

Roen's Tale

Chapter 4

By A.R.G. aka Sovereign Kyle

You can reach or follow me on;

<http://www.furaffinity.net/user/sovereignkyle/>

<https://www.weasyl.com/~sovereignkyle/>

<https://twitter.com/ARG00001975/>

sovereignkyle@gmail.com

*All named characters herein are © and my property,
please do not redistribute without permission.*

Packing our things, Rami asks, "Where're we going now?"

I climb up onto my jata's saddle. "Dendros."

"Which way?"

Amsel and I both answer, "Garrent."

"Why Garrent?" Sarn growls.

I look at Amsel, seeing if he's going to answer first. He nods to me, so I say, "Eastern pass collapsed last month. It's now too narrow for jata. Vit told me this morning that he's had to divert the Three Lands' ice shipments over Warrol peak."

"Why can't we go there?" he growls.

"Soft ground, the jata'll sink," I state. Sarn climbs up on the saddle that was added behind mine as I ask, "Why don't you want to go through Garrent?"

Sarn snarls, "It's haunted."

Amsel laughs, "That's why I want to go there. I want to see what's really going on."

Rami looks between us, then sighs, "Don't believe in ghosts?"

"Nope."

"I do," Sarn growls.

I sigh, "Never had a reason to. depending on what we find, I may change my mind."

Rami sighs and looks at Sarn, "Let's hope it's friendly, whatever it is."

Seeing everyone ready, I prod my jata into motion and follow the west road to Garrent. Despite the village being abandoned for two hundred years, the roads to and from it are still used. Most people, however will take the outer roads around it, rather than venture into the village itself.

With plenty of time, and a new curiosity, I pull out my notebooks. After studying the half page I got from Vit, I realize that there's a pattern. That tells me, it was indeed written in code. Not having enough to try to decipher it, I put that back in my satchel. I

then open Vit's notebook and start reading, hoping to find more details to add to my own notes on how to find the dig.

Seeing the road ahead split, one fork north, and the other south, I put up my notes and get out my telescope. Seeing roofs in the distance, I call out, "Garrent ahead!"

Behind me, Sarn mutters, "Great."

The road into the village is overgrown but once we get into the village itself, there is little growth. Dragons and large bugs scatter as we approach, and I quickly note that both Rami and Amsel are standing on their jata, bows at the ready.

This village is just like the old section where I live, a fact I find both comforting and unnerving. Wind snakes between the huts, making the doors creak. The little dragons protest our arrival with their squawks and hisses. If it wasn't close evening, instead of noon, this place would be very eerie.

A very loud squawk from ahead startles the jata and they stop walking and try to pull themselves into their shells. I hop down from my mount and look into the nearly closed head opening. "Relax, it was just a sound."

My comment is met with a muffled, "Mrrrff."

I turn to Amsel, "Well, what do you want to do?"

Before he can answer, a wail and a few metallic sounds come from the same direction. He looks that way for a moment, then states, "I, want to see what's making that sound."

After checking my short sword and daggers, I pull my staff from the jata and cautiously start towards the source. Amsel and Rami keep their bows ready and Sarn reluctantly brings up the rear.

After a few more indiscernible sounds, I realize that it's coming from the council hut. I wave everyone over, "It's coming out of the council hut," I whisper. "If we stay low and quiet, we should be able to sneak up on it." Rami and Amsel both nod as Sarn frowns.

We move forward as a unit, keeping below windows and darting across doorways and open spaces. Arriving at the hut, we creep around to the front. Rami and Amsel both take up positions at the windows, while Sarn and I kneel ready by the door. I set my staff aside and quietly pull my short sword. With a slight nod to Sarn, I signal my ready. He waits until another sound comes out of the hut to open the door.

As I push through the door, Sarn and Amsel both stand at the windows. Expecting to find something, I stop short in surprise as I discover it's an empty room.

Sarn runs into me, and also stops abruptly, "What the...?"

The others come into the room, equally shocked. Amsel frowns, "This is almost as disappointing as loosing that jata when the bridge collapsed."

I step forward and open the door to the council chamber itself. Seeing nothing in there I turn around and put my sword away, "Nothing in there either."

A sudden deafening whoop and screech drive us out of the hut. Sarn snarls back at the hut, "Not empty after all."

Feeling thoroughly rattled, me mostly because I didn't see anything in either room, we head back to the jata. After moving them to the southern stables, and harvesting some of the nearby keyoe ferns for them to eat, we setup our bedrolls in an empty house next door.

While the others settle in, I take the opportunity to wander around and check out the huts. I look through the windows or doors of a few, and not seeing anything, not even furniture, I move on. After passing several by, I come to one, with a caved in roof.

