

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 39: Present Finds Past Too (midsummer eve 1370)

We traveled back, but nothing attacked us this time. The weather was hot and dry – it is time for some rain. With all major predators gone we had an easy time, but for a small thing: somebody offered us a barrel of 'beer' (I did not drink it) and a haunch of meat near the Behir cave. We think it were those hobgoblins around here, who likely feel a bit fearful of us, but we are not sure as Grimwald is in a kind of daze. I think he saw his karmic path and he is readjusting his perception of life. That can take some time, and quiet is the best way.

Back at the Ghaleb Dhur we were told that we done well and that he had two scrolls to improve the eastern woods again. Again a question to Zhae, and some cryptic remarks to Grimwald before we were dismissed. It is really uncommon that the spirit world is so interested in mortals. Zhae and Grimwald clearly have a great path before them... Perhaps the others too.

Rebecca was happy to see us – I think – and little had happened in Nashkel. Grimwald went back to the smithy to repair armor damage, and Kendalan and I went to the woods to cast the regrowth spells. Nothing changed, of course, but we could *feel* it. Perhaps I should talk to the mayor: if they would leave the land alone for half a year it would pay them back double. Tomorrow would be midsummer, a day of celebration in these parts.

It was deep in the night when we were woken by shouts of '*fire!*' We hastened towards a farm on the other side of the river who's barn was in flames. Cuura started organizing things, while Kendalan ran for the farmhouse as nobody had come out. I couldn't spot Nethander and both Felina and myself lagged a bit: we suspected *something*, even if we did not know what. As it had been the last couple of tendays both Zhae and Kendalan's wolf stayed close to me.

Suddenly arrows flew out of the night, first targeting Cuura, but the next batch also struck Kendalan. Some of the arrows arced high: they were fired from quite some distance. Both of them scrambled for cover, but Felina turned *invisible*, and I cast a *master of air* to find those responsible. I had the dark feeling my nemesis is responsible, but I can't sit at the sideline and simper helplessly.

Racing through the air I heard Cuura (covered by a wheelbarrow) calmly telling the people to continue fighting the fire as they were not the target. Grimwald helped them by covering the area with an invoked mist cloud, and I heard Zhae trying to follow me – or better follow the wolf who was following me. I listening with utter concentration and heard a twang several hundreds yards away.

Closing in on the sound, I couldn't determine its exact position, but a *dancing lights* nicely bracketed a burly half-orc. As soon as I surrounded him with light he jumped on a ready horse, even as Kendalan's arrows started to find him. I tried to keep the light close to him, while Kendalan's wolf harassed his horse, when I heard Zhae say "*Hello*" behind me. That tone of voice could only mean one person! Letting the half-orc flee I raced back, to cast a *glitterdust* over the area. There he was! Closing in further I cast a *fairy fire*. His being visible did not make him more vulnerable as he swapped Kendalan's arrows out of the sky and hit Zhae with a truly stunning blow. Before I could help, Felina was there, hitting him from behind, but then she was herself flanked by another shape. I knew the assassin was very hard to hit – especially in melee – so I threw a *lesser bolt of fire* on the shape. It turned out to be a drow trying to get some distance from me by frying, so I hit him again with a *lesser acid bolt* and he dropped to the ground.

To my amazement I saw Kendalan's wolf running past the assassin. He had used some *invisibility to animals*, that much was clear. Attacked from two sides with Grimwald getting closer, he did his disappearing trick again, but this time the *fairy fire* showed him as he appeared withing running distance. Zhae charged but was hit with a solid blow. I begged Guan Yin for assistance as I healed

him enough so Grimwald could put him back on his feet. Then I saw Cuura was attacked once again by that half-orc and I called on my *combust* spell to finish that one off. I flew at full speed to get close quickly, but my first pass missed and Cuura showed her mastery: calling the half-orc's horse she commands it to come to her, and it obeyed. The fact that the rider did not wish so was of no consequence. He fought for a moment, then surrendered. I was left behind, my flying magic spent and I raced back on foot to where Zhae fought – trying to keep the *combust* ready.

When I got there I found everybody but Grimwald down but alive. Zhae had won before poison took him down. Grimwald was securing the assassin, and we took them back where the priests of Helm were helpful and locked them up.

Still the missing farmers were a problem and Kendalan tracked them to a hole in the ground. Nearby a dead underground creature that had likely died of some wasting disease. Were they planning to poison the well? They must have made plans to kill or abduct the high priest as he was the only one in the village – except Grimwald of course – who could cure diseases.

One of the poisons was in a familiar bottle, he tried to use it on me before. Black Lotus. The deadliest know in T'u Lung. We destroyed all poisons – both the assassin and the drow had several – and we went for a much needed rest.

Next morning I convinced the others that it would be proper to let my nemesis return home. He himself would act no longer against me, that I knew, and there were several very good reasons to let him live: he was no longer a threat, there was a slight chance that the payment was for a single attempt, and last one that I was not sure of but suspected – if the leaders of the guild kept track of their emissaries then alive he would not raise the alarm until he returned. The Half-orc got convicted for the fire. Perhaps the work in the mine will teach him an honest trade.

Nethander wished to speak to me about something. Perhaps I could help him.