

Chapter 17: The Return

There was a long silence, even in their minds. There was no mumbling of thoughts. Before them was the inevitable end of their journey together. They both knew it. It was a conclusion neither had wanted to accept, yet in all this time it had become unavoidable. The End.

“You know,” Julia began, “I knew we’d have our separate ways to go eventually, but I’m not sad. It was all worth it. I feel that... well, I learned a lot from this adventure. I’m not completely clear about what my own future has in store, but I feel like I can meet whatever comes ahead. Things are so much easier to see, for once.”

She felt glad about it. Julia had set out at a whim to see these things that she’d never been sure were true. She had left it all behind for longer than she could remember. Something about completing this left her at peace.

However, Will felt very uneasy. He’d been running from the thought of ever returning to Myrah. He knew the moment he returned, they would try to find him and hunt him down. That stone would be their ultimate prize.

The stone might allow them to cross worlds, control worlds, expand their resources exponentially...

“No,” the voice sounded out. “It would not. You alone control its fate. It sought you out and will obey only your will.”

Taking out the stone, Will looked over it carefully. It was simply like a polished turquoise, a light sky blue. Yet there were no flaws. No specks of black or blue, no dirt or cracks. A very much perfectly smooth rock.

“Go my boy. I will not interfere,” the Monster King thought.

“Thank you.” Will had come to this point in his adventure now. This was the time he’d been dreading for some while now.

Julia clasped Will’s hand and they both braced for the inevitable pull-stretch of the “Jump.”

However, it had changed by now. The pull was less straining. The stretching was more flexible. Though they did not know it, they had become synced to the stone’s arcane energies. It was more a tool than a source of energy. It felt as they felt. The pull was now a shared burden, and both had grown in many ways.

They lifted up through the sphere, past the stone and misty skies to the black of space. Will felt out for home, Myrah, the Gray world. Even in the vastness of space Will could now pick his way past the different worlds and find what he was looking for.

“There it is!” Will thought. Past several star clusters, he could feel it. The world that had been his home for all his life. They shifted in the chrono-sphere and bolted past the stars, planets, and bodies of space at a blinding pace.

As Will could feel it, so now could Julia. It was kind of academic in her mind. So many stars equals so

many planets. Do the math and you'll at some point get life. More math, the chance that life is complex and varied. Add some variables, and voilà! Magic. Arcana, whatever. A symbiotic system of balance.

Simple, yet extraordinary.

Then it came into view. A world unlike one seen by Julia. If Earth had a dingy, dusty cousin, Myrah was it. She could see why Will had said it was gray now. Though gray wasn't the exact color, Julia could see why gray felt appropriate.

Myrah from the view of space had a thick layer of cloud-cover over most parts of it. Large, heavy clouds that probably didn't help with the natural environment. There didn't seem to be too many snow-covered peaks or high elevations. At the same time, there weren't many large swaths of forests or deserts. The coast lines, the visible ones, were dominated by cities. Even past the coasts, the cities wound their way into the interiors like the vines of strangler figs, slowly choking off nature and forcing it to retreat farther back into the continent.

Even the seas looked a sickly green. All the centuries of pollution had managed to sicken the various seas of Myrah.

Will knew the moment they breached the atmosphere of Myrah there would be an alarm of some sort. The world was so thick with enchantments the act of breaking past them would create massive disruptions.

"Will, what's wrong?" Julia knew this had been a moment he'd feared for a very long time.

"We'll need to stay out of sight for a while. The mystic police are always moving around looking for dissident magi."

"How are mystic police different from regular police? They'll try to arrest us, right?" Julia was starting to feel more anxious about their final approach to Myrah.

"If they were like 'police' they'd have to follow certain rules. Mystic police aren't so bound. More like 'secret police,'" Will said with a slight derisive chuckle. Strange, he thought.

"When I left Myrah, I would have been terrified of facing them. Now, well, we'll see." For all the uncertainty, Will felt confident, almost cocky. He'd seen worlds people only ever dreamed of. Learned new ways to bend his arcana to his will and needs. So much more than he'd ever learned on Myrah in a lifetime.

They made one full rotation over Myrah before coming into the layer of barriers that clouded and obscured its upper atmosphere. This time their "jump" and chrono-sphere was resisted by the planet. In a way it felt like that final wall on Geb, except lacking the substance.

They came in closer. The barrier enchantments and their chrono-sphere were sparking off lots of resistance, but they were making progress.

"Oh enough of this!" Will said in frustration. He'd waited long enough for the barriers to weaken by force alone. He put his hand to the outside surface of the sphere. Feeling along the sphere he could feel unevenness and flaws in the resisting barrier. He directed them to the closest weak point and stopped.

“Will, what are you doing?”

