

## Avatar Fan Fiction – Master Hunter, by Jerathai

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Sir'tey and Eytukan went back a long way. They'd grown up together, trained together, and raised their families. Eytukan had been first among the warriors; no one celebrated more than Sir'tey when his friend had been named future Olo'eyctan. Not that it had surprised anyone, given how he and the young tsahik Mo'at were always making eyes at each other when they thought no one was looking.

Sir'tey excelled among the hunters as much as Eytukan had among the warriors. No creature moved in the forest that he could not track. Many Omatikaya swore he could trace the path of an ikran through the sky. Some said that when he decided to track an animal down the chosen beast would simply drop dead in its tracks to save itself the useless exertion of the chase.

He'd brought his keen observational skills to bear on the new dreamwalker that his best friend's daughter had brought to the clan, this Jakesully. It was obvious that many of the clan feared the man, and that many were outraged by his presence. Sir'tey was too good a hunter to let either fear or anger cloud what his eyes could see.

He saw a man who soaked up information like a sponge, someone who took all the taunts that the People threw at him without complaint – but also without submission or fear. The hunter saw a man who took everything the Omatikaya presented him as a challenge to be mastered, and then went on to the next one. The People thought that they were testing Jakesully – but Sir'tey saw a man who was testing himself. Many Omatikaya were shocked when the dreamwalker came back from Ikinmaya as ikran makto. Sir'tey was not. Many were stunned when Jakesully emerged alive from the sacred space under Hometree having successfully passed through Uniltaron. The hunter wasn't.

He had tried to speak to his brother-friend about the dreamwalker when they had found out about the impending Sky People attack, but rage had clouded Eytukan's reason. And then the Olo'eyctan – his heart-brother - was gone. Sir'tey had made the Sky People pay dearly for their heinous crime. It did not make his grief go away.

The hunter had been as incredulous as everyone else when Jakesully returned to the People as Toruk Makto. He watched as the man that the Omatikaya had spat upon saved not just the clan but all Na'vi. Sir'tey saw all of Eywa's creatures come to help the People – in answer to the dreamwalker's prayer, he was later

informed. He saw Jake and Toruk strike down the demon flying machine, watched it explode into a blazing fireball with his own eyes.

After all of that, it did not surprise Sir'tey when Jakesully appeared among the Na'vi at the Tree of Souls wearing the palulukan-claw collar of the Omatikaya Olo'eyctan. It did not surprise the hunter when Jake left his empty Sky People body at the foot of the Tree to walk among them permanently.

There wasn't a man among all the People that Sir'tey respected more.

But he'd never tell him that.

He spent a great deal of time with Jake. That was only natural, since he was the clan's senior hunter. He offered to oversee the hunting while the new Olo'eyctan was getting used to the position before the man even had a chance to ask.

While they were ostensibly speaking about hunting, Sir'tey commented how this custom or that custom involved the animal they were discussing. He brought Jake to the weapon-makers who cheerfully discussed their craft in intimate detail, getting into debates over the various styles of arrowheads, the proper weighting of bowstaves, the merits of claws versus teeth for use in making knives, all the minutiae of their work. Of course they absolutely couldn't let the Olo'eyctan go without proper equipment. Jake felt like a walking armory by the time they'd pressed him into accepting one of every type of weapon they had to offer.

Sir'tey acted as Jake's lieutenant with the hunter-warriors, working so smoothly that it seemed only natural to the other Omatikaya. He introduced Jake to each one, praising their particular area of expertise to their new Olo'eyctan (and not coincidentally giving the Toruk Makto a briefing on his warriors' strengths.)

Occasionally he would tell stories of Eytukan, Mo'at, Neytiri, Sylwanin, or his own mate and family. The stories were always illuminating and timely.

Jake knew what the master hunter was doing, of course, and was incredibly grateful. It wasn't long before others noticed, either.

Mo'at intercepted Sir'tey after the morning hunters' meeting one day and invited him to walk along the river for a bit. She waited until they were out of earshot and then said noncommittally, "You have been helping Jake a great deal."

The hunter replied, "A young man needs a father." He looked back towards the Tree, "That one more than most."

The Tsahik responded, "So you decided to fill the position?"

Sir'tey said gently, "Eytukan would have been a great father to Jake. But since he has gone to Eywa, it falls to someone else to fill that role. Who better than his heart-brother to step in and offer the open ear or the quiet word now and then?"

Mo'at's eyes twinkled despite the pang in her heart at hearing her mate's name spoken aloud. "No more than a quiet word?"

The hunter shook his head. "No more is necessary, with that one." He looked up at the Omatikaya Tshik. "Eywa has shown him his path. I only show him the landscape surrounding it."

She nodded in acknowledgement. "Still, it is good for the Clan that you give him that ear and that word."

Sir'tey said softly, "What better way to honor my heart-brother than to guide his daughter's mate?"

They looked at each other for a few moments, wordlessly sharing their memories of the one who had passed. Then Mo'at smiled and took the arm of her mate's best friend so that they could walk home together.

A whisper on the wind followed them back towards the Tree, so gentle that neither of them heard it.

*Irayo, my friend.*