

## City of the Lost God

### Part 10 – The Guild of Sorcerers

**“Silsk involuntarily looked over her shoulder. The infamous city of Leng was rarely named, usually just being referred to as the city beyond gateway. There was a legend of listeners, waiting for any mention of Leng, listeners that even Silsk was scared of.”**



Once word of the death of Sokkolf, head of the Guild of Sorcerers had spread around the City, his servants had stopped looking oddly at Babaef. No one had questioned him and his housekeeper had arranged for a quiet but dignified cremation of his wife’s body. His daughters had even cried, but the servants had their suspicions, he’d heard their comments.

‘He vanishes for a few days and when he comes back his wife dies, and did you see the body ? That wasn’t death by anything natural.’

Then word of the death of Sokkolf had gone around the town and the condition of his body had similarities to that of his wife. Babaef was keen to point out that Sokkolf had a small army of guards, yet he’d not been able to prevent his own death.

“Obviously some evil creature was abroad in the City,” he told his housekeeper, “who knows what other bodies remain undiscovered ?”

She’d smiled at him and the staff were now relaxed around him, he’d even heard the junior maid refer to him as; ‘that poor man,’ on a few occasions. Now it had been three days since Sokkolf had been killed and Babaef was keen to visit the Guild of Sorcerers to enter his name officially as a candidate for the now vacant position as head of the guild. Besides Nigon had given him strict instructions and Babaef wasn’t about to defy his benefactor.

“Go to the Guild in person and on foot.” Nigon had told him.

He stroked Shadow and picked her up, transferring his pet to an inside pocket in his robes. He would go out unarmed and on foot, but he wasn’t going out without Shadow. Not that he intended to use her as a weapon, there were only so many gruesome deaths he could afford to be associated with, but he felt more secure with the bundle of fluff close to his body. Babaef was coming down the stairs when a breathless maid was coming the other way to get him.

“The men are here sir.”

Babaef smiled at her and the maid went back to her duties. Everything in his home was back to how it should be. He could hear his daughters trying to play yet another musical instrument, badly. Even his garden had been cleared up and now looked reasonably tidy again. A wife would be useful, but Babaef had decided to enjoy the pleasures of being a single person for a while. He approached the front door and noticed that the ‘men’ waiting to escort him across the City were in fact just two short and unimpressive dredger hybrids.

“You know where we’re going ?” He asked them.

The one in slightly less dirty armour answered him.

“Yes sir. We are to escort you to the guild headquarters and wait for you, then we are to escort you home.”

He’d haggled that had been the problem. His housekeeper knew someone who hired out guards by the day, but Babaef had heard the price and decided it was too much. Most of his neighbours had guards, the area seemed to be knee deep in hybrids in ill-fitting armour, carrying assorted weaponry. So he’d decided that having his own guards was a needless expense. He’d never admit to being tight

fisted, in his own mind he was just saving every penny in case the visitation turned out to be fatal. He had no real friends, but most of his fellow sorcerers considered him to be the tightest person in the City.

"Muzzie is away," his housekeeper had said, "but I'm sure Sara could find two cheaper guards for the day."

He'd gone with cheaper and consoled himself with the fact that Nigon would definitely approve of the two scruffy creatures shuffling along behind him.

"I've never walked there, ever !" He'd said to Nigon.

Nigon had laughed at him in a cruel way.

"Don't worry I have need of you. You won't see anyone, but I will not let you be harmed. Once Sockolf is dead there will be several applicants for the position, but only you and Thrand will be serious contenders."

"Thrand has far more friends and influence." He'd replied.

Again there had been the cruel laugh.

"It would be difficult to have fewer friends than you. I can arrange for a few things to blight his reputation, but there can't be two mystery deaths, you'll need to win the selection process. Walking there unarmed, with no more than two guards will impress everyone."

So Babaef was approaching the furthest he had ever walked from his house. Anywhere further than his neighbours boundary wall had always been in a hand pulled carriage of some kind. He looked back at his two guards, one carrying a heavy scythe and the other holding a rusty sword. Even to him they looked more comical than threatening.