“If they’re going to know we’re here I’m going to make sure they’re too busy to focus on us.”

Julia placed her hand on his. “Together then.”

Will smiled. If they were going, it was going to be as a pair. For the first time Julia could feel arcana coursing through her. It was an odd, yet calming sensation. It was a vibration of sorts, but more widespread and “yawning” like a twisting vapor or crawling skin. A type of kinetic energy, but stored and generated by the silent vibrations of life. Subtle, yet always there.

She could see and feel the sprouting tendrils of disruptive chrono-magic from Will’s hand cutting through the protective layers of Myrah’s shields. Will was using the forces of time to slow fragments of the enchantment down so much that it began to atrophy and crack.

The shattering of the barrier was surprise enough, but then it continued to stretch. The cracks grew larger as large sections of the protective aura fell away. Even there was space enough for their jump-sphere.

Through the seemingly glass shield they went. The aura disintegrated as they passed that final layer. The cracks split wider into great splinters, and shards. The hole grew bigger and soon it was really an entire cloud section falling away.

The magi-police would be way too busy patching the holes to keep up on two small invaders... for the immediate future that is.

They cut through the heavy cloud cover to a remote section of mountain north of one of the larger coastal cities.

“Okay, this is weird. Why are the more undeveloped parts of Myrah cleaner?” Julia asked as they hiked through a set of hills looking for adequate shelter for the night. “It’s one of the major problems here. Cities congest a lot of the arcana, hence the need for so many arcanic-engineers to fix it all.”

“Kind of like on Earth. Bigger cities seem to need more people to maintain them despite all the supposed conveniences.”

“Exactly.”

In a way Julia was feeling better knowing congested cities wasn’t just an “Earth” thing.

Around dusk Will started carving runes into the perimeter of their camp. By now Julia understood these were protective spells to keep them safe from detection or attackers. It was unusual watching Will do it without his staff. He’d carried it so long, but lost it on Alth. She’d hoped he’d make a new one; however he’d really taken to using the short sword Alex had given him.

It suited him actually. In time Will had seen how cumbersome a staff really was. Long and frail. More like a crutch than a focus rod for magic. The sword had a special meaning to it. Form and function. A gift, genuinely given. So rare and wonderful on its own.

Secretly, Will had added several runes to add to its function and utility. Harder, sharper, lighter, and

more reliable than his old staff had ever been. He'd also managed a deflection rune in case he needed a split-second guard to escape. Now that he was back on Myrah, he was fairly sure he'd need it.

That night they slept on their clothes from Alth. They both fell asleep quickly that night; the day's return had been exhausting. He was home, but there was still much to do. The final phase of his journey was not yet complete.

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Author's notes...

- **Coniunctio / Sacred Marriage of Opposites:** The pivotal moment is Julia placing her hand on Will's and saying "Together then." For the first time she actively feels and channels arcana—described as a subtle, yawning, life-vibration that spreads through her like kinetic energy. This is a literal and symbolic union: Will's directed, willful, chrono-disruptive magic (Animus/active principle) is balanced and amplified by Julia's intuitive, grounding presence (Anima/feminine principle). Their synced use of the stone turns what was once a solitary, straining burden into a shared, harmonious tool.
 - **Individuation and Wholeness:** Will's growth is unmistakable. The terrified boy who fled Myrah is now confident, almost cocky, because he has incorporated lessons from multiple worlds. His shift from the long, frail staff (a symbolic crutch representing an incomplete or over-reliant Animus) to the short sword—lighter, sharper, personally meaningful, and secretly enhanced with runes—marks a move toward a more integrated, functional psychic instrument. The sword's "form and function" as both weapon and focus embodies the Jungian ideal of opposites held in creative tension.
 - **Confronting the Shadow / Return to Origin:** Myrah itself is the gray, polluted, over-developed "shadow" world—nature choked by cities, seas sickened by centuries of misuse. Will's return is the classic heroic descent: he must re-enter the place of origin with his newly integrated Self (symbolized by the stone now obeying only his will) to achieve final transformation. Julia's peaceful acceptance acts as the Anima's stabilizing mirror, preventing Will's unease from tipping into regression.
 - **Symbolic Clarity (without over-explaining)** - The sword-as-new-focus is excellent, but a single extra beat showing Will consciously noticing the difference (or Julia commenting on it) would quietly reinforce the Animus evolution. Similarly, the stone's voice could echo earlier lore (universal magic / gemstone notes) more explicitly if you want the transcendent-function symbolism to land harder.
 - **Pacing & Tension** - The landing and camp setup feel a touch abrupt after the dramatic breach. A brief moment of heightened stakes (distant mystic-police activity, a sensed pursuit, or Will's first conscious use of the sword in a defensive way) would keep the reader's pulse up before the quieter reflective close.
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