

Water Dancer: Susan Cerniglia

Morgan had been looking for that blasted spell scroll all morning. She couldn't believe she'd lost the gift Nais had given her. "Great work, Morgan," she mumbled bitterly. "'Tis only an ancient waterdancing spell. No reason to NOT lose it around thy camp site."

She ground her teeth in frustration looking everywhere for that blasted scroll. She looked under her bedroll, all around the fire pit, and even checked everywhere she'd hiked. Finally in frustration she put her hands on her hips where her right hand found something hard and metallic. Looking down, she saw a metallic scroll case with the effigy of waves done all across it where the sun's reflecting like made it glitter like the sea.

Oh. Right.

Glad in that moment to be travelling on her own - per usual, truly - Morgan quickly packed the things she'd tossed about in frustration and headed for Bristol where she would meet with her fellow Guardians to help a new generation of heroes prepare to face this upcoming Draco Disciple threat.

The road was harsh that day and littered with what looked to be painted wood shards, cast-offs from a wagon most likely, its remnants decorated at times by fading flowers. Only an idiot would go gallivanting around the woods damaging their wagon like this. Just as Morgan began to wonder how a wagon could sustain this much damage and keep going, suddenly and at the edge of the wood in the lush green field beyond that lay against the shore, the orange glow of a campfire shone.

As she neared the light, she realized the smell of the fire was not that of wood alone but of bodies as well. Morgan sprinted forward toward the destruction hoping her senses were wrong. Her sense of sight however, like her sense of smell, was spot on. She saw the red wagon ablaze, and her heart instantly sank as she realized that it was a gypsy wagon on fire. But this was no ordinary wagon. This was a gypsy wagon belonging to the one of the Bands of the Twisted Claw.

There appeared to be no survivors to the campsite Morgan knew as approached, no longer racing toward the acrid smoke. The camp was rife with the bodies of women and children. It appeared that any men that were there had already been taken. Pain scorched its way through Morgan's heart as she saw the effects of an attack she could not prevent. Specifically, a child reaching out for a ragged looking bear, eyes still wide with fright.

"Draco Disciples..." Morgan murmured on a teary breath. "How could you do this? To women and children? Have you no shame?" Her voice became a scream in the empty glade.

As Morgan surveyed the destruction before her eyes a memory flashed to her mind of the summer since past...

“But Nais, I don’t understand the point of this fighting. If the Lunar Tribe is about making peace with the world around us, should we not therefore seek compromise with the Draco?” Morgan asked of her paragon. It was a breezy day, mild with the last breath of summer, while the two spoke beneath the tree that stood sentry over the Tribe’s camp.

“We in the Tribe have learned the hard way that evil can never be bargained with. Every respect you show them is a step closer to your own doom. Some evils need to be destroyed,” Nais said.

“You sound like Ignis,” Morgan countered in a tone of mockery and pain. “All evil must be destroyed! Leave none alive! Burn them! Just like the Order of the Sun whose quest for glory killed all I loved.”

“Nay, dear one. My Brother seeks to destroy the Darkness of the world where evil hides. He doesn’t know that not all that dwell in the shadows are foes. The Order’s dedication to fighting the dark is based on my brother’s fear of She who rules it,” Nais continued softly.

“Then why do we fight these soldiers of darkness? Perhaps they have a right to be so hateful!” The soon-to-be-guardian paused, taking in a breath. Her tone quieted, though she kept her stubborn lift of her chin. “I do not see the need in more bloodshed.”

“Perhaps, they do. And I commend your wisdom for seeing that not all conflicts need violent ends. But alas my little waterdancer, you will see one day that sometimes action is needed for what the Draco do to this world. And on that day I pray you will still keep this wisdom about you. Sometimes death can be a powerful motivator. Sometimes death is the answer indeed.” Nais placed a gentle hand on Morgan’s shoulder.

Morgan saw now that this was no time for words. As she saw the bodies that had been slashed and burned, she realized that she needed to fight this evil where it lived. She saw in the eyes of the dead the eyes of those evil had taken from her. The brothers she had loved, the soul of poor Druscilla who’d just learned to love, the life of the only man she may have ever truly loved - foolish though he was.

She’d run from those faces long enough. She now understood what she had to do. She had to

stop the Draco Disciples.

A sudden sound disturbed the silence when a man in the black cloak stumbled out of the wagons. He grasped at a small dagger in his right thigh until his shadowed gaze fell on Morgan. A Draco assassin left behind when he got wounded. Fury hot in her blood, Morgan decided to teach him a lesson about murdering children.

“Gix Omniak!” She shouted the curse of Edged Blood.

The man’s vein at the base of his throat pushed out, a hardened lump that caused red spikes to jut through the man’s skin at different parts of his body. The Disciple quickly crumpled to the ground, screaming breathlessly. Morgan looked into his fear stricken eyes, whose pupils were dilated with agony, and felt satisfied.

“Listen well Disciple, for thine own death shall not be the only to occur this night,” Morgan spat at him. “Tell me... where art thy Lady’s ship? I believe she should be docking at Bristol’s port soon for the Queen’s Festival there. I would know where she is that I may dispose of her once and for all.”

The Draco coughed up blood as he was replying to Morgan. “You think... you can... stop her? With what? Your...Paragon’s power... is useless against my Lady. Tso will crush you... insect.”

The Draco then pointed his finger at a large ship on the water and breathed his last.

“That may be so, but some things cannot go unpunished,” Morgan replied, gazing at the water and reliving another memory...

“Careful Morgan! Careful! God’s Blood!” came Ignis’ stern voice, “You could kill yourself doing that you know!”

