

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 33: Who else? (1st ride of Flamerule 1370)

Back in Nashkel we tried to figure out what happened, who was responsible – except for the mayor of course – and if/how we could find the druid responsible. Then Grimwald voiced his opinion that he wanted to be sure that the mayor wasn't double crossing us, so I went with Felina to check. Either he is the best lair I've ever met, or he's just a smalltime crook, fallen for a well played confidence game. He still thinks that *he* decided to sell the lumber rights. We really should expose what he did, but only after we make sure the populace isn't going to suffer from his greed.

What we did learn was that this scheme has been building at least eight years, and, seeing the expertise with which they played him, that even before that they installed a mole. Such a long term game would need to be checked, so it was very likely the mole was still there. We just had to figure out whom. Nashkel only had 800 adults...

Still, problems or no, our esteemed dwarf kept on crafting our new equipment, or, in case of Cuura, rebuilding it. The Ankheg breastplate was a work of art – even if it was no dwarven craft. He also finished Zhae's buckler and scimitar with basic enchantments. Our funds have about run out, alas.

A rather nasty problem occurred when Nethander showed he had a wound that would not heal. Not that it was in any way special, it was Nethander who had changed. The book of the dead had him in his grip, and in his quest to be a capable fighter against the undead, he was quickly becoming one himself. We tried to convince him, even Kendalan took clear position, which showed how far things had progressed, but it took a sign of Tymora to get the concept of the danger across. Paul was willing to assist us and crafted a draught based on the Shar poison that erased part of Nethander's memory. Perhaps the loss was slightly greater than wished for, but he again returned to the living, so we can find a better solution later.

Grimwald knew a few things about the several nasty trade groups in this area and he surmised that the Black Network was the prime suspect. This way of working fitted their way of doing 'business'. They had a crude/subtle mix with one part just taking things by force, but another part expert at this kind of operation. Our learned dwarf knew that magical detection would not expose such an individual, so we needed to weed out the likeliest suspect. Assuming a 'new resident' who had been here at least ten years and with structural access to the mayor we arrived at a fairly manageable list of eighteen persons. Marian could help us with a lot of background knowledge, but she had no inkling that Nashkel had been infiltrated.

People with high ranks in the mine and the main trader were our first suspects. I made a horoscope of both miners but that indicated no involvement, although Nethander saw other uses for the knowledge. The trader was visited by several of us, but he did not betray any improper knowledge.

I was not sure who got the brilliant idea, but somebody thought it was to pressure Noob, not only did that give us no information, but the innkeeper's daughter attacked Grimwald like a wildcat. It took some convincing to get the locals calmed down, especially because Cuura slapped her at the same time as Felina cast a *sleep*. We could thank the dragon for not getting lynched. Yet the girl's connection to Noob let us to investigate further and we found it was likely Noob was actually her father. Such things happen, and we decided to keep quiet about it. I did inform Marian that it might be wise to have somebody with psionic skill to accidentally discover and teach her.

Then we discovered a small thing: the butler of the Mayor folds his trousers for riding the same way as Cuura. Felina and Grimwald investigated and found he had a hidden ring used for communication; the same ring as Nethander is wearing. Nethander bluffed Grimwald to show he only did so to help the party. I took him aside and berated him. He was on a slippery slope and I was still trying to get him to discover self worth and acceptance. I will need to watch him, alas.