

Story of Zhae (Jae)

Chapter 01

The first day

Why am I still lying here? I am a fool! This is just another of the masters tests! Waiting for five days, such a fool! Good there is still some food left, I shall take these coins too, Master always said they are a valued tool by the barbarians that inhabit the nearby nations. My bag is packed, time to go.

Hmm, which way though. Master knows I couldn't find him if he hides, so that could not be the nature of the test. No clear signs of where he went either. It can not be a race, there is no destination. Ah! Perhaps it is a test for me to begin my rise! It must be. Master has taught me all I can process at the moment and it is now time for me to go into the world and learn! Of course so obvious. As I am to do it alone the master must have hurried off to deal with more important matters in the meantime! Or perhaps he watches from afar. Either way master, I shall go and make you proud!

As in the tale of the great yet humble warrior Sanjuuro of Wa I shall begin my tale at the mercy of the spirits and let fortune guide this branch to the way I must choose.

2 days Later...

My lack of skill in locating food is starting to become an annoyance. There is plenty as the master shows me he can find it in abundance even in a dust ridden waste. I have to improve my eye for finding the right signs.

Masters choice in letting me go alone was most wise, hunger shows me what punishment would not, the consequences of failure! For now though, I shall just have to make do, no mere hunger shall stop my path!

The first meeting

A river, such a majestic sight, the paintings do it no justice. It humbles what streams have quenched my thirst as a Giant humbles the goblin. Which way now. Follow the stream upward or down. But wait! A boat approaches! The Fortunes smiles on me still! But I should be cautious and courteous, this is my first meeting with one other than the master.

Curse my inaccurate arm! The kind fellow on the boat provided me with food and a direction, but I wasted one of the coins on a throw that a blind limbless toad could have made! What a poor introduction to the world. I merely hope he ignores such foolishness and does not consider it worth passing on. I shall have to practice a hundred throws later, I must not forget!

The city at last

Arriving at the city at last bestows upon me yet another wondrous sight, the paintings, while marvelous in their own ways, truly can not bring into scope for one who has not witnessed them in person! I have met an educated old man at the gates, a rare surprise in the lands infested with barbarians as the master spoke, someone who it will be worth proving myself to, his offer for work is gladly accepted.

Introductions and the great failing...

The old man introduced to the others he needs for the task, to need so many you would think we would soon be marching against the hells themselves! Though soon it has become clear that none here follow the sublime way, even, very few follow the way of the blade(or whichever art one chose). Yet this journey has it's worth proven to me a hundred times over! For amongst our strange fellows we have a Dwarven hero! Sadly such a realization has caused me to insult him at once, fool that I am inquired if he was a Dwarven Hero implying as if there was any other kind of Dwarf, fortunately he seems to have brushed it off, no doubt realizing my inexperience in meeting true greatness.

Quickly onto the next matter we discussed previous heroes and I managed to completely get all dates and names wrong! I knew I should have spent more time on memorizing the specifics, I am a thrice cursed fool, to deliver such an insult and such incompetence at the same time, the master would have beaten me hundred fold, nay, he would have ended me right there as an apology for having put faith in such a failure! I will have much work to do to make up for it. Ignoring even these failings (a truly humble and forgiving hero!) he has gone on to tell me of the great Dwarven plight (to even imagine what kind of horror could threaten a race of heroes) and I will help him in this as I am able to, he deserves no less for my insults! (Also what a way to make name, one man amongst Dwarves fighting great adversity, what a tale it shall make!)

Of the others however I am not quite sure what to make. One is a woman barbarian with great love for her horse (an infamous pairing in the great plains!) I believe she is human, yet her features are... well no woman in the scrolls or paintings has ever matched her appearance. While female warrior's are a rare thing, I imagine with her build she had little choice. She has a great hatred towards writing however, a true barbarian, not understanding the value and wisdom of those before sealed within and the benefit of improving ones educated mind that it can bring.

There is a lady who keeps quietly to herself, she will need protecting I think, I do not know why the old man chose to have her accompany us. I shall trust in the wisdom of one far more experienced than I.

Another man in the group, I do not know what to make of him. His ears are not "regular" so to say, but he is far to masculine to match the races of which I know have such ears. It is no matter, I shall leave his judgment till I see him fight.

The greatest surprise of all however was yet to arrive, with absolute grandeur like which one finds in the greatest of tales the young miss arrives borne by the great spirits, The vision of the river nor the city could prepare me for this. Such an entrance, this will be a mighty tale I have embarked upon indeed, master Li, as always, your wisdom is impeccable. I do not doubt he had foreseen all of these events. Formidable! But my mind wanders which does her no justice, for the most important part of the tale, the tragic maiden has arrived! Sullen and downcast, bearing the clothes and vision of the masters home, she sadly mentioned her shame. Here now is the true quest! To provide her protection on her journey to undo her shame, what more could a warrior such as I ask! Where once there was only training now I am overladen with purpose, finally able to put my blade and fists to use!

There is no understating how overwhelmed I am at these fortunes, I will not show them cast at me in vain!

