

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 31: Red Dawn (1st day of Flamerule 1370)

I woke in the middle of the night, hearing the others discussing something. It turned out I had been dreaming about fire and 'flaming breath', and Grimwald took that as a warning for an impending attack by a western red dragon. I had learned there are differences between the dragons here and our servants of the Empire of Heaven, but Grimwald had great difficulty in grasping the concept. Kendalan just went very quiet and Zhae almost looked happy for the chance to fight such a dangerous opponent. Our dwarf had asked me when this would happen, and I seemed to have replied that it would occur after 'sister's gone'. It didn't make sense to me although I suddenly feared for my mei-mei. Then Zhae told me I had spoken in Lungsha and I understood. The star 'little sister' is a pre-dawn star in summer and it sets half an hour before the sun rises.

First Grimwald proposed to retreat to the mine, but Zhae mentioned something about leaving the populace behind and he reconsidered. The village was weakly defended, but fairly coin rich after the fair, so that made it a good target for a dragon. However, the amount of coin, and their dispersal made it a lot of work, so Kendalan and Grimwald concluded that it was likely a younger dragon, still building his hoard. Against such opponent the group would actually stand a chance, as Grimwald had several fire protection spells memorized to shield the humans assisting him in his work in the smithy. I myself was happy that I had spend some time figuring out some spells of the spell-book I had received, as my fire spells would do naught against such a creature.

I slept again, to clear my mind for the coming confrontation – if it was indeed this morning and not some warning in the distant future – and was woken by Kendalan when we had about an hour till setting. Focusing on the new acid spell I had learned, I saw the other prepare for imminent battle.

Only a little time left before the setting would occur, Grimwald and Kendalan went to warn the guards, while Zhae and I went to the temple. The temple reacted promptly and started preparations, and when we returned the guards stared to appear. The sergeant considered me with a strange look, then the alarm sounded and the sergeant acted like it was a drill. Some people opposed to be so rudely awakened, but that was suppressed with the threat of repeating the drill for the next few days. Grimwald looked for a decent place to take on a dragon, selecting the cemetery with its many large headstones, and we looked south, towards the mountains when I picked up some yapping in the distance and Kendalan pointed out that some score of kobolds were sneaking up.

Grimwald seemed kind of relieved, explaining that dragons often employed kobolds for menial jobs. Kendalan pointed out a distant point moving towards us, and he started shooting, assisted by his magic. I could hardly tell anything was there, but Kendalan hit, and hit again as the dragon closed. Grimwald prepared us with healing and fire resistance, while I gave Zhae *vigor*. It was small, body no bigger than a bear, and I launched my first acid bolt as it breathed. The flames were hot, but the resistance shielded me a bit, Kendalan's wolf just jumped aside and Zhae dodged most of it. I could almost see the dragon thinking about landing to bite and claw us to shreds, but Zhae's happy anticipation of it landing gave it pause – humans shouldn't look like they would enjoy going toe-to-toe with a dragon. Suddenly I realized I was fighting the strongest creature in the world, and I fled for the cover of the temple before a prayer to Guan-Yin restored my calm.

It flew over, ripping of the roof of the guardhouse and turned as I returned to my friends. A priest of Helm protected the guards against flames, as they tried to hit the beast with their crossbows. A second acid bolt made a nasty hit from neck till the tail, and Kendalan and Grimwald both peppered it with bolts and arrows. Again we were engulfed in flames, and the flames almost blinded me and I had a sudden insight about the nature of fire and how to protect against it. Most of the guards had fallen, but many still lived thanks to the protection. The kobolds were closing on us, but the dragon took cover as it clearly feared our concentrated fire.

I started to assist the fallen guards – a little curing usually buys enough time for better healing later, while Zhae counter charged the massed kobolds. Priests of Helm started to bring the fallen guards to safety and I used the lesser charges of the necklace to damage half a dozen of them at a time.

I really should pay more attention to were the other were, because suddenly three of the kobolds attacked me. Guan-Yin's blessing helped, and a fire invocation plus Kendalan's wolf lifted the threat although I felt a bit worse for the wear. Kendalan, oddly enough, still had a wolf at his side, and Zhae a whirl of knives the threatened anybody daring to get close. It was small wonder that the little creatures broke and ran, while the two wolves picked off stragglers as they are wont to do.

The dragon flew away, taking cover from houses and trees, but Kendalan shot it again. Why had Grimwald been questioning Kendalan's accuracy? It still flew away, but in a way more akin to limping than the proud manner in which it had approached us, mere minutes before.

I finally feel that I understand the unity behind the Art of the Wu-Jen and the gentle teachings of Guan-Yin's Way. Plus I think I Guan Yin has granted me the next step of insight. Together they can be so much more.