

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 168: Melvaunt in Smog (3rd ride of Kythorn 1371)

Parting with the others was difficult, but I realized that they - Nethander in particular - needed to determine their own path for a while. To often I had heard Kendalan say: "Reed wouldn't like that." Often he was right, but it felt wrong. Silverymoon is awash with bards and performers, but for the mission the Lady Illustriel had in mind we needed to look further afield. Although I had become a capable fighter over the last few years, I agreed that traveling alone was a risk better not taken. A troop touring the dales, but with none suspecting Harper connections, was a feat which asked some planning, a skill the Lady excelled at. Arriving in Lyrabar in Impiltur, I quickly befriended two starting artists, who had interesting musical skills, but a lack of financial and promotional insight. Ghurp from Airspur in Chessenta was a half orc drummer and chanter, Ibbiti from Arn near the Steam Lake a halfling female playing an extensive set of tubular bells. After buying several different set of clothing for both rough and tumble style performances as well as high class entertainment, and several days of serious training, we earned enough money to pay for passage to Tsurlagol in the Vast.

Ruins upon ruins, this city was an interesting one: build on layers on layers of sacked/burned/collapsed older buildings, and I had the clear feeling this one wasn't going to survive long too. But in the mean time it was a busy place, with merchants from around the inner sea bumping shoulders with mercenaries, local producers, "free traders", and all those people that make a city a city. But still the harbor was to open, approaches undefended, patrols lackluster. Perhaps that is their defense: just let the attackers in and outlast them. There is an almost palpable feeling of fire present in some older ruins, that and an aura of raw magick. Ghurp had some troubles with the many dwarves in town, but we were busy with mainly low paying performances all over the place, so I hoped the reputation we were building would spread amongst the dwarves too. The local tongue was a mix of Impilturi and the Sembian trade tongue - learning it was frustrating.

Each performance I understood my company's skill better, and tried to arrange pieces that brought them to the foreground. As our reputation grew, I slowly upped our fee. I wasn't planning on becoming an expensive troop, but 'cheap is bad'. The city no longer had a 'king', but instead a secretive council with a known 'speaker'. This man, Conoptora Billon, is not a bad man at heart, but he craves to much, and lacks insight in the consequences of his actions. The leaders of the city allowed the Red Wizards to start an enclave about 3 years ago, and this is really the start of their progress towards the moonsea. Our concert for the council and other 'nobles' was well received, even though I used some minor enhancing magic to lend my partners some of my skill. I visited all the temples, discussing the possibility of an anti-evil-lycanthrope enchantment with the Selunites, the prerequisites for a lucky armor with the followers of Tymora, and how to shield others with the Temple of Helm. Umberlee I gave a free performance of 'the storm' - it was her domain, but it was also a thing of beauty. Shar I evaded, as well as the Red Wizards enclave, and I noticed some interesting play by a group called the silver ravens. Lots of possibilities, but we were not here to interfere.

Leaving I had to decide which city to go to next. As our destination was all the Dales, we really needed a pattern to visit all places, big and small, and a dislike for boat trips. So the village of Sevenecho, where both Ghurp's drums and Ibbiti's bells sounded wonderful in the Wandering Wyvern inn. They had had a problem with a poison that resisted magical cures - a piece of knowledge I decided to keep away from Lyria. Maestar was next. Many country houses of the rich in nearby cities, and rumors of hidden treasure, which Draeni discounted as unlikely. We arrived early in the season so only a few of the rich were present, and the town had an incomplete feeling as many of the residents only lived here part of the year. We followed the road North and arrived at High Haspur which had a gnome run quality inn called The Elf In Armor. There I received word of what the others were doing.

Unless I was very much mistaken, nobody had a solid plan. They had arrived, almost lost Norbert, made some acquaintances, but found no leads. Melvaunt was not a particularly nice city - they had invented the smog - but I was sure information was... Wait. Norbert was lousy in talking to people, Kendalan too distant, Grimwald had improved but current intel was not his thing, Nethander had entered this whole mission disinterested, Cuura lacked subtlety, and Efyra... mmm. It would take a while.

Darkness caught up on us before we reached Sarbreenar and the entrance of the Elf Blood pass. We almost had a fatal misunderstanding with some dwarves who reacted badly when they saw Ghurp. I had to use magic and my throat was sore because I had to talk quickly to stop things going wrong. In the end only Ibbity and I performed, and we quickly left The Merry Mage behind. The land reeked of war: dwarves, some elves, orcs, humans and an ancient wyrm - green according to Draeni.

Entering the pass we joined a caravan. The pass was often used, even if caravans were often attacked by orcs and worse. We had several skirmishes, and I, or better Draeni, was forced to sweep down on two scores of orcs. The caravan master accepted my statement that it was an illusion - which he of course had recognized as such. Draeni was not too happy about that, but was more interested in the knowledge that she was sure some serious treasure was hidden. Perhaps when we had finished the mission and had ensured the Fae creatures safety we could return here.

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/2, Heartfanner/1, Sublime Chord/1, Cli Lyryst/2