

Chapter 14: The Green-Dragon World - Alth - A World of 4 Worlds

The next week Will and Julia spent on various odd jobs around the village. Asuka was right; the village wasn't very big, but there was always work to be done. There were the windmills, the numerous food-growing spots, and hunting for the different foods they all ate.

During this time, Will became more aware of Eli's mention of other places with very odd names: "Red Dragon world," "Black Dragon world," "Green Dragon world," and "White Dragon world." It all sounded a bit long for just names of places. Surely one world couldn't contain four separate worlds.

Finally, one evening, Will got up the courage to ask Eli about the names, knowing he'd have to explain himself and Julia. They had just finished a meal of stewed roots, dried meat, and strange pickled vegetables.

"Eli, why are there so many different 'worlds'? Red, Black, Green, White—why are they named as such?" Will tried to carefully word his questions, but either way, it was hard to ask.

"Hmm, well, that whole thing started, oh, about 100 years ago. Actually, Asuka knows more than I do. She had to take history along with her geography courses back at the university." Eli surrendered his chair to Asuka as he took a seat at a workbench to finish a spell-host bead.

"The 4-Dragon worlds are named after the 4-Dragon Deities of this world, our world, Alth. The world is roughly divided between deserts, cliffs and mountains, river ways, and a great forested region," she explained as she pulled out a large map from under the table. "Well, about 100 years ago, there was a terrible four-way war between all the different regions. Border disputes, trade conflicts, political problems. It left a lot of damage across the whole of Alth. Finally, after several years of inconclusive fighting, the four major powers came together and decided a giant barrier between the regions would resolve a lot of the problems."

"Walls? You mean the giant walls?" Julia recalled upon their landing.

"Yes. Giant glass walls. They help to regulate migration, travel, trade, and culture." That last one seemed to make Asuka a bit upset. "I mean, they help keep the peace, but it also cuts each world off from another. It feels wrong to divide a world, a bit unfair at times." She certainly felt some worlds had a better pick of resources from the walls.

"What about the four Dragons? What are they, really?" Will felt a connection to Geb's monsters; the unseen guardians of a world. Mysterious yet absolute.

"The 4-Dragons are different from regular old wild dragons, like the one that tried to eat you two. They are, well, like gods. They are the source of all magic on Alth. Each is different in nature and temperament, yet very similar in stature."

"Has anyone seen them?" Will was curious. He knew strange things were often involved in the old stories of magic.

"Hard to say one way or another. They don't exactly come out and say 'hi' on a regular basis. But ask any of the shamans or priests of the temples; they'll give you a bona-fide 'yes'."

"Wait, temples devoted to the Dragons?"

"Yep. Can't shake the old ways sometimes. People still talk carefully of the Big 4. Not exactly to be taken lightly; deities."

"How would I find one if I had a question that needs answering?" Will was sure he could find something in the vastness of the desert. It called to him even as he spent days toiling in its heat and dry winds.

Asuka gave a thoughtful grin. "You really have a death wish. First a wild dragon, now 'The Dragons.' Boy, I give you credit for trying." She readjusted her seat and pulled out her guide-staff. "Even though it's not magic, I know it has something special." She hefted her staff thoughtfully. "It has always brought me home, every time. Maybe we can find the Green Dragon?"

At that, Alex looked at his mother with a serious and scared look on his face. "Mom! You know that would be asking for trouble. I've heard some of the stories." He was worried his mom was trying to have one more adventure.

"Not alone," Eli said forcefully. "She'll need Will and Julia, I think. And you." Eli's voice was calm. He knew Asuka wanted one last chance to see if all these rumors, legends, and gossip were true. Always the adventurer.

The unexpected twist came the next day when the four of them were packed, loaded, geared, and set out at the crack of dawn on this wild, last-second adventure. This quartet of travelers set out over the dunes to the North, then the East into the sun. Its rays rose higher, yet it never grew hotter. Though Will and Julia had expected it to be boiling, the contrast was oddly real.

"This part of Alth is desert due to the lack of rain and water, not the heat. Life always finds a way," Asuka said as they crossed the endless dunes.

Two days came and went, quickly yet not so fast that their feet weren't aching from the sand, grit, and rocks. Asuka was always checking her guide staff for exact positions, and Alex was now openly talking to Will about various "spell-host" objects and what he wanted to do when he got home.

"I know guiding is my Mom's thing, but I want to be an enforcement officer in the White or Red-Dragon worlds. Test my skills."

"We'll see about that, Alex. You know how your father feels about that career," his mother reminded him.

"Yeah, I know—dangerous and not the best paying. But—" Alex was cut off.

"If that's your dream, okay. But maybe we should focus on the task at hand." Asuka wanted to be sure of the day's positioning. Few people besides the guides themselves understood the difficulties involved in navigating the desert. It wasn't just "walk in one direction till you hit an oasis." No, nothing so easy.

The dunes were always shifting due to the winds and animals of the wilds. The rotation of Alth and its stars was hard to remember unless you had a good map, and magic was not the 100% solution some people thought it was. There were ways to disrupt, cancel, or "break" spells. Yes, the old ways were best,

since they could almost always be counted on.

