

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

### *Chapter 86: BIG problems (3rd ride of Hammer 1371)*

**W**aterdeep, the biggest city in the western lands. Or perhaps Calimport was bigger – as I understood it it was one of the many disagreements between these two cities. In any case I loved to be here: I need to update my repertoire and get some special equipment, and if I could not find it here, then, well... Grimwald warned us for this city; did he not lose some valuable gear here? True, this was a bigger city, but the 'Gate had its share of pickpockets and others of that ilk, and I kept close to Bear while I got my bearing. Grin. That almost was a pun. Some place to stay for a ride perhaps: the roads north were likely still almost impassable, so it would be wise to join another group traveling there. Yes we were dangerous, but lack of knowledge trumped power.

**M**ay you live in interesting times was a curse in Tu Lung. Perhaps that was what made an adventurer. In any case we ran into a gnome with a problem in the first inn we frequented. I worried about this was a setup, to sell us newcomers something 'special', or to lure us to a trap, but the gnomes story had none of those tell tale hooks. The giant artifact he had received was indeed ancient, his uncles house indeed an alchemists shop – Paul taught us enough for that – and the things lying around indeed dangerous enough to trap one of us. Why people (in this case Zhae) just could not resist sniffing things? He would likely be out for days.

**A** gnome alchemist finding a lead to a giant burial mound *did* feel like one of those to-good-to-be-true things. Especially the hint of a potion to increase lifespan was one of those standard hooks. He had hired some people and left for the mountains north. Grimwald's eyes started gleaming, not because of the potion, but ancient knowledge was his weak point. At least my weak point was now safely asleep. Oh, who was I fooling!

**T**he weather had been cold, wet, and windy, but Kendalan found the trail without any problems. Bear probably helped. Grimwald commented that we would never lose a member of our group while Kendalan was alive, and suppressed a shudder. Prophetic words, yet he didn't know. Four days north of, deep into the hills, we discovered an empty camp, and an entrance to a tunnel. The growth on the hill was totally natural, whatever was down there had to have been there for centuries. Or longer.

**W**e first moved through an underground cemetery of humans. The three kingdoms, then traces of burial from the Illusk tribe. This place had been a burial ground for ages. Deeper and deeper into the hill we finally arrived at a huge stone slab. A door of gigantic proportions. Grimwald wondered how they knew exactly where to dig. The earth knew, of course, but one needed to ask the right questions at the right spot, which would take months, if not years. There was still some magic behind, forbidding entrance to elementals. An opening through the stone led a space beyond. It had to be a space, but if I had not known better I would have guessed it was the open air: it must be enormous.

**T**he hall was indeed big. Big? Enormous, gargantuan, words failed me. I had no problem in entering, but those wearing armor had to do some fancy maneuvering. Our light didn't even reach the ceiling, but it were the many pillars that held my attention. Their shape was simple, but each of them, and there must be hundreds, was filled with writing. I could read this script, and I tried to understand when a rumble to my left indicated some danger: Cuura had kicked a pillar, which turned out to be a stone golem of at least 60 feet in height. I grabbed my pipa and managed to calm it down by reciting stories of power of the giant kingdom – the few names I had picked up from the pillars helped me to give my tale suitable veracity. It stepped back, a pillar once more.

**D**eeper and deeper into the hall, sometimes passing another golem which Grimwald placated with a ritual statement he had either picked from a pillar, or just knew. I wondered why this place was so clean, why there were no traces of the gnome and his retinue, when flasks of alchemist fire, acid, and sticky goo started to fall on us. Kendalan and I used our air mastery and dancing lights to see what was attacking us: skeletons! Some old, some new(!). We could not use area spells as we did not dare trigger the golems, but a hit on those flasks also took

*out the carrier. Within a minute we had removed enough of them so we could break out of the circle. A minor setback, but who created these undead? And where did they get fresh bodies? Was there a necromancer?*

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