

# Chapter 10: Ruins of Time

It was unlike any thing Will had seen before, words or pictures did not even come close. There lay in the open valley below a complex ruin of buildings and roads. Eerie, yet alluring. He could almost imagine the city in its day, when there was a rush of life and activity.

Along the deserted roadways he could see tall obelisks that aligned in some way. Just seeing the ruins laid out before him made all his current doubts pass away, here was something that might have at least one answer to his questions. "Let's wake Kadde, he'll want to see this for sure." Julia was right, they'd been through a lot to get here.

"Mmmfhm, can't it wait?" Kadde said wrapped up in his blanket, still mostly asleep.

"I think you need to see this." Julia said. Miila woke from the sound of her voice as well as Vulgurutt. Jack wasn't having it at that moment. "Not my thing guys, let me rest." Kadde finally rolled out of his comfortable bed and walked to the opening in their tent. The sun was well up and Kadde could clearly see the outline of the ruins of the ancient clock-makers. "By the great winged-Father! It's, it's... more than astounding, more like indescribable. Oh, this is well worth even just a few notes would be a great boon to our studies."

The team managed to move their shelter closer to the ruined city, but this time they set up more permanent structures. "Since we're here we need to set up a camp for studies, excavation, and set some things in order." Kadde said as he took out his journey log. "Vulgurutt and Miila will take charge of rations and provisions, we'll need fresh water and some sort of food if we want to make any observations of note." They both nodded and started searching the borders of the abandoned city.

"Julia, could you help Jack with taking measurements of the city streets. I need an idea of this locations dimensions for the academy." "Sure, sure, yeah. Just let me get a bite to eat." Jack yawned out. He was still tired from the previous day's exertions.

"Finally, Will. I need an assistant with me taking notes on structures and artifacts. I want someone with arcane studies and experience, these ruins were made by people who used time-magics, and you have some knowledge of that, yes?"

Will remembered his time with Hiram on Mist and some of the lessons he had given him during his stay. "I'll see what I can do."

And so it started, the second leg of their trip. Jack and Julia noted that the ruins were actually smaller than at first thought, "Only about 1,000 paces through its axis, and the perimeter a little more than 3,000." Jack noted.

"Well, we know this wasn't a working city or even a trade point, but mostly an excavation and resource site. Refinement and storage of parts," Kadde was also starting to feel a little down after a few days. The ruins were in fairly bad condition besides the obelisks along the street axes.

"I guess treasure hunters carried off what they could and just smashed the rest." Jack noted one day as they sifted through a rock pile.

“Probably.” Miila found research and numbers tedious but enjoyed talking to Julia in her free time.

Will was having better luck using his Chrono-magics in the ruins than previously. Despite all appearances of the ruins Kadde was able to start scrapping together theories and notes faster than ever with Will's unique talents in time-magics. “Seems these ruins really are meant for Chrono-Magic. Just the presence of such energies sets them flowing.”

By the first week's end Kadde had managed a general sketch of the ruins but was still hoping for a little more luck from excavations. “I really just hope we find a log book or some type of archive, something to help with a final report.” Kadde was feeling a little empty at points of the day, too.

It wasn't until the end of the second week that a break came. Julia and Will were wandering the silent streets at dusk. The oddly sharp features of the ruined city gave it the look of a burned out municipality, crumbling walls and constructs. But always the obilisks seemed to stand out most.

“I've always read about ruined cities and ancient buildings, but the books don't do them justice.” Julia said as the two walked past a large pile of rubble and scraps.

“In what way?” Will asked, curious about her thoughts. “Well, this place looks like it wasn't so much abandoned as leveled during a battle or disaster. I mean, an abandoned city has most of its buildings intact. People just leave and don't care to look back. But here, it's been heavily crushed and torn apart, like a bunch of raiders and looters had their way with the entire place. It'd explain why there's so little left.”

Will wondered what could have been so valuable, that it warranted an invasion of sorts. “Hmm, If I were going to hide something.... where would I hide?” His voice was trailing off as he walked off the main street and to a higher vantage point. Will rushed to the highest stable point of the city and tries to imagine a battle hundreds of years old.

“I would have come from the open roads to the East. Encircled the city to cut off all avenues of escape if I had the numbers. The survivors would have fled South or West, harder to follow. Not the biggest building, but the best protected.”