Asuka wasn't as well-read as Eli, but she'd lived in harsh lands her whole childhood and adolescence. Taught by both her parents and grandparents the ways of the wilds and the old world, the Dragons had always been real to her—no question about it.

It was late on the second day that they reached their final destination, though none knew it but Asuka. "This is it. Let's set camp," she said. The rest of her party was a little surprised, but they all followed her directions.

After the preparations were complete, they all gathered around a campfire Asuka had prepared for the ceremony. "Long ago, my grandfather took me out here. Same paths, same time, same place. He told me he was going to show me the secret of the Green-Dragon. So now, I'll show you."

She carefully pulled an old wooden instrument out of her pack and began to shake it, carefully and slowly. The sound was like sand in a long, hollow gourd with several larger polished stones. Then, in a low voice, she began to chant a song, almost like a lullaby:

Tru Tru San ip hammim (Come come one of four)

Glu Glu neh Id at Khurll (Sand sand hence we all return)

Lok Lok hammim Id Clorthin (Green green one we seek out)

Hin chib Vah chip Un chip Sohh Lok Id (This home, your home, our home, please Green One)

The winds that had been a near-constant shuffle the whole day and night fell silent. Will could feel a presence, very much like the one upon Geb, yet in an odd sense less alien, more familiar. It was as if this "force" was more closely attuned to human arcane arts or perhaps had more direct contact with humans.

The presence coiled about them like a giant serpent, keeping a careful distance from the flame of the fire, wishing not to be seen. As the feeling became known to Asuka, Julia, and Alex, they became a little uneasy—except Asuka.

She took a carven stone idol out of her pack and placed it in the ashes of the now waning flames. The stone, whatever it was, changed the vibrance of the flames from red to purple to blue, and finally to a bluish-green hue.

No one spoke as the presence around them converged in the all-but-extinguished fire and began to collect itself. If they had not already seen a dragon several days ago, this might have greatly panicked them, yet Julia and Will stayed calm as the Green-Dragon emerged from the small carven stone figurine.

"I have known your fathers and theirs before. What do you wish of me, my daughter?"

There was not before them but above them hovered, in its full form, a great Green Dragon. It had two long green necks that ended in sharp maws full of needle-sharp teeth. Yet, it gave no horribly uncontrolled aura. It was coiled in and around its long and narrow serpentine body. Its delicate wings folded into its coils carefully, as well as two distinct tails and two sets of limbs; four arms and four legs.

"Green One, my friends have a query, if you would be so gracious, my lord," Asuka spoke with great deference and respect to the massive serpent.

"A friend of yours, my child, is a friend of mine," it said in a peculiar double-echo voice. Both heads spoke in tandem as if as one.

The two heads looked over Julia and Will, ignoring Alex completely—or so he thought until: "We do not forget, Alex. One day you too will call me the Green-lord. That time will come, my child."

The two heads first focused attention on Julia, looking her over and carefully debating its response. "Your secret is safe, one of the Blue-world. Here, you are not to worry."

Then it turned to Will and paused. The two locked eyes, and they could see the other through the other's body and mind for a moment. This time the voice was in Will's mind.

"It is not often we meet travelers like you pair. Two different worlds on our own. How rare, Will."

Will could feel something change in the Dragon's attitude toward him. While it had shown a kindness to Asuka, Alex, and Julia, Will felt almost an anxious feeling from the Green-Dragon.

"Do not mistake my kindness for not. You, Will, are not of this world. Yet, here you pose a danger to our world and its balance."

Will hesitated a bit, trying to grasp what it meant.

"Your quest for answers will bring change. You are one of great change. It is your destiny, though you had not known till now. You would make things different here if you stayed longer. Yet, this world must find its own balance in its own time."

"So, change will come to Myrah," Will thought.

"Yes."

"How?" Will thought.

"You know how. It will not be easy or fast. The road is long and the ways hard, yet it will come. Just as the dawn."

Though the speaking could not have been more than a few moments, the fire had burned out and the night sky had become clear and dotted with an array of stars and three distant moons.

"Thank you, Asuka. I think we've learned a lot today," Julia said first. Will was still a bit shocked from this revelation—the answer he had feared to hear, yet knew had to be true. He'd been running from the truth for a while.

. . . (Home? Where?)

The next morning, Will and Julia thanked Asuka and Alex as they prepared for what Will now knew to be the ending leg of his journey. He'd left Myrah, Mist, Earth, and Geb all looking for answers and experience and a way to solve the strange mysteries of the stone, of his world, and the questions in his own heart.

Now at last he could see clearly. It was almost time for it to end.

"Will, I know it's not much, but please, take this," Alex said shyly, handing his short sword to Will. "You'll need it on the road ahead."

"Thank you, Alex," Will said slowly.

"I wanted to fix your staff, but I'm no good at magic. I just thought..."

"Thank you very much, Alex. This is more than enough. Keep the staff; I think Yuni could use it some day."

The two clasped hands and shook, knowing it would be their last meeting.

"Be strong, Alex," Will said as he let go and grabbed Julia's hand.

"May the Dragons watch over you kids," Asuka said as Will initiated his 'Jump'. This time, he knew he didn't need the staff anymore.

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