

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 11: Books and Birds (1st ride of Tarsakh 1370)

*Whom is the sky looking for
Whom are bones recalled
Whom is the silent strike
Whom is who he seems?*

Things quieted down fairly fast. Grimwald was his usual suspicious self because Nethander appeared so quickly after the combat was over, and because Nethander clearly has been part of the Yak at some time in his life (do you ever leave?) but even with his dark aura and twisted Karma I cannot detect any *taint*: perhaps he would steal, but he wouldn't betray.

I managed to have a strait talk with the thief who was still conscious – Grimwald sputtering a bit, but the rest didn't interfere – and discovered they were not assassins, just thieves who fought because Kendalan discovered them. They had drugs for our water and were chartered to retrieve a (the) book. They had only used one of the two discs they had received: we should be grateful for that, as it was that that *summoned* the undead giant. Their description of their contact immediately suggested a *disguise self* spell, or other such magic, so we gained little information. I let them go, perhaps we can use this connection in the future. As they left they told me where their pickup point would have been, but, although I do not doubt their word, I don't think we should go there.

Next morning I managed to have a chat with the cleric of Myrkul. He told me the book was stolen from the Zhentarim, and that both the Red Wizards – not good – and the Cult of the Dragon – western ones – were interested. The book itself influences its environment, making it a danger of its own. A relic of some kind. It will probably put in the deepest vaults of the Keep of the Candle.

We left early in the morning and the rest of the day I studied the alchemist and Rebecca. He was constantly looking outside, while she was smiling when the merchant was looking, but frowning when not. I spoke to the him, and he explained that he was always looking for rare herbs and other items with special properties. The explanation really fitted with his behavior. Rebecca was less talkative, but I managed to corner her when she was fetching water and she told me she was a slave! The merchant Goja confirmed this – he even was proud on the price he paid for her. Barbaric! Castes are proper, indenture I can understand, but to own somebody? He is not a noble!

*Truth is this
listen not to elven grief
pass through dwarven greed
haste by halfling green*

Kendalan told us that the 'birds' were still following us and we discussed ways to break the surveillance. Nethander had many good ideas; sneaky, yes, but to the point. We will rest but shortly this night and see if we can shake pursuit. Cuura seconded his idea so we continued with our day time travel till early evening. Kendalan told us that only one watcher stayed. If they cannot find us magically – and the circlet gives some protection in this – we might succeed.

We left again when darkness had fallen with Kendalan managing the horses. Close to morning we were all dog tired, but Cuura found us a good hiding spot: a narrow gully. Feliana helped with camouflaging the huge coach, while Zhae practiced his combat moves. We slept fitfully during the day using our usual watch scheme. Then one of those big bird flew over fairly low and did a turn. We have been spotted. Alas, but it shows the scheme *is* working. We just need to hide better.

That evening we were planning to leave, just to discover that getting in is often easier than out. In the end we needed to unload the whole coach and pave the slope. Grimwald sometimes has a point in his taking care of even the tiniest detail. It just is so painfully slow. I should take him so a monastery and see if the monks can keep their patience.

Again we found a good spot, this time between one of the rare copses of trees close to a collapsed hillside. Kendalan had studied some specific nature magic and when the birds came searching again, he made the coach all but disappear. We felt secure until, a couple of hours later, a bird landed near and came ambling over. He could not possibly see us yet, but he would. Quickly I used some minor magic to make the sound of a pack of wolves. The bird flew away as quickly as it could. Hopefully he was convinced.

*The Dark Bridge does loom
From utter darkness to deepest despair
Learn the Truth to stop the doom
Though knowledge has a price to bear*

*More than insight is near,
but only perfection will safeguard life
if it is seen by other eyes, I fear
shadow will be the worst strive*

Next evening we left again, Kendalan handling the coach, Cuura riding along, and with the rest of us inside. We suddenly felt a jerk and a yell from Cuura. We were under attack. As I jump out, crossbow at the ready, I can just make out some dark, bat winged, humanoid harassing Cuura and Kendalan. The elf seemed to have spotted it before it surprised him, but it is almost impossible to see in the darkness. Even as I create such light as I can, Cuura is hit. It flies off again, but I can just make it out and hit it with a fire orb. I might have damaged it, I might not, but it is smoking a bit even if most other weapons just glance off. Again it makes a pass, hitting Kendalan, when Nethander calls to it. What language I am not sure, but I suspect it might be infernal, as it feels almost the opposite of the celestial tongue. I call a rain of stones on its general position – even with four lights it is almost impossible to see - and Nethander threatens it – even I can tell. It flies off as Grimwald climbs out, silver axe in hand, followed later by an armored Zhae. I know it is nice armor, but we might have lost Kendalan or Cuura. He will just have to be quicker next time.

Grimwald suggests to make silver heads on the crossbow bolts. We do not know if it is vulnerable to such, but it is the best we can do. I need to look into the scrolls my grand aunt gave me for 'later' to see if I can learn something.

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1