art that used parts of the body to debilitate opponents. They were also magnificent blacksmiths, who made beautiful, strong weapons out of obsidian and diamonds. They held frequent fight competitions to test out their work. They were recognizable with their staggering height and muscled frames. Their black tattoos and brands were stark labels when they were amid the other tribes. The final tribe was the Sardi. They were a people of agriculture. Though each tribe also farmed, the Sardi were the supplier of most of the crops in the valley. Their scientists created new fruits and vegetables that gave consumers more nutrients or more energy. Their cooks created foods that engaged and excited the taste buds. It was said the Sardi cooked the best food in Chube. That even the gods yearned for a taste. All the tribes coexisted peacefully in the valley, each helping the Beings become an even greater people.

Centuries came and went without issues. The tribes were content with being ruled by the Kutan, for they wanted for nothing. Life was peaceful and full of meaning. However, this sentiment did not last long. The tribes of Chube became less and less dependent on the Kutan. Each tribe became rich from their individual trade with each other and other peoples. The Beings learned to wield magic and no longer needed the assistance of the Kutan to solve their issues. The tribes farthest from the capital decided to make decisions without the Kutan's input. Slowly, but surely, the Kutan lost their usefulness. At the next Govern Consul, delegates from the tribes suggested they have their own governments. The Kutan would still be rulers, as a sign of respect, but they would only make decisions that would affect the Beings as a people, and even then they would receive input from tribe leaders. Some of the Kutan were outraged. They felt betrayed. The people they had given so much to wanted to throw them out of power. The capital erupted into arguments and fights broke out among opposing groups. The fires of anger and conflict lasted for the next two days. Finally, Acha put a stop to the fighting with a powerful blast of lightning that scorched the earth. She gave a rousing speech about how while the Kutan had led their people with wisdom for a long time, it was now time to allow their children to lead themselves. The Kutan agreed to the terms of the delegates, some begrudgingly. The capital erupted in celebration. As the delegates traveled home along Hope Road, they stomped to the beat of loud celebratory drums and horns.

Thus began the era of self-governance for the tribes. Left to their own devices, each one grew in power and prominence. Five strongholds arose in Chube. City-states that dominated their parts of the valley. They asserted an immense influence on neighboring lands. Throughout

lands and realms, peoples spoke of the Beings of Chube. They came to the valley to trade with them, and marvel in the magic they wielded. Some of these peoples, allured by the bounty of the valley, wanted more than trade. They wanted to settle. One of them was the Haras, giants who were known for their wealth and manufacturing prowess. When they arrived in the valley they sent a delegation to the Beings. They met the Kutan at the Hope Road where they shared technology and gold with the Beings. In the middle of Hope Road, they created an alliance. From then on, the Beings and the Haras were the best of neighbors. The Hope Road was extended to the heart of the Haras city and the two peoples traded ideas and resources.

Unfortunately along came a villain: the formidable and power-hungry mage Mela. She had traveled along Hope Road looking for a home. When she arrived in Chube she saw its prosperous occupants and thought it a splendid idea to enslave them. She sent a message to the Kutan threatening to crush them if they didn't relinquish their authority to her. This message was also sent to the Haras. The Kutan, along with the tribal leaders, deemed Mela's demands absurd and looked to the Haras for help to fight their foe. However, the Haras, being a non-violent species, refused to involve themselves. The Beings were offended but turned their attention to defeating the insolent mage. The Kutan, each with bands of warriors from the tribes, arrived at Hope Road ready to defend their land and people. Ignorantly thinking they would quickly overpower Mela, they left their cities defenseless. As the battle progressed, Mela proved too powerful for the Beings who knew nothing of violence and war. Hope Road silently watched as she picked off the soldiers and potent Kutan one by one. The last one standing was Acha. Knowing she was her people's last defense, she used her mightiest spells against the mage, but she too was torn apart, her blood seeping into Hope Road.

Mela decided to punish the Beings for resisting her. She strolled into the Beings' cities across the valley and slaughtered them, young and old. She annihilated them. When she finished, she surveyed her handiwork. Disgusted at the carnage, she set out to find another place to settle down. The broken bodies of the Beings were strewn across the Hope Road, their souls crying out for retribution. The Hope Road heard their pleas and transformed into a broken, jagged path. Thorns grew from the ground refusing any traveler. Many terrifying creatures called the road their home and harassed any who dared come close. The road became known as Dreadful Road. Word of the injustices committed by Mela traveled to the court of the altruistic Chioma, ruler of the Manku. She traveled to Dreadful Road and softly coaxed it to release the souls of the Beings so they could fly to Koni. Chioma's blessing returned Dreadful Road to its former blossomy state, and it could again be traveled.

Dreadful Road became Hope Road once again. Chioma decided to move her kingdom to Hope Road, so the Manku moved into the valley. As her people grew in status and size, their ruler ordered the remodeling of Hope Road to commemorate the sacrifice of the Beings and the achievements of the Manku. The dirt surface was inlaid with luminous limestone that glittered when the sun's rays fell upon it, lighting the journeys of the Manku with guidance and inspiration.

You and I are like Hope Road. Throughout its existence, it has been influenced by many characters. The Beings, the Kutan, Mela, Chioma, their actions changed the Road in some way, whether positive or negative. Likewise, we are the product of our environments. The people we meet, the food we eat, the media we absorb through our senses impact our sense of being, our identities. Sometimes we can't choose what influences us. The Hope Road didn't ask to be created, but it served its purpose, helping the Beings and protecting them when they needed help. Similarly, we have to use our experiences to fulfill our purpose in life. We are all a part of someone's environment. Will we make a positive impact or a negative one?

Word Count: 1914