Will looked over the ruins from a fairly stable building top from East to West. Looking for a low, hidden building, something small and hard to enter. Maybe even just a storehouse or cellar. Will recalled how Hiram had cut clean into rock with his Chrono-magics, maybe someone could have hidden something.

“Nice view Will, looking for something in particular?” Julia tried to see what Will could see.

“Yes. A small or hidden building, tucked away. A place to hide something.”

“Actually, the best place to hide is sometimes right in the open.” She pointed to a practically leveled building foundation to the Northwest of the town center.

“Really?” Will wasn't sure, but Julia had a hunch. She had learned from living in a city, the best place to hide was just off the main way - just out of sight. Hiding from people she didn't care to see every day.

It was a fairly small building, not even that, more like a cottage or a yurt. Easy to miss in a city full of magical workings. Will and Julia walked from their vantage point to the somewhat ramshackle building foundation. The walls were starting to crumble inward and it looked like an imploded room, but

something about its shape seemed to give them hope.

Some lifting and dusting off of the floor tiles they saw that the floor was actually fairly well preserved, even the old arcanic works between the tiles.

“Yeah. I don't think a looter would have given it a second thought.” Will said. “Just an elaborate floor pattern, not much else to the untrained.”

“What? Really?” Julia was glad that they had made a break in the so far lowly two weeks of digging.

It was nearly sun down before they had all assembled before the ruined building structure. “I don't see anything unusual,” Miila said.

“It's not what you can usually 'see'.” Kadde explained. “There are protection wards worked into the floor; subtle, layer, and very old. Maybe some one just hoping to save something from being destroyed.”

Kadde and Will stood at what felt like the opposing ends of the protection ward, both clutching their staves of power. “Will, repeat after me; Ahm um Rahh. Cham Khyll fhüll” They chanted the words of unbinding several times before they finally synchronized and the ward diffused into the air as if it had never been.

The block sections of the floor slid away deeper into the ground until a small spiral stair way remained leading to a basement.

Will ignited his lighting spell and headed down with Julia, Kadde, and Miila taking the rear guard. Not more than two flights down and they were in a square storage area. It was practically empty except for the feeling in Will's gut. 'Cut into rock...'

Placing his hand along the walls Will felt for tiny vibrations in the wall lining. On the opposite wall he felt nothing, a hollow pocket behind a brick. Miila carefully felt along the edges, claws-out and pulled out the brick.

A small ragged piece of cloth was wrapped around a strange silver and red object.

“Your 'big' find, Kadde?”

“No, 'Our' big find, my dear.”

Back at the camp they all bedded down for a good night's sleep. All except Kadde and Will.

Dusting off the metal instrument Kadde took notes as Will used some of his chrono-stasis magics on it to feel out its resonance streams. (Kadde was in awe).

“Fabulous, Will. A work of art.”

“Well it's definitely unique, I'll give you that.” Will said.

“Any clues to its function?” Will could tell that the device was still running, or doing what ever its job was suppose to be even after several hundred years.

“Hmm, I am not well versed in Chrono-magics personally and only a select few at the institute have that knowledge. What do you feel from the device?”

“It's recording information of some kind, or storing something. Like a watch, but... well, we'll have to test it later.”

They had all gathered for “Will's” proposed test from the ruins on an open plain. The pit of his stomach lurched as he placed his hands on the device and ran a chrono-stasis spell around himself. There was a powerful bright flash as the device went into overdrive and began winding this way and that. It began sending out an aura of ever growing strength that soon had engulfed Will. The aura stabilized and blacked out all of Will's senses as the device clicked away seconds and then minutes it seemed.

Suddenly the aura dropped and Will was back. But, it was noon? Or later he thought. “Will's back!” Vulgurutt yelled out.

The barrage of questions mostly centered around what had happened and everything else. “You've been gone half the day! What did you do?” Every answer was carefully worded in Kadde's journal as Julia checked Will's vitals for any deviation.

“So it was half a day? 6 hours or so? Wait, I stopped?” Will remembered that the stasis spell was meant to preserve him from harm during time movement, but the device had slowed time to a very miniscule fraction of itself in the aura.