Entering, I find that the roof has cracked the interior walls, leaving much of the internal structure exposed. With this hut setup much like mine, I realize that it's the wall between the bath and kitchen, and find myself suddenly curious.

Walking into the bathroom, I find the tub's faucet lying in it. As I examine it, I realize that it's just the two on/off knobs and the spigot. There are no pipes, wires, or anything attached. Puzzled, I look into the wall where it came from and find nothing more than a backing plate where it was attached, there are no pipes. Both curious and puzzled, I turn the cold water knob on the faucet.

Receiving a cold spray in the face, I drop the faucet and dive out of the room. I reflexively shake myself dry as I get up. After a brief moment, I cautiously look back into the room, and see the faucet still running, laying on the floor, spraying the wall with water. I pick up the faucet and turn the water off. Still not believing what I just saw, I curiously turn it on and off a couple times.

Shaking my head, I put the spigot in my pack and head back outside. After passing by several more homes, I turn and head down a street towards the council hut. Hearing the, now familiar sounds coming from it, I realize that, whatever is making them, isn't able to leave the hut.

Staying clear of the council hut, I head into the library to look around. Finding the shelves devoid of anything other than dust, I spend some time just wandering around inside. I'm careful not to disturb anything, it's a habit you develop as a scout.

By the time I walk out of the library, it's getting dark and I head towards the hut we're using. As I pass by the council hut for the second time, I hear the sounds quiet, apparently trying to be more coherent. I stop and listen, seeing if it becomes anything discernable.

After a few minutes, I still can't make anything out so I start walking again. I don't get far when a familiar door marking gets my attention. "Treasury?"

I look down the street, and seeing no one outside down the street, I head in. I carefully walk around, watching where I step. After a few moments, I find the vault.

I slowly open its door, and find myself surprised. Thousands of coins literally cover the floor. I stoop to look closely at them, and see that they're all clean, protected from the dusts of time by the vault. I pick up a silver banded copper and look closely at it.

While bearing the mark of Arcania, its secondary mark is for Garrent. I sigh, these coins are rarely seen, and collectors often pay more than their worth for them. I quickly collect two sets of the nine different coins and put them in one of the small pockets in my armor's right leg. The value of one set, will allow Railu and I to live comfortably for many years, as long as the rest of these aren't found.

I quietly close the vault door and exit the treasury. Finding that the sun has set, I quickly skirt along the buildings on my way back to the others.

"Hey, wake up."

Feeling some prodding, I sit up in the saddle. "What's up?"

Sarn points ahead, "I think we're almost there."

I quickly shake off the sleep and pull out my telescope. Looking ahead, I see that

he right, Gila Pass lies just within view. Not the safest way to cross this end of the Dero Ridge, but it cuts four days off the jata ride between Garrent and Lorholt.

Being a short distance ahead of both Rami and Amsel, I stop my jata at the base of the rocky slope and dismount. I start scouting up the path, checking to see how loose the rocks and gravel are. Since the jata have no claws, they'll slip if the slope is unstable.

After a few minutes, I come back down and nod, "It seems pretty stable,

Amsel looks up at the slope, then asks, "What about the other side?"

Sarn turns to him, "Oh, now you want to be careful?"

Rami chuckles as Amsel chides, "I'd hate to loose another jata."

"Won't loose a jata here, just won't be able to climb over if its too loose." I climb back on top, "I'm going first." I press the prod, and my jata starts walking up the slope. When I'm about halfway up, I hear Amsel tell Rami to start up.

Suddenly, I feel my jata slip a little. Sarn and I both turn to see a spray of rocks roll down behind us. Rami stops for a moment, waiting to see if we're going to come down too.

Hearing my jata huff, I look down at his head as it takes a bite of a nearby fern, and starts to walk again. I breath a slight sigh of relief as we reach the top, and I turn to wave them up, only to see Sarn already doing that. We proceed the short distance across the top and stop at the edge of the down slope to wait.

Rami seems to take his time, gently nudging his jata up the slope, as does Amsel. With nearly half the day gone to just getting up the slope, we decide to get down and make camp.

I start my jata over the crest, as it tilts, I feel Sarn grab the back of my saddle for support. My jata takes a few steps and looses it's footing. It lets out a terrified honk, and retracts into its shell, we begin to slide.

Sarn jumps to the ground and I hang on, as it slides down the hill. The ride is bumpy, and we manage to pick up enough speed to slide several meters across the flat, grassy ground at the bottom.

Sarn comes running up, "You alright?"

I jump to the ground, laughing, "What a ride!" I step around and look into the jata's shell, "You alright in there?"

