

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 29: Expected Surprise (2nd ride of Kythorn 1370)

After we came back to the inn, things quickly went back to normal. The fair would have been a nice place to play my Pipa, but I found my time disappeared quickly in reading the Tome of Bones (just the section about religion, mind you), talking with Marian about the customs, history, and other things of these western places, and studying how the elemental art of the Wu Jen meshed with the gifts of nature of Guan-Yin. Added to this comes the fact that I think my performing is not up to the artists wandering around – or perhaps it is, but I certainly don't know enough of the local tunes.

Grimwald came by to ask if it was proper to enchant Nethander's new armor. I was not quite sure why he asked me but we had an interesting discussion about assumptions, redemption, and other issues. The stars did not speak about this, but Grimwald concluded that it would help the group.

Cuura concluded that a tenday was enough rest for the horses and that she would take the group out to see if she could train them some more, and get them in running shape again. Those extra tendays might give her the opportunity to see if any of them have more capabilities than mere draft horses.

Evenings passed with discussion about a buckler for Zhae, Grimwald's dissertation about the role of warriors, and Nethander's counter opinions. I won't say they are starting to become bests of friends, but they listened a lot more. That was really a good sign. Nethander, however, asked me a few things about gods and undead and I had a kind of queasy feeling about it: he had been reading those chapters for several tendays now, and he felt a little bit too interested.

Next evening, when I came back from Marian's, I met Nethander who told me Felina was climbing on the Belching Dragon to scout out the activities of the Guardinals. Nethander told me he feared they were planning something, I heard myself saying that he should pause when striking from hiding, but my lingering attracted attention to our two skulk experts, so I quickly went to the inn.

Kendalan had already informed, so he had opted to go to sleep early, so he could be awake when most people called it a night: he thought it unlikely we would be attacked when many were still awake. I had to admit that, although we posted watches, we did not really take things seriously. So it was close to midnight when I woke because I heard something 'wrong'. Zhae and Grimwald had been awake (and on guard), and Zhae heard it too – dragging Grimwald away from the open (!) window. A red streak exploding into a *fireball* was only half a second later, and I managed to evade most of the blast by pure reflex.

Everybody started to move in furious activity: Felina closed the shutter, I cured the sergeant who had been hit, Grimwald evoked a *mass aid* on the group, and Nethander and Zhae dashed out. Rebecca peered out from under (!?) the bed she had been sleeping on when the shutter *shattered*, and a *lightning bolt* came bouncing in. I got the full blast and something snapped inside. I ran to the smoking window and threw a *fire orb* at the caster at the back. He stood covered by the Guardinal's cleric but my anger, I am sorry to admit, burned furiously, and he burned up to ashes in a moment. Then Nethander came tumbling out of the other window and dropped the priest. Zhae followed him out, then Grimwald pulled me back berating me, and *curing* me at the same time.

We heard clanging on the stairs, and a cry of warning from Kendalan. I called for a much diminished fire in my hand as I had wasted all my fire focus on that first attack, as Grimwald summoned a *cloud of knives*. The sergeant went to look at the door and I noticed Felina was no longer in the room. The fighter who had been beaten by Nethander now came charging in. I tried to touch him, but failed and he dropped the sergeant with one sweep of his lightning enhanced two hander, while his follow up attacks clanged of Grimwald and missed me. In our other room I heard Felina and Kendalan fight with somebody else. My second try succeeded and Grimwald hit him with a barrage of magic and steel dropping him.

The sergeant lay still, his terrible cut not even bleeding much, telling us that he had fallen to those night killers. I retrieved my Guan Dao and followed Grimwald into the hallway, where we just saw a half elf with great presence mumble a terrible curse over Kendalan's wolf. Grimwald attacked him, wounding him, although my attempts were futile and we heard Zhae thundering up the stairs. He whispered something and disappeared but Grimwald shouted "*invisibility!*" and I used a *glitterdust* to locate him. I had to cover Zhae too, but I knew that Zhae would have no problem with it. After that the fight was over in seconds.

Not long after the guard arrived, and, as they had promised, locked everybody up – although they were less harsh towards us than to the sole survivor of the fight: a dwarf caught by Nethander and Felina. They questioned us to what had happened. Clearly they were not happy, but we only had suspicions, no proof, and the ruined state of our sleeping quarters proved how much we had been surprised, our suspicions notwithstanding.

The sergeant was revived, payed for by the spoils of the battle, and I was impressed when Felina gave a rousing speech showing no need for revenge. We all were allowed to claim something as weregeld – even the room damage was arranged for. These priest of Helm are thorough. The fair is closing by now, perhaps the quiet will do us good.