

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 68: Time-Out (Spring of 1371)

The spring air is sweet although there is the vaguest hint of acid in the air, and the clearer smell of bogs. The road is... Road? Spring? We look at each other? Where is Zhae, Felina? The barbarian Oddvar is missing too. Bear is there, as is Horse, and I could feel the stony presence of Grimwald's elemental, but I miss a lot of time. It is spring – no, Grimwald, it is not an illusion – and we are a lot more northern than my last memory. So a mass great forget? I check my gear. Identical to my last memory. Six months and not one change? Time travel becomes a more logical explanation.

Before I can consider the consequences Kendalan is sure we're being watched. Observed from a hill not far away. Grimwald mentioned the Fey, but I'm convinced in my very bones that this is no land for them. Oddly enough we find no spoor. Whatever was there left no trace, only one vague imprint. Somebody better than Kendalan at this game. Rare, but not impossible. Nethander suggests a dream, but it has none of the features. I'll keep the possibility open.

Practical as always Cuura suggest we move on. As we can find no traces of ourselves we continue in the same direction we were going. A mile further Nethander spots a message. At least he mentioned seeing a message. An offer to kill a mage. We spoke about what we remembered last, so it could be that netherese lich. A ninja master might be able to do this and I suppress a shudder.

After another two miles, our dwarf mentioned he knows this road, and that soon we should arrive at a strong inn with a crazy mage living close by. Crazy according to Grimwald so I take that statement with a pinch of salt.

Indeed he is right. This should be the road to Waterdeep past the High Moor. Isn't that the place where the other pages of the Elven tome are stored? The inn is not a true fortress, but a raiding party of a few score of orcs, or a band of trolls would not threaten in. On the other side of the road a small village with odd stone buildings. A lot of variation in humans and an odd dwarf or half-elf if my eyes don't deceive me. The wizard should be living in the tower we see. Placed on the moor it is a huge, bigger than the whole inn. Eight side, with a smaller eight sided tower off-center on top. I can feel the power of elemental earth radiating from it. A dwarf mage?

The inn is nice, but probably run by the Yakuza. At least I saw Nethander glancing at an odd symbol over the gate, and he seems... more careful. Grimwald and Cuura enjoy the food. Nethander enjoyed the drinks. Our dwarf too, of course, but I'm sure that he will be able to handle them, while I am not so sure about our rogue. Should I asked for spiced food? Again, what are the odds such a place would have them. I feel a bit unstuck, unsure how to act. Kendalan leaves, and later returns to tell us that the mage-in-the-tower is actually an elven princess? If I felt unstuck before, now I feel dazed. What? How? We are to visit her next morning.

I sleep fitfully, the stars – correct for the time of year – predict danger from a friend. Nethander feels worse for the wear, Grimwald grins, and most of us (Cuura excepted) try to look our best.

The tower is even bigger than I thought, massive. Is this the home for elven nobility? To the north I can see ruins of a once great castle. There must be a reason for building here and not there. We are led by an elf, but how unexpected is she: Kendalan is a 'copper' elf, closer bound to nature than the outgoing moon elves, or the masterful gold elves. But she is a wood elf, almost feral. Her equipment has many dwarven items, and, seeing our smith's reaction, they are of high quality. She even speaks dwarvish! She doesn't like me at all, as she hates all mages... no, human mages. My connection to Guan Yin mollified her a bit, but only from 'instant hatred' to 'severe dislike'.

We are warned against the door, which one shouldn't try to open unless invited. I hear the echo of voices in my head, too vague to understand, and there is a kind of insistent pulling from *somewhere*. Inside is a great austere hall, its only adornment a skull of colossal dragon. Who is this princess? I mutely accompany the group as we walk towards the sole other door at the far right.

The next room is the opposite! Still big, yes, but with a hearth, wooden floor and beautiful wand tapestries. The big table and many chairs speak of a place welcoming many guests, and several comfortable seats next to small side tables talk of evenings spend in comfort. The only things my mind can grasp on is Leira, the fallen goddess of deception.

Up the stairs, then float past other stairs in a vertical corridor where gravity is suppressed. Easy and comfortable, but it doesn't help with my feeling of uncertainty.

We arrive at a laboratory. With a small, and to me obvious pregnant, elven girl studying a tome. How old is she? Fifteen? We try and be at our best behavior, except of course for Cuura who just asks for a picture book. As often I should pay more attention to Cuura: the elf's reaction, as the previous reactions of her 'servant' suddenly make sense. This is a noble who doesn't want to be reminded of the fact, who tries, futilely, to escape the bonds of blood. Cuura gets her book as the elf confirms that we are indeed in the grip of time magic. It doesn't seem to surprise her, even if she is fairly absentminded. To this elf's estimation we will probably be sucked back after a full day, which time is nearing quickly, and she tells us how to make sure to arrive at our proper time.

On thing is clear, she has done this herself.

Grimwald and Nethander look around, when Grimwald's usually stoic behavior crumples when he sees a kind of crystal sword. First time I've seen him drool. Really. I mean like he's seen Moradin's Anvil. The elf returned to her book (about shadow dragons, I think), when the servant ushers us out.

We get some tea – actually rather good – and the wild elf queries us about evil mages. As I have said: hatred is not a good basis in life. Then Nethander tells her that I told them to spare Kakanos and I suddenly know how a predator looks who has selected it prey.

Not very nice.

Nethander realized what he did, but retraction was impossible. I think it was only the presence of Grimwald and Kendalan that made her doubt. Not so much because of the fight, but because I was part of their group and by attacking, no, killing me, she might loose their goodwill.

Kendalan takes me outside, when the pull of before becomes to strong to withstand.

Of course I forgot to ask about that undead archmage and the 'falling cities'. Or even about that glass city Grimwald wanted to visit, or that ruined elven dungeon, or ... Then again, what were the odds that this elf actually was interested at all in, mostly human, history?

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