

**The Last**  
**Traveler**

**T.S.SMITH**

The Last Traveler  
A Novel By T.S.Smith  
Orange County, CA 92691  
[www.tssmith.org](http://www.tssmith.org)

© 2019 T.S.Smith

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

For questions contact:

[TSSmith.author@gmail.com](mailto:TSSmith.author@gmail.com)

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

First Edition

**THE LAST TRAVELER**  
**CHAPTER THREE**



## Chapter Three

### Cresi Del Saj

#### I

The clouds shifted over the deserted landscape where a lone figure sat atop his horse, resting, waiting, watching. To his front was the small town of Cresi Del Saj, one of the seven, and behind was the long-travelled path that they had arrived on from the south. The man wore a white coat that hung to his knees which was tunic-like and still pristine in color, the dark black threads of his hair fell to the top of his shoulders. Attached to his belt was a sidearm, some might say an antiquated weapon when facing the Magaii or their powerful kinfolk, maybe the Revans too, but the gun was genuine enough and would do the job when he needed it to. The thing had, after all, just done quite the job in the fourth

Cresi, punishment for the disloyal. The man grinned. Faith in one's weapon was a necessity when the trouble came, and by the Gods, trouble was coming.

*Where is the bird now?* Corbis wondered. *And what does Patric now see?* The man in white scanned the desolate town and found that the small-bodied raven was nowhere to be seen. All that was in view was a handful of dilapidated buildings and a few shanties. *Is this rubble what the locals call freedom?* He laughed at the idea to himself. Those of the Cresi were arrogant to think of themselves as free, though he supposed that the towns held certain benefits by living outside of the Foundation.

The clouds continued their slow crawl across the sky. He lifted his jacket over his legs and was content to watch the town below, silent though it was. The horse pulled its tongue across its dry lips and gave a small shriek, it had gone sick when they had stopped on the crest of the hill.

*It's tired,* Corbis thought. *And weak.*

Feeling the slightest touch of the wind against his face, the man watched the sun bleed its color out over the land, casting the yellow glow across the field between him and the city. He jumped down, smiling as he did so, and his boots landed hard amongst the thimble weeds and small grasses. The man in white walked to the front side of the great horse, *his* great horse, and let the double-set reins fall to the thicket below. The creature had carried him from the Southern Sea

Gulf for six days to Del Saj, the sixth Cresi. He looked at the animal and the horse snorted in return.

It was dying.

“No, this won’t do,” the man said. “This won’t do at all.”

Corbis lifted his gloved hand to the animal’s snout, pressing his leathered fingers hard into the thing’s mouth just to be sure. And it was true, truer than the Magaii’s stupid and convoluted fortunes, for the horse’s mouth foamed. He knew the creature’s life was soon to expire just as he knew the sun would rise in the east the next morning. The man in white had run the beast dry and it getting sick had been his doing, yet Corbis felt no shame in the matter. The journey was complete and the horse had sacrificed everything to get him here. The ends justify the means and this was the end of the path for his foul friend. Corbis smiled to himself.

“Thank you,” he whispered to the dispirited and dull animal. Without hesitation the man in white brought the gloved hand down to the revolver at his side, pulled it from the clutch, brought it back up, buried the muzzle beneath the horse’s head, and pulled the trigger.

The cold sound reverberated over the dim landscape and the beast fell onto the grass under the orange glow of the sunset where it made a heavy thump and went still. Corbis looked down at the dead thing, said a small prayer to his master and his Gods, and then looked up once more. As he walked down the hill where he finally entered Del Saj, he began to whistle a cheerful tune that his brother had taught

him earlier in their lives when they were only children. He was closer now, closer to the Temple, the man in white felt it deep within his bones. *Ruby's Blood*, the man thought. *It's my right to be here.* If he'd allowed the horse to live, the thing would have slowed him down, and he wasn't a man to be slowed. There were other horses in the Cresi, after all, and the night's work was just beginning.

## II

A single main drag of barren dirt road made up the core of Del Saj and to its sides were branches that supported the local shanties. The sixth Cresi was a small and dirty town which lacked any sort of the sophistication that Corbis was used to, it was nothing like the Foundation.

*Disgusting*, he thought.

The man hadn't expected much since departing the Sea Gulf to set upon his quest but this place was even poorer than he'd imagined it would be. No wonder the raven had yet to return, this was worse than the fourth and they had burned that city completely out. Corbis's father had let the Southern Lands fall free of the Foundation's control. And surely, outside of the roaming bands of Revans and mystics, the Free Cities were devoid of true civilization. But a leader was supposed to see beyond what holds a place back, to see the true worth behind the curtain. His father hadn't recognized the Cresi's importance and the spirit of what the land could *become*, what the inhabitants could form when the cities were banded together. Followers. Free men were followers despite

them thinking otherwise. (Well, followers or the dead, it was their choice.) His own father was a fool and had left the Seven Cresi alone for far too long. Corbis wouldn't make the same mistake now that he was here.

