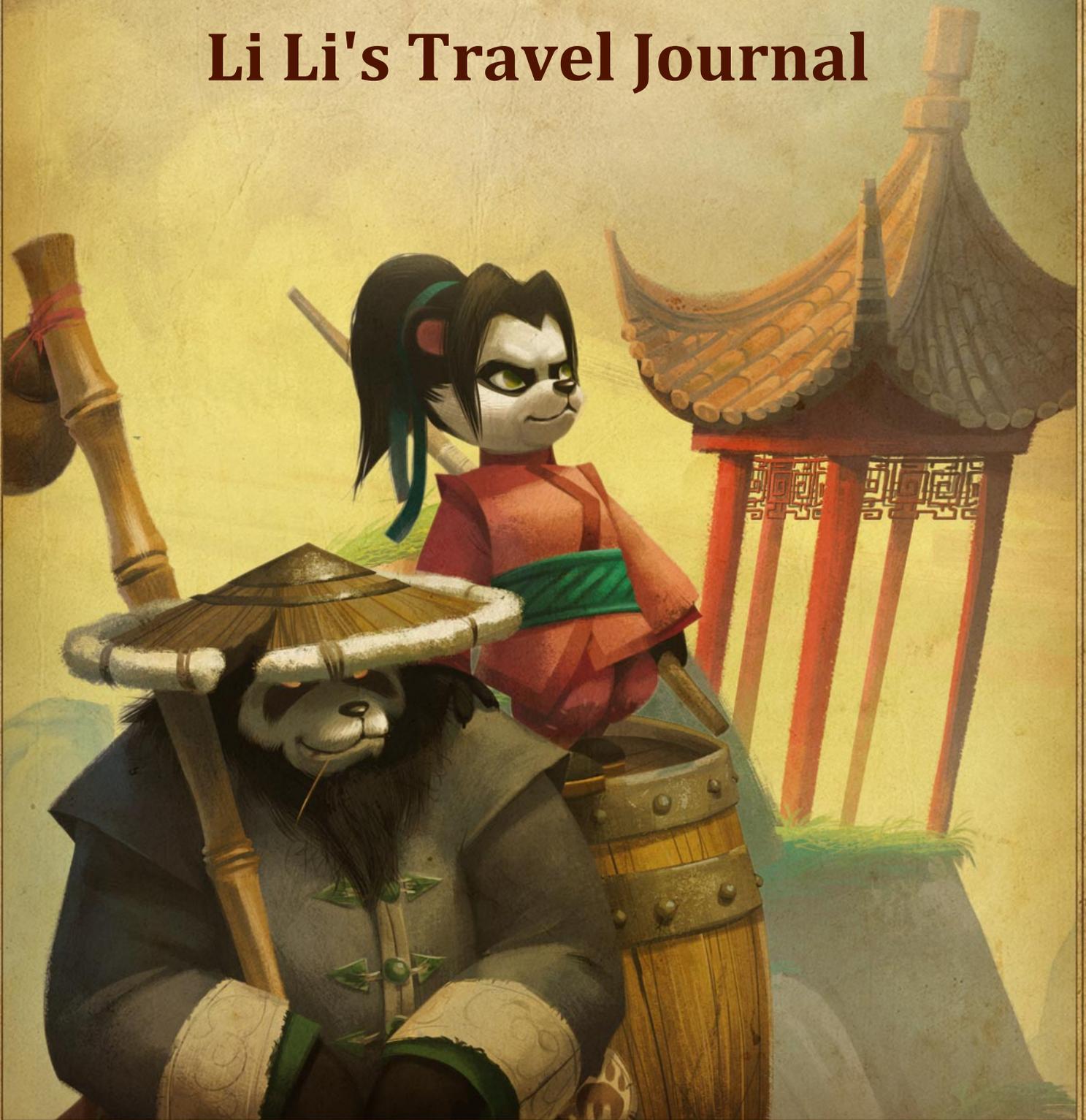


WORLD
WARCRAFT
MISTS of PANDARIA

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Li Li's Travel Journal



Life is an adventure.

That's what Uncle Chen wrote in a letter to me once. It's sage advice, but my pop, Chon Po, doesn't think so. He says I spend too much time dreaming about the outside world, and that I ignore all the beauty and wonder of the Wandering Isle. He couldn't be more wrong—I *do* love where I'm from.

That's the point of this journal. I figure if I'm ever going to be a great explorer like Uncle Chen, I need to start writing about my own adventures, just like he does. Why not begin at home? Maybe my book will end up in the Great Library, tucked alongside Uncle Chen's missives. Better yet, someday folks in Stormwind City, Orgrimmar, or other faraway lands might read this and learn about my kin, our culture, and what makes this place so great!

First things first: an introduction. I was born on the Great Turtle, Shen-zin Su, also known as the Wandering Isle. Nowadays, many of the pandaren here just sit around on their butts, telling the same old stories, but it wasn't always like that. Our ancestors had adventure in their blood. To them, every day on the isle was a chance to see new things and make *new* stories!

As I write this, Uncle Chen is carrying on that tradition somewhere out in the world, but he's not the only one. The Traveler's Path has called to me too, right here at home, and it's time I finally answered!

My name is Li Li Stormstout, and this is the Wandering Isle.



Entry One: Back to the Basics

I decided to explore my home using the Wanderer's Way, a philosophy that Uncle Chen has written a lot about in his missives. Basically it means to take each journey one step at a time, observe everything around you, speak to everyone you meet, and soak in all the details.

After some thought, I started my journey across Shen-zin Su where I had initially learned about the isle's history: the Dawning Span. This massive stone bridge stretches along high cliffs near the center of the isle. From the top of the span, you can see all across the emerald Pei-Wu Forest to the south. It's breathtaking up there!

But I didn't go for the view. I headed into a small classroom built below the bridge. This is where most cubs learn of Liu Lang, the first pandaren explorer (although I originally heard about him in a letter from Uncle Chen). The cozy open-air room was packed with eager little cubs who were being told Liu Lang's history by a couple of Lorewalkers. I grabbed a seat and closed my eyes, trying to imagine I was hearing the tale for the first time.

Listening to Liu Lang's story made me feel like anything was possible! Inspired, I set out across the span to the Temple of Five Dawns, a gleaming tower at the heart of the isle. Stepping into the giant building is like entering a different world. Rain poured from the ceiling; a soft breeze tugged at my clothes; and, even though it was chilly outside, the air within was as warm as a summer's day.

The Lorewalkers say that as Shen-zin Su grew larger, so did the temple, as if the building itself were a part of the Great Turtle. This is a sacred place, and for good reason. The temple is home to the four ancient spirits of the land: Shu (water), Wugou (earth), Huo (fire), and Dafeng (air). As long as they're safe and sound, the weather stays calm and the seasons pass as they should.

The temple's full of wise proverbs and rare trinkets, but what interested me most was the statue of Liu Lang on the first floor. As I looked at him, I thought about all the great things he'd accomplished. It took guts to do what he did! Adventure must've followed him around at every step, even at home.

I bumped into Master Shang Xi as I was leaving. He's a big deal around these parts, a very noble and brave pandaren who mentors young and old alike. I can't count how many times I've gotten into trouble with Shang, but he's always been pretty forgiving (except that day I brewed his tea with skunk-water from the cursed pools). Anyways, he was in a good mood, so I hit him with some questions that'd been bothering me: What would Liu Lang do if he were still alive today? Where would he find adventure on the isle?

"Why don't you ask him?" Master Xi replied, pointing back to the statue.

I hadn't thought of that, so I gave it a shot. I didn't *really* expect an answer.

But I got one!

