

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

### Chapter 82: Ambushing Trolls (2nd ride of Nightal 1370)

I always tried to be calm, and not to jump to conclusions, but lately I found I sometimes lost myself in emotion. Lasham nodded when I told him, telling me that he felt my fire burning more brightly. Fire was my element, true, but did this path to music necessitate that I lost my decorum and manners? Lasham seemed not to care, so I looked at the stars for guidance, and prayed to Guan Yin for insight. As usual I did not find any straight solutions, but I did find that Garden set while Anadia rose. I read that as a change from calm to heat, and my dreams reminded me of the old axiom: no growth without pain. Likely I would need to unbalance to find a new balance point. I just hoped I wouldn't inconvenience anybody while doing so.

To make sure that I would still remember who I was, I decided to name my companions, and tell how I felt about them. It wasn't easy, but that only meant it needed to be done.



Cuura was the easiest, even if one should never underestimate her. Her sign was of course Horse. She dreamed of becoming a great general, to have an army doing her bidding. Like others in our group I prayed that she would understand that a true general was one who went to war reluctantly, yet I knew that would only come to pass when she had commanded the biggest army this world had ever seen. Her talents were fighting, a total lack of a hidden agenda, and a propensity not to be diverted by lesser concerns. Her weakness was the fact she couldn't really grasp the concept of people being different from her.



Felina was Monkey. No doubt about that. Gajin would say Cat, but no mere cat was so capable of getting the other of balance. Part of her strength was that she didn't really know where she was going... and didn't care too. She lived each day to the full, not caring what the next day would bring. If Nethander had an open Karma, then Felina had none. Perhaps because she was new to this world. Her strengths were her versatility, her ability to be unnoticed, and an open mind to any problem. Her weakness was that she never planned ahead.



Grimwald was dog, which oddly was an insult in these Gajin lands. Loyal, steadfast, and reliable, he strove for the renewed energy in the dwarven race. His Karma is fixed and greater than himself: I could feel the mass of forebears pushing him forward, and one voice between them sounding more and more like him. He abhorred not being part of any clan, but I could feel it opened a path he would never had taken otherwise. His strengths were his skill, his preparedness, and his willingness to pay for mistakes others made. His weakness was his fundamental belief that change was bad.



Kendalan, seeing all and totally going his own way. Although he was not totally self-focused he mostly felt like Rooster. He was the most carefree of the whole group, the months he spend with us only a moment of his time. He was usually detached, so when he got emotional it was time to pay attention. I had no idea what his Karma was, but with an elf it was not unlike talking about the Karma of a baby: more time had to pass to make things clear. His strengths were his sight, his detachment, and deep connection to nature. His weakness was his lack of moral strength.



Nethander, in an interesting match of his background and being, is clearly a Rat. Again Gajin had a far nastier picture than we did: quick witted and aggressive, but better in making acquaintances than friends. He wanted to become (in)famous, proving the world wrong in assuming he never would mean anything. Of course this was a fallacy, but, as with Cuura and Zhae, he would need time to discover this. His strengths were his clever mind, his trust in good luck, and a willingness to go on whatever happened, His weakness was that he did not see strangers as real people.



*Zhae, the specialist, the Tiger who only knew fighting and preparing for a fight. His master trained him well. Why then did I feel this connection? He was smart and had learned to read people and situations better, but he stayed on his narrow focus. Was he fated for an important fight? On the one hand I feared that, on the other I hoped so... At least it taught me to listen better. His strengths were his perfectionism, his ability to negate attacks with his focus, and his disinterest in worldly goods. His weakness was his blindness to anything outside his art.*



*It was always difficult to describe oneself, but I thought that Pig was the sign that matched me best. A year ago I was a Tu Lung maiden, with hardly any knowledge beyond my home town. As I wrote this I was a wanderer on the Way trying to understand the Music as a crossroad between the elements and nature. Where was I going? I tried to follow the example of Guan Yin, tried to bring peace and happiness where I went, but a real target... perhaps later. My weakness was that I wasn't even close to the path my Lady of Compassion showed me.*

*As I was practicing to have the music touch the spirits of the listeners, to enable them to let go of fear, an 'interesting' smell crept in my nose. Did somebody break the slough jar? No, they didn't have those here. I walked down the stairs, meeting Felina who clearly objected to the olfactory intrusion. Down in the cellar we found Grimwald, Cuura, and Zhae who were proudly showing they had dug up a main sewer. Wonderful! Such inventivity must clearly be rewarded. Ugh! Time to brave the cold outside and visit the bath house. I had crept through dark and smelly dungeons without objections, but to endure this without need is beyond the call of duty.*

