

Chapter 11: An Alternate World

The 'Jump' pulled Will and Julia skyward, then space-ward. The stone's power enmeshed them both securely as Will tried to clear his mind and create a chrono-sphere around them. He'd remembered that the sphere would give him added time to direct and find his way.

This time the 'Jump' felt more fluid, mobile. The raw arcanic energies were easier to feel for Will. He could grasp at their flaws and flows as they moved at such a great speed; past worlds and stars.

With a slower flow now on the inside he could appreciate the endlessness of space without the strain of trying to direct the 'Jump' this way and that.

The voice had been clear in a way about where his next destination lay. An 'Alternate' world, one along a different path than Myrah.

He had at least a glimpse and a feeling to go on, the stone did the rest, or did it? What was this stone? Where had it come from? It felt no different than other stones on its exterior, yet there was a mysterious force to it.

Julia didn't feel quite so overwhelmed this time. The last time the 'Jump' had absolutely shocked her senses so much that she had a hard time re-collecting her thoughts. After Geb she felt that visiting another world wouldn't be as unsettling.

She could also see the vast reaches of space easier this time. The pictures she had seen back on Earth hadn't been wrong, but the feeling of being surrounded by the void of space made it feel very much more complete.

From far off Will could see the green, blue, and yellow speck that was their next step along their journey. It looked strange from space and he noticed something very odd about its contours as they came closer, the world appeared to divide by gigantic white-walls. Separating large-yet equal parts of the world into 4-separate regions.

Unlike before Will could see their final approach over a vast open area along the equator or he guessed to be its equator.

The entry into the atmosphere struck with significant force as they descended. Will tried hard to center his sphere to the front of the impact, but the jarring strike had undone the chrono-sphere as they began to speed to the surface of the planet.

Will put all his effort into creating a defensive sphere to lessen the eventual landing, but as they were being pulled to the surface the stone began to glow a calming blue radiance. They slowed and were able to glance over the planet's great surface from the clouds as they drifted to an open sandy area far from any city. Will did not know what to expect, so wished to avoid any complications.

For the first time Will could feel the actual landing. The drain of the 'Jump' still left him woozy and tired, but he was standing this time, on his own two feet. Then the headache came as usual. The pain was splitting like a dull blade through his skull. It panged a few times, heavily with each breath.

Will sat down and let the air brush over him. He took a long centering breath and tried to push back the pain. It swelled and kicked, though with less force than he recalled. The 'jumps' weren't draining as much as they had before, or he had a greater reserve of energy now that he hadn't when he started.

Looking around Will knew what to expect, open sands. Desert. He'd made sure they didn't disturb any settlements with their descent. The breeze was dry and whipping over the shallow dunes.

A sort of anxiety was growing in his gut, but now was no time to lose it. 'Keep calm, recover your energy' he kept telling himself. 'Stay focused.' Julia was doing a quick check on her equipment and then started asking how Will felt.

"Head hurt again?" she let him rest for a bit on the sandy space of the open desert stretch. "Anything I can do to help?" She was looking around the undulating hills of grit and sand. "Can you go to the top of a dune and tell me what you see? Any people or creatures you see." Julia started walking up a closeby dune.

Will couldn't feel anything strange about the world yet, but he was still fighting back the pangs of his arcana-drain. He leaned a bit on his staff and carefully drew a rune-symbol in the sands, something Kadde had taught him in their free-time during the excavation.

He could feel the spell take and suddenly Will could feel all the tiny vibrations along the sands for several hundred meters. It worked better here on the sands where it was more loose than the packed clay of a road or path. He could even pick out Julia's foot falls up to the top of the dune.

Julia looked out over the expanse of open land before her. She could see that it was afternoon with the sun clearly descending, East or West, she couldn't yet tell. She tried to keep the directions clear in her head as she turned at 90° each time.

There seemed to be a distant green haze several miles away to the 'South' but she knew the desert glare could play tricks on a person's mind. As she stepped she could see little pieces of sand shift slowly down the top of the dune and collect on another wave below. That was the funny thing about deserts, they were always changing and altering.

Finally Julia came down to see how Will was doing. He was leaning a bit on his staff, but he was on his feet. 'Amazing' she thought. 'He just took us heaven knows how many light-years across space by magic alone and he's still standing.' She couldn't help but admire his determination.

"Feeling better?"

"Comparably. Better than last time, yes."

"Did you see anything?"

"Not much. Just a green haze to the South, if it's South." She watched as Will take a tool from his satchel he'd had from Geb. They'd managed to make a 'jump' with more preparation this time. Julia was still dressed in her travel fatigues from the excavation and Will had really taken to his magi's clothes and suit.

