

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 59: What is that? (3rd ride of Elesias 1370)

We said goodbye to the druids, wondering why they did not act themselves. I turned for a moment and suddenly I realized that the eldest druid of Sylvanus was slightly more powerful than we were, but that the others had only started on the path, even though all of them were older than I was. The elder's croc was dangerous in the river stretch of his domain, but unsuitable for hunting tainted creatures, and the other animals would not stop Kendalan's bear for a more than a few seconds. I never knew before, but we have become quite dangerous in the past months.

I also realized that I could do most of the things my aunt showed me in the scrolls she gave. Was it time to start looking for another teacher?

We got returned to our previous spot where Zhae and Kendalan's bear were patiently waiting. Seeing him I felt a kind of twinge... Should he be here? I used my Ladies magic to speed us up, but, in truth, the rest of us just slowed Kendalan down. Our keen eyed elf had no difficulty in picking up the trail, but noon the next day we were worried when we found a place where a battle had been fought. Nature clearly had been touched by something wretched, a certain spot still feeling... bad. Bear could not smell a grave, though, and Kendalan found a trail of Cuura's horse and Grimwald's boots. Why wasn't I there to help? Zhae was crestfallen at having missed a combat. It was clear that they started traveling nights. Should we do so too? I decided against it as we (I) made better speed in the daylight, we could look farther, and Guan Yin's blessing meant we have nature form a trail for us. Even a fully mounted company would be slower than we are unless they have a druid willing to help them, and that, knowing the circumstances, was extremely unlikely.

The oddest thing Kendalan noticed was that some earth creature (an elemental?) was following Grimwald. The way the tracks are just that little bit smeared. Really weird. A few dried puddles showed it had been right on his heels. It was tracking him, that was for sure.

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Broken arrows everywhere. Not yet dusk, but I feared the worse. We spend a few minutes trying to understand what happened here. Then I spotted discolored leaves. A *stinking cloud*? That pile of dust, a *disintegrate*? The cloud was over whomever assailed Grimwald, and the others would have collected the dust if it had been one of us. Still, I wasn't aware that Felina could call such spells, although her staff might be responsible for the *disintegrate*. We were slowly catching up. I decided to prepare combat magic. Things were going badly. Zhae looked even more down, and I suddenly felt *bad*. He should be with *them*, I just *know*. Creating a swift fire with my Art, I captured the smoke in the bottle the gnomes made for me, asking Horse to help us. I just hope he will be in time.

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We were closing, the trail was getting fresher by the minute. The elemental is there again. It disappeared close to dusk, as far as we can tell, then reappeared at Grimwald's new location at dawn. A tracker? It just did not feel like that. But I had other things to worry about. Other trails started to intermingle. It felt a bit like wolves, but Kendalan shook his head. Close to wolves, but different. Altered. The other tracks were almost as bad. They stank of taint, of destruction and hatred. I felt my fire starting to burn, even though it couldn't harm elder demons.

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/2