A muffled moan is my only response, so I grab a nearby fern and poke it through the opening. He quickly opens up, as I pull the fern back out.

"Let's see if you got hurt." With a little more coaching, he comes all the way out and starts walking towards me. I let him have the food and quickly lie down to check his plastron.

Aside from the fresh tracks from the rocks as he slid over them, there are a few new gouges and a several dents. With a sigh, I quickly slide underneath and check the dents to see if his shell cracked. Finding no holes, I slide out from under, and quickly get to my feet.

Happy he's not hurt, I start rubbing the jata's head as the others come down the slope. Fortunately, both make it down without incident, and we setup camp. Sarn picks up the empty water bladders and heads off to find a stream. I quickly start a fire and Rami gets out the cookware. Before too long, we've eaten our fill of supper and turn in for the night.

We arrive in Lorholt late in the day, so we board the jata at the north stables and find an inn, then we head off to the markets. After trading off some of my collected goods, I find a café and sit down for a drink and dessert.

The waitress, a rather chipper red panda, comes around, “Hi ya! My name’s Niva. What would you like?”

“Burrowfield whiskey and cinnamon cake.” She nods, but before she can leave, I state, “Bring the bottle.”

She tilts her head slightly, but her smile doesn’t fade, “Quarter or half?”

I sigh, “I’ve still got a long road ahead, half.”

She nods curiously, as if understanding that something’s bothering me. “Alright. Be right back.” As she heads off, I watch her long, ringed tail gracefully trail behind her, and reflexively reach into my satchel and pull out the small box. I set the figuring on the table and sigh heavily. “I miss you, my love. If it wasn’t for the money I’d just go home.” Hearing a sigh, I turn and see the waitress with my order.

She looks at me, then at the figurine and sighs. “Ah, now I see.” She sets the bottle, cake, and a small glass on the table. “Your mate?”

I nod, “Yeah, back in Arroket.”

She pours me my first shot, and gives me a polite smile before she heading off for another customer.

I take the first shot, quickly and pour another. After taking a bite of the cake, I put the figurine away, and relax back in my chair. As I watch the waitresses work, I see Amsel and Rami sit at another table. It comes as no surprise when Rami makes a pass at, and touches Niva’s tail.

What does come as a surprise is her response: she smacks him, claws out. He quickly grabs a napkin and puts it over his, now bleeding, muzzle as he apologizes to her. Apparently not satisfied, she waves over another waitress, a female skunk, to wait on their table.

As she walks by me, I smile, “He deserved that.”

She scowls at me for a moment, but seeing me still looking at Rami, she relaxes. “Yes, he did.”

“I would normally be inclined to apologize for him, but he knows better than to behave like that. He just chooses to be that way.”

She hold the tray to her chest as she sits, “Why would someone choose to be that way?”

I shrug and lean forward, gently taking her hand into mine. As I start to clean his fur from her claws, I state, “He has a lot of coin, ego. I don’t know, really, but I think some part of him thinks it works...that and he likes fluffy tails.”

She wraps her tail around her waist and blushes. “So, why are you so nice?”

I smile, blushing slightly, “You remind me of my mate. Nice, polite, caring...at least to me, she is.”

I let her have her hand back, and she stands. “She’s lucky to have you.” She then bows slightly and heads off.

I lean back in the chair again and notice that Amsel and Rami are both staring my way. I shrug to them, then finish my cake and second shot. I stopper the bottle, drop it in my satchel, and drop a fifty coin on the plate as I turn to leave, knowing that it’ll more than cover the whiskey and cake, and leave plenty for a tip.

Once it get to my room, I take off my armor. My nose quickly tells me that I need to get it cleaned, so I stuff it in my pack. After grabbing a change of cloths, I head to the bath.

Having dropped of my armor with the smith, Amsel and I head out to the home of Shon's son, whom Amsel and Rami had located yesterday. Amsel steps up to the door and knocks. When the door opens, we're greeted by a male kit, who simply gawks at us.

A female's voice from inside calls, "Who is it?"

The kit doesn't move, so Amsel calls back, "We are looking for Shon's son. Is this his hut?"

When the female comes out from the hall, she looks at us blankly for a moment then calls out, "Zanny, company!"

He comes in from the back of the house and gives a suspicious look. He gently shoos the kit away as he asks, "Can I help you?"

Amsel smiles and nods, "We were hoping you could help us. We're looking for information your father had about a place called the Dig."

He gives us both a blank look, "I've never heard of it, well, not from my dad anyway."

Amsel looks at him and then me shocked. "He never told you about his trip to find it?"

"My dad didn't like to travel, pretty sure he'd have told me if he ever did."