"Keep up." He shouted.

As they got to the end of his road, he turned onto the main highway that led into the City, though it was still little more than a muddy lane. Some people in their garden came to watch him go by, their children pointing at him. Since the murders and the plague no one was walking, very few were even leaving their homes by cart or carriage.

"Good morning." He called.

They waved at him and returned his greeting.

"It's Itet's father." He heard a child say.

Babaef was making an impression, but he had the worst part of old town to walk through and he just hoped he survived the day.

~ ~

"Mention this to no one." Said Adamaz.

Borlas was one of the more timid of the library apprentices and Adamaz was sure he wouldn't mention the disappearance of Caspian and Vella to anyone. He'd given the lad a lot of leeway, but after three days Sara had come to the library looking for Vella, they were shorthanded at the tavern.

"It's not like her," Sara had said, "she might turn up tired, but she's never missed a shift."

Normally he'd have been quite brusque with someone like Sara, but she did have some useful contacts. Adamaz had sent Borlas to see if Caspian was asleep in his room and the boy had come back looking quite scared, so Adamaz had come to look for himself, taking Sara with him.

"This is his bedroom," said Adamaz, "but none of his things are here."

He scanned the room, but there was nothing but a few scuff marks on the floor and a slight smell of something unpleasant.

"They moved bedrooms sir," said Borlas, "to further along the passage."

"Why ?"

The lad just looked scared and confused and shrugged at him. Why did people shrug so much these days ? All the lad had to say was that he didn't know.

"Show me where."

The three of them arrived at the room Caspian and Vella had turned into a love nest and it was exactly as the two had left it three days before. There was a bowl of fruit that was beginning to go bad and dirty clothing left in piles. There was the impression that no one had slept in the room for some time.

"All her clothes are here," said Sara, "I recognise most of them."

They investigated the rest of the rooms, finding more food going bad in the kitchen and ominously a large knife covered in congealed blood. Adamaz picked it up and smelled the blade.

"They must have been preparing meat, it's not their blood."

He saw Sara give him an odd look, but she was obviously too polite to ask him how he knew. Adamaz could put out an alert for the couple, but that would involve the dark angels and they would take a dim view of a missing librarian with Caspian's skills.

"Perhaps they've just gone away together for a while, you know what the young are like." He said.

Borlas was now looking very upset, so Adamaz sent him back to his duties, with yet another order to keep the matter to himself.

"He knows something." Said Sara.

"I know he does, but he's not about to tell us."

They returned to the bedroom and looked through the clothing and opened the cupboards, looking for clues. There did seem to be a lot of books from the library, but Caspian had permission to read almost anything he wanted. Sara looked out of the window at the view of the desolate western part of the rift.

"I can't just abandon the girl, what do we do now ?"

Adamaz was more concerned with Caspian than Vella, but he guessed that find one and you'd find the other.

"We give them another few days to return and if they don't I'll involve the dark angels in a search of the City."

Sara didn't look happy, but she nodded at him.

~ ~

"They don't seem bothered by the barrows where nothing happens." Said Lilleth.

Lilleth had stopped counting the barrows, one day was beginning to seem like the previous and their enthusiasm, which had started quite low, was fading to nothing. Two days ago a tremor had been so large that one of the standing stones had toppled over, but since then they'd just moved from barrow to barrow, with Sajaha reading from his book.

"Maybe nothing is meant to happen, maybe it's all part of large lock of some kind and not all the keys cause tremors."

Muzzie noticed Lilleth was giving him an odd look, he had been giving the daily routine quite a bit of thought. Besides eating and sleeping with Lilleth, it had become his life over the last few days.

"So you think Sajaha might succeed ?" Lilleth asked.

"I have no idea." He winked at her. "I really hope not !"

They both started to check over the next barrow for any dangers, not that there'd been anything bigger than a Nesh Bug for days. Annun approached them with his hood tight against his head.

