

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 30: Master Trap (3rd ride of Kythorn 1370)

The quiet after fighting the Guardinals was not unlike the quiet after rescuing Felina and Cuura. There was a danger there: one could get used to this continuing fighting and forget the importance of helping others and personal development. The spellbook I had received as weregeld was not trapped and held mostly evocation spells if the first three circles. I wasn't surprised. Too much offense and not enough defense. I could feel Grimwald nod, and saw Zhae moving through his defensive steps... hmm, as I thought about it it felt like Zhae too put too much energy in offense, too much focus on damage, a bit short in actual precision, and clearly not enough in his personal protection. I wondered if it was the path his master chose, or his own interpretation.

As I lacked the funds to transcribe most spells – one second level spell is all I have ink for – I started on another chapter of the Tome of Bones: the one pertaining to detection of undead. It might be risky, but I have decided to read two chapters from each book. I feel the book already drawing me in, yet the knowledge comes easily and the counter effect feels fairly natural: as I can better see undead, so they can better see me. I have no great problem with that, as sneaking is not my profession at all – Felina, Nethander, and also Kendalan are our unseen types.

I don't see the others that much, Cuura is away teaching horses, Grimwald is busy, Felina trying to ingrain herself with the mayor. Kendalan was back a bit more now the fair has ended and the multitudes have left, while Nethander was trying to build a reputation. Zhae was still training – but for what? What was his purpose? I was at Marian's most of the time, teaching her about the Druid – Wu Jen synergy. I had found that the best way to get a clear idea was to try and explain it to somebody interested but lacking fundamental knowledge. She in turn told me about the Harpers: where they came from, their music, their purpose, and deeds. If I was impressed with one thing it was about how freely Marian admitted failures, defeats, and cock ups. *Through failure one learns.*

One day later Grimwald announced he had time to craft my sword. While he hammered, heated metal to the exact right temperature, and harangued his helpers to do his bidding, I tried to explain the principle behind the Jian: speed, precision, and the fact a correct cut lets the Jian flow to find the gap. This was not the dwarven style – how could it with their physiology – but he saw how the weakness of the blade could lead to strength. It will never be as long lasting as a true dwarven axe, but a strong enchantment can offset that I am sure. Basic properties decided, I made him frown by asking for a multi-hue phoenix with trailing tears on the blade. The craftsman inside him, however, saw the opportunity to learn and he etched, burned, and inlaid a truly nice pattern.

A few days later Zhae asked Kendalan and me to help find a meeting place of the Twelve which should be in the hills half a days march to the east. Nethander had heard of the existence from a local, who had shown to know what he was talking about. After informing Grimwald (grunt) we left next morning.

This was not a happy journey. Where I had understood that well cared for forest should be – the mine needs a lot of wood, so cut trees are immediately replaced by new seedlings – we found a fairly barren landscape. Thorny brushes and thin sickly trees that would not support a two year old, nor would give enough wood for the smelters. Kendalan and I complained to the others, but they were over focused on that meeting place. Nashkel will pay the price for this I am sure.

We arrived at more hilly terrain and Kendalan guided us with his usual precision to the badly described entrance of a minor valley. As we went in shadows started to coalesce. I could not make out the exact shape, but I could tell that Kendalan saw more than I (surprise!), but that Zhae and Nethander reacted like they saw a true opponent. More from my companions than from what I saw I surmised that it was a challenge of some kind.

Nethander responded to it and started his attack, following his usual lightning fast footwork, and deceptive moves. After a few seconds he retreated however, like he had been hit. No blood, however. Again he attacked, his pattern impossible for me to follow – I really have to pay more attention to that – and after a tumble over the ground attacked... nothing. The way was free.

Only a few yards further on another shadow blocked our path. This time Zhae took the challenge. It was difficult to be sure, but I got the feeling that this opponent was more difficult to beat. That would be logical, and Zhae clearly needed to figure out how to beat somebody wielding a pole arm in long stance, or another weapon that could attack long and close. Finally he figured out a method and hit it with an attack that could have shattered an oaken door... the shade disappeared.

A third shadow appeared and both Zhae and Nethander looked at it in appreciation and some slight nervousness. Nethander took it, and stepped in. I've never seen him more careful, he did not even seem to attack – all his energy was in evading and blocking. The movement was so quick it was almost a blur to me, then, for a blink in time, the action stopped. I saw/felt Nethander cheek being touched by the shadow and it was gone, leaving all of us mystified.

We found the cave and we were lucky that Nethander entered first – most of us would have fallen prey to the green slime, but he noticed in time. After burning the cave clean we entered to find a place that was clearly to train footing and maneuvers, again with twelve seats around. Our two budding masters trained, while I contemplated who these people had been.

As we left the cave Kendalan spotted a wyvern in ambush. It could have been dangerous but we coordinated, took out its stinger, and Zhae was trapped under the wyvern's body. Somebody helped Nethander by making him drop the poison sack. It's better for him, even if he doesn't know it.