Amsel scratches his chin, apparently at a loss, so I ask, "Could there have been another raccoon named Shon?"

Zanny shakes his head, "Not that I've ever heard."

I sigh and fish out the map that Kurro gave me. "Do you recognize any of these symbols?"

He looks at the map for a moment, then turns and points at something inside. "Yeah, there." I take a step in and look where he's pointing. "Dad painted that sometime before I was born, never did tell me what it was about, but it was the one thing he valued."

"May I take a closer look at it?"

He looks back at the female then shrugs, "I guess."

I step around the kit's toys and up to the painting. It's nothing really special, but I can tell that it's the same symbols that are on the map, just arranged where the verticals are staggered, creating a diamond like shape out of them. Despite this, I quickly see a pattern.

"Can I make a copy of this?"

He scratches his head in thought. "Why?"

"Maybe you could just sell it to them," the female offers. "We just don't see what your father saw in it."

Amsel doesn't hesitate, "I'll give you a hundred for it."

Zanny looks at the painting, then to me and back to Amsel, "Two."

I look to Amsel and shrug, "It's up to you."

He smiles, then nods, "Alright, two."

Zanny steps over by me and takes down the painting as Amsel counts out the coins and hands them to the female.

As we turn to leave, the kit grabs onto my leg, laughing. “Dessu wanna pway?” he asks.

I let myself chuckle at being caught off guard, and scrub his head, “I would, if I didn’t have work to do.”

He reluctantly lets me go and then latches onto his father. “Come on dad, wets go.”

After thanking them, Amsel and I head out the front door, as the kit drags his father out the back. When we’re a ways down the street, Amsel looks at me, “You’re sure this is the cipher.”

“It’s the only lead we have here. If I study it a while, I should be able to figure it out, already saw a pattern to the symbols. Just need to figure out what they mean.”

When he sees me eyeing the café where I ate last night, he pats me on the shoulder, “Go, have fun. This can wait.”

“Fun, what fun?”

He smiles and laughs, “The panda, you two seemed to hit it of well.”

I snort a laugh, “We were just talking, nothing more.”

“Whatever,” he waves a dismissive hand at me. “You had better luck than Rami did, and that made him jealous.”

I sigh and shake my head, letting it go. With a quick check of the sun’s position, I realize that it’s near lunch and head over for a bite. I manage to snag the same table I had before, and when Niva comes around, I order a meal. She seems pleased to see me in better spirits, despite being busy due to the lunch rush.

Not getting a chance to really talk with her, I glance her way often, and find that she’s paying more attention to me than the other patrons. When I finish my lunch, drop her tip as I leave, I give her a polite nod, and receive one, and a smile, in return.

After picking up my armor at the smith, I head to the inn. Seeing the painting on the table of the common room. I get out my notes and start working. Several minutes in, Rami walks in and sits across from me.

He looks at the painting and asks, “What, is this?”

“This is what Shon left his son. Apparently the only thing that he valued. The symbols match the ones on the map and half page that Vit had.”

He sighs, I though a cipher would tell you how to decode it. This...doesn’t.” He lifts the painting to look at and I see something that catches my attention.

“Let me see that.” I take it from him and hold it up in front of the window.

Seeing a shadow through the canvas, “What’s that?”

“That, is probably our cipher.” I set the painting face down on the table and start feeling the back of the canvas. “It’s a double canvas. Help me pry the frame apart.” We both pull out our daggers and start working on the double frame.

It takes us a couple minutes, but we manage to work the frames apart as Amsel comes in. “What are you two doing?” he barks.

I pull a piece of canvas from between the frames, “Wondering what this is.” As I unfold it, I see that it is the cipher we were hoping for. “Ha haa, yeah! We’ve got it.” Rami moves the painting aside as I lay out the cipher and start copying it into my notebook.

Amsel though, looks at it, “Take the art off the frame, see if we can sell it.” Rami nods and starts cutting the piece from it’s frame. He then rolls it and sticks it in my pack

with the scrolls.

“This should fetch a nice coin,” he states as he puts the outer frame back on the inner, leaving the clean canvas in place. He then gets up and heads out the door with it.

“Sarn, good. I need you to help me find something.”

They’re soon out of earshot and Amsel turns to me with a smug smirk on his face. “Made any progress with her yet?”

Caught by surprise, I jerk up from my work, “What!?”

“Come on, the waitress. You’re trying to tell me you’re not interested in her?”

“Will you just stop. She’s nice alright, but we’re not interested in each other that way.”

He smiles, “Are you sure?” and leaves it at that by leaving.

I glare after him for a minute, then turn back to copying the cipher.