The spirit Shu must've been listening. The little guy hopped up on Liu Lang's shoulder and chucked a glob of water that splattered on the ground. After a moment, the puddle *moved*. It slithered to the entrance of the temple as if it was alive, and then it bounced down the long Dawning Stair outside.

I followed as fast as I could until I reached the wide valley north of the temple. I never asked the water where it was going; that would've ruined the surprise. Just like Chen, I was taking the journey one step at a time!



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Entry Two: The Dawning Dilemma

My journey through the Wandering Isle continued in the Dawning Valley!

I chased the water blob that Shu had created all across the region's grassy hills and wooded thickets. The little guy stayed one step ahead of me, but I didn't mind. That time of year, the valley was beautiful and full of fascinating plants and animals, such as the amberleaf scamps, tricky forest sprites who love to play pranks and cause mischief. I've always liked them. But my favorite things in that part of the isle are the bright red puzhu trees. There's something magical about them. Their petals keep their color for months even after you pick them.

The Lorewalkers say that Liu Lang planted different saplings and seeds across the isle years and years ago. Does that mean the same types of plants and flowers are in Pandaria? If so, maybe the folks there use puzhu petals for medicines and festival decorations like we do.

Anyway, I lost the trail of Shu's water somewhere in Wu-Song Village, north of the Dawning Valley. To make matters worse, no one in the settlement had spotted it! How can you miss a living blob of water dancing through your streets? I guess I can't really blame the villagers. They seemed busy doing chores and practicing martial arts. Many of the isle's best monks are born and raised in Wu-Song, partly because of how close it is to the Shang Xi Training Grounds.

The grounds sit atop a towering hill just east of the village. All day the sounds of bare fists and weapons smacking against training dummies echo across the valley below. As I headed toward the grounds, I ran into two of the wisest pandaren around: Aysa Cloudsinger, a master of the Tushui way of thought, and Ji Firepaw, a master of the Huojin way.

Both of these philosophies are pretty popular, but each has its own distinct flavor. Tushui above all else teaches that you should defend what is right. There is only one correct path in life, and it must *always* be followed. On the other paw, Huojin is all about passion and taking direct action. The students of this school believe that as long as they're working for the greater good, they can be more flexible about how they get the job done.

Being a follower of the Wanderer's Way, I couldn't pass up the rare chance to bug Aysa and Ji with questions, so I asked them what I should do to find the water blob.

"Sit, watch, and wait, young one," Aysa said. "Shu is an ancient being, and he will not always answer your call. If his water wishes to find *you*, it will. In time."

Ji's approach was a bit different. "You'll find the water only if you're thorough, little Stormstout. Search every tree and riverbank. Leave no stone unturned!"

I ended up trying both ways. First, I settled down at Fu's Pond, a tranquil area south of the training grounds. I sat there and meditated for what seemed like hours, but Shu's water blob never showed up. Then I tried Ji's advice and went digging through every shrub I could find. Eventually, I realized that it was all kind of pointless. My mission was to *explore*. If Shu led me there for a reason, maybe it was to help me take the first step in my journey.

After heading back to the Temple of Five Dawns, I crossed paths with a cart driver named Lun and his big yak. He'd just delivered some supplies for the temple and was getting ready to return to the Dai-Lo Farmstead. That part of the isle seemed as good a place as any to visit next. I managed to talk Lun into giving me a ride on his cart.

But I got the feeling he was in a bad mood. He had this sour look on his face, like the kind you get when you bite into a sweet red-bean bun only to find that someone has filled it with rancid yak cheese. (This has happened to me.) After a round of questions, I pried the truth from him: hozen thieves had pillaged his food stores!

Sure, I felt bad for Lun, but to be honest, I was also pretty excited. Exploring Dai-Lo was one thing, but exploring it *and* investigating hozen thievery sounded like a dream come true.

The next leg of my journey was shaping up to be quite the adventure!



Entry Three: To Catch a Hozen

After my romp through the Dawning Valley, I continued on to the Dai-Lo Farmstead!

This beautiful place is the breadbasket of the Wandering Isle, and I read in the Great Library that the region's soil is some of the most fertile in the world. Dai-Lo itself is a small farming community near the Rows—long, winding tracts of tilled land bursting with pumpkins, carrots, and other goodies. All that ripe food sitting out in the open makes this area a prime target for annoying pests like virmen. Those furry critters will devour anything they can get their grubby little mitts on, but they especially love vegetables.

But virmen are just one of the problems at the farmstead. While taking me to Dai-Lo, the cart driver Lun told me about a group of hozen thieves that had snuck into the village and made off with a few sacks of rice and veggies. Normally, the tenacious monkeys kept to Fe-Fang Village in the northwestern part of the isle, but sometimes they would show up to cause trouble.

Don't get me wrong; I like hozen. They have their own captivating culture and customs. Hozen are crazy in a fun, lovable kind of way. But every so often they get a little *too* crazy.

I was shocked to learn that no one was trying to find the thieves. I guess with virmen snooping around, Dai-Lo's farmers didn't think losing a few bundles of food now and then was a big deal. The way I saw it, if the farmers let the hozen snatch their crops, the fur balls would just keep doing it. That was *our* food they were taking, and I wasn't going to sit back and allow them to get away with it!

Lun said the hozen were last seen heading through the forests north of the Rows, toward an area called the Singing Pools. It didn't take me long to find a trail of chewed-up carrot bits and discarded broccoli heads (I guess even hozen hate broccoli). I followed the trail into the secluded emerald forests surrounding the pools.

I've always enjoyed visiting the pools. They're serene and full of magic. I've spent a lot of time there, balancing atop narrow wooden poles that rise up through the water. Those training sessions are a big thrill, because falling in doesn't just mean you get wet. There's more to the waters than that.

See, over the years, all sorts of animals have died in the pools, and their spirits have merged with the enchanted waters. If you get wet... BAM! Next thing you know, you're hopping around as a frog or waddling through the mud as a turtle. There's even a pool infused with skunk spirits. After that curse wears off, you'll stink for days!

I took my time searching around, watching cubs leap from pole to pole under the guidance of a pandaren named Strongbo. He's a burly, no-nonsense fellow who's been one of my teachers for years. He has a good heart, but he's about as much fun to be around as a bucket of week-old fish bait. It's always *Don't do that!* with Strongbo... just like with my pop. They're both complete opposites of Uncle Chen.

Strongbo spotted me as I walked beside the pools, and he gave me the evil eye. He probably thought I was up to no good. (He was right, of course.) Luckily, he was too busy teaching the cubs to bother me.

Finally, I found the hozen thieves—five of them, to be exact. They were hanging around the shore of the skunk pool, pushing each other into the water. Whenever one of them fell in and briefly transformed, the rest would jump up and down, hooting and hollering like it was two-for-one night at the Ki-Han Brewery.

I saw what was left of the sacks of rice and veggies on a nearby hill, tucked behind a tree. The hozen were so busy with their game, they never noticed as I quietly approached the hiding spot for a better look at the goods. I crept closer and closer until the food was within arm's reach, and then... two fuzzy hozen babies popped up from behind the bags!

I hadn't expected the thieves to be a *family*. They must have taken the stuff to feed their young, so I couldn't bring myself to reclaim the food. But I could still get a little bit of revenge. I hurled one of the stolen pumpkins at the hozen near the pool, and then I raced off into the forest. From the big splash that followed, I figured I'd knocked at least a few of them in, although turning into a skunk probably made the hozen smell better than they normally did.

On my way back to the farmstead, I decided where I'd go next: Pei-Wu Forest, a dense and scary stretch of wilderness near Dai-Lo. For me, going there was more than just exploring. As a cub, I would sneak into Pei-Wu every few years, but I always ran home after a couple of steps, too frightened to continue.