They'd both noticed that the manservant didn't like showing his transparent skin in public.

"If things go right at this barrow, we may need you to recover an item before moving on."

Lilleth just smiled, but Muzzie knew it was going to mean going into a barrow, or a hole in the ground and he was mentally practising his 'I told you so' speech.

"What sort of object?" Asked Lilleth.

"Another part of the book Master Sajaha is reading."

The barrow had been extensively excavated and there were pits dug right where Sajaha would normally stand to give his reading. Unusually this barrow had a large standing stone beside it, a needle of stone forty feet in height and it looked to have once been covered in writing.

"Too worn to make anything out." Muzzie commented.

Sajaha seemed to have no interest in the stone needle, or the fact that so much digging had already taken place. Annun lit the incense burners and after a few minutes Sajaha began his usual intoning of a verse from the book on the stand. At first nothing happened, but then there was a sound, as if hundreds of buzzing insects had filled the air. They all started to look around, while Sajaha continued with his verse, but it was Lilleth who noticed the top of the stone needle.

"It seems to be dissolving."

There was what looked like a mini tornado, whipping around the top of the needle and sending dust from the stone in all directions. As the tornado moved down the stone, the dust and debris being flung from the stone was so intense that they all moved back from it, except Sajaha, who carried on reading. He too moved back many yards from the stone once he'd finished the verse. The sound of buzzing grew and as the tornado reached the lowest parts of the needle, the dust and stone fragments were thrown out with some force, one knocking over the book stand.

"The book must be protected!" Shouted Sajaha.

Annun ran into the storm of rock dust, ignoring the larger lumps that hit his skin like barbed arrows. Already bleeding, Muzzie watched as the brave manservant threw himself across the book, taking the brunt of the debris storm across his back. The tornado didn't stop at ground level, but continued. Throwing out dust like a volcano for quite some time. A few larger lumps of stone fell quite close to Lilleth, so she moved even further back. As to poor Annun? It had been some time since he'd shown any sign of life and he seemed half buried under rock fragments.

"It's stopped." Said Muzzie.

The whirring buzz had stopped and Muzzie ran straight towards Annun, pulling the largest pieces of stone off his bruised body. Lilleth started to clear the dust off the manservant's face.

"He's alive." She said.

Once they'd dusted him down Annun didn't seem too badly injured. There were a few nasty gashes in his back that oozed a viscous clear fluid, which was obviously his blood. Once he'd coughed up a few handfuls of dust, the manservant seemed none the worse for his ordeal. Lilleth bandaged him up, while Muzzie picked up the book stand. The stand was badly damaged, but repairable and thanks to Annun the precious metal pages of the book were undamaged. Sajaha immediately took the book from Muzzie and kept it in his grasp.

"Shall we see what was below the stone needle?" Said Muzzie.

They all stared down what looked like a dry stone well, eight feet or so square and a good thirty feet deep. At the bottom they could just make out a passage heading away from the barrow.

"I know," said Muzzie, "you want me to go down there and get the book page."

"There may be several pages." Said Sajaha.

Muzzie looked down into the hole. He doubted that any wild creature would be down there, but there might be traps and of course cave ins to worry about.

"We'll need ropes and lamps." Said Lilleth.

It looked very deep and they'd need to ram posts into the ground to tie ropes to.

"It's all on the waggon," said Annun, "ropes, lamps, shovels, hammers. Everything you'll need."

Once Lilleth was happy Annun wasn't going to bleed to death, she joined Muzzie in walking back to the waggon to pick up the things they'd need.

"So you're going down there with me?" Muzzie asked.

"You don't think I'd let you have all the fun do you?"

~

~

The walk through old town had been nerve wracking. Babaef had seen a group of four ruffians eyeing up his clothing and deciding whether he was worth robbing. To his surprise his cheap and scruffy guards hadn't run and after giving him a few dirty looks, the ruffians had left him alone. Luck or some influence from Nigon? Babaef wasn't sure, but he was glad when old town was behind him and the impressive edifice of the Guild of Sorcerers was in view across just one more street.

