

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 10: Not so lonely (1st ride of Tarsakh 1370)

We returned to Berdusk, with Cuura getting ever more insistent to leave for other places. She wanted to become 'a general' and needed to spread her fame around. I was not really sure that this was the best way to find enlightenment, but going against what felt to be your destiny would have its own drawbacks. The others acted like they felt the same way I did: Felina even stopped suggesting she would be better off alone, and Grimwald now seldom questioned our use or customs. Kendalan, as was his habit, just accepted our changing thoughts - he must be on a higher level.

In town I started hunting for some better armor for Zhae, and, after some lucky inquiries and crafty negotiations I got an armor of some quality. I was ashamed to admit it, but I needed to ask Zhae for funds, as mine were insufficient, but Zhae seemed glad to receive it - he overacted his gratitude, but I have to blame his local upbringing. I also gave him the sword we found in the Ettin/priest tower (repaired by Grimwald, who passed it to Felina, who passed it to me), and again he overacted. When we reach civilization again I will need to gently remind him to be more circumspect.

That Weldin character needed our help yet again, but this time there was even some monetary compensation! Not that that was important - the soul is in no need of it - but on the mundane level it helped preparations and it also showed what some people find important. Hmm, there is a kind of conflict in my mind created by my feelings for my personal development and my family's trained values. *The Way asks difficult choices* is a well known proverb. I must strive to make the right ones.

A book needed to be brought to Candlekeep. I hadn't heard of the place (neither had Felina, nor Grimwald) but if I could trust the words of Weldin it is *the* library of the western realms. I had this faint feeling that they just ignored the libraries of the Dwarves, the Elves, and possibly several other races, but I better withhold judgment until I'd seen the place. What I *did* wonder about was why they did not simply *teleport*? For the money we're getting such a spell should be well within budgetary limitations. The weirdness didn't stop there. The groups consisted of Goya from Sembia, a merchant of Shou wares (acceptable quality, but nothing which would interest my grandmother) with a manservant annex guardian named Bruno and a display figure/dancer/man-eater female called Rebecca. She almost draped herself over Zhae - I do not trust her! Then there was an alchemist, who I've yet to talk to because Goya sort of dominated the conversation, and last - and in a way least - there was the carrier of the Book. A hidden priest of Myrkul, the fallen deity of the Dead! I subtly signaled that I recognized his faith, but he did not react. There are a lot of questions here, but answers will have to wait as everybody was in a hurry to be off.

Grimwald asked me if he could wear the circlet. He thought that my prophetic statements (which prophetic statements?) might be induced by that item. I did not see the point in objecting, and I must admit some feeling of freedom. I felt the urge to see if I could discover some more information and I went into town. I managed to walk along with some complaining warriors, they were the ones previously guarding the wagon and they complained about dark dreams, people acting weirdly, undead, and other problems. Why did Weldin not inform us of these problems? Why did none of the people we were asked to protect? What was clear is that we needed magic to shield us from undue influence and luckily Felina and I managed to acquire *Protection from Evil* spells. I also told Kendalan and Grimwald of these problems. Well at least Zhae had the proper equipment. We were to leave next morning. Felina and the others were going to ask some 'Nethander' to protect our rear.

The wagon was big, solidly built like a wooden castle and pulled by four horses. Inside wasn't cramped at all, especially because either Cuura or Kendalan was managing the horses while the other rode scout. I tried to suggest that Zhae ride on the front seat - he might scare away highwaymen. Grimwald was sleeping most of the time as arranged. When we would camp at night he would work on our equipment.

We crossed the river with Cuura cursing and hitting the horses. Outwardly rough, but the crossing went smoothly. It showed that our barbarian may sound nasty, but her actions were for the best - including the horses.

As we traveled Kendalan pointed out a flock of birds - mere specks to my untrained eyes - that shouldn't be here. I have learned to trust the spirit's opinion in this, but they are too far away to do anything against. Perhaps this was a part of the Art where I should apply myself? We traveled on, in a way more comfortable than on foot, but I missed the healthy exertion.

After a day's travel we camped near some trees. The trail was there, but it was a mere suggestion sometimes - except of course to Kendalan, who always knew where to travel. The food was better, now Kendalan has had the opportunity to buy herbs and other tasty additions. We included Bruno in our watch scheme, but decided against asking any of the others, and made sure that two of us would be awake at any time. Felina and Zhae, Grimwald and me (with Kendalan rising early), and finally Cuura and Kendalan. I slept well, if short, and hoped my watch would be uneventful.

I should know better. Grimwald made good progress with his metal work, when I heard a kind of rumbling sound in the distance. Waking the others Cuura went to investigate. She reported a growing mole's hill - but one of serious proportions. Bruno, Felina, and Grimwald went along when Kendalan spotted some movement in some bushes. Whoever it was fled as he was discovered, but Kendalan *entangled* him and Zhae ran to capture the spy. Then Zhae was hit by a crossbow bolt. Luckily he bent or the wound could have been much worse. I called up some lesser magic to light the area the miscreant was hiding in, but Zhae was hit a second time before we could locate the assassin. With Kendalan taking care of his entangled foe, I tried to support Zhae in capturing the rogue who tried to flee; not for long because Zhae cut him down, checked on my health, then ran to help Cuura and the others. I managed to keep the man alive, while Kendalan tied up the other one. Finally Grimwald arrived to help me take care of the wounded man. They had an oddly engraved runic disc - necromancy I envisioned - which I asked Grimwald to cut in two.

Where did they come from? What was the purpose of that disc? How did they evade our scouts? What was that huge skeleton I hear the others talk about and what force tried to invade their minds? A great many questions indeed.

Human female Paragon/2, Wu-Jen/1