

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 13: Entering the twilight zone (2nd ride of Tarsakh 1370)

Paul was half frozen and I helped him outside with some difficulty. The sounds of battle from over the hill dropped to nothing while I rubbed the poor mans limbs. Louis came hurrying up and disappeared inside to where those books (and Felina) were. I felt terrible and exalted at the same time. Time felt unreal as the others returned from the battlefield laden with Gnoll equipment. Cuura looked pale and the amount of blood on her clothes told me that she was only riding because she had been helped by... by... Kendalan, Yes. The aura is smooth and natural, not square and rocky. Zhae was fine, as were Bruno and Nethander. Grimwald started to pray as dusk was upon us and Goya complained that the food was burned because I had teleported him out of harms way. Rebecca's face is inscrutable.

As soon as he had finished his praying, Grimwald called some of us together for a healing ritual. I learned some of the truths of Dumathoin, but I mostly learned that he is a terrible public speaker. No rhythm, no tension, no expectation, but mumbles, repeats, and strange words. Still his devotion is clear as I feel the earth. Square. Solid. One can – and should – learn from even the lowest, for how can you be sure that you will not be such yourself next time?

Afterwards Grimwald sat down in the coach to think and Felina voiced our common though that staying next to the carnage would not be the best camping spot. When we reached a good spot the good dwarf was upset because we did not anger the dead and destroyed their bodies. I can understand the fact that a whole body can be used by a necromancer to creature zombies or skeletons. But an angry ghost is a far greater danger. I should tell him that, but he's a male and a priest. How can I tell if he doesn't ask? He even used the word 'haunt'. Can't he feel what he said?

We traveled on, the birds gone, she sky overcast. I can almost feel dreams beginning when I lie down to go to sleep, but they're always interrupted by memories: the music of the Gajin, the six and one elements my aunt taught me, Yoshi in a full battle spin, Moon playing with her old doll, Zhae looking at me. I dream other dreams, but I awake rested. Others had trouble sleeping, Nethander had the loudest nightmares, but almost all others look tired – although Kendalan and Felina were their usual self. Kendalan has a good ear: he could parrot the sounds Nethander made even if he did not understand one word of what that poor soul said. Was it the battle? Was it that book? I wanted to ask, wanted to tell, but there was a kind of pressure on my mind. Should I drop the customs of home? I now know that I could play an active roll in this group, but it felt like betraying my father – again. The terrible choice of stepping outside rules. How could I *do* that? *How* could I do that?

At insistence of Kendalan I read what they say I had, well, prophesied. I'm trying to understand what I said. The dark bridge is clear, something growing stronger because it connects two tainted locations. The three items needed to shield it are also obvious. Am I prophesying? It would explain a lot. A lot. Moon's Mirror, suddenly things connect. What am I? What path should I follow?

Felina had a private talk with Louis, and I forced myself to do likewise. The physical dangers we might be able to handle, but the pressure on my mind is growing. Louis confirmed my vision that the guardian books could be read, but that there would be a price. He also said something about even the Gods not knowing, or being allowed to say, what was going on. When I suggested we turn to answers from the stars – them being created before or during the birth of the gods – he was doubtful, yet reserved verdict until I could do a reading. Now, when will we have a clear night sky? How much time do we have until the next threat occurs?

Some days later I trained with Nethander. He's not a master like Zhae, but he often put me on the wrong footing, and he's an expert at utilizing those moments. That night I checked if a *Protection from Evil* helped on Nethander's nightmares. It did – for the few minutes it was active. Felina listened to his speech; it sounded horrible. It sounded like a person fighting a terrible fate. The

searing light? When he awoke we tried to discuss things. Zhae started to get really restless. Should I awake the priest? Won't he be angry because I broke our watch scheme? Why is Cuura walking towards her horse? Ni-gin Zhae sukisu! He just punched Louis, I could hear ribs cracking from here. I needed to get Zhae away from him, so I ran toward a spot away from anything else and switched position. Two drops, identical but different. Cuura mounted and started to charge us but Kendalan showed his strength and just held up his hand – the horse slowed down immediately. I started to bandage Louis and I became aware that Zhae was also moving towards us, his mind captured in a nightmare. Luck was with us because Cuura, in her dreamlike state, hadn't tightened the saddle belt and just dropped of, an opportunity Nethander used to grab and run away with her hammer. Zhae closed in and I tried to awake both by making the sound of a score of people yelling. No results, then Bruno walked up. Zhae attacked me, missing, but he hit Bruno with his bare hand. Why is he carrying a sword? His hand did more damage with one punch than most soldiers can do with a spear charge. Bruno fought back – to incapacitate. I have to thank him for that. I tried to wake him as I saw Nethander, Grimwald, and Cuura in a mix up, while Felina and Kendalan tried in vain to capture the dreamers with ropes. Zhae half turned to kick Kendalan who had come to close and I saw an opening. It felt unreal, but more real than my existence till now. A path. I kissed him. My soul connecting to his for the briefest moment.

What have I done?

Chaos, doubt, uncertainty, but also the rightness of my action and choices which cannot be undone. My plea to Louis to read the books then and there was insane and Louis rightly refused. Felina came up to help me but she hasn't got an inkling of what is bothering me. We're on parallel paths, but but miles away from each other. Zhae was blind, of course. Perhaps Rebecca understood. My anger towards her is valid yet invalid: to win I must learn to loose.

We needed answers. The night sky cannot be seen. I go back to the garden of my great aunt. There are many paths to knowledge. I need to talk to the spirits, they know things outside the boundaries. I undress until I'm clothed in a simple shift. Rain, ground, wind, no metals. I open my mind, my soul, to the spirits of rock, land, river, and storm. I ask, and they answer. Next full moon. Sixteen days. We need to stay together until then.