

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 125: Five to Go (1st ride of Mirtul 1371)

Politeness was a bit lacking, but Omero was adamant in his duty and the Warlord's colors carried some serious weight. We were given guest quarters until such time as they could figure out what had just happened. Cuura was her usual social self, and with guards (against whom?) from the battlefield and the divine presence of Sune still tangible, she talked the time away. Suddenly there was an influx of elven warriors, and I understood that they had been trapped in some kind of gate holdup, not unlike my *anticipate* spell. Soon after we were taken to Grimwald and Droyt who too had succeeded and were taken to the Warlord for a few moments. It was a happy reunion until Nethander and ever charming Lyria dropped by. Luckily the wood elf quickly left when she heard that 'beasts of Malar' were still prowling the northern forests, because her hatred was quite disconcerting. We had to wait for an hour, which I used to start preparing for our fight with the Red Wizards, before Kendalan and Felina returned, and then the lady Iliana who showed that Omero can get effects by glaring, but that she could do so with the proper words. I might be better at talking, but I lack breeding: only royalty can be *that* convinced of itself.

One didn't need to be a master of politics to see that the presence of some of us hackled a rather large part of those informed. Kendalan was sort of acceptable, Felina, Zhae, Cuura and I distasteful, Nethander and Grimwald an eyesore, but Eos and Droyt really triggered some unhealthy hatred. Her ladyship was planning to blatantly ignore it (as was her right), but I convinced her that we had a job to do. Droyt was unhappy that she would stay behind without protection, so she just turned to Zhae and asked him to stick around. "A human who can stand against the *Ityak Ortheel* will do just fine." In a single sentence answering her consort, giving Zhae credit, and showing what they had done to the elves around and listening in (quite a few, it felt). I was loosing him, I knew, but maybe his path and mine would reconnect some other day.

Usually we try not to split up, but in this case we needed to take out the Red Wizards as well as convince the fiend that we could help it escape this world. The first would mean sneaking, but Felina mentioned that she thought it best to go to the fiend. Odd... but I felt something pure in Felina that would need the corruption of the hellish creatures. It was a most baffling feeling, but not bad. If anything I feared what would happen to our group, yet knew it was as inevitable as the tide. Cuura, Grimwald and Kendalan too would go negotiate with the fiend (my rash action against the erinyes a punishment), as would Droyt. Eos, Nethander, and myself would find the Zhent spy and fight that evil. I much rather talk, but I knew that was extremely unlikely to work, and worse, extremely likely to make matter worse. So in lieu of talking I prepared, tranced, prepared, slept a bit, and prepared some more. I could feel water and air in me, my aura and outside twisted to misinform those looking, a *teleportation lock* widened around me, and more detection and protection magic than I ever felt before: *arcane sight*, *true seeing* from a scroll, *battle magic perception*, *deeper darkvision*, and a boon from my mistress: *Eyes of the Avoral*. It was difficult to move normally with a *longstrider*, *branch to branch*, *jump*, and *climb walls* active, but the fact I moved differently than usually probably did help my disguise. Oddly enough, it was one of the least spells which helped us the most: *pass without trace* blocked the smell of the whole group.

Night had not yet fallen when we contacted the spy. Nethander did most of the talking, which was good as he turned out to be a rather horrid male. It felt bad to be working with such an evil person, yet this evil was on a human scale: bad yet not totally depraved. A true Talos follower. It was the classic question, must one, to be good, solve any evil one encounters, or was the greater good more important. A riddle I would likely not be able to fully solve, as I feared there was no perfect answer. We learned that the wizards were not present in the hobgoblin castle, but had their own place (devil guarded) in a rebuild ruin nearby. The fellow didn't mind to tell us things (Nethander played the Zhent handler with a little bit to much gusto) Hm, perhaps I better write down what I already knew plus the new info so I can make sense of this when I read it back:

