

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 65: Crossroads (3rd ride of Elesias 1370)

We looked at each other: Kolakas freed, and Ozias able to leave for his rest, yet we were far from ready. We walked the way back, back to the priest to offer him his soul. He accepted, how could he not, and his God forgave him. He was allowed to start again, perhaps to restore this temple to what it should be. A new beginning. I am sure the innkeeper and his daughter will help.

Their son will follow Lathander too, but their second daughter will marry one of our kids.

I saw the other changing. Odd, but I was ready, yet not. I could only progress if Guan Yin would be allowed to teach here, and for that I needed to talk to a high priest in good standing... Patience is a virtue, a lesson well learned. I should focus on finding the books again and keep myself from anger.

Kendalan needed to calm down Bear. A strong creature, but his mental defenses were not up to a Red Wizard. Two horses were missing, but that was all. It didn't seem to match the Red Wizards usual modus operandi, but Kakanos had shown himself to be an extremely orderly person. I cannot but conclude that he was under some kind of Vow – voluntarily or otherwise. We had to hurry to catch up on him, and I could guess that scrying was futile. The stars, however, had him travel in a starless night, in cold aspect. North of us then, planning to go underground. Grimwald got a vision of Moradin. A tower with a Red Guard and a sad gnome. We ate a bit, checked our gear and were off. Grimwald rose his earth-elemental, so I helped its speed a bit. We needed more speed, and the druids had told me something about the world which I instantly knew to be true. Crossroads...

It was close to noon when we discovered a crossroad... and the fact that its arcane power could be misused. Kakanos had offered the banite priest and the horses to summon Daemonic assistance: he called a Nightmare! I felt for the priest – he had left my hold, only to be damned forever. But in the end a man's Karma was his own to decide. I had to look further, and quickly I discerned the towering fury of a crossroad guardian. I got out my pipa and started playing, showing my sorrow, regret, and asking for the boon of travel. He appeared, still radiating wrath, and needed to be shown that we were creators, not destroyers. Grimwald started carving a rune stone, Felina showed her art, Kendalan amazed it with his sharp observation, Zhae did a sword dance, Cuura showed he oneness with horses, Oddvar mastery of rope, and Nethander... he bluffed himself past the guardian.

Several yards travels while the backgrounds shifts... and we were within a mile of the tower. Even with the flying speed of his mount I was sure we were ahead of him. I cast a message and Oddvar moved a bit south to give us advance warning. Then Felina and Nethander butchered the Red Guard. I agreed with their action, and I saw no other option, but it was murder none the less. I knew it was impossible for us to capture the man with any chance of success, and I saw Felina check if she could keep him alive when he fell, but to no avail. Sometimes you are forced to choose between bad and worse. The others made a deal with the deep-gnome.

We prepared quickly for the arrival of the wizard, and we did not need to wait long. Our first attack wasn't as effective as it could be, but I managed to cut loose the books, so after flying off, Kakanos returned with a *mass paralysis*. I wasn't prepared – even Kendalan stiffened, but Grimwald used his spiritual hammer to good effect, and managed to free Kendalan. He launched *tentacles*, and shielded himself with *repulsion* and *stoneskin*. Seeing the path clear for a moment he landed close to me to get the books, but Grimwald pummeled the Nightmare to oblivion, and I listened to my aunt to shake loose the paralysis. After I jumped on him, we quickly prevailed.

Grimwald thought a minor nick is treating a prisoner badly, but with his defenses (and gear) gone I dared let him go. By not killing us when he could I need to mirror that. He clearly considered attacking us from a distance by wisely decided not, then left with the gnome.