

## *The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)*

### *Chapter 3: Resupply and trails (2nd ride of Alturiak 1370)*

*The smell of death was overpowering, only tempered by the icy cold, and I stood there as Cuura calmly stripped the dead of any armor or weapons which might be useful to this group. Kendalan was a bit wobbly, but quickly started to collect those arrows which were to be found near the carnage, while Grimwald stood lamenting his loss of equipment, until I walked over to the dropped Orc and returned his backpack. Zhae had removed the heads of that creature – I now learned it is called an Ettin, although one with magical powers seems an anomaly – which I understand is one of the few ways to truly kill a regenerating creature; the others being use of acid or fire. Felina looked pale, but oddly non shocked by the dead and dying – nobody even tried to see if some of those Orcs might be saved for information – but instead, after receiving some healing from Grimwald, took the meager magical supplies in the Ettin's pouch. The decision to continue was the only valid option, but I haven't felt this tired ever, even if I'm one with the least cuts and bruises.*

*Felina led us for a while, as Kendalan took the rear to hide our trail, but the path she took meandered and our progress was slow. A hour later the Spirit took his usual position and we made more speed away from the battlefield, looking for a secluded spot where we could finally rest. Then Cuura proposed that she could lay a false trail away from us, as she had the speed to outrun pursuers, and could more easily hide her own when she had lured whoever followed us in the wrong direction. We accepted gratefully, and, after trying to make clear arrangement of possible meeting points, signals, and way markers, she left at an angle while Kendalan put great effort in hiding the groups splitting up. It was a brave act, even my great grandfather could find no fault with: choosing danger so the group might reach safety.*

*At dawn, Grimwald looked for (and found) a rocky outcrop with a sheltering hole, although it was no true cave, but Kendalan showed that the location was to 'visible good' and that it would attract attention by anybody searching. A small stand of trees nearby looked totally average, but gave good cover, had a tiny stream for cold water, and allowed for surveillance on the previous location. We quickly entered, making sure no tracks were left and prepared for rest. I would have liked to go to sleep at that very moment, but all except Zhae had had a close brush to death and were, in a way, even more in need of rest than I was. So we went and guarded the others, but I'm afraid we were not so vigilant as we were otherwise. Near noon the Spirit woke afreshed and we could finally sleep.*

*My head had hardly touched the ground or we were woken again to a story of some invisible tall creature flying to check the outcrop. I tried to focus on what had happened, but my body was still desperate for sleep and could do little more than stare. We were allowed to sleep for a few seconds more, but when I looked the sun was low, so it most have been longer. We left our hiding spot to continue our search, but our sorry state and exhaustion did not promise a good result. Luckily those more awake realized this and we left these hills and sparse grown lands to look for a village to the south. It was utterly dark when we reached it, to be halted by some guards, but Felina spoke well and we were allowed in. A crude, barn-like, hall was to be both our welcoming place as well as sleeping quarters, but the hay smelled sweet and the well tended fire warmth, so I did not complain, especially as it had started to rain and hail outside. I wonder if I would be able to survive such weather outside, but Cuura is one with the land, and this climate might actually be far friendlier than the places she comes from. At least such were the tales she told us. I would dearly loved to go to sleep then and there, but Felina asked me to speak to those present to allow Grimwald to ply his trade (he's an armor smith!), so I spoke politely, but with skill, and our hosts understood our humble but righteous requests.*

*Gods stop things mortals cannot  
Mortals can do things Gods cannot*

*The day went by quickly: Grimwald was busy in the smithy, Felina spent time on cleaning one of the studded leather armors and fitting it to my size, Kendalan spoke to the local guards and shared some of his expertise, I arranged for the exchange of goods for the spoils of battle, and I've got no idea what Zhae did. Of course our dwarf wanted to stay longer to create a long list of items absolutely vital to the success of the mission (according to him), but he seems to have an unrealistic idea of what one can expect in a little village of no more than twenty buildings and a single shrine. But again I will also have to look at his positive points: he made some warped looking bolts which should be extremely effective on close range. A day ago I might have doubted his statement, but this time I took the time to see how he and the owner of the smithy interacted and it was clear that at least that man did not consider him a novice, nor journeyman.*

*Refreshed and resupplied we went north again on a slightly different route as we encountered a small stream (no more than 12 feet wide) coming from the hills we were combing for the location of the Darkness. Zhae paid attention, for he plucked an old boot out of the water which Grimwald and Kendalan declared to be Orc made. Having an indication that the Orcs had either crossed this stream, or had made camp nearby, we traveled north alongside it, soon leaving the tilled lands behind and entering the rough and sparsely grown hills again.*

*Coming to a narrow gully Felina, Kendalan went in first, followed by the dwarf and the mule. Zhae and I went last, trying to keep our balance on the slippery stones and the cold current, when I slipped and fell headlong in the water. The cold overwhelmed me and I later heard that first Zhae had plucked me out of the water before Felina used her sleep magic to get me relaxed enough to have her be able to pull off my soaked clothing and wrap me in one of her own gowns. Such are the dangers of nature – in a way I have been closer to death due to an almost frozen stream than to an armed Orc.*

*We traveled on finding no trace of Orcish passage, until the sound of a waterfall reached our ears. Kendalan and Felina went on to scout, but returned several minutes later with the knowledge that there was a secret passage behind the waterfall, that somebody recently had used that, but that the path was open and sneaking in would be a tricky proposition.*

*Perhaps it would be best to find Cuura first.*

*Human female Paragon/1*