

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 141: Unseen (3rd ride of Mirtul 1371 - Feast of Lanterns)

As we left the carnage behind, I paused a moment to check if everybody was present. Cuura in the vanguard, with Grimwald close by, followed by Kendalan, who could not help himself: even if he sauntered he outpaced any of us. I looked at Efyra, who seemed both appalled and interested by those machines, and Norbert who looked at me with a more accepting look. Why? So I was angry at him, but I would never truly harm him: to harm somebody to teach them not to harm somebody was only valid, and then barely so, in mortal combat, or when the chance of the other learning the lesson in this life was virtually none. I almost asked Nethander what he had been thinking but Grimwald was as guilty, and to address one and not the other was not done.

Looking through the hallway I prepared to call to Grimwald, when, with a deafening clang, the corridor between us was closed by several stone doors. For a moment I was worried that the others had been mangled, but like any Wu Jen I had a lot of practice with estimating distances: they had been in no danger, nor did it seem the purpose of the trap. A separator between two towers, to stop one servant connecting to another. There was no honor between thieves as Norbert so aptly described it. We could wait, Grimwald would undoubtedly manage to dig through in several hours time, yet I wasn't sure we could loose that amount of time. Norbert was inclined to wait, as he logically feared those siege engines, but I countered that it would take significant time before they had destroyed each other, and Nethander mentioned that time was not to be wasted. So we crossed the room again, me spending a wand charge to pull Norbert out of danger. Odd, this was the first time I saw the disadvantage of small size: he lacked oversight and just couldn't jump over debris and nasty fluids.

On the other side Norbert mentioned that he feared the pool was not yet neutralized. A valid worry, and one easily checked. We pass through the armory and flight room where his concern proved accurate. He asked me after the essence of the pool and I felt it, screeching at my senses: hatred. Hatred and control. The single path where every action can be excused. He looked pensive and oddly worried.

Noting the sound that isn't made is often far more important than the sound that was. I heard Nethander prowling around, but there was no more sound of Efyra, who had climbed to the empty room above. Empty? Why didn't I look? It could be a veil, invisibility, or several other magical effect. I hasten up and blanket the room with a glitterdust. Nethander was close behind, and, when things became outlined, stormed forward to help a pinned Efyra. Pinned by invisible creature, evil air elemental of sorts. Norbert showed his use by creating a wall of cold so they lost the advantage of numbers, but Nethander felt that he needed to be in every part of the fight and barged right through... I should remind him that my healing is limited...

Entering the pool room again Norbert asked if I could counter the pool. It was a pervading power, slowly building its strength. Yet my music had ways to counter these dark emotions. For a moment I thought about using my pipa, but then felt deeper. The strongest magic is the magic of the heart, that lesson I was still learning. Strength wasn't the same as control, but in this case I followed my deepest emotions: I affirmed that I could and just sat there feeling how so much potential for good was warped, how much I would have loved to speak to these heroes when they still followed the path of honor. I loved them, missed them, a bit like I love Zhae. Oh why did he leave me?

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