

Village of Humans

by Kog Zadare

Chinese Landscape Painting

It must have been then and in those days and during that time when the grass and short brush, like so much amber and jade, emerged from the snow and the poet Li Po, who while traveling within the ten thousand crags of the Tanggula Mountains, looked up from his jar of transparent broomcorn wine and asked thoughtlessly "how is it that before now I have understood nothing of the true nature of poetry?" and then without further reflection he proceeded in the direction of the Yangtze river, downward from the highest plateau.

Nearby a small snow capped village of humans seemed to grow naturally out from the bits of waisted earth around the edges of a steep pass, a small distance from what was then the main road. Some yellow and red lanterns could be seen by the travelers along the pass. Once long ago the Emperor Ruizong, during his exile, had deigned to spend a night at the inn. It was said that some Yew trees were planted to mark the occasion, but either they were not sympathetic to the climate and had long since died or those who knew their right places had long since died. In any case, so far as one could tell, the village remained living.

The village looked to many travelers a bit like a hastily cooked carrot that was still covered in soil and added too early to a stew. After all, some of the little fences were always being torn down and rebuilt for no reason and the paths, half covered with snow, seemed all to incompletely and foolishly laid out. Of course those who had a more careful eye and a greater understanding, saw at once that the village was in fact very ancient, so much so that its origins were unknown. The humans that lived there were not much different than any others, though in that small place there were perhaps as many differing dreams in the heads of the few who lived there, as in the whole of China. Yet it is said that everyone knows how it is with human beings and that it is of little enough importance. Nearby the voices of three fox's, who were speaking amongst themselves, came from the direction of a high ridge which stood beyond the village.

Look at that sun, is it already days end? How the hours pass.

Brother, it will soon be the end of our lives. How quickly it all goes by.

Yes that's true. Now listen while I tell you what happened to me today, I met with a curious hare in a field of this Autumn's snow. He told me that he is on his way to the land of the spring lotus where grandfather rabbit dwells amidst the great court. He has already come a great distance from the hills and ravines of the interior on an errand of his lord and he is unflagging in his duty. His greatest guides have been the caustic auras cast by the great valley of the stars which he reads as a fox would a scroll rolled out across the ephemeral blue black ceiling of the world. He has traveled for a vast span of time and he is still going further, ignoring all the race of the rabbits and all the beasts of the land. It was only by earnest exhortation that I held him from his travels, as you know even a rabbit will bite when cornered, so at last I let him go, though I wished to learn more about his mission. Never it seems would he be depleted in his strength, as his goal stood always before his face. I do not question the deep seriousness of his intent and yet never will he reach the illumined images of the great ancestral temple and the deep glorious chambers within the shimmering sanctuary which hold the unknowable objects. The Foxes will be gone from the earth and all the beasts disappear, time will pass away, yet he endures. Forever he will go on and on. It is a little like that, that which I am describing to you now...it is all something of that sort... Brothers, I hear the voices of humans. It would be wise to go away.

What are you saying? Leave the cloudy tops of our ridge? What is that you are talking about? Are we to leave it empty all around?

What is a human? What is a human? What is a human?