Will turned the small metallic cross-shaped object twice and watched as it levitated inches over the sand. It spun and began to center towards the 'North' opposite the 'green' Julia had seen. "Guess you're right. That is South. We're about 7 leagues from something looking like a settlement or water. Some form of

life.”

With night coming they knew they'd have to build a fire. Deserts were notoriously cold at night and they would need a fire to make camp. They looked around for any kind of cover but were coming up blank.

Finally as sun was beginning to set they found a cleft of rock jutting out of the sands and pitched up their blankets for cover from the cold, chilling, desert winds. Will knew he didn't need wood for a fire, so long as he had rocks which were scattered across much of the desert. He set down another set of runes on the surface of the sands and soon a smallish fire was crackling away.

“Wait, how did you do that? There's no wood.” Julia looked at the oddly flickering and hovering flame.

“The rune acts as a catalyst and breaks down the silica and detritus on the sands and rocks. So long as the rune holds, maybe a few hours.” Will smiled. “Clever bit of Arcana really.” He looked quite pleased with himself.

“Guess we head South in the morning?” Julia was getting everything set for a rough night of sleep on the sands.

“Yes. Water is our biggest worry right now. Aside from one or two bottles in our packs, we'll need some soon.” Will wrapped himself in a cloak.

“Why the desert, Will?” Julia was lying down by the fire. It wasn't as cold as she thought it would have been, maybe this desert was closer to humidity or near a water source.

“Safety. Don't want people finding us when we arrive. Too many questions.” And... Will thought about it, but there was a personal reason, too.

“I remember someone once said, 'Deserts have an odd mystical quality about them. A world supposedly devoid of life, but they never are.' A sort of tranquility, serene silence. I want to try something, meditate on something.” Will sat cross-legged, he looked very serious about his wish, Julia thought. She quietly laid down and tried to sleep without disturbing Will.

Slowly at first, but then at a steady pulse Will could feel out the arcane energies of this new world. He closed his eyes in meditation and blocked out all other disturbances; the fire, the breeze of the desert air, and Julia's light breathing. He let the darkness take hold and let his feelings reach out through the gentle featherlets of arcanic forces flow through his body.

It was different from Geb's wilder arcana, the sensation was threadlike, tendrils of slight tension, like a piano wire; very refined and vibrate, tense. He felt almost like a spider on a web of fine silk, feeling for vibrations around him.

Geb had been a flow, a rush of winds and teeming with eddies. This 'alternate' world was almost technical, in its ways. After a time Will, too became very relaxed and passed into rest for the night on the soft desert sands.

The sun's heat could be felt as Will woke from his rest. 'Boy, I'm hungry,' he thought.

“Finally awake are we?” Julia came and had a seat by Will, snacking on a chewy roll from Geb. He stretched out and looked about him carefully, the seismic-rune had been active all night and he was sure

something was getting closer.

It was early morning, but it felt like the sun was getting close to mid-day. They double checked their bags and started walking South. He was following the compass he'd received from Kadde, it was supposed to aid in finding things - that of course depended on what you were looking for. Kadde had stressed the point that it was meant for simple objects or features. "Too complicated and it wouldn't be any use would it?"

After they crossed the first dune it was clear that some form of water was due South over the next few sets of dunes. There was a stronger green haze that stretched for a fair degree over that distant horizon. "Will we make it today?" Julia asked trying to keep pace as Will strided up the sands.

"We'd better. Another day without water would be pushing it." They both continued.

As the day wore on it seemed that their packs and clothes got heavier with sweat and the heat. Will couldn't think of a clear solution to the heat. He had a fair number of combat and utility spells, but nothing quite match this dilemma.

It took some time getting used to the constant shifting of the sands. There was nothing stable or consistent about it.

And the heat didn't help much either. Around Mid-day they stopped and tried to make cover of some sort to fight off the heat. Both of them had taken off their heavier coats and jackets.

While it had been fall on Geb, here it felt very much like summer. They could feel the little grains of sand working their way into their boots and socks. Finally Will stopped and dug a shallow pit in the sand, closer to the cooler grit under the top sand. He pulled up his jacket and put it on the top of his staff and sat down to cool off.

Julia did the same thing. Will then took carefully time to check his compass and the seismic rune. Something under the sands was definitely tracking them. It felt big, but neither of them had noticed any movements over the sands behind them besides their own foot falls.

A quick rest and a bite and both of them continued their trek. The rest had given them a renewed feeling as they kept a decent pace as the sun kept up its journey across the sky of this new world.

"Will, what do you know about this world? I know you have a reason for why you came here?" Will had been a bit coy about why he'd picked this destination. Voices in one's own head was usually seen as crazy, both on Myrah or Earth. Almost always a sign of crazy or demented.