*Where are you now, my bloody raven?* he wondered to himself. *Any luck with sighting the boy?*

Siding the town center was an infirmary, animal husbandry, a local butcher, a weapons crafter, and a small marketplace where the skins of rodent animals hung from rafters built over makeshift wooden columns that sprouted from their rotten, concrete bases. A dank smell lifted from the merchant's row and a frail elderly woman reached to Corbis from the steps to his left. Her skin was taut and yellowed. "Yer there? Need substance? I's just needs some coin, please. Please help, good traveler. Help an old woman to eat well. Buy from me, Sir."

"No," Corbis said. *Not from this one at least, not from this old hag.* "I have no need of your substance, woman. But I do have coin if you'd show me the way to the Del Saj roadhouse." The woman pointed a bony finger up toward the end of the drag where he saw a single building in the distance. *Is the boy in lay there?* he wondered. Perhaps he could cut him off before Ful, he'd have known it if the raven had returned on time. The man in white reached into his pouch and pulled high two coppers, looked at them, and carelessly threw them to the harpy. She scrambled to the coin shouting thanks and the man in white continued on.

He passed the last row of desolate shops and further on, the roadhouse came into good view, sided with the rusted skins of ancient metals and standing next to the railway at the head of the Del Saj drag. A single oak tree stood to the building's front, based in tall hallowed grass, its ancient branches arched over the sagging porch roofline. At one time, Corbis could see that the railway and the roadhouse were the central hub of the sixth Cresi and Free City. In fact, in the Old World, the building must have been quite extraordinary, magnificent in size and construction compared to all of the others in the southern lands. But not now, not in his time, not in the New World. Here, it was dilapidated and unkempt. Here, it was nothing but destroyed.

*Where is Patric?* he asked himself. *That raven better arrive with telling news.* Corbis approached the roadhouse from afar. It was possible the traveler was there already, resting gently in one of the rooms on the second floor, unaware of the doom that would fall to him if the man in white couldn't reach him soon. The boy would think of the man in white as a savior, the key for him to get back home.

Corbis smiled and his immaculate teeth shown bright and clean in the twilight that still clung to the skies over the main road. He'd gone unshaven for the last week and stubble filled the cheeks around his grin. He felt the white coat resting over his shoulders, hanging tight to his rigid and thin body where sweat had worn its way through his vest and dried there, he'd need to clean himself in the roadhouse. The women of his life had often referred to him as tall and handsome, tall and thin,

sometimes. But these qualities were only those that the Gods had given him. His true abilities rested beneath his looks and the good fortunes he had received from fate alone. His power came from his complete dedication to his craft, obedient to it even when it spurned him. Only his brother had seen the extent of his capabilities when the pair had stood in front of their father, his brother yelling that Corbis had fallen to the darkness. But like their father, his brother was a fool, and soon after the man in white had given his brother the reward for betrayal. In response, the Revans now hunted him throughout the Free Cities, pursuing him from the Southern Gulf, even when the Foundation had more pressing needs.

*Fools, all of them. Fools.*

It had been only eight days since he had fallen ill with his brother and father and he knew he'd need to make up ground, it hadn't been long enough and the soldiers would certainly be making their way below the southern wall by now. But they all served the same master and they'd eventually understand his true purpose after it was revealed to them.

He looked up at the building behind the oak tree. A sign hung from the roadhouse and he chuckled to himself. *Why would they hang a sign if the people can't read it?* Like the entirety of the Cresi, the people of Del Saj were illiterate, except for the Magaii, the damn witches who meant to control the population with their Word. He would soon cleanse the land of their filth and usher upon the locals a standard of peace and prosperity greater than the Free Cities had ever known. Knowledge. He would give them knowledge and guidance.

Once he had the stone in his hands, that was. The stars foretold of a boy's coming and now that boy was here within reach, The Last Traveler would soon follow. Nothing would stop the cleansing now. Not his brother, not the Revans, and certainly not the destructive conflict that was likely to ravage the north when the histories were done being written. The prophesized Last Traveler would be upon them and issue unto them the Rebirth of the Lands. Corbis watched his own reflection in the roadhouse window stare back at him. The man in the glass panels grinned back, success spread across his dirtied face, and stood in the middle of the road.

