

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 103: Truth against Fear (1st ride of Tarsakh 1371)

I kind of knew I was in my **plant growth**. Thinking was hard, ideas, thoughts, plans flitting though my head. I knew the danger we were in, yet I was incapable of any coherent action. How had I got here? Rock? I heard the crackling sound of a **lightning** strike, the growl of Bear, and the unmistakable sound of a weapon beating against adamantite armor. I regained my footing. Had somebody pilfered something from my pack? No threats were near, although it was more knowing than seeing.

The lightning sound ceased, but the air still had that charged feeling. Kendalan? He had fallen silent... No... An uncertain whisper. A realization, even if my body refused to act: he had been hit by that horned devil too. Nethander desperately looking for his sword, Felina trying to find a position where she could act without being squashed. A sudden knowledge: we were being watched by a divine presence.

My ears told me what happened, a jumble of facts hard to separate, each demanding my full attention. Why couldn't I focus? The trampling sound of horses on our right flank suddenly ceased to be coordinated. At least half of them were milling. But they had been effective, even if I only discovered it because they were now less so. My great-aunt told me that she was willing to help the others too, but there would need to be a binding of sorts. The pain from the horned devil's hit slowly started to seep through. I couldn't handle another blow let that.

Lightning again struck. Kendalan was back. Back with the archers and pikemen. He told them to concentrate on the worgs - the wolves were still my responsibility. Pain now burned, but I found that I could feel again, even if the pain precluded any coordination. Pain was a known friend, however. I knew that I would be able to act soon again. And none of us had fallen. Yet.

Stepping out of the growth I saw five or six score of orcs sweeping in on our left flank. With their leader in the rear. My backpack almost pushed the scroll in my hand and I **charmed** him, telling him to retreat his troops. I had to shout to reach him, so the rest of the battlefield knew what was going to happen. This meant I gave the Fiend chance to react, but as he and the horned devil were trying to crush Grimwald between them, this was a price I gladly paid. He **teleported** there, leaving Grimwald to the horned devil. Perhaps Grimwald's focus weakened for a moment, now I had returned and the Fiends had left. In any case the horned devil hit Grimwald once with a stunning blow and Grimwald stopped responding. The Orc captain broke to the fiend's verbal barrage.

Choices had to be made. I could do things to try and save Grimwald... but to save him - an unlikely event - and to still lose the army. I did not think Grimwald would want me to do that. Cuura's troops were in trouble on our right. She had bought us time, weakened that flank, but if their right broke through... Time to do one thing, suggest another, and never let the other think about my true intentions. I smiled, waved at the Fiend and horned devil as if to lure them, then stepped back into the growth. All focus on me. And I prayed that Grimwald's craft, his armor, would keep him alive for the few seconds I needed to save the army. A **lightning** bolt from Kendalan, then Grimwald punched out via **updraft** and a potion of **gaseous form**. Our gambit had worked.

Fear was a powerful motivator. Yet also a brittle one. If it broke it was hard to use again. The fiend had forgotten to dispel my charm, and his power of intimidate he had already used. Again I showed myself and I spoke, breaking through the fear, telling the orc captain to order the dispersal of his troops, or loose them forever. I knew I did not use the proper terms that an orc would easily understand, but he accepted my statement and ordered his troops to disperse. The fiend looked at me. Hatred filled his eyes. Yet I knew that his fire would not touch me, and I was too far away for anything else. His left flank was weakened, it would not break through. And if he tried it... he needed to regain control over his right flank **now**. They **teleported** out, and I hasted back to our lines, scaring away the wolves as I passed them.

The look we got from the men... They would never forget this action. We were still standing.