Morgan sighed at the Fire Paragon’s approach, tone dry. “Oh, really? And how can a simple waterdancer spell kill me? I’d rather think ‘twas thine own element that spelled doom for those who use it.”

Ignis’ eyes narrowed on her. “That’s no simple splash girl! Maneuvers that complex are only meant to be used in dire circumstances indeed. To channel that much elemental power through thyself risks thine own life!”

“Let me guess,” Morgan replied, spitting out the rejoinder lightning fast. “Such power was never

meant for mortals to wield and to do such risks the corruption of my soul for water is too dark an element to be trusted?"

"Thou art as brazen as thou art witless girl," Ignis shouted back at her. "I am merely trying to warn thee that if you take in too much of an elemental power it will overcome thee and thou shall die. But nay, 'tis always some joke at my expense. Continue with thine foolish practicing if thou would. I shall teach thee no more. This is Nais' craft. Mayhaps her philosophy of 'You will know when to use this gift' applies here."

Coming back into herself, Morgan realized that now was the time to use her power. All of it. Tso's power had grown tremendously, this much was true. But the same could not be said for Tso's resources. They could be burned, buried, blown away, or drowned. They didn't share in her invulnerability to Morgan's powers.

"My child," Nais' voice came into her head. "You know what must be done. You must weaken Tso."

She knew. Morgan made quick strides over the ground that separated her from the distant water. Close enough, she drew a circle in the at the shore line and began to chant:

By the waves of the ocean so pure
And the great Northern Winds' mighty gail
Take me to my foe so that they may endure
The power of flames, boulders, winds, and hail.

And thus do I with Paragons' power
Meet Lady Tso to battle in this hour

The wind around Morgan swept her hair away from her face as the waves before her foamed and crashed hard at her feet. Soon the howling wind around her met only the waves that, in a single breath, pulled her beneath. The tide that that pulled Morgan under left the winds as a cocoon of air around her, protecting her.

It happened so fast and with so much rushing and fury that Morgan didn't realize what was going on until the watery bubble around her had unfurled and the winds died down, showing her that she was on the deck of the ship she had seen on shore. The deck was empty, which seemed unusual to Morgan who'd been on a ship once or twice in her travels before. Ropes and masts seemed freshly attended to but only half so as if everyone decided to suddenly have the urge to leave the top of the ship and go below. Beyond, a few other ships rocked in the waters, sails

fluttering in the wind.

“Well, well, well. I didn’t believe it when I saw the waves rise this morn and felt the wind change, but by the Dark Queen’s bounty I do see it to be true. A Guardian come to slay me. I had hoped that exterminating those foul gypsy bands would lure some of thee out of hiding.” The Lady’s smile was too twisted to be beautiful. “And I see thou art from the Lunar Tribe. I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure of mangling one of thine lot as of yet. Oh, fortune is with me indeed.”

“You have committed sins beyond sin, Tso. And for this I will not let you and your Disciples leave this place.”

“And you think thou canst stop me? Nothing can stop me, my poppet. Your Paragons have failed time and time again to stop me. The Order of the Sun itself, whose heroes are known throughout the land for defeating Draco Disciples, has fallen before my might, its mages no match for my power. What can you do?” She asked it as a taunt, disapproving as a governess to a child.

“I am no hero of the Order of the Sun. I am of the Lunar Tribe, and only a fool would challenge our magics.”

“For certes?” Tso Laughed “I have the greatest assassins and warriors from across the land. Not to mention those aboard this ship, such as MinMei Lyn and Thomas Wisseu. I could have them cut you to pieces before you finish your little rhyme. I don’t know what you came here to do darling, but all thou art going to do is die.”

“That’s beside the point,” Morgan murmured, even as her eyes rolled into the back of her head.

“Nais, Great Mother of the Seas
She who knows no age
Dispatch this Evil with ease
Show them Water’s age.

Kethemos fo Vignar’s OMNIAK!!!”

Whirlpools began to form in the water beneath another of the ships carrying the Draco Disciples to Bristol’s shore and surged upward, cracking hull and rigging alike in their way to forming giant spires of water that reached into the heavens above and declared their supremacy.

Morgan looked then to Tso, with her eyes glowing a brilliant azure, who looked fearfully around as if expecting the Water Paragon herself to appear. Screams were heard from the ships as they

gave way to Morgan's spell.

"Show them, my little waterdancer," came Nais' voice urging Morgan on. "Show them the power of Water that this world has forgotten."

Head tilting back, Morgan began to turn. She performed a dance more ancient than any society, as ancient as the seas themselves. As she performed this dance, the lost-and-then-found-again scroll glowed with a silent blue light at her hip.

Before she realized it, Morgan began whispering words in an ancient tongue not her own but weighted with strange familiarity. Tso, turning from the destruction, whipped back to Morgan mid-spell and plunged a dagger into her heart. The dagger's blade was met with a splash as it gave way to water where flesh should have been. Tso toppled forward to the deck, falling through the Guardian's form.

"Fool!" she shrieked, fingers grasping at the deck and dagger. "You've killed only yourself! You've reached too far into your power. Now you shall join with the elements you love so much."

"Sometimes death is a powerful motivator. Someone needs to stand up to you. I have weakened you, Tso. For the lives you have taken this night and all the lives of past and future nights, I have taken these others from you. You'll be no match for the Draco Hunters now. Enjoy those few you have left for I've done worse than kill you. I've left you alone."

And with a laugh ever on her lips, Morgan became one with her waters and cascaded into the sea.