### III

Corbis stepped up to the sagging roadhouse porch and looked back at the Del Saj drag. There was certainly some local Magaii witch around here with her nonsensical prophecies and tall tales about the coming of a Great Dark Man and the Fall of the Foundation. Nonsense. He was the Foundation's reckoning, did they prefer to live in filth and stupidity? The man in white could almost hear one of the woman's cackles echo from the hills above. And what of it? The Fall of the Foundation, is that what the Magaii were really afraid of? No. It was losing their form of control, their ability to produce the Word that they feared most. And what were these words if not something to forge the people of The Seven Cresis into their servants? That is what the witches were truly afraid of, to lose their own flock! He could give the people of the Free Cities something of greater value than they

dreamed of, he could give them purpose. And this put Corbis and the witches inherently at odds. Followers didn't need two ideologies nor did they want them. For the man in white, none of this mattered. The Magaii would be cleansed from the world soon enough by his own hand and order would be restored to Del Saj and the rest of the Free Cities. His father would be proud. He walked to his left, passing the horse post and galvanized steel watering bin that stood outside the roadhouse.

The doors of the small motel moaned as he slid into the building where the interior was more impressive than he'd expected but still below his own expectations. Hand-carved cherry wood detail was installed throughout the lobby above dark green carpeting. Two chairs, upholstered with red scratched leather, sat in the middle of the room under the soft glow of gas-fired wall sconces. Their hum was washed out by the natural ambient light that still flooded the room from the setting sun through tinted window shades. And against the counter, Corbis saw a beautiful young woman. When was the last time he had laid with a woman? A week? A month? He couldn't quite remember. His mind had been focused on other matters.

"Heyah," the woman greeted him. "What can I do yeh?"

"Well, how fortunate do I find myself being in a position to become finely acquainted with such a beautiful woman," he said. The woman blushed but maintained her professional stance. The man continued, "I need a room for the night before I head north in the 'morrow."

“Well, the compliment is well-received, but we’re all booked up, Sir. Didn’t yeh see it from the outside?” She gestured to the window and the man’s eyes followed to where a board had been placed in the window, though he could not see what it indicated from his perspective. When he returned to look at the woman, she had a glint in her eye that told a different story to the man. They told him that she was lonely and waiting, they told him that she was wanting. His thoughts focused and clarity washed over him, it was what he liked to think his own version of the Word.

“You’re fully occupied with company then?” the man inquired. “This town is empty. I doubt this roadhouse is full.” He squinted at her. *But the boy could still be here.*

“I’m sorry, but yes. We’re fully occupied.” The woman glanced around nervously. Something wasn’t right.

“Well then, might I ask a question? I’m just a traveler and I’ve come a great distance to be here in Del Saj over many days and nights. I need a place to board and wash for the night as my horse just passed away right outside of town at the top of the hill there. I’m devastated by the entire ordeal. If you can’t board me here, do you know of any other openings in town for a man like myself in such a destitute position? A second roadhouse, perhaps? Any locals that might have an open bed in their own home even?”

“I’m sorry to hear about your horse, Sir. And, well,” the woman started to say as she broke eye contact and looked from left to right again. She was lying, liars always had a tell.

“Are you sure you’re booked full? It doesn’t look too busy if you ask me. I am supposed to meet someone here. A boy who is traveling along with a second companion. If I could just speak with them, I would leave soon after to find my way and would cause no trouble. But I need to speak with them first.”

She lowered her voice and whispered, “I’m sorry but there is no one here like that.” She was telling the truth now. The woman whispered, “No one has checked into this roadhouse for days. He saw you coming and told me not to give you room but maybe-”

“Who’s this, Aemi?” asked a man who appeared from the back room to the side of the counter.

“Raend,” she said, surprised, and stood up straight and proper. “Well, I didn’t quite catch his name yet. I’m sorry for my improperness, but what did you say your name was again?” Her eyes shone bright, testing his own, probing at his thoughts and desires.

“I haven’t told you my name,” Corbis said, holding still in his white coat. He stared at this newcomer, Raend, and gave a fake smile. His perfect teeth shined under the glow of the wall sconces above the emerald carpeting of the room. The air felt unsettled, dust floated through the dimming light slants sprouting from the window. The furniture smelled unused.

“Well,” she began but stopped, expecting the man in the jacket to continue her sentence but he didn’t. Silence told

Corbis more about the people he was interested in than words ever did.

He looked down and saw that she wore a band made of rawhide on the third finger of her left hand. An expensive form of garment for a lowly place like Cresi Del Saj. He also saw that the man wore the same. Husband and wife. The potential patron's grin widened.