"The voice told me. The one from when we first arrived on Geb. It spoke of another world, an Alternate world." Will worded his thoughts carefully. He didn't want to make Julia feel she'd been taken on a wild chase.

"A voice, from a dream? I hope you're right Will. It just, it's a lot of trust in a voice from someone we've never seen face-to-face." Julia was trying to stay calm, she knew a few more miles, 'miles!?' the thought was pushing her a little close to that edge of incredulity. "Geb, was... wasn't too bad, but it wasn't devoid of settlements or life. I haven't seen the slightest evidence of life out here. Why'd you bring us to freaking Tatooine, Chewie!?" Julia had finally decided it was time to vent some long pent-up frustrations. Ever

since leaving Earth Julia had tried to be cool about the whole thing. Admittedly, Miila was someone worth meeting, the group they'd become part of on Geb wasn't a total waste, but the thought of all that late class work....

"Will, I want to believe you, but I had a life of my own, too. I have a home. A world of my own. I have finals in December!" Julia didn't know if it was the heat or the whole thought of being so far away that had driven her over the edge. She didn't have time to think about that.

The sands behind them shook, rose, and then erupted. Something she'd never expected to see let out a blood curdling roar that rent the air around them. It opened its vast wings in a terrifying threat display.

Its dark brown scaled hide had concealed it well the past few miles under the hot dunes. Somehow it had managed to hide its hulking reptilian mass under all that sand.

Both Will and Julia knew what it was and started running as fast as they could down the sandy slopes to an open space. Will clasped firmly to his staff in his right hand and Julia's hand in his left.

"A Dragon!" Julia yelled. "What ever you do, keep running!" Will said. "No, you're my ticket home. We stay together, Will!" They kept running as Will's mind raced to think of any thing that could slow it down.

On Geb, Miila and Vulgurutt had bought him time to incant his attack spell, but the dragon was only a few meters back, there wasn't much room for error this time. All they could do is keep running.

Fear and adrenaline were pumping at their throbbing height. Conscious thought was hard to focus as the thundering foot-falls of a hungry beast closed in slowly behind Will and Julia. Will did not have a free hand to cast any arcana. He'd have to lose the staff or Julia, a very hard choice.

In a last ditch effort Will summoned every free bit of arcana into his staff and called out his lighting spell. In a rushed overload he could feel the arcana come as he threw his staff to the side and looked away as it blasted out a blinding flash of light.

There was another shrieking roar as the dragon momentarily stopped its hulking mass, blinded by the bright flash of light.

The staff, over-charged by the energies splintered in a powerful explosion. Will and Julia tried to put on a final burst of speed to put more space between them and the hungry draconian. Instead the dragon took a few powerful flaps of its wings and lifted quickly into the sky above. It crashed down in front of Will and Julia, cutting off their only recognizable route of escape.

They both stopped in their tracks, hearts in their stomachs. Will took a long, deep breath to calm his mind and catch his breath. He locked eyes with their serpentine foe. It was waiting. It knew Will was getting ready to make a move. It simply lowered its body to a crouched striking position. Will wouldn't have another chance, not this time.

Julia held fast to Will's hand, was this now the end? There was a moment of surreality to it. Like every thing was happening in super-slow motion. Everything in a smooth slow flow of events.

There was an odd thing though, a loud shrill whistle was marring the doom that stood before them. The sound was very low in its pitch but it had an odd effect on the dragon. As if the sound happened to be an errant insect, annoying the great beast to no end. It shook its head quickly to the left and to the right.

The sound got higher, more shrill and constant.

Its jaws closed and it took a few slow steps back. A second sound joined in, a stronger whistle of a similar shrill nature. The dragon acted as if it had taken a physical blow, backing down from the unseen force. Shifting its shoulders and wings in an odd way it tried to find a better, stronger position, but the irritating sounds were a force it couldn't fight. Not without being able to see its oppressor. It let out a forceful roar into the open desert sky, but decided it had reached its point of resistance. There was a low grumbling from its gullet as it took another set of steps back and then it turned and flew off into the distance, leaving Will and Julia unharmed.

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Author's notes for improvement:

The meditation is another point where we can emphasize the connection between Will and Julia. His mind could still feel muddled until Julia comes over and holds his shoulder or has a light conversation with him.

The White Walls and the Mandalas You mentioned the world is divided by “gigantic white-walls” into “four separate regions.”

Improvement: The number four is highly significant in Jungian psychology as a symbol of Quaternity or wholeness (like the four functions: Thinking, Feeling, Sensation, Intuition).

As they move through the regions, you could have them encounter challenges that force them to use a specific “function” they usually ignore.

If Julia is the “Thinker” (worrying about school), this desert region might be the “Sensation” test, where she must survive the physical elements.

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