Well, it was about time I finally faced my fears. I gathered supplies in Dai-Lo, and then I was off to Pei-Wu Forest, the most dangerous and forbidden spot on all of the Wandering Isle!



Entry Four: The Forbidden Forest

Loaded up with supplies from the Dai-Lo Farmstead, I prepared for my trek into the deadliest place on the Wandering Isle: Pei-Wu Forest!

The woods are dangerous—forbidden to almost all pandaren—and I knew sneaking in would be tricky. Hills and steep, rocky mountains surround the dense bamboo forest, and the only real path leading inside is blocked off by two massive gates. These sturdy barriers are located outside Mandori Village, where I've lived my whole life. That might sound convenient, but pandaren are always in the area, so it's hard to get over the walls undetected.

To make matters worse, I saw Strongbo as I was searching for a secluded place to scale the first gate from. Why was he snooping around the village today of all days? He asked me what I'd been up to earlier at the Singing Pools. "Experiencing the beauty and splendor that is our home," was my answer—and it was true!

Even so, Strongbo just narrowed his eyes and scowled like usual. (I wonder if he knows how much he looks like a wrinkly mossback toad when he does that.) With Bo poking his fat nose around, I went home to lay low and get some rest until I knew the coast was clear. Before sunrise, I crept out into the quiet, empty streets and climbed over the two great gates with a yak-hair rope I'd picked up in Dai-Lo.

Soon the sun peeked over the horizon, but Pei-Wu's thick canopy blocked out almost all light. Fog hung low on the forest floor, making it even harder to see. But I could hear sounds all around me... a lot of them. The region is well known for its abundance of critters, but there's only one that strikes fear into the heart of every pandaren: the ferocious Pei-Wu tiger.

And one of them was hunting *me*. Wherever I walked, heavy footsteps followed in the distance. If I stopped, they stopped. If I moved, they moved. Then, all of a sudden, the beast rushed toward me, snorting and growling. I went into the stance of the sturdy ox to defend myself just as a giant form emerged from the mists—

It was *Strongbo*!

Why couldn't he mind his own business? Without a word, Bo took me back home, and then he woke up Pop and told him I'd snuck into the forbidden forest. My pop chewed me out for a good hour before he finally calmed down. As punishment, he decided I'd have to suffer through a full week of training at the Singing Pools... under Bo's watchful eye.

I tried to tell Pop what I'd been doing, that I'd been exploring the Great Turtle and writing about how wonderful the journey was. I thought it would make him happy, but he didn't seem to understand or care.

Pop said my punishment would begin the next day, which meant I had time to visit one more location. Still fuming about what had happened, I set out west until I reached a long, winding trail that led to the Wood of Staves—the final resting place of the Wandering Isle's Elder pandaren. A massive stone lion, the Guardian of the Elders, protects the entrance, and the mighty being won't let you through unless you've bested him in single combat. (I was one of the youngest pandaren ever to pass the test.)

Years ago, before he left the Great Turtle, Uncle Chen had told me that he often visited this part of the isle for inspiration. Back then I didn't understand why, but now I do. There's magic to this place. When someone is laid to rest there, their walking stick is planted into the ground, and the staff eventually grows into a wondrous tree. Well, after many generations, an entire forest has sprouted—an entire history of the isle's great pandaren.

Even my family has a spot there... but I'd rather not write about that. I didn't visit it that trip. After my argument with Pop, the last thing I needed was more heartache.

As I strolled through one of the oldest thickets in the area, I came across Elder Shaopai lighting incense on his family's shrine. He's a supremely wise pandaren from nearby Morning Breeze Village. The Elder has spent his whole life recording words of wisdom for the benefit of future generations.

Shaopai walked with me for a short time, pointing at trees and saying who they were in remembrance of. Before he left for his village, he said, "I can tell that you have much on your mind, little Stormstout. It's not my place to ask you about personal matters, but take this." The Elder gave me a smooth, round object just bigger than the size of my paw—a worry stone. "When life weighs heavy on your shoulders, the worry stone can lighten the load. Its magic is very powerful."

I'd always thought worry stones were useless trinkets, but if a genius like Shaopai believed they worked, that was good enough for me.

When I finally left the woods, an odd feeling came over me, and I haven't been able to shake it. I was thankful for Shaopai's gift and for having visited so many great places on the isle, but I wanted *more*. The Wandering Isle is a beautiful and enchanted land full of history and wonder. For me, though, it's home. I've seen it all. Meanwhile, there is a whole world out there waiting to be explored, and I'm afraid I won't ever get to experience it.

I spent the rest of the day in the Great Library, reading through Uncle Chen's letters again. I miss him. Pop says my uncle probably got himself killed on one of his "crazy" adventures, but I don't believe it. I know he's still out there somewhere, and I know he'll come back someday.

Until then, all I can do is keep the Wanderer's Way alive here on the Great Turtle. Uncle Chen would be proud of that... My ancestors would be proud of that. It's how we were always meant to live! As Liu Lang himself once said, "Every horizon is a treasure chest; every blank map, a story waiting to be told."

If only my pop understood that. No matter what he says, one day I will make my mark on the world.

And when I do, maybe Uncle Chen will be there at my side.



Entry Five: The Jade Forest

A lot's happened since I last wrote in this journal. For one, Uncle Chen finally came home to the Wandering Isle (thanks to the help of *yours truly*). A little while after, we ventured to the far corners of the world, searching for the legendary continent of Pandaria. Most folks on the Great Turtle believed the place had been destroyed long ago, through war or disease.

Well, they were *wrong*.

After battling pirates, surviving a violent storm at sea, and overcoming all sorts of other perils, Uncle Chen and I did the impossible: we found Pandaria, the lost homeland of our ancestors!

But getting there didn't go exactly as planned. Our guide for the trip was the Pearl of Pandaria, a mystical artifact that granted me visions of how to locate the continent. I only wished that dumb pearl had warned us how dangerous the journey would be.

The important thing is that we reached Pandaria in one piece. We made landfall near the Jade Forest, a region that stretched across the continent's eastern shore. The woods were green as far as the eye could see, with dense bamboo thickets full of strange plants and critters.

Uncle Chen and I didn't have a map, but that wasn't a problem. After having a look at our immediate surroundings, we picked a random direction and began our journey as any true follower of the Wanderer's Way would: one step at a time.

It wasn't long before the locals showed up to greet us. Dozens of beady-eyed lizard-men (called saurok, I later learned) burst out of the forest. They smelled something like old leather that was soaked in rotten ale and then stuffed into a barrel of Granny Mei's fermented fish paste. And that was the best part about them.

We made short work of the leather-faces (well, maybe it was mostly Chen). The only one that gave us any real trouble was the leader, a huge saurok covered with scars, war paint, and more scars. Pretty soon he was retreating through the forest, hollering like a baby.

We found the saurok's dingy camp nearby. It was filled with what looked like plunder: carts of grain, vegetables, and big chunks of pure jade. As we sorted through the stuff, a group of pandaren slowly emerged from the woods. When they saw that the saurok were gone, they bowed low and praised us like we were heroes! It turned out the leather-faces had been terrorizing the area, and all attempts to defeat them had failed.

Our new fans were dumbfounded when Uncle Chen told them we'd come from the Wandering Isle. The folk in Pandaria hadn't seen the Great Turtle in centuries, and most of them had started thinking the island was no more. I was surprised how similar the pandaren in the Jade Forest were to those back home. Apart from some minor differences, like clothing, not much had changed over the generations.

Once they learned we were good old-fashioned explorers, the pandaren told us a lot about the Jade Forest, its inhabitants, and its most important site: the Temple of the Jade Serpent. Apart from being a monument to the pandaren's legendary emperor Shaohao, the incredible temple was closely tied to the Jade Serpent, Yu'lon, one of the four celestial beings that watched over Pandaria.

