

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

### *Chapter 88: Tactics 101 (1st ride of Alturiak 1371)*

**A** Neverwinter militia unit had traveled south to Waterdeep, Cuura informed us. They did that every spring to check the quality of the road, to ensure that no goblin or orc tribe had build a 'toll booth', or the presence of other creatures which might be a hazard to commerce. They were to return soon, and, after some inquiry, did not mind some additional people traveling with them as long as we pulled our weight in checking the safety of the road. We had delayed long enough.

**M**aybe I was a bit forward, but as we prepared I heard that our combat leader planned to take several people she had met with her. The Neverwinter group was on horseback. Most of us had varying ways to keep up our speed, but I doubted that her troop was equipped for speed and to travel weeks through conditions that were no longer icy-death, but still far from hospitable. She understood that and dismissed them. Again I had to intervene, because it might harm her reputation, so I gave them some funds as was proper towards clients.

**B**he sergeant in charge of the ten riders was a military man through and through. Not a great intellect, nor a wise and insightful man, but thorough, strict, and by-the-book. The riders were related to the barbarians living to the utter north. Equipped with bows, curved swords, and leather armor they were clearly harassers, not heavy cavalry like Cuura. They were to sweep the terrain to the side of the road, and they told me they only did the east side. The west they already did going south, and the closeness of the sea and lack of hills meant it was not easy to hide more than half a dozen orcs, let alone a marauding ogre group. About halfway was a swamp called the mere of dead men. They did not speak much of it, but they were planning to leave it alone, hoping it would leave them be too. As I heard the name I suddenly knew we would need to go there. But not now. Soon, though.

**U**nthawed and icy muddy patches alternated as we travelled, and we covered each mile twice, but the soldiers had knowledge of lands, and Kendalan's and my knowledge of nature meant it was cold, sometimes wet, but never dangerous. Felina, of course, disliked the discomfort. Grimwald stayed close to the sergeant, while the rest of us joined the barbarians in their sweeps. Cuura proposed different patterns, possible because we had more men, and we indeed covered ground more quickly but also more thoroughly.

**S**till deep in the hills of the Sword Mountains we ran into our first serious problem. A large group of worgs ridden by goblins appeared, clearly trying to intercept us. Without a way to start parlay, nor much time, we were forced into a fight. Cuura proposed a half moon stance, where we would funnel the attack to the center. A breakthrough there would mean each wing would be on its own, but it also meant the goblins were exposed to the most ranged fire. It was a typical Cuura gambit. My enlarged fireball removed most of the right rear flank, and the remaining charge was broken by an arrow storm and some lightning from Kendalan. How things had changed. We were never in any danger, but if this patrol had been on its own then it would have been overrun.

**H**ow did these goblins know we were here? Why did they attack us? Questions without answers as we continued our sweep. Then the group Felina and I accompanied discovered some tracks and followed them into a clump of trees. A body on a clearing was the lure used by four trolls to spring an ambush. Two of the soldiers fell, and the others offered their horses as cover. Felina and I tried to hold the attention of the trolls, allowing the remaining soldiers to flee. One troll was clearly more advanced than the others, and he made the mistake of trying to catch me in an entangle. This meant I had total freedom to take out the trolls wading towards me one by one, while Felina dazzled their leader with feints and illusions. Kendalan flew in to help, but by then the battle had already been won. I learned two important lessons: keep connected to the main force at all time and any unplanned deviation on foreign terrain should be considered an enemy trap.