

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 85: Water/Fire/Air (1st ride of Hammer 1371)

Morning was breaking and it seemed our problems were far from over. Half a dozen sails had appeared behind us. They were likely pirates, who had to know our exact course to find us in this stormy weather. We asked Ella, but she denied any knowledge of such ploy. Seeing that she was getting agitated by Nethander's constant presence, and that Cyric was hardly known for his sea relations, I was pretty sure that she actually spoke the truth. Still Grimwald took no risks, and I couldn't fault him in that.

Five ships against one was tricky even in the best of weather, and with the choppy sea and heavy wind even a minor hit could spell doom. We must plan on this all being a ploy, so Cuura, Bear, and Zhae were going to guard the cargo. Poor wizard who teleported in on them! There was something odd about the way the ships were gaining on us, and the captain confirmed there was something odd about it. Wave magic. I was sure Guan Yin would be willing to share that power with me, if I finally managed to get enough sleep to open my mind to Her.

We turned to Kendalan, who had not squandered his magical focus, but even with his lightning he could only take out one, perhaps two. Grimwald hefted his ax and stated that he could take one ship. Still that wasn't quite enough to be sure of victory, or better, survival. This meant we needed to look for other options, and Ella was the most obvious one. Grimwald asked me what I thought was a proper action, and I replied I wanted to talk to her for a tenday or so. I only intended that to see if I could turn her away from the path of lies and deception, but he understood it as the whole punishment. For a moment I wanted to correct him, but then reconsidered. Who would benefit from holding her longer? She would not, we would not, and either she was willing to look at life with different eyes, or she was not. Which meant the responsibility was mine, and to shirk that was surely a sign I did not trust in redemption. So I accepted his grumbling and saw how Ella accepted this 'punishment' (evil always thinks in punishment) with alacrity, not believing her luck. Well, Tymora due.

The sun was hardly visible between the clouds and we stood close to the leeward side to be able to hear each other. We were trying to gauge the size of the ships behind us to determine who would attack which vessel, when an impossible wave crashed on the deck. It not so much grabbed me – my heart's connection to water blocked that – but it swept me overboard together with Ella and Kendalan. The water was cold, but I could move easily. Ella was not so lucky and I saw her shape sink in the deep. I knew Kendalan had spells for this occasion, and Ella was my charge, so I dove. Using dancing lights I found her, and a runestone helped her breath. She was still out, though, and a large shark shape quickly closed in. I hesitated for a second, then saw/felt that this was no ordinary shark, but a companion of a sea druid. A companion no longer was a simple animal... I still did not like to attack it but my duty to Ella trumped that. Fire spells do work underwater: scalding steam is as deadly as fire itself.

I surfaced and with Grimwald's and Kendalan's help we managed to get back on the ship. Even with the captain slowing down I could not have caught up by mere swimming. On deck Ella was more than willing to use her spells, I would need to tell her that it was necessary, but that vengeance was a bitter brew. Fire and Lightning broke two vessels apart, and we flew to the biggest boat, so Grimwald could cut down her mast. So much opposition was clearly unexpected, so they fled. Alas Kendalan could not just let them go, and Nethander and Felina just saw opportunities for loot. Grimwald, however, saw the plight of those pirates and rescued those he could, with Kendalan's assistance. That elf's state of mind was like a summer afternoon.

The content of the crate must be the reason for all this and the captain rightly saw his contract as less binding than his duty to his ship and crew. Yet both Omens showed **Nothing**. A total blank. In a way it felt more dangerous than the darkest prediction. Void is the most dangerous element. In Waterdeep the captain contacted the guard and first and apprentice, then a master admitted they did not understand. Finally a watchful mage carrying a black staff arrive by teleport and he opened the crate using high level, yet subtle, magic. Inside was a sphere of utter darkness. It seemed to suck in everything around. He nodded and had the crate removed. A dangerous man. I was sure he knew us without even seeming to glance in our direction.