

## Misadventure in Bristol

by Tracy Keane

Until this weekend, I had largely managed to avoid Lady Tso. There is no doubt that she's the most evil woman to ever walk the streets of Bristol, but Thoren and the Paragons have declared that we aren't to take action against her -- not yet, anyway. As if I needed additional incentive to avoid her, the Lady is almost always accompanying that vile Sheriff: the hand of the unjust, the punisher of the innocent, the bearer of many buckles.

Until this weekend. Then Ryder and I found ourselves tasked with a quest that would place us face-to-face with the Lady, and most definitely incur her wrath in the process. I shan't speak of many details, for this quest was given in secrecy. Needless to say we were successful in our efforts, and Lady Tso's eyes blazed with hellfire as she swore that we would pay for what we had done.

Hours passed, sharing laughter and food with friends, and my guard slowly dropped. It was late in the afternoon when a girl in patched clothes and a mud-smearred face approached us, showing interest in my staff, Auranel. It's common for the citizens of Bristol to become distracted by shinies, and I thought nothing of it as I let the girl examine the trinkets and crystals of power tied above the handgrip.

She began turning away with it, as if she was examining something in the light, but I sensed she was preparing to run off with it. I made a few attempts to politely take my staff back, which were doggedly ignored. So I changed tactics. Let her run with it, leaving me free to give chase and drop all pretense of politeness.

She ran as expected, quite fleet of foot for a mortal, weaving in and out of the crowd. Not only did they slow me as I chased her, they made it impossible for me to hit her with a stun spell. Small irritants that only made the hunt all the more exciting.

Mud Girl was quick, but I was the quicker, and a thrill of triumph ran through me as I reached above her and closed my hands around the familiar handgrip. But she wouldn't let go, stuck fast to the thing like a stubborn barnacle. I caught a flash of red and black at the edge of the crowd -- Lady Tso, and Mud Girl was running straight to her. Of course that venomous viper would be the one behind this!

I'd been having fun chasing Mud Girl before, giving half-hearted attempts when I thought there was no real danger. With Lady Tso standing before me, the grave reality of the situation sunk in. It was unthinkable that Auranel might fall into her hands.

Mud Girl be damned. I put my back to Lady Tso and called on the power of the Earth for the strength to trudge away, dragging the Mud Girl in my wake as her hands were still stuck fast around Auranel. It pains me to say that Lady Tso's minions are truly selfless in their devotion -- I

was worried the Mud Girl's arms would wrench from their sockets as I dragged her ten good paces away.

Finally we stopped and she shamefacedly stared at the ground as she let go of Auranel. "Back to Lady Tso with you," I spat, pointing at the villainess, who had begun to walk away once it became clear that her ploy had failed. Howe'er, I have now twice vexed the Lady. I fear she will not easily forget such slights.

May the fates watch over me.