

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 6: Broken promises, broken chains (1st ride of Ches 1370)

*N*ext morning there was a long winded dispute of who of us should become leader. Grimwald in particular found such a rank mandatory, and the others did not disagree enough to really block his everlasting monologue. I kept outside the talks, I really didn't find the will to mix myself in these sordid matters. Odd in a way. At home I was often berated because I put myself forward, and here, where it seemed allowed for a woman to raise objections and point out problems, I did not. Might it be that headband I was given by Weldin?

*T*hey picked Felina. Smile, it was certainly not Grimwald's first choice, nor his second. She would probably not be a very demanding leader, which was good – I had had my fill of people deciding how I should live without asking me. Oh dear. Was this bad? Was I insulting my forbears? I needed to declare that I would follow the path of hidden knowledge, the path of the Wu Jen. But how to arrange for this? I pondered these things as I helped to break up camp. It had been decided to follow the other group, to find if we could kill some more Orcs. Grimwald had another ideafix. No surprise there.

*K*endalan took the lead, and quickly found the path that group of Four had taken. Now there was little talk and we fell in the travel pattern like we had been doing for days. When I first met them I had wondered about the amount of food Cuura would carry for her horse, but now I quite understood. She circled around the group untiringly, probably moving twice the distance we did. Felina and Grimwald in front of me, quiet, while I brought the donkey with Zhae ever close. We traveled quickly until Kendalan found a spot where three of the Four veered off towards the plains. After a brief consultation we copied their example, trying to make more speed on the flatter lands.

*W*e made good progress, even Felina could keep up, even if she longingly mentioned the baths, pedicures, and other luxuries she would undergo as soon as we returned to civilization. Then something odd happened. A lone traveler sat before us on the trail we were following. Nobody went on the roads alone - at last not in Tu Lung. I might be mistaken, but the lands here were empty and were touched by sadness and loss, so a lone man might indicate a lure for a robbers gang, an insane priest, or other dangers. The others reacted guardedly, but the high quality red clothing and utter correct manners of the man proved disarming. He said he was following a caravan because he had issues with the caravan master, and Kendalan with his usual expertise pointed out where the priest of Tempus had stomped all over the tracks. Grateful the man asked if he could walk with us. As he wore a well made sword, and wished to travel the same trail we were on, nobody objected against his company. He named himself Veta.

*K*endalan and the stranger talked about the tracks, the trail, and other details. He quite politely reacted to any remarks by the others, but even dour Grimwald did not find it necessary to inquire further to his 'issue'. We walked on until, close to nightfall, we encountered the camping caravan in the distance. Kendalan acted dismayed; he had so been paying attention to the caravan trail that he had lost the spores of the Four. He and Cuura wanted to leave immediately to rediscover it, but in the mean time Veta just walked straight for the caravans, and pulled a golden sword. Tsi-Chuh! They could not but label us as hostiles too!

*V*eta in no way tried to sneak up to them, so soon arrows started to rain. However, those that hit just bounced off! There was something odd about his movement. It became totally rhythmic, mechanical, like a clockwork. Some guards then tried to block him, but he just swept them aside, gutting at least one of them. The person I suspected was the caravan master stood there, the speed of Veta making running away futile. He also carried a sword, but it looked black and dark, and the two fought with a ferocity which was awesome to behold. That black sword managed to hurt Veta, but suddenly Veta reached out and touched the caravan master. Veta suddenly looked whole again, as the caravan master sagged, and the fight did not take long after that.

The guards still stood there, uncertain of what Veta would do, as we slowly closed in. Grimwald named him an Inevitable, some servant of the gods to exact revenge. Whatever it was it made sure the caravan master was truly dead, then took the black sword and just broke it to bits. I thought magical weapons were strong, but possible the creature had special powers. Then Veta moved, there was a tense moment everywhere, but he walked in a strait line to the north west. We just started to relax trying to see what the guards would do, as they suddenly looked horrified at the wagons and all ran away. Only one of them suddenly popped up near us, shouting for us to leave quickly.

Three of the four wagons suddenly boiled with activity, creatures of different ilk working their way from underneath the deck cloth covering what I presumed were their cages. Cages that had suddenly sprang open on the death of the caravan master. Or was it the destruction of the sword? We started to fall back when Grimwald screamed in anguish and totally panicked because of some weird pony size creature running towards us. We all started to run away until Cuura ordered us to stand and fight. A smart order, as the creatures gained on us and would have caught us anyway.

Two bird like creatures flew towards us, they looked like misshapen turkeys of some kind. The creature that instilled so much fear in Grimwald was brown and ran quickly on four bow legged appendices. It had two big brush like antennae. No large mandibles, no aspect of dark powers. Why was he so afraid? In the distance we saw a dog. Poof, now it was much closer. I shot at one of those turkeys, as did Kendalan and we do managed to hit it. The birds swept closer, as Cuura rode in and Zhae stood to receive the creature... He threw his sword away! Why would he do that? Grimwald spoke to him, so there must be a reason. We continued shooting as the beast closed in and Felina managed to kill one of the birds as it almost landed on her. The second targeted me!

Felina dashed in from the side, as did that caravan guard, as I fumbled for my Kama. A thin long sword pierced the bird, but it picked a me, and I felt a strange sensation which I could shake off only with great difficulty. I heard Cuura yell to her horse, Grimwald scream with fear, and the twang of Kendalan's bow as he shot at the brown beast. I tried to attack, but the beating wings made it hard and then it picks me again...

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PAIN. Like burning your hand on a stove, like ear-burn-sickness, like nothing I ever felt. The pain was my total existence and there was no way out. I felt myself falling away, leaving myself behind, until a voice called me back. It was a voice of love, a voice caring. Would I follow the voice always? But that was not what she asked. Just to follow her back, because others needed me, needed my caring, needed my love. I opened my eyes and saw all of them, loved all of them even our Grimwald.

Human female Paragon/1, Wu-Jen/1