"You can come inside," he said to his guards, "there is a room where you can wait."

The guild's full name was The Guild of Sorcerers, Seers and Necromancers, and those words were carved in ornate gold painted words above the door. Everyone in the City knew it simply as The Guild of Sorcerers. Not far from Muzzie's, the building was elegant without appearing flashy and there was a permanent guard to make sure the building remained un-vandalised. At five floors high, it was the highest stone built structure apart from the towers and it was rumoured to have been built by Tomma-Goran himself.

"Good day sir."

The guard on the door opened the door for him, while a servant silently escorted his men to a nearby waiting room. Babaef was in the reception area for the guild and it always excited him, like a child visiting their favourite toy shop. In his heart of hearts he'd always wanted to be head of the guild, but he'd never had enough confidence to seek election to the role. Perhaps it was surviving the visitation, or using Shadow to kill his wife, but Babaef suddenly thought he could achieve anything if he really wanted to. Striding past the portraits of past heads of the guild, Babaef stroked Shadow as he headed up the stairs and towards the administration office on the first floor. He saw two members of the guild at the far end of the corridor, but they just nodded at him. Purposefully Babaef opened the door and walked in without knocking.

"Babaef, I didn't expect to see you today. I was sorry to hear about your wife." Said Pinthrad.

Pinthrad was the clerk of the guild and so old that his eyes were difficult to make out through the wrinkles on his face. There were several other senior members of the guild in the room, but no sign of Thrand, the current favourite to take over as head.

"I came today to put my name on the election papers."

Pinthrad shuffled a few papers about on his desk and brought out the election list. He carefully wrote Babaef's name on the roll and then passed it to him for signature.

"I'm surprised you came in person, Thrand sent his man with a note."

Babaef brought Shadow out from under his robes and let the creature snuggle up on his left arm.

"You allowed that?" Shouted Babaef. "The rules clearly state that all candidates must attend in person to enter their name on the roll."

He scratched his name on the roll and replaced the feather pen back in its holder on the desk.

"I know that strictly that is the rule but....."

"Don't you give me that, rules are rules. If I took the trouble to walk here, through a city under the threat of plague, then Thrand can get in his carriage and attend."

There were mutterings behind him. Nigon hadn't told him how to behave, but he knew that loud and provocative were something he would approve of.

"You walked here?" Asked Pinthrad.

"Indeed I did. Being head of the guild would mean a lot to me, I have a lot of changes I'd like to make. Adherence to the rules is just one of them."

There was more muttering in the room and a few nodding heads. Babaef knew well that the ignoring of rules, lateness for meetings and non-payment of dues had grown to epidemic levels under the late Sökkolf.

"So what are you going to do about Thrand?" He asked.

Pinthrad looked distressed, he wasn't used to being put under pressure and hadn't expected it from the usually amiable Babaef.

"Do?" He muttered.

Babaef took the time to pet Shadow and take a slow look around the room, nodding at anyone he recognised, which was quite a few.

"Yes do," he said, "obviously his name can't go on the roll without him attending, unless you'd like me to lodge a formal complaint?"

Pinthrad started reaching for a glass nearby and took a sip of the liquid; Babaef doubted if it was just water in the glass. Pinthrad had come out of one complaint very badly and another might well cost him his job.

"No you're right of course, I'll send a messenger to his house, insist that he attends."

"Good and I assume you'll check that his dues to the guild are paid in full?"

Pinthrad just nodded at him. Babaef put Shadow back inside his robes and headed for the stairs. He was surprised to see a great many guild members had heard his commotion, or of it and had come out to slap him on the back, or smile at him. Even the guard stood to attention as he collected his men and started on the long and frightening walk home.

~

~

"It has to be behind this door." Said Caspian.

