

Norbert's Notes

Saved by the Bear (131)

In which I reflect on the nature of my duties relating to the group

Where are we going, in such a hurry? Like ordinary criminals: back to the crime scene. Back to where we first encountered the pirates, trying to rescue Wok's son. Well, that we did, and we also took out their leader and his bodyguard and half a dozen more, before nearly getting arrested, presumably in some sort of set-up. *Why* we are going back now is unclear. Felina has been talking to a spy in service of the Emperor, and we have learned a lot about power struggles and secret brotherhoods without really finding out anything to go on. But this is an adventuring group after all, usually without much purpose or direction, except for a generally downward trajectory when dungeon-delving, and a generally hoped-for upward trajectory, in social standing, when spending their looted treasure. I guess that is what we are trying to do now: make a name for ourselves, in this city, halfway across the world, where we were sent by a devil, to look for something we know nothing about. I would rather walk the streets of Tai Tun in silence, seeing what I can see, hearing what I can hear, and likely finding out more in a single night of undisturbed investigation than in a month of aimless adventure-seeking. But alas; two duties bind me to the group.

One, that of the investigator. Not merely because of any given assignment, but because I am starting to believe that there really is something unusual about them. Their out-of-placeness and disruptive potential needs to be observed, and even experienced, to some degree, to properly monitor and assess them.

Two... well.

Not only my life, but my *soul* would have been forfeit, but for our encounter in the pit fiend's hold on the High Moors. It was through that meeting that I was given the chance to fulfill a service to the fiend and pay my way out. In a sense, *they helped me win my soul*. 'And I helped them bring back that of the tiefling', I can hear myself thinking. But I need to be frank here. I cannot pretend this is really something as neat as debt and repayment, and be done with it. We moved through the Afterlife, and returned, together. I was as good as dead in the land of the living, and then, alive in the land of the dead. I saw beyond the veils of this world, and felt the interlocking of the planes. I was both saved and given sight beyond sight. And without *them*, this would not have happened. I still have my suspicions, and my duty as an investigator, but I feel I now also have some sort of duty to *them*.

So as they rush on, for both of my duties, I follow. Mostly we ignore the pirates, who are now likely happily engaged setting their little fire-filled balloons afloat in their Festival of Lights, just like the rest of the Shou. Instead, suddenly distracted again, we track a fresh trail to the river, where a scene of serious concern is set before us.

Two men are being surrounded by a dozen leather-clad figures, all coming at them silently, with blades drawn. It seems clear the two men - a father and his son, I wager - have been targeted for assassination. My companions theorise the older man is a martial arts master, which would give him a fighting chance, but they are not only outnumbered, but also, very clearly, out-prepared. I do not know the source of this conflict, but whatever the motivation, this is not the proper way to resolve a dispute! As my companions charge in to try to save the two men from their assailants, I feel compelled to lend my assistance, erecting a psychic barrier to protect the two men.

Despite the assassin's prolific use of expensive poisons, we manage to kill a number of them and scare off the rest. More importantly, we prevent a tragedy by saving both the father - the master of the local martial arts school - and his headstrong son. Yet there is little time for celebration, for just when we think we have a chance to catch our breath, and start to discuss what happened and who could have targeted him, horns sound, and the sky colours red.

Fire has broken out in the city, and we rush back, hoping to help the guards contain it.