

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 106: Rank and Command (2nd ride of Tarsakfi 1371)

Barely officially ranked as lieutenants, we were assessed for our command potential. Grimwald and Cuura were to be checked first, so I spent some time asking around to see what such a test would be like. This was probably a trait I had picked up from my father: never enter an unknown market. It sounded not unlike the imperial tests they have in Shou Lung, although with less classics, and more physical exertions. I would probably not excel in those – I really should work on my physique. Perhaps with Zhae?

The next day Kendalan and I were tested, in the morning by a sergeant Dren – an old and likely very experienced soldier – and in the afternoon by a captain Crook, a priest of Helm. Sometimes a name could be a burden, but he clearly had learned to make the best of it, even though I found the Watcher lacking in care.

Our minds were evaluated first – questions about money, amounts, probable outcome, opposed intelligence. I rather liked it, even though a question about pre acquiring equipment estimates had two valid answers, and I did not care much for loss expectancy curve. Even though sergeant Dren tried to keep his marks hidden, I could 'read' his marks by noting the movement of the feather. I got a pass, one good, two excellent, and one exclamation mark. Kendalan got four goods, and one fail. The sergeant clearly did not understand how Kendalan arrived at his answers, and the fact that Kendalan refused to believe the assumption that a subcommander would not try to execute orders he had accepted. My old abacus was a tool unknown to him, so he was amazed at the speed of my computations. I surmised that he thought that I would do well in the quartermaster's corp. My father would have been proud – if I had been a boy. But I did not think Guan Yin had this path in mind.

Next came the physical stage, a kind of multi round track with separate tests along the way. I lacked the bodily mass and right frame of mind for the overrun, and Kendalan was upset that he wasn't allowed to use Bear when he needed to close in to 'melee'. We both got identical scores: one fail, two passes, one good, and one excellent (archery for Kendalan, moving under fire for me). Sergeant Dren could hardly believe Kendalan's speed, but as they have no others with that skill, I expected that it will not be counted as a merit. If I read the sergeant correctly, then Cuura had aced this test, and our scores were borderline acceptable for a field command.

At noon it was time for a rather sparse dinner. I had used most of Guan Yin's blessing for *Create riceballs and water*, *Stew*, and maximized and empowered *Goodberry* spells, which in combination with my pouch allowed me to feed and heal slightly over a hundred people, a tenth of the army. *Purify food and drink* was good for making doubtful food nourishing and tasty, and I even was allowed half an hour to play in the mess hall to improve morale. I was very happy that my Mistress allowed me the use of *Create*, as she normally doesn't grant it to those that walk the Way. But she is the lady of rice, and the protector of fishers so it was well within her power to give me this boon.

Captain Crook was a man with straight morale and hidden humor. For a priest of Helm I found him unexpectedly easy to talk to, and I saw no reason to be anything but truthful. He quickly found out Kendalan's total lack of knowledge (and interest) of anything that did not pertain to forests. Although my background knowledge was rather sparse, he seemed to find some of my comments insightful. His tricks in coercion and bribery just bounced off: neither Kendalan nor I are interested in wealth or standing per se, and our minds are not easy to trick even with magic. Kendalan's background was, alas, a mark against him, as copper elves were known to find the call of a forest more important than any contract, and Kendalan wasn't interested at all in a permanent job with any army. I wasn't sure if our elf's usual total lack of regret was counted as a boon or a weakness. It was the same with my focus on doing good above the rule of law, and my many regrets. Captain Crook noted them, but refrained from commenting. On the one hand this was rather refreshing, but on the other hand I was always a bit worried about people who focused on facts but did not draw conclusions.

*A*fter the analyze part we did several active tests, where the captain tried to ascertain that we were capable in certain roles, but would not step beyond our limitations. Of course I liked talking, but I thought he noticed that I disliked threatening, preferring to discover the positive side. Kendalan's use reticence was seen as acceptable. Combat training was exactly as I expected: Kendalan excelling in archery, and my dislike in starting a fight. I did notice that I was slowly becoming an acceptable warrior though: if one needed to fight anyway, then it was best to do it quickly and efficiently. I also noticed that my style of fighting was more and more based on my opponent, and that the simpler the weapon the easier I could react.

*F*or a staff role we clearly needed to have background knowledge – which I had – but they also checked if we were any good with draft animals. This was Cuura's expertise, so to my shame I must admit I was rather bad at it, even if my other marks were between acceptable and excellent. Kendalan's lack of interest in human concerns probably excluded him for this roll. It also came to no surprise that neither of us would be a good garrison commander. For battlefield support commander captain Crook had his reservations about Kendalan. Kendalan scored better than I did: both lousy on anything having to do with fortifications and siege, and excellent for missiles/magic (good for me); but it seemed his lack of a wider vision as it pertained to human affairs was a serious burden. I thought he had flagged me for another job – I could do this but was better suited for something else.

*Z*hae was mentioned. Odd. They asked me if I (Reed) in combination with Zhae was good at breaching fortifications. I told them that Zhae was more than capable, but that the mind was the weapon, not the hand. He then made a note about talking with a psionist. Very odd.

*F*or field commands we had to do a lot of things, but luckily no fighting. Hand signals, flags, ordering people around all went without a hitch, although Kendalan had not paid any attention to human style signaling. Captain Crook frowned when I asked instead of ordered, but the men were disciplined and responded promptly and correctly, so I did not see what I did wrong. Morale was never a problem, and Kendalan too passed these test. At the end we did some social stuff. Fun. Kendalan showed he could convince people if he thought it was needed

*P*erhaps it was wrong, but I sneaked a preview of the final assessment. By now I was pretty good at reading upside down. He thought me best suited for Herald, with a field commission in either quartermaster, staff, or support as needed. He considered that I even could be an effective field commander, but for the fact that he thought that I would risk myself before my men would make that a gambit. Because I was so capable in raising morale he mentioned a position in the third line. Kendalan's forte was archery and battlefield spells. There was a question mark at his higher officer rating. They just didn't understand our elf.

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/2, Heartfanner/1, Sublime Chord/1