

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 24: Ogre Management (2nd ride of Mirtul 1370)

I ran through the forest, feelings of all kind whirling through my mind. The fear for the ninja, the joy of being accepted by the forest, the worry about the troll and my friends, and doubts of my own actions. I used my woodcraft to put as much distance between me and my pursuer as I can. I asked how long he would tail me, because that is not their style. I insulted him, however, so... I'm going to pay for what I said, that's for sure. Perhaps it is time to start thinking more proactive: if I let him keep the initiative, I'm going to die for sure. When I've got the time, I need to study the stars.

After the first mad dash, I slowed down to a solid walking pace. Perhaps I can link up with the rest tomorrow – or perhaps the day after. Dawn was breaking, and I started feeling a little tired. Not so much that it influenced my speed, but the lack of sleep and the battle against the troll were catching up on me. I looked for a place to rest – my pursuer wasn't that far behind me, but it would be unwise to skip a perfect spot and a chance to rest for a bit. Then I noticed small signals, indicating a druid made his abode here. It is odd, but all the small things my aunt showed me in those few months now suddenly start to make sense. She was a subtle teacher, and I lament her passing

The subtle signals became more pronounced, so I started to display that I was a follower of nature too. Then, from a tree, emerged the druid. He seemed not unfriendly, but asked some direct questions of why we were here, what we were doing, and situation with the troll. I told him what I could, by necessity withholding information about the Manual, and by shame not giving him the details of my pursuer. He guessed much, I suppose, then told me to wait while he arranged things.

I waited and in the far distance I heard the silence of a somebody closing. Still I waited, as I had promised. Then the Druid reappeared and we joined my friends, who had encountered the wood elves. They seemed to be wearing a triple rose symbol, but their reception of the rest of the party was more thorny than welcome, especially -oddly- towards Kendalan and not towards Nethander.

By listening I figured out that the Troll was a kind of unwilling guardian for the forest, one with whom the elves lived in a kind of precarious balance. I can understand that the elves would like to guard their border, but I do question the use of such a creature. We were in no way a danger to the forest and our mission was for the greater good, yet the troll attacked us and we lived but by the thinnest chance. But that problem was not relevant to these elves. We trespassed and led that danger they created themselves into their territory. Our lives were again depending on careful negotiation.

Then we found out a second questionable defense: a group of ogres that had been wandering about had decided to make camp near a rocky knoll. Not only that, but the group had grown by some members and a whole lot of goblins. This changed their value from positive to a future threat – to the druid and the wood elves. Although ogres are very much less a danger than that troll ranger, I had lost my respect for the druid and the elves by now. Use of taint taints the user. Still to fulfill our mission we had to force at least six of these ogres to start wandering again – and to kill the rest. I can't be happy about this, but there is little choice.

We are allowed to rest for a full day, giving us time to heal our wounds and restore our spells. I left without my spell-scrolls, a mistake which almost cost me dearly. I will need to keep them closer.

Next evening Nethander and Felina went to scout, Kendalan giving them cover from a nearby tree. The ogres had build a bramble wall with sound traps underneath. In the knoll was a cave entrance from which goblins brought meat (!) An open secret entrance led to an elven build cave filled with goblin families and they could scout no further to another open entrance to further below. Some tracks to the north only add to the confusion. How to do what needs to be done?