*The others were busy doing some martial training – something that I knew I should focus on, but first I had to come to grips with what sound was capable in doing. The base, that sound can touch another's spirit, was easy to envision, even if the fire that burned inside me was not yet hot enough to warm others. Yet beyond that was sound as pattern for the Art, outside the usual Wu Jen scope, and beyond that was sound as the base of existence.*

*Martial training would need to wait: perhaps next winter. I decided to show the others my appreciation and cooked a Tu Lung dinner. Expensive, yes, but at least most of the ingredients were available. For a smith used to warmth Grimwald surely sweat a lot, the other's reacted variously. Even I turned out to have gotten used to the rather tame taste of Gajin food. Luckily I put aside some peppers to chew on, carefully sealed they should stay good for at least a month or three.*

*As I was storing the remains of dinner for later (waste not, want not), we got a visitor. I missed most of it, but it was a dwarf looking for Nethander and Felina not taking 'I won't tell you' for an answer. Felina's curiosity versus dwarven reticence. Alas for Felina.*

*A few days later, Cuura came running in, inviting us to a troll hunt. I felt unsure about it, why would one try to kill others before they had actually done something? The principle of a preemptive strike were not so much wrong per se, but clearly not automatically right. The others, however, insist, so I just shelved my objections and put on my garb. Zhae was almost out of the door before any of us had considered the idea, but he had to wait as Cuura and Grimwald needed to suit up. It was the first time I had seen them both in full gear, and I suddenly realized that the group that wiped out the orcs lair near Berdusk had been less well equipped than them.*

*A sobering thought indeed.*

*We found more than a dozen riders waiting, carrying flame pots, fire arrows and other anti-troll weaponry. The leader is preparing them for battle, and I recognize many of the tricks of the trade. I could easily learn to do this, but how would Guan Yin feel about that? She didn't force any listening for her to follow the Path of Peace, but many did, and she smiled on most of them. Was learning the trade of War a necessary deviation from the Way, leading back to more prosperity and love, or would it corrupt me and others, tainting this world? These choices I worried over as the soldiers admired our gear and Felina. I kept a bit in the background, changing my red outfit to a more appropriate white (I didn't think any here would get the double meaning).*

*We rode north, towards some hills next to the Winding Water. The lieutenant told us that many trolls live even farther north at the other side of the river, but that each winter some of them move south towards Baldur's Gate. To stop them attacking farmers and cattle the Flaming Fist patrolled and tried to lure them out before they could attack innocent civilians. The plan was to let a group on foot be 'bait', while the cavalry waited in a hammer-anvil maneuver.*

*Most of us went with the bait, only Cuura staying with the hammer group. Indeed a group of trolls came running towards us, and we retreated toward a nearby knoll: standing higher than these creatures would negate some of their strengths. Zhae, of course, is first on the top of the hillock, Felina wisely tried to keep as much metal as possible between her and these aggressive creatures, while Grimwald lagged behind a bit as he was calling on his Gods to assist us. Then Zhae called out: some trolls had been waiting behind the slope to ambush us; they had predicted that we would fall back to this hill, and only Zhae's speedy ascent resulted in the fact we controlled the top and not they. I called on my mastery of air and quickly spotted Zhae and the lieutenant battling three armored trolls. They were a lot more like that forest troll we encountered near the Wood of Sharp Teeth, and they attacked using eight feet blades and well crafted bows. I tried to not interfere to much in the fight, as I knew its importance to Zhae, but they threatened to break through and the lieutenant was hard pressed. As I dove down I noticed Cuura breaking the ranks of the trolls, while Felina rescued some soldier by a timely intervention. Grimwald, of course, was a rock on which the troll sea broke.*

*Fire shifted the balance on our side, so Cuura's move to assist us was well considered, but luckily not needed. As I flew up to get oversight again I found the battle over and only Guan Yin's gift of healing a welcome reprieve. We had no losses, although I shuddered at the thought what could have happened if we hadn't been present. The lieutenant decided that such armored trolls were an unexpected danger and decided to report in. Grimwald got permission to take some of the gear so he could analyze it – it was something new so he put the last details of our equipment on hold as he locked himself in to find answers to this riddle. They also carried two ancient tomes, carefully wrapped as if they were messengers of some kind. There was a clear aura of magic around them, so it seems wise to first rest and prepare protective spells before opening them.*

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