

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

### Chapter 99: From bad to worse (1<sup>st</sup> ride of Tarsakh 1371)

**I**t was a much bigger camp the next day than the day before, as the Waterdhavian army had finally arrived. Several platoons of guards, mixed infantry with crossbows, chainmail and short swords, but far more farmer units with only the least of armor and just spears. They had the word 'expendable' just written over them, and I felt chill. We were being setup to fall, manipulated into loosing. The gaudy equipment of the officers didn't bode well. Some of it might be actually good armor, but it spoke of self centric thinking. For the price of gilding they could have given most farmer units proper shields, for the price of those gems they could have trained them.

**O**ne thing that worried me (one?) was the lack of special units. No cavalry; even though I knew the grounds on the moor was tricky, the Sky-People proved that riding was possible. No real contingent of mages and priests; likely several lesser were part of the guard, but three casters capable of dismissal spells would have enhanced our fighting capability far more than 60 more farmer infantry. No flying units; I would have loved four griffon knights. And finally no specialists; aka adventurers, people that can face bad odds and have a knack of winning. It was an army the Fiend could beat. Why did he allow us to join forces? We were being played!

**T**hat evening we were summoned to the war council. To say I had a bad feeling about it was an understatement. A ruined amphitheater with all officers present. Captain Ogg moved us inside, to the most rearmost of the places, the only persons lower than lieutenants. I didn't know why Kendalan came with us – he even had to leave bear behind – it had to be because the rest of us was going.

**W**e were told that the place was secured against teleports, and with the whole Neverwinter and Waterdhavian army stationed around this place was secure. The colonel in charge of the army looked like a smart and capable, if slightly opportunistic, man. But the whole placement allowed for an attack on all ranking officers. Couldn't they feel the danger? That this was a trap? Doom crept closer and closer, and only the fact that Zhae seemed focused and aware helped me to...

But of Zhae felt aware then...

**S**ilence and darkness descended over the amphitheater, and from the corner of my eye I saw Kendalan shudder as something hit him then drop like a rock. An invisible devil, humanoid, but with grey skin and a wicked smile, stood behind him. I rushed forward as I prayed for protection in light, past people still in shock about what happened, and activated the rune Kendalan carried, while shielding his body with my own. Felina, Nethander and Zhae moved in, but they hadn't the power to perceive invisible creatures like I did. The front ranks, with all the upper officers, was attacked by more than a dozen bearded devils, the four orthon's behind them, and five others behind that. A fireball exploded amongst the captains and lieutenants – it came from the rearmost horned devil – and immediately after more than three dozen lemures appeared: some between the officers, others on the first ring of the amphitheater to hem us in. Grimwald and Cuura ran forward to shield the officers from the bearded devils, and I asked Guan Yin to help protect those close to me.

**T**he assassin devil ran for the front ranks, dodging unaware officers and bloated lemures with deceptive ease, the colonel or Grimwald his next target. I could not follow – I had not the skill Zhae, Felina, and Nethander had – so I pointed out his location and barged out of the ring of lemures, reading to negate the next fireball that was sure to occur. Kendalan scrambled up and downed a potion, while Nethander and Zhae ran towards the front, and Felina broke out of the circle, hastening us. I was able to cancel the next fireball, but the assassin attacked Grimwald. The lieutenants tried to kill the lemures, tried to assist their captains, but the reach of the glaives took a heavy toll. The four devils in front of the one with the horns were spellcasters of sorts, because suddenly several officers froze, held, and were quickly killed by the bearded devils.

**K**endalan ran out of the encirclement, and his actions allowed me to faerie fire the assassin. I moved to the flank ready to counter another fireball. Zhae, Cuura, Grimwald and Nethander had broken the first line of bearded devils, but the horned devil used a lightning bolt to attack me and the officers between. I could not cancel

it, but I evaded its power and it looked like he had done more damage to his own ranks than to ours. Major Orisond was *held*, but my prayer to Guan Yin released him, then he offered his life to save major Locke, who was *held* too. Zhae and Nethander attacked the assassin, but he did not fall, while Cuura valiantly assaulted the orthons, and Grimwald desperately held off the attack on the officers. There had been an odd sound in the silence, I suddenly realized. What could one hear in nothing?

*A*s his current position was untenable, the assassin *dimension door*'ed next to Kendalan, but our elf just left with astonishing speed and lightning ball'ed the devils. Alas, I could see that he hadn't managed to overcome their natural resistance. I exchanged places with major Locke. I knew a *fireball* would follow, but I could not stand idle by when a man who hated would be killed. Perhaps, perhaps, this would show the major that there was more than just power. First he was saved by major Orrisund, then by me. Felina danced her dance of death against the assassin, and enough lemures had been killed to allow a retreat, which most surviving lieutenants did. Another fireball exploded, and although Nethander sidestepped the blast, and Zhae just became one with the flames, it did considerable damage to the others. I had to talk about this? He showed an insight into flames that was amazing! How Cuura and Grimwald still stood I only understood because I knew their defenses, but a hit by a devil made her stumble and fall. Zhae dashed forward and activated her belt, but then Grimwald collapsed too. I feared he had been killed – I had to trust his formidable armor enchantments.

*N*ow the horned devil tried to take out Kendalan, but he resisted their magic – although only barely. I used my pouch to call 5 donkeys. Three created a line that stopped pursuit, if even for a round, and two appeared under Grimwald and a downed officer. Kendalan was not to be stopped, and he released a lightning ball that blasted bearded devils and orthons. Felina raced in to cure Grimwald with a potion, Nethander saved an officer, Zhae stood in front of three bearded devils and four orthons, holding their attention so we could flee. A bearded devil slashed me as I left, but it was my first wound. I had other things to worry about.

*T*he assassin devil teleported out, so I quickly broke out of the silence – there had been sound there! – and altered myself into a Yak woman: Zhae was formidable, but he would need help against a dozen opponents. Kendalan was surrounded but he managed to fly out of the danger zone, and disappear behind the amphitheater's wall, while Felina turned invisible mere moments before she was targeted by multiple spells, and she raced off to save the colonel. Zhae fought against bearded devil and three orthons, but he only got hit once, while he disrupted an orthon, then fell back to me. Three left. Nethander poured another potion in Grimwald and I saw a shudder. Alive! The horned devil tried to find a spot where he could launch another *lightning bolt* – he must be incapable of more than three *fireballs* – but to many of his own blocked such attacks. A wall of stone, Grimwald's doing, appeared, blocking almost all attack lines from the devils to the retreating group. Almost. I stepped aside and focused everything I got in a 'fireball' over the area where most devils still stood. Power, more power, mirroring the energy towards cold, and pushing it far beyond its normal boundaries. I let it go and ice cold washed over the area, disrupted all bearded devils inside it and two orthons.

*I* did it not because of hate, not because of dislike, but because this would save the souls of so many be it, orc, human, or elf. Because this battle wasn't over, this was the prelude. For killing all the leaders was only a smart plan if you planned to not give the survivors a chance to regroup. No, the Fiend's army was close, and battle would start as soon as he could manage it. How many had fallen? Half? More? We needed to fill the gap, show leadership to the men, bolster their spirits and helped them withstand the surge of orcs, ogres, and goblins to come. Withstand, not defeat. For we should defeat the Fiend, send it back to Hell, and show the orcs that hatred was the wrong path. For it would be bitter indeed to win this battle and fall to the lure of evil.

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