

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 21: Skirting Dangers (1st ride of Mirtul 1370)

Our travel became more and more a matter of habit. Without those birds circling above, or the imminent threat of an attack by Demons, Gnolls, Zhentarim, or others of that ilk, we found we had some time to learn more about those books. Zhae, and Cuura of course, were not interested and spent most of their time outside. My guardian spent his time running, his steps becoming longer and more relaxed each day, while Cuura was training herself in shooting arrows from horseback while in full gallop. Those *mending* spells most of us keep handy are very useful to keep our stock of arrows in order. Paul asked about the content of these ancient works but concluded that there was little of interest to him; he also seemed loath to get captured by our quest. He did, however, ask for whatever knowledge I had of the poisons used by the assassin, so he might be able to concoct some antidote. The sergeant didn't seem to mind the lack of orders – he helped Kendalan to cook, sat next to Felina whenever he could, and seemed to enjoy this 'outing'. Rebecca was busy with some cloth, and she talked to Cuura once in a while. I heard fragments of their conversation, but managed to not hear anything: if there was one thing I was trained in, it was in giving others privacy in these circumstances.

The rest of us studied the books, Kendalan and Felina the Book of the Brotherhood, Grimwald and Nethander the Tome of Bones, and I tried to understand to content of the Scripture of the Sun. Grimwald, of course, objected against Nethander reading, but his argument that he lacked the skill to be of assistance in a fight with undead, and that certain chapters would teach him that, were so correct that our dwarf had to agree. Probably the threat to start study Summoning helped, but, while successful, Nethander had yet to learn not to aggravate people without need. Grimwald, with his deep understanding of these matters did rather well, and Felina and I were also trained to understand lore, but Kendalan and Nethander struggled with these new ideas. I wasn't sure, but it almost felt like Nethander was retreating from us, becoming gray and hostile. After this he really should stop. I have a craving to read some of the pages of the Tome, but Cuura watches me like a hawk whenever I'm close. However, the text I was perusing really gave me deeper insight into how creatures of all standing responded to one another, and I felt my connection with Guan-Yin deepen because of it. It shows that by having some understanding of the fundamental equality of all living beings one can project acceptance of their true selves, making almost any living creature more friendlier. I am humble of my own capabilities but grateful that I was given the opportunity.

We had decided to travel to the Wood of Sharp Teeth first and then continue south through its outer border. Slower for sure, but it would give us cover along the way. On the day of full moon I sat outside again, trying to increase my understanding of the natural world, its components, and its higher purpose. The answer that had been promised me was unclear because of my limited understanding of this regions history, but I tried to capture its essence as well as I could:

*From east to west, to safety long ago in future
Held in holdfast build before the Schism by those who created*

We really need a loremaster to solve this riddle. Well, it's quite likely that such a person is either living in Candlekeep, or is known to them.

One afternoon we discovered a column of smoke in our rear. None of us knew of any settlement there, and we feared a lure, so we continued on. The next day, as we got close to the Wood, Kendalan spotted smoke to the north, not more than a few hours out. He and Felina, and the sergeant of course, went to have a careful look. They returned with some speed hours later with the alarming news that it had been a shepherds kraal that likely had been ransacked by a fire breathing dragon, but, even worse, that our elf had spotted the Ninja. I felt emotions wash over me, but shortly after had to conclude that my future killer must feel awful, being seen by that eagle eyed elf!

We discussed what we knew about the assassin. Zhae had much to tell, as his training and lore gave him solid insight of his opponents capabilities and limitations. We concluded that the mastery of shadows was one of his major powers: it made the most deadly attacks miss, gave him an opportunity to strike a wrong footed attacker, and allowed him to leave unchecked when things went against him. After some discussion I found out I actually had two spells, one arcane, one naturalist, that would counter this. Why he managed to kill my aunt, who was so much more trained than me, is something I had to find out, but I bowed to her foreknowledge to put me on the path needed to protect myself.

We finally reached the edge of the Woof of Sharp Teeth. Most of us wondered where it got its name from? Several horrific possibilities passed the revue, and we all agreed that to stay in the outer woods would be a good idea. Travel wasn't that much slower, at least not in the beginning, until we hit a stretch where trees were a bit more dispersed and tall grass and bushes grew. Suddenly the lead horse screamed in pain, and Cuura stopped immediately. I jumped of, as did Zhae, only to be attacked by Groundrazors. They were difficult to spot, but they were a dangerous breed. Still, they were part of nature and I was loath to kill them. The horses panicked as I scared those critters off with wolfs howling. Breaking the leads the horses scattered in all directions, forcing Zhae, Kendalan, Felina, and the sergeant to try and track them down. I started clearing the grass around us with my Guan Dao, it being far more suitable than Nethander's rapier. He warned me that he saw an unexpected shadow high in the trees – this moment being when we indeed were most vulnerable – but no attack ensued.

Zhae alas did not manage to capture one horse, but the others were successful. As we still have some spare horses it was no problem. Later as we traveled we found the remains of our horse. The circle of life. At noon the next day we encountered a lone hermit. I offered him things, but he refused charity. Again the reasons why people thought such things was a total mystery, but it reminded me that I was in a foreign country. As the customs of a person are his own to decide, I changed tack and offered my simple gifts in exchange for information of the trail. This was well received and he warned us for a creature that lurked in the bogs to the south. It sounded like a Shambling Mount, an extremely dangerous creature to those unprepared, but less so with the right divine support. I do had to ask myself: was forcing the encounter proper? After all, it to was part of the natural circle...