

## The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

### Chapter 48: The Tower (2<sup>nd</sup> ride of Elesias 1370)

When we arrived in the inner gatehouse my protector finally got his brain functioning again. His mental defenses were hard but brittle: any first attack was blocked, but any follow up attack broke through because the first weakened his defenses. Odd. In a way his style was more like that of a mage: powerful, but limited. He had chosen his path, though, so I would need to make sure I could shield him against secondary attacks.

The gates into the tower were unlocked and undefended. In a way that was more scary than having to fight ourselves in. It was almost like we were lured inside. Kendalan's fear made him say awful things, like killing everything we encounter. I hoped that it was just his phobia talking. I said nothing: their actions were their own, and I was not to interfere. The corridor led to the central room (we suspected) so we took a left hand opening to first check out the perimeter. Nethander went in first: he did not need any light and his stealth was only approximated by Felina.

This was one of the things I was still in doubt over: was it better to be perfect in a single mastery, or should one choose several that supported each other? In truth only Zhae followed a single path, even Cuura and Grimwald were broader, and Nethander, Felina, Kendalan, and myself were generalists in an ever increasing scope. I was pretty sure that, if I had concentrated solely on the elemental power of Wu-Jen, I would have reached higher than I was able. But then I would have no healing power, no real skills in weapons. Perhaps the truth was that we needed each other.

A cry echoed through the hallway – Nethander was in trouble. Zhae ran off, followed by me and Cuura, then Grimwald. I heard the sound of a bolt hitting stone, followed by the short yells of Nethander and Zhae coordinating. I tried to feel as I had an open line to Nethander and felt the icy cold of unlife. My fire helped them to find the Shadows who had ambushed Nethander, and he didn't look well. When I asked if I should try to restore his lost strength he dismissed it, however, as he feared others would need it more. Grimwald asked Zhae why he did not use the light our esteemed dwarf had made for him, but my protector had been over-focused on battle... again.

We continued skirting the edge, the bend corridor making it difficult to determine our whereabouts. Of course Grimwald had no problems, and Felina seemed less confused than the rest of us, but Kendalan was deeply unhappy. We arrived at a kitchen, stripped of all useful items, and found a garbage chute which seemed to go down a long way. We all remembered black slimes creeping up, so we made sure it was blocked. I was a bit in the rear as Nethander opened a door to the left. Startled Nethander dove away, but Grimwald attacked immediately. A cloud of something burst forth from the room, engulfing Grimwald, Kendalan, and Zhae. Grimwald was not affected, but the others started coughing. Grimwald explained it had been a sporebag, which looked like a Beholder (a dreaded creature unknown to me), and that he feared the spores were growing inside the bodies of our friends to make more of them. Although I could understand their place in the natural cycle, I felt that it would be wrong not to negate this danger. I used my fire to remove all remaining spores and helped Grimwald creating a smoke that killed all spores in their bodies – a treatment that was effective, but highly uncomfortable.

We found the desiccated body of a former rogue, who had been killed by a previous spore bag. We took care of his remains, praying that his soul would not stay behind. The corridor then forced us to the central hall, which we entered ready for combat. Indeed a warrior of some kind came running at us – the threat of which was gladly answered by Cuura – when Grimwald noted that the fellow was enspelled in some way. Cuura swung could not be stopped, but then a wand of Hold Person stopped unnecessary bloodshed. The poor man turned out to be *feebleminded*. How to save him? I vowed to follow Guan-Yin that I would help any who asked.

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/1