They'd found the one locked door quite early on, but had decided to explore everywhere else first. They'd found rooms with chests full of gold, enough armour and weapons to equip a small army, drawers full of spells they couldn't read, yet no portal leading out of the upper dome. Their food was running out and they were back at the door.

"I wonder why LLud didn't open it?" Said Vella.

"Perhaps he couldn't?"

The door was at the end of a corridor and it looked important, the sort of door the person in charge of the place would have. Solid silver metal, with bronze coloured bracing struts and studs of what might be gold. It was impressive, it was huge and it was firmly locked.

"How long will our food last?" Asked Caspian.

Vella had taken charge of the rations, she seemed the most organised and she had brought most of the food anyway.

"Two days on minimum rations and then we start starving."

There was no obvious key hole in the door, but they'd spent the best part of a day looking for levers, buttons or anything else that might open the door, all with no luck. Caspian had been thinking of a solution, but he'd kept the idea to himself, as a last resort.

"We should try the terrible weapon." He said.

"Will it disintegrate the door?"

"I remember the instructions in a book, it has a detonation setting."

They walked back to LLud's workroom, along corridors now all too familiar to them. They'd long since stopped turning off the light globes, so everywhere they went was brightly lit. To Caspian at least the upper dome was beginning to feel like a home from home. They entered the workroom, still gritty with the dust of the shattered sorcerer. Caspian pick up the weapon from a bench and felt it throb as soon as he put his hand on the flat metal side of the device.

"It still holds a charge." He said.

The weapon had a sling on it, which Caspian carefully put over his shoulder.

"What did the book say about this detonation?" Asked Vella.

Caspian started to walk back towards the door. Not wanting to avoid the question, but to get the weapon fired before his own courage failed him.

"Casp, don't ignore me, tell me about it?"

"There was an old engraving," he said, "of someone using the weapon against city walls during a siege. There wasn't much left of the walls."

They walked on in silence with Vella giving him worried looks. Once back at the door, Caspian started to explore the other open rooms leading off the corridor.

"I'll fire it from the end of the corridor, but I need some extra cover. Help me drag this chest of drawers."

They dragged the heavy wooden furniture to the end of the corridor and left just enough of a gap between it and the wall for Caspian to fire the weapon through. They then looked for cushions, fabrics, old clothing, anything to help pad out the position where Caspian was to lay.

"Where do I go?" Asked Vella.

Caspian held her and kissed her, wondering if he'd ever seen her again.

"I want you a long way from here, right down in the kitchen."

"No I want to be with you Casp."

"There's no point in both of us getting killed, if it goes wrong. I'll give you a while to get down there, then I'm firing the weapon."

They kissed for quite some time, Vella crying as she reluctantly let go of him and walked towards the kitchen, several floors below. Caspian wedged himself against the wall and pulled the various pieces of padding over himself. He'd heard once that holding your nose was good in a detonation, but he needed both hands for the weapon. After he'd decided Vella must have reached the kitchen, he brought up the muzzle of the terrible weapon and aimed it at the centre of the door. He pulled down the first lever and the weapon gave off a reassuring deep throbbing sound, he had no doubt that it was still fully charged.

"May the eight great demon God's watch over me." He muttered.

After making sure the weapon was still centred on the door, he felt for the metal lever furthest from him and pulled it down.

~ ~

Silsk was reluctant to leave Olvir, he really was a very attentive lover. But she needed to discuss matters that even he wasn't allowed to know. She dropped from her bedroom window enjoying the feel of the wind whipping through her hair. Just as the ground started to look detailed, she extended her wings and soared over the City, enjoying the thought of all those cringing away from her passing shadow. She'd have loved to visit Merrick, beat him around a little, perhaps a lot. But Aeony would be waiting for her on the roof of the highest part of the towers and Silsk needed her help. She came around in a large circle, more to emphasise her dominion over the City, than a need to climb higher.

She noticed Aeony sat on the small flat roof over three hundred feet above the ground and spiralled down to land next to her.

“Thank you for coming.” She said.