When Uncle Chen and I reached the temple grounds, workers were carving an enormous jade statue called the Serpent's Heart. Every hundred years, Yu'lon would transfer her life essence into the sculpture, which would then turn into a new being. This cycle—creating statues so that Yu'lon could undergo her rebirth—had been going on for generations, and those saurok raiders had threatened it all by stealing the workers' supply of precious jade.

One of the temple's caretakers, Elder Sage Rain-Zhu, was kind enough to give me and Uncle Chen a tour of the surrounding area. He took us north to the Arboretum, a beautiful spot of land that was home to the Order of the Cloud Serpent. This fearless group had a long history of taming, raising, and riding the region's cloud serpents, majestic flying beasts that I'd seen in the sky above the temple.

Old Rain-Zhu said he'd grant us *any* request as thanks for defeating the saurok and returning the jade. My first instinct was to ask for a serpent of my own (the babies were adorable), but Uncle Chen thought that was going too far. So I settled for the next best thing: a ride on a cloud serpent!

Now, I'd flown on one of the giant cranes back home—and even on a goblin-built zeppelin—but this cloud serpent was in a class of its own. The beast rocketed into the sky faster than I'd seen anything move before. Being up so high gave me a clear view of what lay beyond the Jade Forest. To the west: rolling plains and farmlands. To the northwest: a range of impossibly tall mountains, their peaks capped with snow. Pandaria was *huge*. There was so much out there to discover. I was exploring an entire continent that no Wandering Isle pandaren had laid their eyes on for generations!

Before my uncle and I set out across the rest of the forest, we decided to give Rain-Zhu the Pearl of Pandaria. He'd treated us like family, and seeing as how the pandaren revered the temple as a center of wisdom and insight, we couldn't think of a better place to donate the pearl. It was tough giving it up, but it had already led me to Pandaria. It was time for the pearl to guide someone else toward their destiny.

In the weeks that followed, Uncle Chen and I walked... and walked... and walked. The Jade Forest seemed to go on forever, and around every corner was something new and exciting: secluded pandaren shrines, ancient vine-covered ruins, and monasteries tucked high in the mountains. The only problem was that my uncle moved at a snail's pace, stopping every few minutes to sit and "enjoy the scenery," as he put it.

Finally, we reached the Jade Forest's border. Ahead lay the Valley of the Four Winds, the farmlands I'd seen from atop the cloud serpent. By that time I was itching to explore anything that wasn't a forest, but I never could've expected what Uncle Chen and I would find on the next leg of our journey.

Soon, we'd make a discovery that would change what we knew about the Stormstout family forever!



Entry Six: The Valley of the Four Winds

During the weeks Uncle Chen and I explored the Jade Forest, I started feeling like a total stranger with no real connection to Pandaria. Sure, my ancestors had come from these lands, but that was generations ago. Although I ran across a few hozen (*bigger* and even *crazier* than the ones back home), almost everything else on the continent was so different from what I knew.

Well, that was all before I visited the Valley of the Four Winds. It was a home away from home, only on a *much* larger scale. The valley—considered the breadbasket of Pandaria—was covered with giant tracts of farmland that made the Rows on the Wandering Isle look like a tiny garden. I bet one harvest of the valley's crops could feed every pandaren in Mandori Village—even a fatso like Uncle Chen—for a lifetime.

I could fill this whole journal with the incredible things I saw in the valley, from the roaring Huangtze Falls to the magical Pools of Purity. But it wasn't the *new* stuff that really caught my attention; it was the *familiar* stuff that I never expected to find in a place so far from my home.

These discoveries started as Uncle Chen and I were exploring the valley alongside heroes from other lands of Azeroth, travelers just like us. Running into outsiders wasn't that big of a surprise. My uncle told me he'd crossed paths with a couple members of the Horde and the Alliance a few weeks back (I'd been asleep at the time). It turned out that the two factions had landed in the Jade Forest and caused all sorts of trouble. They'd even dragged some of the locals into their conflict, such as the hozen and a race of fish folk called the jinyu. Luckily, Uncle Chen and I were on our way out of the forest when that stuff was happening.

Not long after we entered the valley, we met a fellow named Mudmug, a friendly pandaren who brewed his own ale with muddy water. He was sort of weird, but I liked the big guy.

Out of the blue, he told us about a Stormstout Brewery in the area. Uncle Chen and I couldn't believe it. We had living, breathing cousins in Pandaria—and a brewery! The news got Chen moving faster than a few steps per hour for the first time in weeks.

Unfortunately, the brewery was a complete mess. Virmen (just like the ones on the Wandering Isle) had infested the grain and rice stores. Hozen had taken over parts of the building and gone bonkers. To add insult to injury, the Stormstout in charge of the brewery, Uncle Gao, didn't even want our help! Well, Chen and I weren't going to let the greatest discovery in our family's history fall to ruin because of some grouchy relative.

Eventually, we cleared out the brewery's pests (something we couldn't have done without our fellow newcomers from the outside world). Once the place was under control, Gao opened up to me and Uncle Chen. Usually, many other Stormstouts lived and worked in the brewery, but they'd all gone west to fight an ancient insect people known as the mantid. Gao had been left behind to take care of the brewery. I guess he was under a lot of pressure to live up to the family name, because his efforts had led to some pretty unstable brews—the kind that come to life and try to kill you.

Gao didn't know when the other Stormstouts would return, but he told us all about them. He also explained our family's history in the valley, and how far back it went. Right outside the brewery, he showed us an old shrine dedicated to the widow Mab Stormstout and her son, Liao. I'd heard about those two from my pop. After Mab's husband had died in a tragic grape-press accident, she'd taken Liao and begun a new life on the Wandering Isle.

Aside from the Stormstout family, there were even bigger ties between the valley and my homeland. Gao claimed that Liu Lang—founder of the Wandering Isle—had been born and raised close to the brewery. Imagine that! His birthplace, around a village called Stoneplow, was located at the valley's western edge.

Every day, I learned new stuff about the region and my distant relatives. Things were going well, until bad news suddenly arrived...

Something *big* was happening far to the west, at a colossal wall called the Serpent's Spine. Years and years ago, the mogu—gigantic brutes who ruled over Pandaria until my ancestors kicked their butts—had built the barrier to protect themselves against their archenemies, the mantid. Now, the pandaren guarded the Serpent's Spine, but the bug-things had recently broken through their defenses and begun invading the nearest settlement: Stoneplow!

Uncle Chen and I joined a large group of pandaren who'd gathered at Stoneplow to ward off the invaders. We wiped the floor with the mantid, but I got the feeling that this was only the first of more attacks to come. The locals whispered about some other force being responsible for the assault, a dark and mysterious power known as the sha. It sent chills up my spine, thinking that such evil existed in Pandaria.

Things calmed down after the attack. Uncle Chen and Uncle Gao spent days on end in the brewery, discussing recipes and testing new ales. That was fine by me. Chen had been slowing me down ever since we'd come to Pandaria. I was itching to explore on my own, and I knew the perfect place to visit: the Krasarang Wilds. That was where Liu Lang had first set out from Pandaria atop Shen-zin Su, the sea turtle that would eventually grow to become the Wandering Isle!

I'd learned about Krasarang from one of the valley's farmers. He warned me that the place was *very* dangerous, but hearing that made me want to go even more. So, I gathered some supplies and wrote a note for Uncle Chen, telling him where I was headed. He had his nose stuffed so deep into sacks of hops and barley that I figured I'd be back before he knew I was gone.

Finally I was free, blazing a trail of my own. Next stop: Krasarang Wilds and the birthplace of the Wandering Isle!