"I have gone by many names over the years, some that maybe even those in this town might have let slip through their lips once or twice, but you shall know me as Corbis."

The woman repeated the name and paused at the end of it, "Corbis then. What about a last name?" Below her, on the cherry-wood desk, was a shallow box inset with a grid pattern of slots in the shape of the roadhouse. All of the slots contained blue stones except for two, which were an earthy brownish-gray. She looked back up to him, her eyes glowed hazel beneath brunette hair.

"I don't have a second name," the man in white said.

"Everyone has a second name, from somewhere they come from? Or a name that tells what they are?"

"Is your question then of where I'm from? Or what I am?"

The husband butted in, "She just wants to know your last name, Sir. Please, watch your tone with my wife." The husband kept his hands low behind the front desk, out of sight. Probably fingering the trigger of a firearm.

Perturbed, Corbis looked from the husband back to Aemi, who still watched him with great interest. Her eyes danced with his own, back and forth, over and over, she was his. “Very well then. Kane. Corbis Kane. Prince of the Foundation and first heir to these Seven Cresis. I’m looking for a boy that I believe is here and it’s of stately importance.”

The husband hacked up a laugh, ugly and unfitting of the man. “If you’re Corbis Kane, the Revans would be storming into this roadhouse soon enough!”

*How do you know they aren’t?*

“I was not speaking with you, Raend,” the man in white said as sharp as a fine spear to the husband and turned back to the woman. “But, well acquainted in this place, we are. If the boy isn’t here, I just need a room to stay in for the night.”

*And possibly a good woman to keep me company in a warm bed.*

The woman shuffled her hands over the board with the slots full of deep blue stones, looked at her husband, and then back to the board. “We’re all filled up but,” she turned to her husband and whispered, “He can stay with us back at the ranch for the night. It’s only one night. We can give a traveler a room when needed, can’t we? He shan’t cause a problem. You can watch him there as you wish.”

The husband’s eyes widened and he immediately began whispering to the woman in an angry tone, “Aemi, I thought I told you, we don’t even know who this man is and now you want to bring him to our ranch? You know how this goes, one night turns into three or four and, well, I need to, I need to

“speak with you in the back room. Away from our patron here. I’m sorry, Sir.”

“No apologies needed.”

Corbis could clearly see the man was anything but sorry.

He stood in the lobby and felt the long jacket resting on his calm shoulders. The woman smiled back at him from behind the counter. His looks held a certain charm around these low parts.

The husband took his wife by the arm and dragged her to the backroom where Corbis heard them beginning to argue. It wasn’t much of an argument though, as the man was more chastising his wife than taking any form of negotiation. The husband was no man at all. Rather, he was an angry child afraid of what he might lose, fitting for the sixth Cresi of Del Saj, fitting for their Magaii. Corbis focused on her thoughts, *You shall grant me room.*

When she spoke to her husband, her voice held firm and was strong, “We’ll take him in for the night, it’s one night.”

“What has gotten into you?!” the husband yelled back in the form of a whisper. Corbis could hear him through the woman’s thoughts. She spoke again, “We will take him in, Raend. Or else I’ll finally be rid of you and this dreadfully lonely place!”

Their argument continued for some time and when the two finally emerged from the back room and were in front of the man in white once more, it was the husband that spoke

and the woman who watched through glowing hazel eyes, “Mister, it’s just one night, am I right to say this?”

“One night is all I ask of you.” *One night is all I can take in your disgusting roadhouse, the boy isn’t here.*

“Well, then. I’ve heard that your horse has died and it’s my decision to let you stay at our ranch to the east of Del Saj to help you out of your bad situation. It’s a courtesy, hear me well, to a lone traveler. But know this, I have a strong eye on you and in the ‘morrow, I’ll be askin’ you to leave along with your wandering stare and your white coat and all you carry.”

*If your heart doesn’t give out before the ‘morrow, old man.*

Corbis smiled at the woman and then to her husband, “Well acquainted then, well acquainted to you both and thank you.”

The husband smiled back uncomfortably, appearing to be mildly aware of something strange that had just taken place. It was no matter, Corbis had gained a fine consolation prize, after all. The hazel eyes of the woman spoke of the deep yearning within her soul and he could use that. This woman would be a great help to him on his journey if only the right strings were plucked in the correct order. Yes, she was very valuable, indeed. Beautiful women always had their ways.

There was a tap at the window and the man in white turned. There, sitting on the sill and behind the glass, was Patric. The raven had returned.

*Traveler, the bird said. A traveler is here.*