- ✗ Her highness had helped our angry wood elf and while doing so closed a gate that had poured water in the realms for the past few centuries or so, creating the Marsh of Celimber.
- ✗ This had made the druids angry, because removing an unnatural cause which resulted in a natural balance is bad. Not to sure about this, disasters are part of the natural cycle too.
- ✗ It also changed the habitat of the lizardmen, which left for the best spot they could find: the High Moor.
- ✗ The Red Wizards wanted to turn them back. Not sure why yet. They wanted to get lost items from the Moor and maybe thought the orcs, trolls, et all were easier to control, or perhaps the war was a good excuse to intervene. More study needed. I also should find out who was on The High Moor mutual defense confederacy's Ruling Council and the Advisory Council.
- ✗ Lots of tribes left in all directions. Odd. Lizardmen as I knew them would not easily overrun orcs and bigger goblinkin. Perhaps there were a lot of them, perhaps there were other races in the swamp that used them as a vanguard. Black dragons were a definite possibility, but there existed several other races that preferred swamps.
- ✗ The elves of the high forest or the misty forest were not involved, except for exterminating the fleeing orc tribes. A sad story, but one I could currently do little about. The most 'successful' route was south towards the Greenfields. I already noted that I should convince the elven princess of restoring the balance, but now I had solid reason to make her do so.
- ✗ Lot's of misinformation about who we were. People thought I was a dragon! Like I would ever be singled out for the honor of meeting one of the good caretakers of the world, let alone become one in a next life.
- ✗ The thayans had organized a great meeting of chiefs, and the army of orcs, goblins, giants, and devils was about to attack the lizardmen leaving the Marsh of Chelimber – the attack on our troops was just to secure their flanks. But that attack had lost them so many that they had needed to take their reserves, which left the base camps badly secured... Better keep this private or some people will see this as a good excuse to exterminate them.
- ✗ The red wizards were surprised about the presence of the Waterdhavian/Neverwinter army, but somebody had delayed things and added those assassins. Somebody had known and prepared...
- ✗ The tieflings (and the negotiator) were also involved. He acted weak, so I expect him to have two or three other agendas... Hm... the lady Iliana mentioned that she wanted her restored kingdom to be one of many races...
- ✗ There was an archmage, a high ranking wizard, and a dozen or so apprentices in those ruins, plus the guard of the archmage, the slave handler (and assassin), and finally a big brute enforcer (a former gladiator).

Cramping the last thread of magic in my mind I prepared for what was to come: we would meet the spy just before dawn and try and eliminate the Red Wizards threat. I prayed that my Mistress would forgive me using her powers in this way. In arcane matter it was not unusual to let the Art determine life and death, but both the Path and the Way stressed reflection before action. The stars still showed mostly the same signs: chaos had shifted to a lesser position, but war was still the main theme. War and loss, Chandos now touching the Coins, Lady luck would roll her dice. Eos seemed calm, Nethander convinced, and then we arrived at the meeting spot. Ugh, the man was worse than I expected, almost drooling over me. I had to twist words and bluff my way out, even though my story sounded ill made and incomplete. I was sure it was only the magic around me which made him consider me non-human-female, although he didn't really seem to care. Crude as he was, he was a clever fellow with more than a little arcane knowledge. With some metal powder he twisted the rules which bound the devils to their perimeter, allowing us safe access. The mist inside was indeed an enlarged *guards and wards*, and my *true-seeing* allowed me to keep to the proper path. An apprentice guarding a gate was evaded by Eos' ranger magic, as we traveled some distance through sewers empty for millenia. A squad of gnolls was passed as Nethander and Torad bluffed their way past with a little help of a *suggestion* scroll. Eos just turned invisible and I clambered over the crumbling stones, making sure never to get above the mist. We didn't know what was there, just that no wizard would forget fly spells. We were close to the center, a center with a hole. Torad again warned us for the gladiator, but Nethander assured him we could handle him. I reminded myself of the deal: if one of us could get a clear shot on the mage, he would do so, while the others would take care of anything else.

*E*asing ourselves we arrived at the back wall of the wizards home. A suspended silence allowed Torad to expertly break a hole in the wall were we were greeted by a laboratory manned with air elementals. Only the biggest reacted to our presence however, and it sped up the stairs followed by Nethander. I tried to follow even if lagged a bit, and when a wizard in night clothing tried to first blow Nethander down the stairs and then turned invisible I just faeryfired him keeping to my role of innocent bard: if they would take the thread truly seriously there was no way we could stop them leaving. Nethander and Eos finished him off, even leaving the gruesome decision to me. We could not take him prisoner. I felt tears in my eyes as I moved down. Somebody had teleported out of another room to the other side of the square outside. One somebody would alert others and they would arrive... Boom. The door was flung back as I felt spells being cast at a distant location: stonesskin, invisibility, and the like, but no energy immunity. A hulking minotaur barged in and I cringed and acted like a scared rabbit. Act... more or less true. This was a dangerous creature running up the stairs to engage Nethander. Then I saw movement. And invisible person just trusting the spell a bit to much. I flailed him with my *flamewhips*, but fire magic was a bit suppressed so he still stood. Then Eos highlighted him so he ran. Through the open door I saw a visible knight, and two invisible casters. Pulling in all the magic I could handle I enveloped them in one series of full power sun heated fire balls, shifted time, and did it again. The archmage might have handled even that, but then his assistant blew up in his deaththrows... and time caught up with me. I blinked, back and still alive, seeing the last sparks as Torad had blown the knight down with a lightning bolt and Nethander being cut in two by the minotaur... He had never called on Tymora today... Not once... Fighting that creature was risky, but I had a scroll that might convince him that we were not worthy of his attention. For the price of a lesser ring we were deemed suitably chastised and the new Lord of the Moor allowed us to leave with Nethanders remains. We took what we could of the mages, as Eos quickly ransacked the other building finding the fiendish contract. I had know something was going wrong! But Grimwald would not gainsay me in trying to get Nethander back. Just one thing left: make sure Torad went somewhere where we would never see him again.

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