Entry Seven: The Krasarang Wilds

Even without Uncle Chen around to help me, it was easy finding the Krasarang Wilds. But slogging my way through the gloomy coastal swamp was quite the challenge. The thick forest canopy blocked out the sun, making it almost impossible to get a sense of direction. When I wasn't tripping over gnarled roots, I was getting tangled in the big stupid vines that hung down from the trees. And then there was the wildlife. Saurok, giant hissing wasps, and other types of angry critters prowled around everywhere.

It was just as exciting as I'd hoped!

But it bothered me that I couldn't find the spot where Liu Lang had set off from atop Shen-zin Su. After days of searching through the wilds with nothing to show for it, I crossed paths with an angler named Ryshan, the first pandaren I'd seen in a while. He'd just delivered a shipment of fish to Zhu's Watch, an outpost in northeastern Krasarang, built to keep nasties like the saurok from attacking travelers destined for the coast.

Friends must be rare in Krasarang, because Ryshan treated me like family even though we'd just met. When I explained what I was doing in the wilds, he told me that the place where Liu Lang had left Pandaria from was very close to his village, the Anglers Wharf. He was nice enough to invite me back to his settlement to stock up on supplies before I made my trek to the site. Finally, my luck was picking up.

On the way to the village, Ryshan filled me in on Krasarang's history. Few pandaren trod those forests. "Only anglers and madmen, if there's any difference," he said, beaming with pride. We passed a bunch of crumbling old ruins that he said had once belonged to the mogu. Before their empire fell long ago, some of the big brutes had lived in Krasarang. More recently, the mogu had returned to claim their former territories, but heroes like the ones who'd helped Uncle Chen and me at the family brewery had stopped them.

It was near dusk by the time we approached the Anglers Wharf. The ramshackle little village had been built just off Krasarang's shore, meaning Ryshan and I had to take a boat to get there. Not a big deal, right? Well, after we'd set sail, the angler suddenly started screaming bloody murder and leapt to his feet, swinging one of the boat's oars through the air. What could rattle a bold angler like him? Crocolisks? Saurok? I was fearing for my life until I saw what had spooked him: a bandicoon.

These furry little guys were master thieves, and they *loved* snacking on fish. In other words, they were the bane of anglers. The bandicoon in our boat was fierce. He didn't flinch when Ryshan began smashing his oar onto the deck. In fact, the critter fought back, hissing and swiping at the angler with his claws.

Bandicoons normally keep to the Valley of the Four Winds, but this one had come all the way into Krasarang. I calmed Ryshan down by promising to take care of the furball and make sure he didn't get his paws on any fish. It was the least I could do. After all, this bandicoon was a fellow explorer. Oddly, the critter reminded me of my older brother, Shisai. Maybe it was his chubby face and bushy ears. Or maybe it was the way he picked tiny bits of old food out of his fur and ate them, not caring how disgusting it made him look. Whatever the reason, I decided to name the bandicoon after my big brother. As hard as it was to believe, I actually missed Shisai. Well... a little bit.

At the Anglers Wharf, Ryshan and his pals roasted up some of the day's catches and told me their best fishing stories. When I said I'd come from the Wandering Isle, they took it as a challenge to tell better stories, and began spinning some yarn about a baby kraken they'd fished up years ago.

Only anglers and madmen. Yeah. That sounded about right.

One of the most interesting things the anglers talked about was the Temple of the Red Crane. The massive complex, located in central Krasarang, was built in honor of the

celestial Chi-Ji, known as the Red Crane. Ryshan mentioned that this powerful and benevolent creature was also called the spirit of hope. Not long ago, something dangerous had escaped from the depths of the Red Crane's temple: *sha*. The strange evils were later defeated, but not before a shadow of despair had fallen across the wilds.

I'd heard about the *sha* during the mantid attack on Stoneplow back in the Valley of the Four Winds. Why were these weird things suddenly popping up all over the place? Was it happening *everywhere* in Pandaria? Just thinking about the *sha* made my skin crawl. It was hard to sleep that night.

The next morning, I was getting ready to continue my search for the Wandering Isle's birthplace when a giant hot-air balloon landed at the Anglers Wharf! The pilot, a soft-spoken pandaren named Shin Whispercloud, had come from the northern region of Kun-Lai Summit to pick up a shipment of fish. Apparently, he was making a delivery to a sacred place high in the mountains: the Temple of the White Tiger. The fish in Krasarang must be some of the best in Pandaria; otherwise why would Shin come so far south?

The more Shin talked about Kun-Lai, the more I wanted to see it. The balloon pilot said I was welcome to join him as long as I helped load the fish. How could I say no? Sure, I still hadn't found the spot where Liu Lang and the Great Turtle had begun their journey across the seas, but at least I'd figured out the general area it was in. Uncle Chen and I could always come back some other time. But when would I get another chance to go to Kun-Lai? With my uncle holed up in the brewery, it could be weeks—or even *months*—before we finally visited the distant corners of Pandaria. Or maybe we never would. I imagined Uncle Chen sitting around in the brewery, drinking barrels and barrels of ale and growing fatter than Shin's balloon—too big even to fit through the building's doors!

There was only one thing to do: I rolled up my sleeves, held my breath, and started loading barrels of fish into the large basket hanging from the balloon. I probably smelled like a true

angler after the work was done, but it was a small price to pay for a free trip to somewhere as mysterious and exciting as Kun-Lai.

After saying my good-byes to the anglers, I tucked Shisai into my travel bag and hopped aboard Shin's balloon. Pretty soon we were rising above the Krasarang Wilds higher and higher and higher! The wind carried us north, over the Jade Forest, and then on toward Kun-Lai's majestic mountains. Through openings in the white fluffy clouds, I began to make out my destination.

When I told Shin how beautiful Kun-Lai seemed from afar, he became sad. "Funny how everything looks so perfect from the sky," he said. "Kun-Lai is a wondrous place, as you say. But these days, not all is well there. A storm is gathering over the region, little one."

Shin went on to explain that war had come to parts of Kun-Lai. He told me not to worry; the area he was taking me to was safe, but I still wondered if joining him had been a mistake.

Then I reminded myself that Uncle Chen and every other great explorer needed to travel dangerous lands *and* peaceful ones. It was all part of being a wanderer. I took a deep breath and stared ahead, ready to face *any* challenge that was waiting for me in the snowy mountains of Kun-Lai Summit!



Entry Eight: Kun-Lai Summit

I'd thought the Jade Forest was a big honking slice of land, but it didn't compare to Kun-Lai Summit. The mountains there were so tall that even from up in the hot-air balloon, I had to crane my neck just to see where the snowy slopes vanished above the clouds.

Our destination—the Temple of the White Tiger—was nestled in northeastern Kun-Lai. Like the temples in the Jade Forest and the Krasarang Wilds, it was dedicated to one of Pandaria's legendary celestials. In this case it was Xuen, the White Tiger. The balloon's pilot, Shin, also referred to the being as the spirit of strength, which seemed like the perfect trait to have up in those harsh mountains.

The temple grounds were freezing cold when we arrived. My paws were numb by the time we'd unloaded all of the fish barrels. Even my bandicoon, Shisai, couldn't escape the cold. Frost covered his fur from head to tail, and his whiskers had turned to ice. I would've felt bad for the little guy if he hadn't been acting like such a grouch recently. Just the night before, he'd tried to bite me when I'd caught him stealing fish from the barrels!

Something was wrong with him, but I didn't know what... Not yet.

After making our delivery, we returned to the skies and headed to the rocky highland steppes in southern Kun-Lai. That was where most folks in the region lived. Apart from hozen huts and pandaren villages, I saw a jinyu settlement at the edge of a lake called Inkgill Mere. I'd been hoping to learn a lot about that amphibious race's ancient culture and rich history. More importantly, I wanted to know how they put tiny fish into bubbles and then made them float around in the air.

