

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 12: Caught between them (2nd ride of Tarsakh 1370)

As we tried to get to grips with what happened, Felina just stated that Zhae should just keep wearing the armor. Amazingly Zhae did not object. Then Grimwald said something about Zhae acting like a true soldiers and I seconded Felina before I noticed. Amazingly both Zhae and Grimwald just listened, although the dwarf grumbled some more. These people, they're *odd*, but I'm starting to enjoy this. I opened the two scrolls my aunt had indicated contained information I might need and lo! It was a Demon, but one who preferred to hunt in groups. It's powers were unclear. However, it had used cold energy, but my fire had burned it - not roasted. So it wasn't especially vulnerable, suggesting that the cold wasn't really something bound to its essence. Perhaps others of its ilk use other elements? I hope I won't be able to confirm that theory.

In the meanwhile Nethander pulled out some serious cash strings. Oh no strings attached. See I start to understand this weird language. Anyway he offered the silver to Grimwald so our crafter could create silver bolts and arrow heads. I could understand the doubt about how a lonely guard might have acquired such funds, but the offer shows nothing but good sense. Grimwald's intention of making arrows for Kendalan first is a bit double edged: the elf is our best archer, but it almost tastes like a put down towards Nethander. He tries to break free from his Karma. Futile perhaps, but I have to admire the attempt.

We continued travel. Kendalan managing the horses ignoring his stiffness. When daybreak was near we looked for a place to hide from the birds, but none were suitable. So we hid in plain sight, but not so obviously as one would expect as the color magic of Felina, and the understanding of nature by Kendalan and Cuura made the coach not look like one at all when seen from up high. We – well, our Spirit – saw a bird scouting, but just flying past. Who, after all, would hide in plain sight? At dusk Grimwald prayed for cures for Kendalan and Cuura. The healing from our master crafter clearly helped, Cuura could hardly walk before, but now she's moving again, although not with her usual flair, so she suggested that she would do the coach while Kendalan would ride.

We traveled again, till sometime close after midnight I heard movement. Front left and right, and also aft right. Some suggested we should turn for the gap, but sudden insight - no doubt acquired from listening in on Yoshi's training - told me to both distrust the gap and to take on the enemy piecemeal. Cuura put the horses in a quick trot while the others prepared. Suddenly from the darkness arrows started raining upon us. Zhae tried to shield me, but some darts hit my leg. A light evocation of mine pinpointed the left front group and Kendalan commanded the grass to hold them fast - them being a score of dog headed humanoids - Gnolls! They clearly aimed at the horses, but our speed made their aim untrustworthy. The second front group was now close, but my newfound magical power blinded them while making them stand out in the darkness. I'm sure my enhanced stone rain spell and the arrows and bolts of the others took down several of them. Felina used her magic to get safely to the horses to do some very needed healing as we sped away. Kendalan also rode up to use the curing wand on the most heavily hit beasts. I couldn't help but notice that there also came sound from the left rear: wolves; that gap had been a trap!

When daybreak was close we found an excellent hiding spot in an old waterway - limestone according to Grimwald. He seemed upset when I suggested the horses needed healing power, and his focus was lackluster at best. He doesn't seem to understand that without horses we would lose the coach and we need its protection, carrying capacity, and hiding for the book. I need to find terms to explain that to him. Sometimes he so difficult!

As dawn was upon us I saw a red haze around the battle stars. As the rhyme goes 'blooded stars, blooded swords', so I went to sleep as soon as I could to refresh my mind. I can hardly believe it, but the meager magic I control is growing to be a serious part of our group's power. It was early in

the afternoon when I awoke. Somebody had spotted the Gnolls on our trail. There was some discussion of how to evade them, but Nethander made the valid point that one day they would get the drop on us and that it would be so much better to have the initiative. Strait from the Book of War, you can't discuss with that. With the decision made Zhae suddenly sprang to live. He analyzed out powers, the strength and weakness of the Gnolls, and the possible defensible spots the Green Fields could give us. He even told a few tales of battles fought in comparable situations. It was truly impressive.

We left early, trying to discover a spot were we can fight with the sun low and in our backs. It was almost like a game of passing the ball: given the description of the position needed, Kendalan found a perfect hilltop, and Grimwald's knowledge of stone showed its worth by building a breastwork from whatever material lay around. Nethander created some rolling boulder trap, while Cuura rode the wagon to a position behind the hill. Most of them slept less than I did, and their fatigue began to show, but we were determined to remove this threat. Gnolls... Could it be that the Red Wizards were behind his, because this seemed unlikely country for them.

Zhae's plan worked. Following our trail they suddenly found themselves at the foot of the hill, with no real option other than to attack. It looked like a score of Gnolls, assisted by half a dozen wolves. They started forward and I *rained stones* on their right flank. I twisted the magic so its size and magnitude increased and the beastmen fall under my onslaught. Did I do this? The plan control from Kendalan slowed most of their center and left flank, so for a short time it is a missile war between them in the open on lower ground and us behind cover on high. I got hit by one of their arrows even though our cover is excellent and I heard a disappointed grunt of Grimwald. The wolves charged ahead. Some were dropped by Felina's sleep spell, others stopped as their footing disappeared because of Nethander's trap and one jumped on me – its bite hurt, but my prepared *combust* killed him before it could do more.

I heard Cuura starting her charge from around the hill... and the sound of flapping wings flying close behind our back. I turned and ran towards the rear of the hill beneath with the coach should be. It was and I saw that Demon flying in. Kendalan and Felina had responded to, but we needed to be down there quickly! Seeing Goya outside cooking dinner, I used the equation of ever changing water to exchange position between him and myself. The Demon got hit by a bolt from our leader, and that surely hurt it! A trick from a master of the Art. Then it saw me and I could feel the memory of fire in his eyes, so he flew past me to reach the coach as quick as possible. I rushed up and managed to touch it with my second *combust*. It writhed in pain, then wrenched open the doors and cried something in what must be abyssal. There was a response, but not the one it expected: part of the coach blew open and a golden light engulfed him and me. It didn't harm me, but it unmade the Demon who disappeared in a blast of cold that froze my bones and the alchemist inside. Through the pain a saw four books, three stacked together: I even recognized two of them: the top had to be The Scripture of the Sun, a relic of Lathander, the western Morning Lord, while the bottom had the white skull of Myrkul – The Tome of Bones - a book not less famed than the Scripture. The book between almost oozed. I have no doubt that that was the book all are worried about. Rightly I felt.

*Ink of blood
Writing bones
Shadows of a fallen god
Be covered by fiery stone*

Suddenly Felina was beside me and I clambered inside the coach to help the alchemist.