

## Chapter 12: Village in the Dunes

A silence came over them, clearing up what had been a scene of great terror. Off over a dune to their immediate left they heard steps coming closer over the grit and dust of the slopes.

"Mom! Two of them! Over here!" A voice said as its owner crested the top of the slope. A young boy, not more than twelve, dressed in fairly loose desert robes and cloaks came into view. He wore a light brown robe with a sky blue cloak over that. His boots were simple desert boots with leg wraps for lighter travel. At his side he wore a short sword of sorts, nothing bigger than a machete from its looks.

He stopped a fair distance from the pair, a bit apprehensive about who these strangers were. He soon saw his 'mother' at his side as the two came down to Will and Julia.

"Hello," she said making a deep slow bow to them. The boy also bowed in greetings though he was still a bit cautious.

"Hello," Julia and Will said together but unsure how to begin.

"I hope you are both okay. Are either of you hurt?" The woman asked in a kind but serious way as she carefully took stock of their clothes. "You're not from the Green Dragon world are you?" She asked carefully.

Her son relaxed a little bit as she said this.

"No. We're still finding our bearings," Will answered. "I'm sorry, but we were looking for a way out of this desert." Julia said, hoping to loosen the mood a bit.

"Ah, well that explains a bit. Maybe we can help you."

"Allow me to introduce myself, Asuka 'Morse' Hayashi. This is my son and assistant-guide-in-training, Alex." Both took a more relaxed bow as Will returned the bow and nudged Julia to do the same.

"My name is Will, 3rd class magi."

"Hello, my name is Julia Orrhm."

"Oh, ok now I see!" Asuka chuckled out a bit of a relief. "I thought I saw a flare incantus." She looked around and spotted Will's shattered and splintered staff.

"Alex could you help get the man's staff. He'll need to fix it at some point."

"Thank you, Asuka." The boy quickly salvaged the pieces and slipped them into a sturdy leather satchel.

"You can use magic then? Like attack spells and stuff?" Alex said in a slightly timid voice.

"Kind of, but it's well complicated." Will didn't want to make things any more of a mess.

"Our village is a kilometer or more this way," Asuka said pointing to the west. "You look like you got

yourselves lost. Are you from the Red-Dragon world by any chance? Your clothes look a lot like the garb of that region.”

“Well, it's a little more complicated than that,” Julia replied.

“Oh, really? That's okay. We get all types out here: magi, non-magi, engineers, executives, medical officers, business force about it. The desert has a strange mystique. It draws all types to it,” Asuka walked on with Alex at her side. “It's not a big village, but it has everything anybody needs to get by.” As the group walked over the second, then the third dune Asuka planted her smaller staff into the sand and carefully adjusted some dials as she looked through a small telescope. Then she looked up at the dangling instruments and kept walking.

“What is that? The staff?” Julia asked. It looked in some ways like Will's now decrepit staff. Several strange bits or pieces along its construction.

“It's my guide's cane. I use it to navigate the deserts. Most people would get lost in this expanse of endless dunes and rock.”

Alex was still seeming a bit tense as they walked onward.

“Alex, how old are you?” Julia wanted to help mellow out the mood. “Thirteen.” That was all that was said for a while.

“Alex, it's okay. I don't think they're raiders or bandits. They don't have swords.” He's just a bit edgy. We ran into a nest of bandits a few weeks ago guiding a caravan. Still trying to get a handle on things.

“Ah, here we are. Home.” They could see several dozen small dried mud-huts that emerged from the ground only a few feet. Each one had a smooth dome top to reduce its exposure to sun and desert winds. The homes also had a sunken step-way into the ground, acting as the entrance.

“Interesting. You live under the ground - right?” Will found the set-up very strange, yet incredibly logical.

“Yup. Easier to get water and store food.” She said this as they got closer to the village. Most of its residents were either minding a set of wind mills hooked up to a strange looking generator or capacitor for electricity.

If that was true, then this would be the first world they had seen since Earth that used modern technology.

The rest of the residents were checking the wells around the settlement making sure they had fresh water.

They made their way down the central row of domed huts to a hut that was decorated with an odd collection of antenna-shaped objects on its top. They all shifted and aligned to various forces in the winds. The dome was also topped so of looking around Will and Julia noticed how all the huts were not in fact identical. Each was decorated with an elaborate mosaic of un-cut stones on the shell of the hut, almost like turtle shells.

“Mom!” A little girl yelled as she rushed out of the hut they had been approaching. Unlike Alex, who had more of a rough brown hair, this girl had long black hair, very much like Asuka's. She was wearing a

simple blue and pink child's tunic and robe, tied with a rough grey and red sash around the waist.

Slowly an older man walked out of the hut. He had a very slight limp to his right leg as he walked with his cane to better maintain his stride and balance.

"Ah, Honey, Alex. Was it a worthwhile search?"

He said in a strange accent. The man looked very different from Asuka, his wife. While she had a face people on Earth would call Asian, his features were very roughly 'western'. He had a rough unshaven beard that looked like coarse sand-paper and a fairly pointed nose.

Julia could swear he looked like a professor from her university.

"These two were being chased by a desert dragon. Almost got them, too," Asuka explained as he came closer. The little girl latched herself to Asuka in a very clingy way.

"Mom, who are they?" "The boy is Will and the girl is Julia." The little girl turned and bowed to both of them in a slightly greeting.

"What's your name?" Julia asked nicely.

"My name is Yuni. I'm eight years old." "I'm pleased to meet you Yuni." Julia bowed back hoping to get a reaction from the girl.

"Are you two married?" Yuni spoke out loudly. At that both Will and Julia blushed a bit. It had occurred to both of them over the course of this past few months they'd become pretty good friends. Having adventures with people will do that.

"Not exactly," Will said. "We travel together and are good friends." Yuni paused for a moment to get a better look at them as she made a 'thoughtful' gesture with her hand on her chin. "Hmm? Maybe..."

"Yuni, give them a break, okay?" The man said as he came forward and offered his hand to Will and then Julia. "My name is Eli Morse. Pleased to meet you." He seemed a bit more formal than the rest of his family.

"I'm Asuka's husband." "I think they could guess that," Asuka said in a matter-of-fact way. "Shall we go inside? A bit more comfortable, easier on my bad leg."

*End of Jon's green Book 1*

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