But I never got a chance to explore Inkgill. In fact, I couldn't enjoy *any* of Kun-Lai's amazing sights. Every second that passed, Shisai became more dangerous and unpredictable.

"He is angry," Shin explained, noticing the bandicoon's behavior. "But it is not his fault..." The pandaren went on to tell me that one of the sha—a being of pure anger—had escaped from its prison high in the mountains. It was terrorizing the steppes, causing violence to break out among the different peoples who lived there.

To make things worse, a race of shaggy yak-faced nomads called the yaungol had marched into the region from the west. The big jerks acted like they owned the place, burning any settlements that stood in their path to the ground. Shin didn't know if the yaungol's sudden appearance was connected to the sha, but the brutes sure weren't making Kun-Lai safer.

Although we couldn't do much about the sha or the yaungol, we could still help my bandicoon. Shin said he knew just the person to cure Shisai's anger issues: Courageous Yon.

Yon lived in a small cave up in Kota Peak, a remote mountain in southwestern Kun-Lai. He was an eccentric pandaren, famous for his ability to tame wild animals and train them how to fight. Luckily, Shin was old pals with Yon, so the tamer welcomed us into his home and agreed to help Shisai. Carefully, he inspected the grumpy bandicoon. Every so often, Yon would turn to the pets he kept in his cave and ask them a question or mutter something under his breath. But what really freaked me out were the weird sweaters, booties, and scarves hanging on the walls. It was clear they'd been knitted to fit different kinds of animals. Each piece of clothing even had the name of one of Yon's pets embroidered on it!

"Laugh if you want," the tamer said defensively when he caught me staring at the clothes. "But up here in the cold it's important to keep a pet warm. They could pull a muscle, you know."

Yeah... Yon was kind of crazy, but I liked him. He reminded me of the master monks back on the Wandering Isle, who spent their entire lives training in their chosen arts. Only instead of achieving inner balance, Yon was making bunnies fight baby crocolisks. Which was cool, too.

Over the next day, Yon showed me ways to deal with Shisai and "focus his anger." By that, I realized he meant teaching the bandicoot how to battle other animals. I never expected my scrappy little furball would be able to use tactics in a fight, but he turned out to be pretty good at it!

Shisai was actually holding his own against Yon's battle-hardened pets (thanks to *my* strategic coaching, of course). More than that, the fighting *did* calm Shisai. In between smacking around his opponents, he was back to his old self, although with a few more scars.

The following morning, I set off from Kota Peak with Shin and Shisai. Before we left, Yon gave me a bag of his old pet supplies: chew toys to settle Shisai down if he got crabby, treats, and all sorts of other stuff. The tamer never asked me for payment. I respected him a lot for that. He'd helped Shisai because of his love for taming wild beasts. And, well, the fact that he knew I didn't have any money might've been a factor too.

Shin piloted the balloon east as we talked about where he would drop me off. About halfway into our conversation, something on the ground caught my eye. Dozens and dozens of pandaren were entering a giant gate at the southern border of Kun-Lai.

Shin called it the Gate of the August Celestials. He was stunned that it was open. Apparently, the barrier had been closed for thousands of years. Beyond the wall lay a place long shrouded in myth and legend: the Vale of Eternal Blossoms. It was a land very few people had *ever* set foot in.

In other words, the vale was an explorer's dream come true, and I knew I *had* to go there next.



Entry Nine: The Vale of Eternal Blossoms

The Vale of Eternal Blossoms was like its own little world hidden in the heart of Pandaria. A warm, calming breeze washed over hills of golden grass. Leaves and blossoms rained down from the trees, filling the air with a sweet smell. Instead of getting all dry and crunchy like normal leaves and petals, the ones that fell stayed fresh and soft for days.

A lot of the things I saw seemed to fit with the legends I'd heard of the vale. Cubs across Pandaria grew up learning myths about the place. One of the most popular stories was that the region was home to a handful of magical pools. Some people even claimed that the waters could perform miracles! There was definitely something special to the vale, and I wasn't the only one who wanted to see if the tales concerning the region were true.

Dozens of pandaren refugees flocked to the golden valley. Almost all of them had been driven out of Kun-Lai Summit, their homes destroyed by the youngol. The poor folks brought as much as they could carry with them, which in most cases was only the clothes on their backs. If they were lucky, they also had a yak or two, some old family heirlooms, and enough food to last them maybe a couple of days.

I joined two refugees—a pandaren named Buwei and his son, Little Fu—who were traveling by themselves. They were both pretty quiet until I put the ol' Stormstout charm to good use and learned more about them. It turned out Buwei and his cub had lost *everything* in a youngol attack in Kun-Lai... even the rest of their family. Now, the father and son were headed to Mistfall Village, a place in the vale that had become a refuge for many of Kun-Lai's pandaren.

Like all of the refugees, Buwei and Little Fu believed they'd find peace in the valley. And who could blame them? Until a few days ago, the vale had been blocked off from other

areas of Pandaria for thousands of years. All that time, the great celestials had watched over it closely. The legendary beings handpicked special caretakers—the Golden Lotus—to help them keep an eye on the vale. The pandaren I met said it was a huge honor to be chosen as a member of the sacred order, but the whole thing seemed a little weird to me. I couldn't imagine a godlike creature showing up one day and asking me to leave my friends and family behind to spend my life in a secret valley.

All that aside, I understood why the refugees were coming to the vale. With the celestials and the Golden Lotus around, it was probably the safest place in Pandaria.

At least, it *used* to be.

Buwei told me that the vale had once been the seat of the mogu empire. Recently, the big stinkers had found a way back inside the valley and were trying to reclaim their old turf. It was hard to believe that the mogu had ruled over a place as beautiful as the vale, but statues of them were everywhere!

Despite the news of the mogu, Buwei and Little Fu cheered up as the days wore on. I wished I could take credit for that, but the honor went to my bandicoot, Shisai. The furball had gotten over most of his anger issues once we'd left Kun-Lai. But just in case, I taught the two refugees how to calm him down if he got a little cranky, using treats and chew toys. Buwei and his son played with the bandicoot a lot. Having him around must've taken their minds off of everything they'd lost, especially for Little Fu. The only time he smiled was when he held Shisai. Pretty soon the cub became a master at taking care of the critter.

When we finally reached Mistfall Village, I was surprised at how big and lively it was. The village's stone streets looked ancient and worn, but many of the buildings seemed new. Buwei said that Mistfall used to be smaller, just a few structures here and there occupied by

the Golden Lotus, but the first wave of pandaren from Kun-Lai had quickly expanded the place.

The refugees hadn't wasted any time making themselves at home. The sounds of pandaren chatting, laughing, and singing filled every corner of the village. Most of the carts they'd brought had been broken apart and rebuilt into makeshift tables and market stalls. Leftover scraps were used as firewood to cook big boiling pots of green curry fish or to roast skewers of peanut chicken. Now and then I saw sprites—like the ones back on the Wandering Isle—peek down from atop the roofs. The mischievous little guys watched the refugees go about their business before darting out of sight.

Visiting Mistfall was great, but I still wanted to explore the rest of the vale. I set off early the next morning. Buwei was sleeping. So was Little Fu. The cub was smiling, his arms wrapped tight around Shisai. I'd been planning on taking the bandicoon with me, but after seeing how happy he made Buwei's son, how could I? After everything Little Fu had been through, he deserved Shisai. Plus, I was getting tired of finding the bandicoon's hair in my clothes, food, and tea every day. At least... that was what I told myself to keep from blubbering like a baby as I wrote a good-bye note for the father and son. Then, I made my way out of the village.

