

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 92: Attacker attacked (2nd ride of Ches 1371)

The morning reveille... I never minded it before, but a shake by ones companions was so much better than this. Also food was centralized and I couldn't brew my own tea. At least I was allowed the quiet of prayer to Guan Yin, and the solitude to study my scrolls. I feared the coming day: it was clear combat was the order of the day, and there would be scant opportunity for compassion.

Questioning the captured goblins led to information about their lair. How did they managed to get the goblins to talk? They were sneaky creatures, but if this knowledge was bought by torture... Yet I did not have the standing to ask, nor had the influence to change it. None of the leaders seem to be truly bloodthirsty, so I had to hope for the best, trusting in the good of the people. In any case we needed to flush out these goblins, as their nightly raids had done some minor but noticeably damage. It was such a pity that the goblins didn't even try to negotiate. It was a pity that it was extremely unlikely that it would have helped. Alas.

I entered one of the bigger entrances of the lair together with a squad of scouts, sappers, and two squads of spear men. I had a *detect snares & pits* active, it wouldn't be any help with magical defenses, but I suspected the goblins wouldn't have many of those. It did point out a trapped ceiling close to the entrance, but the sappers either decided to have it come down, or the flunked but were very lucky: nobody was hurt. Soon after the scouts were attacked by two dozen goblins. The problem was that scouts really didn't have the armor for this, and that my spell made them a bit superfluous. Not that I mentioned this, of course: I was just a soldier-instructor, and there might be solid reasons otherwise.

Grimwald had a lot to tell about the underground battle, but for me it was choosing between bad decisions and worse. I healed when I could, helped the fight by encouraging them by blowing on my horn, and assisted the sappers with a *snake-swiftness*. They fought against a wolves pack, but I came to the regrettable conclusion that no group of wolves would, by nature, fight underground, nor would they attack a unit of armed men unless starving – and these wolves weren't. Domesticated, thus bound by the rules of goblins, not nature.

When there was a pause in the fighting I rallied the scouts who lost one of their unit, then blessed the whole group I entered the tunnel with. We moved forward, occasionally encountering goblin units trying (and sometimes partially succeeding) in ambushing us. Yet we were able to join up with Felina's unit, while Grimwald left for the smaller of the two target caves. I should have know better, shielded those in my care, but I missed the magical trap which stunned the scouts Felina and I were walking with – we two were to experience to let the mental blast overcome our mental blocks. It was a bottleneck, the last line of defense. As wolves and goblins moved in the spear-men behind us desperately tried to hook onto their helpless comrades. I called to Guan Yin to shield them, just before the area was locked into a *silence*. Felina fell back as the last of the living scouts was saved, but I realized that we needed to take this point. Take it, hold it, break the lines. So I stepped aside and released my fire: the wolves and goblins in range just ceased to exists, may their souls have earned a better place on the wheel next time.

Altering myself to Asabi form allowed me to dig around the trapped area. It also allowed the goblins to flee, but I refuse to attack anybody who had lost his will to fight. Regrouping we readied ourselves for the last sweep, but I steeled myself: to fight goblin warriors was one thing, but I would not allow harm to come to those willing to surrender...

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