

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 70: Loss of Control (3rd ride of Elesias 1370)

With our flank secured we called the The Burning Bridge Mercenaries and explained the situation. A hammer and Anvil tactic seemed suitable. Bishop was his usual nasty self, but the idea to have several ranks of crossbow men pore salvo's in attacking 'Hulks sounded to my (inexperienced) ears like a solid plan. First, however, we let them replenish their stores and helped re-equip the two rescued males. They won't be a great asset, but crossbows were an easy weapon to learn, and every bolt could count. I lend Spill my newly acquired wand of *Acid Arrow*.

I wasn't quite sure how it happened, but it was decided that Cuura would stay with/lead the mercenaries, while the rest of us crawled through that narrow opening off the leader's cave. Felina would use her staff to remove the blockade.

Of course no plan survived contact with the enemy... Enemy? Opponents? Enemy. Even though fighting them was something I disliked they were, in fact, our enemy. Often I wondered if I should be following the path of non violence, like many of Guan Yin's most blessed followers, yet all the signs I read indicated it was not to be... at least not in the next few years.

*Protect three,
Unlock four
Liberate nine
Redeem twelve
Defend eighteen
Deliver uncounted
Save one*

The prediction I made only a few rides ago. Only the 'four' and 'twelve' seem clear: the four tomes needed to shield the Manual of Malevolence (and Sword, of course), and the twelve famous masters. I have to concentrate at the matters at hand: there were four 'Hulks, two Neogi, and about four Bugbears close. I wasn't quite sure as Grimwald had *silenced* us, and Zhae shielded me.

When the battle began Zhae and Nethander moved towards to attack the flank of the main group, as Kendalan, Grimwald, and I attacked the rearmost (from Cuura's point of view) Neogi. We focussed our attacks on the Neogi first, then the 'Hulks. My connection with Cuura got garbled: her mind was not up to the influence of the 'Hulks. Kendalan raced to support her and the mercenaries, then one of those big aberrations got too close to us. Of course Grimwald and I were unaffected, and Zhae's training shielded him, but Nethander attacked me, only to have his attack blocked by Grimwald. Zhae was busy with four Bugbears, and Grimwald's spell did not free Nethander's mind. It was lucky Grimwald had payed attention because he recognized the true danger in Nethander's attack. I used a rune to stay out of this combat and then our dwarf's elemental friend brought Nethander down, and Grimwald tried to pin him, only to have Nethander wurm out... and wandered of.

Suddenly the connection with Cuura was back, Bishop having forced some potion on her. I didn't like the man, but this counted heavily in his favor. The mercenary group had several wounded, but no fatalities. Together we looked at the ship: a huge spider like creature with web like constructs between its limbs. It was moving! Leaving! We ran forward, past cowering enslaved humans, even as the mercenaries were carefully organizing. Kendalan and I called on the support of air to get inside, Zhae assisted Cuura and Grimwald, and Felina and Nethander appeared.

Inside we encountered a small floating sphere with two eyes. Beholderkin, ugh! The Neogi tried to negotiate, yet their reputation spoke against them. Even if we made an arrangement with them, what would stop them enslaving others? They lacked the manual dexterity to repair this vessel and they would not pay honest coin for support if they could get it by domination. We told their messenger to be off – attacking it was against all customs – and continued to the 'bridge'.

The trembling of the corridor told us we were still moving and then a blue metal door stopped us. Likely trapped. Indeed trapped as Felina knocked it, and gas filled the hall. Weirdly enough Grimwald (plus Felina and Nethander) fell, so the rest of us burst in. I lacked understanding, but I knew that we had to take them before they took over our minds. I used my wand of *Scorching Ray* to get one sitting on some strange things with lots of buttons, then Zhae suddenly stopped and turned to attack us. Kendalan shot one (not the one dominating Zhae, it turned out), and Cuura blocked Zhae's advance.

I ran towards the steering apparatus, being overwhelmed by options. Cuura turned too, and I pumped another charge of the wand in the last Neogi. Luckily it killed him before Zhae was forced to make mincemeat of me. I used my magical control over metal to move the web-sails, but I just managed to decrease the speed of descend, not stop it.

How fast were we going? No way of telling, but it felt fast!

Then Kendalan returned with Grimwald who mumbled something extremely impolite about our killing the pilot. Like we had many options besides that! Grimwald's deeper understanding of mechanics payed off, as he made sense of the levers needed for flying versus those for other things. Suddenly the ship shook, and saw a enormous cliff wall appearing from the vague light produced by the webs. Grimwald managed to stop us colliding, but with a swerve and some choice dwarven curses – Cuura tried to help – put us down on a ledge like the one we had been on... minutes before?

The ship was even more damaged, but we were all alive and the ship was in a stable position. Success in other words, even if I needed to whisper a prayer to Tymora and Moradin. We found some more treasure – and those blue metal doors seem very valuable according to Grimwald – but we needed to continue our trek for Candlekeep. We seemed to have crossed the abyss... leaving much of our gear with the mercenaries.

Getting outside we were greeting be a woman telling us we were late!

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/2