

## The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

### Chapter 19: Watch the Water (1<sup>st</sup> ride of Mirtul 1370)

Rebecca was back at the coach, Zhae was walking the plateaus, while Felina walked toward the lake and put her head in the water? Odd... did she look for refreshment, or had she reason to believe something was hidden below the waters? Felina looked so vulnerable, but her reflexes were excellent: she jumped away from the water even as a snakelike water appendage reached for her. It coiled, grabbed, but did not get hold of her – she was just too quick and the magic armor which was still active allowed no grip.

As I turned to react, Nethander stepped out of the coach, his face showing the discomfort of sleeping due to poison. He saw what happened to Felina and with a growl/gesture he almost threw something dark and sinister towards the water. It was not a physical thing, but I could feel the darkness and hatred inside. When it hit the water the water seemed to recoil for a moment, just a fraction before I let go of my fire over the very same spot. As the steam of the fire dissipated, I saw how Felina walked away from the water, with a kind of bemused look on her face.

Kendalan assured us that three other beings lived under the water. I hadn't seen anything, but by know there wasn't the least of doubts: if the elf said there were three others, there were. Felina thought the creature attacking her was a water weird – an twisted water elemental bound by evil to this plane, very, very hard to destroy, although there seemed to be some kind of clerical magic which could disrupt it utterly.

A bit later I had a talk with Nethander. I'm not sure it was the poison, or the same gradual process I went through to discover my feeling for fire but he now has access to some form of innate magic. The spell like power he used on the water, and also something else. That 'else' felt even more horrible than that 'curse' he used before, but it wasn't targeted on me but on himself! After some experimentation I interpreted it as a *protection from good*, or something very close to it. As Nethander wasn't the most scrupulous person I knew, but not so selfish I would call him wholly evil, I could not but presume that the power was a heritage from his abysmal parent. I was sure some – Grimwald among others - would see this as a confirmation of his depraved essence, but I still hoped that the intent/use determined Good or Evil. Touched by darkness, he might still be one free to determine his own karma. How could I help him to resist this lure? He seemed doubtful of the concept of reincarnation, and I was loathe to force the issue: the western gods might very well use a different system to strife for perfection.

Felina, Cuura, Nethander, and myself moved to those 'chairs' as they were on a safe distance to the water and we were trying to discover if Nethander might discover something. He found a chair which felt 'fitting', as he could sit and his rapier hung free, but still comfortable. As we talked we suddenly became aware of the fact that we were moving toward the water! I tried to grasp what was happening and hardly took notice of Nethander tumbling away and Felina using her grapple (and her sergeant) to escape. Only Cuura who started hammering to crush which ever power moved us I saw. The water level lowered, because... because... we were moved by a water elemental! It seeped through the sand below and moved us to the water edge. The edge, it was close and something reached for me! I let go of my fire and then Zhae was there. He kept his footing, then, with an effortless sweep, threw his sword on the seat of his master. I wondered why he did so, but then he grabbed me with one hand and a rope thrown by Kendalan with the other and pulled me to safety, even as Cuura pummeled the water elemental into submission.

Grimwald, who had been working on his smithing fire, berated us for foolishly getting so close to the water, and I felt guilty, but then Felina remarked she had seen a chest in lake as the water had lowered. According to her it either was magic of itself, or contained something. Grimwald's admonishing were quickly forgotten as we discussed a way to retrieve it.

Grimwald decided not to help as the fire had the right color and it was not done to delay working the metal. Luckily Cuura came up with the simple plan of dragging the chest out by two people standing opposite the each other around the lake. Alas the creatures in the lake dissolved the rope, so we needed to improve this idea. A lure to keep the creatures busy was proposed and Nethander volunteered with Cuura as his safety. He stripped to his loincloth and I saw how thin he was. Poor soul, I could suddenly image how his youth must have been. This explained a lot. I projected the care of Guan-Yin towards him and that seemed to help him to enhance his natural speed to evade most of the attacks. Some still hit; the acidic attacks hardly inconvenienced him, but the force of the blows did inflicted some nasty bruises. In th mean time Kendalan and Felina worked on the dragging. It did not go without flaws, but the managed to get the chest close to the shore when Nethander had enough. Felina got into trouble with the 'weird, but her sergeant managed to pull her and the chest to safety.

Felina noticed a magical trap on the lock, but after some deliberation decided to just spring it and dive aside before it could harm her. We helped her with some minor magic and we were then ready to open it. We found no weapons, as at least I had expected, but wands, potions, a scroll, ring and coin like object... All magical. Have I said I do not understand this place?