Silsk still hated Aeony with a deep hatred that both knew would end with one of them dying, but today Silsk needed the help of another dark angel and Aeony was by far the cleverest and toughest.

“As always, I am yours to command.” Said Aeony.

So Aeony was playing the role of loyal subject, so be it. Silsk looked at the ground far below and wondered what Aeony would do if ordered to hurl herself off the edge of the roof and fall to her death. At the moment though Silsk had need of her.

“You may have heard of the sorcerer Muzzie took to the Ring of Volkin ?” She said.

“Sajaha, yes I did note their noisy exit from the City. His servant Annun was unusual, a caged elemental is rare this side of gateway.”

So she’d been right, Annun was an elemental captured in a host body. Silsk had thought so, but it was nice to have it confirmed. She was tempted to ask how Aeony knew, but that would mean admitting her own sources weren’t as good as hers.

“My sources say he doesn’t come from Tandalla as he claims, but he’s come from beyond gateway.”

“From Leng itself ?” Asked Aeony.

Silsk involuntarily looked over her shoulder. The infamous city of Leng was rarely named, usually just being referred to as the city beyond gateway. There was a legend of listeners, waiting for any mention of Leng, listeners that even Silsk was scared of.

“What would someone from.... There... be doing digging in an old stone ring on the 1<sup>st</sup> rift ?”

“Leng wouldn’t be interested in treasure, there must be an item of power there somewhere, or they think there is.”

Silsk cringed inside at the second open use of the name of Leng, but knew it would show weakness to admonish Aeony for its use.

“We need to know what Sajaha seeks and if it may be of use to the City. Will you act as my eyes and ears in this matter ?”

“Yes. I await your orders.”

“Good, good. Arrange for Sajaha to be observed. Nothing clumsy, Muzzie is no fool and neither is Lilleth. Use a few good people and get them to report if they seem to discover anything other than old stones and dust at the Ring of Volkin.”

Aeony bowed and was gone, dropping away before flying off towards the slums, probably to seek out reliable spies for the mission. Silsk remained a while, looking out over the City and hoping that Sajaha might find something she could use to enforce her often tenuous hold on power over the creatures living out their lives below her.

~ ~

“It needs more bracing.” Said Lilleth.

They’d spent some time hammering poles into the dry ground, but no matter how deep they put them the poles wobbled and neither of them fancied the idea of their lives relying on ropes tied to them.

“There are metal pegs that you may be able to hammer into gaps in the stones.” Said Annun.

Sajaha was losing patience, constantly moaning about the time they were wasting.

“You’ll have no daylight soon. Surely the ropes will be secure enough ?”

Muzzie was getting fed up with the constant nagging.



"It's my life at the end of those ropes," he said, "and anyway you hired me as a guide and for protection. There was no mention of exploring holes in the ground."

Sajaha seemed shocked and looked to Lilleth for support.

"He's got a point," said Lilleth, "neither of us signed up for this. We'll go down there and find your book page, if it's there, but not until the ropes are safe."

Sajaha muttered to himself and watched the lengthening shadows, but he no longer moaned at them. Muzzie and Lilleth went to the waggon and after a lot of digging they found a bag full of metal pegs.

"Annun has prepared well," said Lilleth, "these are used in construction, they hammer them between stones, then fix timbers to them."

"Thank you, I tried to think of every eventuality." Said Annun.

They hadn't heard him approach and were surprised at how silently the servant could move, Lilleth was rarely crept up on.

"These will do the job." Said Muzzie.

With Annun, they collected anything they might need down the hole. Lamps, another two lengths of rope, two water bottles, they were leaving nothing to chance. They returned to the hole to find a far calmer and quiet Sajaha.

"You're right," said Sajaha, "neither of you did sign up for this and this won't be the last place to explore. I believe money is the usual compensation for such risks and I will pay you both a handsome bonus if this expedition is a success."

"There really is no need....." Started Lilleth.