Just after sunrise, someone—or *something*—started following me through the vale. I felt it in my gut, but what really tipped me off was the weird stench that hung in the air like incense. It reminded me of Ryshan and the other anglers in the Krasarang Wilds: a mix of sweaty fur and fish parts. I tracked the smell down and caught my stalker hiding behind a big boulder. At first I thought it was my granny Mei, but after a closer look I realized the thing wasn't as hairy as she was. Not by a long shot.

It was a grumple. I'd seen the strange creatures in Kun-Lai, but I'd never met one of them up close. They were expert mountain climbers and trackers with an incredible sense of smell. Traveling around the hostile mountains made them pretty superstitious, and they had a habit of carrying charms (like coins or rabbit feet) called luckydos. Grummles even took on the names of their favorite luckydo, which in the case of my new friend also explained the stink...

"Messenger Fishtail at your service!" the grumple said. "Chen Stormstout sent me to find you, but it was most difficult. I followed for many days making sure *you were you*. Not enough stink. You need a better luckydo."

"Or you could've just asked me who I was," I replied.

"A grumple always trusts his nose above all else."

He handed me a scroll addressed from Uncle Chen. Between the ale stains and bits of spicy tofu splattered across the parchment, I learned that he'd finally gotten off his butt and left the brewery. Not only that, he'd found *more* Stormstouts in the Sunset Brewgarden, some kind of settlement in a region that he cryptically called the Dread Wastes. He told me to meet him at one of the guard towers along the Serpent's Spine, the great wall that stretched across western Pandaria.

And Li Li, Uncle Chen wrote at the end of the letter, whatever happens, do not go to the other side of the wall! It is extremely dangerous there. Just stay put when you reach the guard tower.

The fact that he didn't mention the way I'd run off without his permission made me nervous. Something big was happening down in the Dread Wastes if he was going to let that slide. As much as I regretted leaving the vale, I knew that Uncle Chen needed me. And, well, I *really* wanted to walk on the wall.

"Come, come!" Messenger Fishtail pointed west, where the Serpent's Spine ran across the vale's edge. "I will lead you to the wall, but we must hurry. East winds are blowing. That means good luck and safe travels!"

Even from far away the Serpent's Spine looked *huge*. I'd first seen the barrier in the Valley of the Four Winds. From that moment on, I'd been hoping to one day gaze out across Pandaria from the top.

Well, that day had finally come.



Entry Ten: The Townlong Steppes

I'd heard a legend once that the Serpent's Spine was made from billions of stones.

Yes. Billions.

At the time, I thought it was just crazy talk. But when I finally stood on the great wall and saw how big it was, I started to believe the story. The Serpent's Spine stretched to the south like a giant winding snake, so far that I couldn't see where it ended. The top was wide enough that you could've driven a few carts side by side and still had room for a fat pandaren like Uncle Chen to walk between them. Some parts of the barrier were newly rebuilt, the stones flat and precisely cut. Other areas were rough and craggy, weathered by the elements and covered in gouges from past battles.

Being at the Serpent's Spine was a dream come true, especially after all the time I'd spent getting there. Based on detailed instructions from Uncle Chen, the grumple messenger Fishtail had led me to one of the wall's guard towers way out in Kun-Lai. Once we finally made it to the wall, I understood why we'd taken such a roundabout route.

Uncle Chen had arranged an escort to meet me there... a member of the Shado-pan!

The fellow's name was Min. For generations, his mysterious order had stood watch on the Serpent's Spine, protecting Pandaria from nasties like the mantid. He dressed like most of

the other Shado-pan I'd seen: lightly armored, with a wide hat tilted low over his eyes and a scarf wrapped around his face. He didn't talk much, but the stuff he did tell me was pretty interesting. Min said that every stone on the wall had a story: tales of where Shado-pan guardians had fended off attackers, sometimes sacrificing their own lives to uphold their sacred duty.

It started raining as we made our way south. Instead of forming into big puddles, the water traveled through grooves in the stonework and then cascaded off the sides of the wall like thousands of tiny waterfalls. I was admiring the barricade's architecture when I noticed something odd about Min. He always seemed to keep his eyes fixed to the west, as if doing so was second nature for him. The land in that direction was known as the Townlong Steppes, a place of open, grassy hills and rocky outcroppings. Here and there, huge trees (called kypari) towered into the sky. Some of them looked as tall as the Serpent's Spine.

Townlong was a rugged land inhabited by rugged folk: the yaungol. Min told me that in years past, you could gaze out from the wall and see giant groups of the shaggy nomads roaming the hills. Now, the area looked deserted. Vultures hovered in the air, flying over the smoldering wreckage of yaungol camps.

War had come and gone in Townlong. It all started when the mantid had invaded the region, causing the yaungol to flee into Kun-Lai and begin destroying pandaren villages. The sha had also influenced the brutes, making them more violent than usual. Eventually, the pandaren and their allies had defeated the yaungol.

"I harbor no hate for yaungol," Min said. "The Shado-pan do only what we must to protect Pandaria. Emotion plays no part in our actions. We train to keep our feelings in check so that they do not control us. But take heart, little one. Those nomads are survivors. Their culture will endure. Most of all, I hope that they learn from these events."

Min didn't say anything else during the rest of our journey, which was fine by me. I had a lot to think about. I'd wanted the yaungol to be punished for the terrible things they'd done in Kun-Lai, but after what I'd seen in Townlong, I didn't know how to feel. Should I be happy or sad?

By the time we reached the guard tower where Uncle Chen was supposed to meet us, the rain had stopped and the clouds had parted. The good weather lifted my spirits... until I noticed my uncle wasn't there. The Shado-pan guards who usually stood watch at the tower were gone too.

Before I could ask Min where everyone was, the mantid attacked.

The bugs had been waiting for us, clinging to the outer part of the Serpent's Spine. Dozens of them suddenly leapt over the side and circled us. They clustered to the north, south, and east, cutting off our escape and forcing me and Min against the edge of the wall overlooking Townlong. I'd fought the mantid back in the Valley of the Four Winds, but that didn't make

seeing them again any easier. Their weird antennae, mandibles, and parchment-thin wings made my skin crawl.

Min cut through a few of the bugs with his spear. He stabbed, parried, and dodged as if he knew what the mantid were going to do before they did it. I jumped forward to help, but he held me back.

"We have secret caches of supplies hidden near the guard towers," he said calmly, even as he twirled his spear and knocked away a group of mantid approaching his flank. "Look for a stone with a snarling tiger carved into it. The Shado-pan emblem. Move it aside and take the rope from within."

I found one of those blocks near his feet and pried it up with my staff. Beneath the stone was a wide chamber filled with bags of dried food and a thick rope. As Min held off the mantid, he ordered me to tie the line around his waist and then throw the other end over the side of the wall.

After that, he told me to climb down.

I was a little freaked out. Descending the colossal Serpent's Spine was one thing, but doing it while my anchor was fighting a small army of mantid was another. Also, what would I find when I got to the ground? I remembered the cryptic message Uncle Chen had written

to me: *And Li Li, whatever happens, do not go to the other side of the wall! It is extremely dangerous there.*

More than all that, leaving Min behind felt wrong. But what else could I do? He was a Shado-pan and a monk of the highest order. He knew what he was doing, and if I wanted to earn his respect, I had to follow his lead.

So, I climbed. The whole way down I could hear the clash of Min's spear against mantid swords and armor. I kept hoping he would peer over the side and tell me the battle was finished. He didn't.

As I neared the ground, the line suddenly went slack. Someone had cut the rope. I fell and landed in a thorny bush growing alongside the Serpent's Spine. I stayed there without moving, fearing the worst. I breathed a sigh of relief when Min finally poked his head over the wall and started yelling.

