

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 95: the Tyrant of the Moor (1st ride of Tarsakh 1371)

The army went northeast circling the edge of the moor. As I understood it they were planning to evade the bulk of the devil army, which they placed on the south center of the moor, and make a pincher movement with the (soon to arrive – hopefully) Waterdhavian army attacking from the west. By rank and by necessity I was far removed from the decision making, so I could not really comment. Nethander mentioned that he thought it a risky venture, however, with the other army not yet in place, and when Nethander thought something was risky, it usually was. The stars just showed nexus on nexus: small decisions would have great influence.

No scouts were sent south, so we did not know the extend of the devils control. Personally I would think such knowledge vital for the planning, but the fact was that we needed the Silverymoon's scouts for that – and those had not arrived either. I did not hear if they wanted to inform that elven princess – even if she was as weird as many said, she was still an abjurer of considerable skill, and **banishments** might be our best weapon against the devils. I decided to focus most of my energy to offensive magic: I had not the skill to shield the troops, so I could best help them by making sure as few enemies reached them as possible. The weather turned warmer, it wont be long before the midgets will fly and make all of our lives miserable.

Even though the music I was looking for stayed elusive, I was happy that my Lady showed me different ways in applying power. Instead of harming animals I found a path to force them away. I also did something I should have done before: doubt Lasham. It wasn't that he was wrong, but his path of inflaming the heart was missing an important aspect: I had learned both to inflame others as well as to calm them, but had not learned to calm myself. Marching on the moor with others responsible for scouting allowed me time to consider Grimwald's warnings and my own internal balance. Then I found it. My cold side. Hidden, yet clearly present since the time I accepted Guan Yin's voice. It would allow me to disable without permanent harm, to stop without killing. Cold was perhaps my anti-self, but ones inverse **defines** oneself. Void in its truest form.

Our route would take us through the bear-hand clan, with whom we already made contact. They would allow us to pass unmolested, but for a token fight between champions. This kind of fight wasn't to kill or even harm the opponent, but just to show that one was worthy, so the major sent us ahead under command of scout lieutenant Darque. We had about a day's worth to make arrangements, ample time for this.

Plans had this weird ability to change: the champion was out hunting goats, so Cuura and Zhae left with a bear-hand warrior to find him. The rest of us discussed matters with the clan elder, a man of limited view, but honest interest in his tribes welfare. We were just discussing what lay east of his holding, when a warrior announced a 'special visitor'. We went with him, and found a Erinyes under a flag of truce. Such creature followed the letter of the law, not the spirit, so she tried to **charm** the elder, something I managed to make obvious to him. She wasn't at all happy to see us, and my intervention breaking the charm was almost enough to make her frown – impressive self control. Nethander tried to rile her, but she blatantly ignored him, although I was sure he was on her short list. She offered the elder to absorb the clan in the devils force – or be utterly destroyed. The elder weighted his options, but to let the clan disappear – even though its members would survive – was something more abhorrent than the danger in front of him. Rock searched for an escape route, but the few caves it found would mean we would need to hold against what was coming: a Pit Fiend!

I had no knowledge of such creature, but Grimwald told me it was a general of devils, in strength the equal of the strongest dragon. Almost all devils are immune to fire, but it had fire, poison, and many other deadly weapons. It also was a general, so it would never come here without an army. All of us against him alone would be extremely risky, but he would not be alone. We talked for a few minutes, then decided to try and delay things while we dug an escape tunnel. Grimwald proposed to create an advanced tower: it was tactically unsound to leave such a hold in ones rear, so by creating it we could force them to neutralize it first. While he and his two sappers worked on that and the ballista they had brought – my mules were so handy for that – we would go to the pit fiend and try to delay things. I also heard the sounds of goblins and wargs. As I suspected, he was not alone.

Although I was good at negotiating, I had precious little to work with. Felina, however, managed to get him talking about his plans to restore order and what not in this area (world?), but, more importantly, got the telltale signs that he was not in **total** control. Was he bound to a summoner? Somebody knew his true name? We needed to inform the major of this development, although I could not fault him if he left us: this devil could destroy the whole contingent. In any case the scout lieutenant would tell him, as he had decided to retreat. Perhaps cowardly, but what else could he have done? The Fiend had six bodyguards: some type of Baatezu with armour bolted directly on their bodies and maggots crawling out of seeping wounds. Phalanx troops, that much was obvious. To defeat them when they shielded the Fiend would ask more than we were able to deliver.

Grimwald, Kendalan, and the two sappers stayed at the tower, while Nethander, Felina, and I joined the bear hand warriors at the three entrances to their caves. I was in doubt if this was a good action, but I could enhance the fighting power of the warriors, and I could still cover the tower. We might very well not live to tell. Would Zhae and Cuura return in time? And would their assistance be enough to turn the tide?

A wall of ice sprang up, shielding the tower from whatever tried to close in. I blew it apart with my **fire**, and, for a short moment, saw/heard orcs advancing. A second wall appeared, and this time I enlarged the area, destroying both the wall and the front line of the orcs. Some creatures behind the orcs were pushing them forward. A third wall appeared right before the caves – this must be the work of a Cold Devil, as a Fiend is fire, an Erinyes is charm. I had no more fire, so I tried to exchange places with one of the sappers. Alas he was unwilling so it took a second spell before I entered the tower.

Perhaps a score of orcs surrounded us, so I used a **spike stones** to limit their mobility. Then Grimwald used some holy spell. Leave or stay, the orcs were doomed. The creatures commanding them I understood were bearded devils, but one teleported out after it was hit by Kendalan and the ballista, and the other fell to Nethander. The first attack had been easily stopped, but there would be more. Some flying devils were totally ineffective against Grimwald and Kendalan.

It was perhaps ten minutes later – the ice wall in front of the caves had melted – when the second wave attacked. This time the wall of ice was perpendicular to the caves, allowing a group to advance without being in the fire zone of the tower. The tower itself was attacked by six ogres and a score of orcs. I heard that Nethander had returned to the caves to lead the battle, and Bear was still there, so I knew they were far from done for, but I heard wargs on the other side of the ice, and those were dangerous. First I put an **entangle** around the tower, then I forced the wargs – first six, then the remaining four – away with the power of Guan Yin. The bear-hand clan should be able to fight off the remaining goblins. My entangle slowed the ogres down so a **lightning ball** and Grimwald attacks killed four and the remaining fled. The orcs used javelins, but they wouldn't last.

We won the second round, but we really needed to take out whatever devil created those ice-walls and any other lieutenant.

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