The journey begins

Still getting used to suddenly being around so many people, each has their own habits. To keep myself at peak I train in the mornings whenever I can find the time. The horse woman has joined in on occasions, however her methods are very distant from mine. I look forward to seeing their effectiveness in combat, for horseback fighting is one I have never witnessed. I merely hope she is well versed in the art. I keep my attentions focused on the young miss, she is a beacon of support, setting a most exquisite tea. I have to often translate for her, yet every now and then she speaks fluently in the barbarian trade tongue, it is eerie and reminds me of many an ancient tale, what portents could they hold. We have encountered many trails and possibly we might find diversion in eradicating the local orc's. They are but a minor thing of course, but every tale begins somewhere. Ah if only a true adversary would appear before us, the lack of activity on our travels grows frustrating and I then realize what a fool I am to get so ahead of myself, especially when the fortunes have been so forthcoming. I must wait.

Chapter 02

A minor attack upon us I think, I was stirred from my sleep. After waking though it seems all adversaries we're already gone. Ah the negative side of a Dwarven hero amongst us. No doubt they ran when they realized we had one on our side. Later we discovered a lone Orc, but he was quickly dispatched. So much happening yet it feels like I am missing it all! The fortunes have a sense of humor as the master said.

We have continued in a careful fashion, I let myself be led in this area, as they are far more experienced in these matters than I, yet I can not but help feel like a drag on. The young miss still remains safe and that pleases me. There has been discussions of tactics, but they strike me as oddly static. Not quite made for one who relies upon his mobility(though as the master always reminds me I have the agility of a drunken rock, I must press my exercises on this matter! Nearly have I forgotten the failure at the boat!)

A trinket was found today, with nearby the results of powerful magic some said. I see nothing but some slightly weathered tree's however, they just didn't survive the weather as well as they could have as far as I could see.

The first trial

Things have become interesting, awoken by loud noises in our thorny "house" we have begun to relocate. Still somewhat groggy the exact occurrences are somewhat lost, I continue to trust their wisdom in this. The march and darkness reminds me of one of the masters favorite tests. It is nostalgic...

The hero has decided now was the time for our stand, a large group was sighted and he has drawn their attention to us, finally action will be had! Their numbers are 4 times the ours, so victory should easily be had. A small seed of doubt I must admit I felt for a brief instant, the master trained me in the theory of many opponents, but have only ever been able to bring it to bear against the master, though of course against him one feels like one fights a thousand at once. Such a seed only fuels my fire to finally test my blade in true combat, where more than just my masters mood is at stake!

They near us and I am puzzled at the sight. There is... a two headed giant? Far too

small though, though such is the only thing I know it to possibly be. many of them I can now identify as Orcs... and mini Orcs? Do they come so small? Perhaps goblins, I'll have to ask the hero later, he'll surely know. There I go, insulting him further, even if it is in my mind. He'll *KNOW*.

Those with ranged weapons have begun to shoot the giant, yet I can not detect it even so much as slowing him, such is why I train in the blade after all. Many a thing will ignore pin pricks, but see them try to ignore their limbs severed leaving them looking like a pennaggolan.

The horse woman has charged for the giant and 4 of the small ones seem to have fallen on the spot, perhaps their heart collapsed at the sight of our Hero, a good start. If she is to focus on the giant, I'll try to take as many of the small fries as possible to give her some peace...

...it proceeds not as well as I hope, two blows I foolishly allowed through..... this pain is new...nothing like the masters blows..... so much blood the armor has saved me from a few more a foolishly missed, the masters wisdom prevailing even in a battle where he is absent.... I...do not think I'll survive this... am I so ill prepared??? The masters skills have felled several, but so many still remain....

A brief respite, the young miss has cleverly brought a weapon to keep the foe at bay! I'd rather her be distant, but then I realize why she is here! Like in the tales she carries supplies! I drank a potion from her belt, exclaimed ! I instantly forgot about the meaningless scratches that plagued me and all was brought back into relation, even should I die here I will die fighting and protecting the young miss! Ah! a strike upon her, letting myself sink in thoughts, what a fool!

A few more further ahead, I'll have to risk leaving the miss behind, should not have her near the fighting till I can better guard her, but I must admit, she fights with a valiant heart! I will charge that one with the strength of the shilong, the tiexin has served me well so far, but I need to be sure he falls, to many left to not make the strikes count!

They... they are running! Spirits grant her a hundred blessings, I had not even noticed the horse woman had brought the giant to fall! The fight is victorious and we all still stand! The hero seems to be helping the young miss get our ally from the tree, much better, they wanted to have her sever the giants heads! Such filthy work is not for such as her. I still must say, the disgusting innards of these monsters, another sight I was not prepared for, one truly must experience it. However, I let that get in the way of the perfection of the moment! It is the first test of my blade and it was successful! I am glad the hero left me to my own to experience the battle for myself, it wouldn't do if he had to do my work! I now see how foolish my previous doubts were, there was no other course for this battle other than victory. Is it not the way of classic tales that the hero feel overcome, yet only to overcome those very doubts and triumph! I see now how it feels! trust in the blade and the skills the master instilled in my arm! With allies as formidable as these as well. The only shadow is the cut I let them lay upon the young miss, I must double my exercises, must prepare my mind! Such failure is too dangerous to allow it to persist! Pausing to tend to my wounds, even as swiftly as the potion allowed, let her be marked!

*glorious triumph
in mind and soul united
dawn of a new sun*