

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 8: Half of a double problem (3rd ride of Ches 1370)

It was after midnight when we returned to Berdusk with Grimwald reacting more to our cut up equipment than our wounds. It was his way, I suppose, and he wasn't tardy in applying his healing magic, so I shouldn't complain. Cuura gave both Grimwald and Felina a share of our gains, which were gladly received, and we were happy to take some days to rest and heal up. The next day Zhae felt a bit off so he stayed in bed while the rest of us did our own things. Cuura returned with a rather nicely made golden necklace, while Felina and I concentrated on understanding more of the Art. I've got no idea what Kendalan was working on, he asked me to show me how to play my instrument, but where his voice was nice, his hands were too strong to coach the right tones from my pipa.

Next day Zhae really fell ill, so we got a priest and he felt better soon after. Cuura had given some silver cups to the temple, which had given us a good reputation. That woman looked so wild, but she managed to make friends rather easily! With Zhae slowly recuperating we spent another few days doing this and that until Weldin again asked us to help him. He was a skillful negotiator, that man. Either he had few funds, or there was another reason why he didn't want to pay. In any case there was a problem with an Ettin bothering a halfling village to the south, and we were going to solve it.

Without pay.

We decided to leave Zhae home. He didn't like it, but he turned an interesting yellow-green when he tried to stand, so I hope he's a smart guy (guy! so little chance) and stay in bed until fully cured.

We left the next morning and two days later arrived at the halfling village.

They build in the **ground!** They also didn't trust us much, clearly they have had nothing but trouble from those bigger than them. We managed to get directions to the shrine, or, as we saw when we arrived, the remains of one. The roof was gone and one side was just open. Cuura, Grimwald, and Felina discussed the odd behavior of this Ettin, and then they discovered some writing on one of the walls. That seemed truly odd and they spent some time making sense of the rhyme. I had a little knowledge of the gods of these western realms and could assist a bit. Quickly it was decided we needed to wait it out here, so we spent the night in cover, but no Ettin - odd or otherwise - showed.

In the morning Cuura rode to the village to find out if it was possible that one of the halflings was a shapechanger. Unlikely perhaps, but not impossible. That woman was really much smarter than she looked. We were discussing our possible plans when a horn signal called our attention. It didn't take much to figure out it was an alarm call of some kind so we hurried towards the sound.

Half an hour later we arrived at the spot. Half of a cow near a ruined well, and several halflings trying to rescue two halflings who had jumped into it to evade the Ettin. Cuura arrived too, having transformed a small group into a kind of army, or at least a patrol. There was a flurry of activity where Cuura and Kendalan decided to track the Ettin on horseback while we helped the halflings and followed them with the impromptu army Cuura had created. As I closed in on the well it was clear it was half collapsed - the Ettin had smashed the outer rim and pushed it inwards. One could see the people in, but lowering somebody would probably mean that some pieces of masonry would fall down. I again praised the foresight of my aunt and swapped places with one of the halflings, then waited for a roped so we could be pulled up to narrow part, after which I could protect the shivering and wounded halfling until an opening was made.

While I dried myself, Grimwald had managed to lose control over the patrol Cuura had created. He couldn't help it really, he had nothing of the control aura Cuura had. Felina wasn't about to help him, she didn't like ordered groups and her aura was one of 'unseen'. Should I step forward? It was unseemly for a woman to take command, but the customs here were so much different.

Anyway we followed the tracks as best as we were able. Truth be told we went in the general direction in which Cuura and Kendalan had left and followed the arrows on the ground once the hills stopped being gentle curves and started to becoming hilly. There was something odd about those arrows. They don't seem to be made by either Kendalan nor Cuura, but the occasional hoof print of Cuura's charger and Kendalan's horse convinced us that we were on the right track. Finally we crossed over a kind of ridge and saw a wide meadow below with an enclosure in the middle and off the center a ruined tower. To our chagrin the bodies of Cuura and Kendalan lay sprawled on the ground amidst several chunks of masonry not ten yards from the remains of the tower.

Felina immediately cast a spell on Grimwald, telling him that he had speed, and he took off like a horse on racing day! A truly inspiring sight! Felina and I ran after him, although I outpaced her, because she was casting spells. As Grimwald closed in a half seen Ettin tried squash the dwarf lobbing rocks, but most stones were artfully evaded. I have to admit Grimwald is impressing me. He reached the two fallen figures, clearly intending to help when a missile hit him. Would he fall to?

He did not fall and ran towards the ruined door opening while both Kendalan and Cuura rose. I was almost giddy with happiness that they were still alive and I saw from a distance how they fought the Ettin who stood in the door opening. It clearly had expected one opponent, not three and blows and arrows from them, plus some magic and bolts from Felina and me quickly made it bleed from multiple wounds. There was something different about this Ettin: the left arm only made small motions and the left head looked kind of stunned.

The barrage of attacks forced it backwards and it pulled a kind of defensive lever which made the top of the tower fall outwards almost blocking the entrance and hitting several of my friends. Friends? Yes, what else could they be? They started yelling to the left head to fight the right, but it responded by a wail. Grimwald got clobbered to the ground, but the supportive speech of all of them clearly made an impression.

And then there was insight on the face.

It suddenly started casting a spell, and the right arm tried to stop it. Cuura and Kendalan, however, managed to hang on for dear life and suddenly the Ettin shrunk while the right head disappeared. What remained was a poorly clad human, tears streaming over his face.

Human female Paragon/2, Wu-Jen/1