“How does that help us?” Jack thought aloud. “Think of it as a time-prison or capsule. You would slow to a fraction of your present time. You could sleep for decades, centuries even. Time would flow freely around you, but you would not age.”

“Not very useful.”

“No, extremely useful if you were dying! You could be held in a sort of time-stop sleep until help arrived!” Julia shouted out. “Your golden hour could last a day. Plenty of time to get the proper care you needed to live.”

“Well, which ever, the institute will be pleased.” Kadde reached for the device but Will hesitated a moment. 'Should such a device be known? Researched? Duplicated?' It seemed such a thing maybe could be too powerful. 'Sometimes, I wonder. Does this world or any world really need magic. It makes so many conflicts' Will slowly handed the delicate metallic trinket to Kadde.

“Indeed Will. It is a hard question, no matter how it is asked.”

After the test with the device Will had so many questions still. Too many. 'About himself, Geb, Mayiz, Myrah.' Things were still very unclear.

The sun set over the distant hills as everyone prepared for the night. Will waited for everyone to be in their tents before stirring and walking to a distant hill. The sky was clear that night. The two moons of Geb drifting over head; one green, Mist, one grey, Durat.

Deep out in the vast sea of the spaces between the stars was Myrah and Earth.

Behind him the soft foot falls of some one came closer, Will defty reached for his staff. His other hand

slowly reached for the stone. He knew either way, his time on Geb was growing short.

"Don't. It's just me." Julia's voice said in a whisper. "Miila told me you had slipped out." Julia was wrapped in a blanket to fight off the late fall chill.

"I think we need to leave Geb soon. But, I don't know where I should go. It's a blank"

Will sat down on a tuft of grass as Julia came closer. "Yeah. Maybe we've learned all we can for now. Something is still missing, isn't it?"

Will felt exactly as she had said it. A missing part, out there in the vastness of space, but he didn't know where to begin.

They walked silently back to the camp. No one was really on guard, they were many miles from the nearest town or village. It was a cold night so Will wrapped with an extra blanket for warmth. Just as he drifted into sleep the voice came again.

It was kind of familiar to hear a second time, the same aura of fear and darkness, but not so like the first time. The aura was more ambient, not malicious.

"I am sorry Will. Geb has no more answers for you at this time." The voice murmured. In his mind Will could see a distant world come into view across the stars way. "Yet, I believe there is still a world which may answer your query. It is like Myrah, but its fate has changed and may give you hope. For it is an Alternate World." The voice said and ended. His mind could piece together a world that looked a bit harsher than Myrah, yet free of the grey gloom. The sight felt vexing in ways; an alternate world? How so?

It was hard for Julia to say good-bye to Miila when the time came. Everyone knowing that this would be the final good-bye.

"You have your own path. You must take it now." Miila said as she hugged Julia tight. "Will, you'd better take care of her. I've grown very fond of her." Miila said as Julia slowly tore herself away. Will nodded in understanding.

Vulgurutt came forward, offering his large clawed hand to Will. "Peace be with you, child." He said as he bowed slowly. Will knew he'd miss them all, too. Jack simply gave a silent nod of understanding. Heartfelt-emotions were really not his thing.

Kadde rushed up from the camp to the hill they had decided to make their point of 'Jump'. He rushed up the hill, trying hard to keep breathing as he made his way up.

"Will!" Kadde yelled in between pants. Finally, he arrived, several devices in tow.

"A little much for a good-bye, Kadde." Miila said as Kadde set up several spindle legged magical devices around them.

"Just want to get a reading for my notes. How many people have ever jumped from one planet to another?"

The last one set, Kadde came forward and clasped Will's hands and gave them a very grateful shake.

"I want you to know how grateful I am for your help, Will, Julia. Both of you. I hope you don't mind if I give you something." He rifled through his satchel until he pulled out a thin leather bound book.

"A copy of all this trip's notes. The daily logs, the excavation, the device, everything. I hope it'll help you." He handed the book to Julia since he felt he had monopolized Will's attention for much of their stay. "Sorry, I took so much of Will's time, Julia."

Julia gave Kadde a big hug and he knew she had felt the apology.

Then everyone moved away as Will and Julia stood together on the crown of the hill. Julia clasped Will's staff arm as he held the stone in one and his staff in the other. He remembered what the voice had said and uttered the words of lighting and they were gone from the world of Geb.

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