

# Paths in the Dark

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*After the seige of Ba Seng Se, Zuko is faced with many tormenting feelings, including a not-so-clear conscience. As he sets out of the large capitol for a break away from the chaos, he finds more than just a bit of fresh air.*

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# 1 - Judgement

## Paths In the Dark

The stone grazing the boys hand was rough and gritty. Brushing it, oblivious to the current time, he felt its dry grains and sharp edges. The air hovering among the grassy plain where Zuko lay was heavy and warm. Its humidity brought a haunting sensation of eeriness to the weather.

Sitting before a small pond, he could gaze into the reflections bouncing off, and still see the pebbles and sands lying underneath. Its clear waters offered soothing company to the rest of the natural landscape. Dark mountains, fogged from the distant evening moisture, gave way in balancing with the elegant river most. Its heavy masculinity opposed the feminine figure perfectly.

As the young prince sat there in his sultry silence, he could not help the reminiscence it brought him. Four days had passed, and the decision he had made lingered on without productivity. In taking sides with his sister, imprisoning his uncle, and helping with the siege of the largest city in the world, had he betrayed more than a simple guideline of morality? What decisiveness had brought him to the cornerstones of his now present position?

Taking the rock in his dirty palm, he tossed it into the pond anxiously. He knew these feelings would haunt him until a decision was come upon. As Zuko glanced down to the softening pond, the ripples panned out, churning his reflection into waves of distortion. Circling above his image was a lone hawk, searching for her innocent prey. Its wings glided softly along, as if floating in the cool waters below. While the boy noticed this, he felt a prickle of unease creep up his spine.

The sparrowhawk was a brief depiction of the swift and cunning ruthlessness of a predator ready to hunt. Its deep golden-red eyes searched and searched the earth below, a keen determination in them. Azula had once declared it the prime animal of its family. And indeed, the characters shared much more than similarity.

*Does everything around me really need to bring back memories? Unwelcome ones at that. What I want is some peace, and time to think all this through. I'm going to go insane if I don't!* Zuko absorbed himself in his irate thoughts once more.

*I mean, even if I did help the Earth Kingdom become overthrown, so what. I didn't play any major part in it or anything. I just did what I needed to do. And yet, Zuko was still overcome with repent for what he had done to his uncle. Someone who had shown him so much love and compassion didn't deserve this. But perhaps, in any event, he could consider this rash idea. Possibly, could this decision have been the*

right one, if played wisely?

Never once over this time had he considered it, but maybe, just this time, it would be his chance to show his true feelings without hesitation.