The distance between us made it almost impossible to hear what he was saying. From what I could tell, he'd killed the mantid, but the last one had sliced through the rope. Min kept pointing south and flailing his arms like he was trying to explain something else to me. He was a great monk (one of the best I'd ever seen), but he couldn't perform a gesture to save his life. All I knew was that staying put would be a bad idea. With the rope cut, there was no way back up the wall. If the mantid had attacked there, more of the bugs were probably creeping around, just waiting to launch another ambush.

Townlong seemed a lot more dangerous from the ground. The grass was oddly cold to the touch. The clear sky had disappeared behind a layer of dark clouds. Thunder boomed overhead. All the hills and giant boulders in the area were perfect hiding spots for beasts that might want to eat me.

But Uncle Chen was my biggest concern. Where was he? Why hadn't he shown up? He wouldn't have forgotten. The thought that the mantid had done something to him crossed my mind, but I knew he was too tough for the bugs. He would've smashed them to pieces with one paw tied behind his back (or, more likely, holding a mug of ale).

I decided to head south for the Dread Wastes and try to find the Sunset Brewgarden on my own. I was guessing that the folks there would know what had happened to Uncle Chen, or where he'd gone.

It was a long shot, but from where I stood, that was the only option I had left.



Entry Eleven: The Dread Wastes

The first time I'd ever been afraid—*really* terrified—was back on the Wandering Isle. I was just a little cub, and I'd gone to the Great Library to read the *Book of the Turtle*. A few pages in, I spilled a pot of ink onto the parchment. I tried wiping the stains off, but that only made things worse. So I freaked out, stuffed the book into a dusty corner of the library, and hoped it would stay a secret forever.

For the next three days, I lived in terror, sure that I'd get caught. I could barely eat or sleep. I hardly ever left my room. The fear had taken over me like one of the evil forest sprites in Granny Mei's scary stories. At the end of the third day, the library caretakers figured out what I'd done. (Luckily, the book was a copy they kept on hand.) As punishment, my pop forced me to write the "Song of Liu Lang" lyrics a few thousand times, but that didn't bother me much. The worst part had been those three horrible days.

I'd never been that afraid again... until I stepped into the Dread Wastes, homeland of the mantid. I entered the region farther away from the Serpent's Spine than I liked. A huge ravine separated the Townlong Steppes from the Dread Wastes. I'd headed west along the chasm until I'd found a natural bridge—a giant hollowed-out tree trunk—that I could use to cross over.

The Sha of Fear had turned the wastes into a weird mirror image of Townlong. The terrain was the same—grassy hills, rocks, and towering kypari trees—but everything seemed

strange and unnatural. A clump of dark clouds twisted in a big angry swirl overhead. The sky around that glowed with a ghostly light. Splotches of white and black sha energy bubbled up all over the ground. They reminded me of the ink stains on the *Book of the Turtle*. As a matter of fact, every time I breathed or took a step, a chill went up my spine, and I felt as if I was reliving those three days of terror.

I wanted to run. I would've if Uncle Chen hadn't been on my mind. I *had to* find the Sunset Brewgarden.

The more I focused on the place, the more I calmed down. I kept repeating the name in my head as I made my way to the base of a kypari tree (called Kor'vess, as I later learned). The exposed roots were so big they curved over me like massive archways. Bits of shimmering amber drifted off the branches, floating through the air like lazy fireflies. Here and there I saw vaulted doorways and honeycomb windows built into the kypari's trunk. There was something insect-like about the architecture, and I realized the mantid must've created the structures. The bugs lived *inside* the trees!

Luckily, I didn't see any mantid around—not any living ones, at least. Bug corpses were everywhere, as if some kind of battle had taken place. Still, I played it safe and kept to the shadows of the kypari roots, looking for clues that would point me in the direction of the brewgarden.

My first break came when I found the remains of a wooden cask. It was definitely pandaren-made. Drops of bright amber surrounded the debris. Then it hit me: were the pandaren who lived in the Dread Wastes hunting for kypari sap? It made sense. The mantid used amber for all sorts of things, from creating weapons to building their homes. I'd even heard that the gooey stuff had healing properties. In other words, it would make the perfect ingredient for a batch of rare ale.

It took me the better part of an hour to spot the brewgarden at another kypari tree near Kor'vess. Pandaren dressed in light armor lumbered around the rugged settlement. Steam spiraled out of cauldrons filled with boiling barley and hops. Globbs of sap dripped down from the tree into waiting barrels. All in all, the place had a cozy feel, even if it was a little rough around the edges.

A few steps into the brewgarden, I heard a familiar voice.

"... Shado-pan last saw her heading toward the Dread Wastes," Uncle Chen was saying. I spotted him near the back of the settlement, standing next to three other pandaren.

"Then what are we waiting for?" someone replied. She was an older lady, her hair tied up in two buns. She kicked at a fat pandaren who was snoozing on the ground. "Get up, Big Dan! We can't afford to lose another Stormstout."

"Looking for me?" I interrupted.

All of their heads turned at once. The surprise on Uncle Chen's face was priceless.

"Li Li!" He scooped me up and gave me a big hug. Suddenly all my fear melted away. I started to apologize for leaving the brewery without asking, but Uncle Chen stopped me.

"How could I be angry at you for running off to explore?" he said. "That's what I've done my whole life. I'm just glad you're safe."

Uncle Chen explained why he hadn't met me at the Serpent's Spine. The mantid had attacked spots across the great wall, blocking his way. Once the bugs had been defeated, he'd found the Shado-pan monk Min, who then had told him what'd happened to me. My uncle had just returned to the brewgarden, and he was in the middle of organizing a search party.

A search party full of *Stormstouts*! Their names were Han, Mama, and Big Dan.

"You made it through Townlong and the Dread Wastes all by yourself?" Han asked me.

"Of course she did!" Mama pinched my cheek. "She's a Stormstout, isn't she?"

Big Dan snorted, sat up, and rubbed his eyes. I got the idea that this much movement was rare for him. He stared at me in silence before finally saying, "She... she looks just like Evie."

Mama, Uncle Chen, and Han nodded and lowered their heads. When I asked who that Evie person was, they led me out of the brewgarden, down to the ravine bordering the Dread Wastes. At the edge of the chasm, a stone memorial had been set into the ground. It was dedicated to Evie.

Evie Stormstout.

She'd died while hunting out in the Dread Wastes, killed by the sha or mantid (or maybe a combination of both). Uncle Chen had been the one to find her. I'd never met the girl, but I missed her. If Big Dan said I looked like Evie, did that mean our personalities were the same too? Could we have been good friends, or even something like sisters?

The sha and mantid had ruined any chance of me answering those questions. I was angry, not just about Evie, but about everything I'd seen during my journeys through Pandaria. In one way or another, the sha had stirred up trouble across the entire continent. How many more innocent folks would die like my cousin?

"I'm taking you back to the Valley of the Four Winds," Uncle Chen said. "You should stay there until the sha and the mantid are dealt with. It's not safe to explore a wasteland like this."

"No," I replied. Exploring was the *last* thing on my mind. "There's a time to explore and there's a time to stand your ground and fight. You wrote that to me in one of your letters. Well, I'm following your advice. I want to stay and help."

I was afraid Uncle Chen would refuse and send me to the valley anyway, but after a few moments a smile tugged at the corners of his chubby face. "Hmph. Spoken like a true wanderer."

With that, we headed back to the brewgarden. There was a lot of planning to do. Maybe I wouldn't be fighting against the sha and the mantid on the front lines, but I'd do whatever I could to help, even if I had to cut bandages or cook meals. I'd make sure that Evie's death meant something... that Buwei and Little Fu could return to their family home and start a new life... and that everyone else I'd met on my travels could live free from the sha's influence.

I'd make sure there was still a Pandaria left to explore when all this was over.

—Li Li Stormstout