"I'll take her share if she doesn't want it," said Muzzie, "if I'm going into dark and dangerous holes in the ground on a semi-regular basis, then yes, I want that bonus."

Lilleth gave him a dark look, but she held the metal pegs while he hammered them between the stones that lined the top of the hole. They put in quite a few pegs and then fixed ropes to them, which they pulled tight around the wooden poles. Eventually as the light was fading they both thought the ropes would be secure enough to get them down the hole and more importantly, out of it again. Lilleth lit one of the lamps to give their anchor a final inspection.

"It'll hold. We'll go down at first light."

"Not until morning? Surely you could go now?" Said Sajaha.

Muzzie lit a lamp and tied it to a length of rope and began to lower it into the hole.

"We can at least get a better idea of what's down there." He said.

The lamp went down and they could see that the stone lining was secure and went right to the bottom of the hole. A few tree roots had once pushed a gap through the stones, but the roots were almost completely rotted away and there was no danger of collapse.

"Let's see right to the bottom." Said Lilleth.

Down the lamp went and as it touched the bottom they could see the dark area to one side, where a passage led away from the barrow and out under the rift.

"I'll swing it over a bit."

Muzzie pulled the lamp up a little and started to gently swing it from side to side. Once he'd got a good rhythm going he let it land on the floor just inside the passage. They all craned over the edge to see what was there, even Sajaha. As they looked an arm came out of the darkness of the passage, a long dark arm with a powerful hand. It picked up the lamp and crushed it, crushed it until the lamp went out and the rope went slack. Muzzie pulled the rope up and all that remained of the lamp was the badly twisted handle, still tied to the rope.

“We’ll wait until morning to go down,” said Lilleth, “and I will take that bonus.”

~ ~

Caspian regained consciousness long enough to remember being pulled by his feet, but the next thing he clearly remembered was seeing Vella’s face covered in tears. He turned towards her and tried to smile, but his face hurt. Everything hurt ! As he coughed and tried to sit up it felt like a hammer was being used to hit him between the eyes.

“You’re alive !” Said Vella.

She hugged him and although the affection was nice, every hug seemed to bring a fresh pain. Eventually Vella helped him get into a seated position against the wall. He’d been cleaned up, his face had obviously been scrubbed clean and Vella had dressed several wounds on his legs, there were a lot of blood stains on his ragged trousers.

“How long was I out ?”

“Hours, it’s now the middle of the night.”

He started coughing, bringing up phlegm full of grey dust.

“The furniture cut you, it was all turned to matchwood.”

He had a few experimental moves around and although everything hurt, it didn’t feel like anything was actually broken. The furniture may have broken up, but it had obviously saved him from serious injury.

“And the weapon ?” He asked.

“Not a scratch on it, I put it back in LLud’s workroom.”

Vella reached for a jug of water and poured him a cup. The water seemed warm and slightly dusty, but Caspian enjoyed every drop.

“Are you hungry ?”

“No, but I’d like more water.”

Vella gave him more water and waited for him to drink it before giving him a serious look.

“I’ll help you, but you should get on your feet, make sure there is nothing broken.”

He could see the sense of her suggestion and with her help he got to his feet and walked a few steps along the corridor. There were pains in his legs where they’d been cut, but there were none of the debilitating pains caused by broken bones. He took a few really deep lungfuls of air and although his ribs hurt, none of them seemed cracked.

“I think I got off lightly Vella. But I can’t walk to our room, I’ll stay here until morning.”

As he sat down and leaned against the wall, Vella sat next to him and put her arm around him.

“I’ll stay with you, I’ll go for some of the bedding in a minute.”

Caspian felt very tired, but as he started to drift off he had to ask.

“Did we get the door open ?”

“Yes there’s nothing left of it.”

Vella was suddenly very animated, the familiar gleam of excitement in her eyes.

“You should see the rooms beyond the door Casp, they’re the most beautiful I’ve ever seen.”

~ ~

© Ed Cowling – July 2014

Part 11 will be posted at the end of August.