

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 44: Knowledge (2nd ride of Elesias 1370)

We got closer to the gnomish vilage we had been told was close to the tower. The traces of careful management of nature were unmistakable – even if only Kendalan and I recognized them as such. Yet there was one thing that worried me. Constantly when I looked at nature I saw passiveness. But only when *I* looked. It was like nature was telling me to let things go as they would. But why?

A single simple wooden beam across the road with a bell nearby and a simple message: “Please ring the bell and close the gate again.” The others wondered about it, even if Grimwald followed the instructions. Yet some of us spotted a gnome in hiding and I thought I perceived the meaning of this 'gate'. It was a test for politeness, willingness to follow customs. No doubt an alarm call would have gone out had we violated them in any way.

The village was build as being part of nature and the ground. Grimwald seemed to like it. Felina looked destitute because of the lack of high fashion, Rebecca bored, and Cuura not understanding. With the urge of passiveness pervading my essence it was Nethander who did the speaking, and it showed how right it was that I followed Guan Yin's advice: he spoke well and the gnomes slowly dropped their reservations. They told us they had a kind of barn/public-house available for us big folk. Its location was hard to guess, so only friendly people would be able to find it. I quite liked the way these gnomes thought! Their way of talking, however, would need some getting used to!

In the barn a few of them helped us settle. They asked for how long we would stay and it was clear their idea of 'short' and 'long' was more like the elves than humans. They were even willing to trade. They warned us against staying in the tower – according to local lore those who stayed too long never left – and all kinds of monsters seemed to be attracted to it. Those gnomes were subtle thinkers: the barn was just inside the anti scrying area around the tower – this was a good place to remember. Those that left seemed to fall in two groups: those defeated and those successful, but neither ever told the gnomes what happened there. The most noteworthy was a group some fifteen years ago who pacified the tower, and an old man that put stuff in the tower some decade ago after which this strange things started to happen. He also left a single odd stone near a waterfall.

Grimwald, Zhae, Kendalan, and Nethander went to look for that stone, even if it was night. Nethander wore his new hat he bought. Large and floppy it still gave him a daring outlook. Nethander returned to tell us the stone was 'asleep', so the next morning we got our gear together and left for the stone and the tower. Rebecca stayed behind. As we touched it the stone talked to us. In my case it repeated what I already had felt: I would be weighted according to my companion's actions. I had to return to be a proper T'u Lung maiden: passive, waiting and depending on others. It felt good and horrible at the same time. There was a lesson here, but I did not perceive its true meaning. Some talked about what they heard, others did not; Nethander was clearest – he needed to learn mercy. I could not but smile even if I grappled with my own fate.