

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 89: OLD problems (3rd ride of Hammer 1371)

Grand pillars disappearing in the gloom, as we slowly tried to discover where we had to go. I spend much of the time looking up – my light spells had only a very limited duration. Then Felina noted a change in the floor and a slight widening of the pillars. There was a passage down here, but the amount of power present indicated that it was seriously warded. Odd, like the new skeletons. As far as I knew magic changed over the ages and I could hardly believe that even runic magic could withstand millennia without leaking, activating, or otherwise express its presence. Somebody had done maintenance, and this was far beyond what skeletons could do. Entering was not really a problem, as Grimwald and I quickly figured out the proper responses by reading the runic messages carved in the nearby pillars. A massive stair down appeared, with no end in sight.

In case of entrances being locked behind us, we decide to let Zhae stay behind. Perhaps we were to careful, but the way the gnome got here... it felt like he was lured. If we had not returned in two hours time he was to open the entrance again, and, if that failed, return to Waterdeep for help. Would he listen? We, in the mean time, found a huge room, more than 30 feet high, with effigies of special giants on the wall. There was a enormous stone table, with chairs, and one throne. A feasting hall, but also a hall of remembrance, as each effigy was for a hero or sublime servant of those ages past. Their immortal first king rested here. The runes were truly archaic, so I could not be sure if they had several immortal kings and this was their first, or if this was their first (and only) king who was immortal. Yet if he was immortal, why this tomb? Was 'immortal' a figure of speech and this place comparable to normal ancestor worship, or was this like some aberrations where some 'living' part of the king still existed. I shuddered. If that was true then this place was a horrible joke on the karmic circle.

As we still found no trace of the gnome we decided to look at the door behind the throne. Runes suggested that it would only open to those worthy to receive, and we figured out that it opened if we would sacrifice a proper amount of food, wine, and sundries and praised the king and his retinue. So I read the inscriptions next to the hero's effigies and made a proper recital of their deeds. My accent was probably horrible, but I took care to make it heroic. Yet I still blundered: I mentioned all the heroes, and their king, yet I missed the servants. I was mortified that I should make such a mistake – my mistress must look at me with disappointment. Ten or so effigies opened on the far side of the room, and out of the gloom corpses wrapped in only the memory of deteriorated linen shambled towards us.

No other options were left. I really should learn how to talk to the unliving as well as the living, because to be forced to fight was admitting defeat. Grimwald and Cuura put their weight against the door, while the rest of us prepared to fight the mummified undead. I altered myself into Yak woman form, my Guan Dao having reach over those sad cursed creatures. Nethander and Felina got into trouble as their style of fighting was not suited to combat the unliving, so Cuura left Grimwald with the door while she assisted us. Kendalan, of course, kept his distance and released his usual hail of arrows. We were slowly whittling them down, when I heard a grinding sound and the acoustics of the room changed. Grimwald had opened the door.

The next room wasn't dark, and neither was it a tomb. Instead Grimwald and I found an alchemist workplace. Bubbling and gurgling apparati, puffing arid smoke in multiple hues, were spaced on laboratory benches on less than human height. It was an odd mix: ancient stonework combined with 'state of the art' retorts and other stuff. High, near the ceiling, was a cage with a hungry looking gnome who looked at me in dismay. I excused myself and let go of the alter self: I could understand that a nine feet tall, bovine white haired creature was not something that looked like a rescuer.

Kendalan yelled a warning to Felina in the other room, as the gnome croaked a warning to us. Out of a vat came a yellow-greenish liquid monstrosity. Not an elemental, but a construct made of acid. I cowardly dove behind Grimwald, who bashed it, and got splattered in return. Nethander ran in, and found that this creature was

as unimpressed by his style as the undead had been. The anti-acid coating that Grimwald had devised protected their gear but not their flesh. Still, it slowly lost structure, so we would win if nothing else happened.

If... from a door something else entered. A nightmarish creature, 10 feet high, consisting of a headless body made of the flesh of a dozen men or more with a large transparent vat on top containing some horrid fluid feeding a brain with a single eye in the front. The smoke inside the room was nauseating, but I almost lost my breakfast when I saw it. The Giant King cheating death. How had the gnome known? Seeing his position he was enslaved for a purpose. I disliked fighting, but this affront to nature and the cycle of souls needed to go.

Nasty orders, a pressure to obey this... ugh... tried to grip my mind, but I managed to slip from that hold. My magic damaged the body-parts holding up the brain, but it was solidly build. Nethander was effective (as usual) and he targeted the 'head', the glass vat containing the brain. This was indeed more effective, even as I saw Grimwald racing around the room to stop the acid golem from drinking healing acid. Then we cracked the glass and the brain flopped on the ground. For a moment I thought I felt a cry for help, but Nethander had already killed this immortal king of giants... No doubt some would have thought that its knowledge was valuable, but the balance of the world was more important than any piece of lore. I made sure it would not return by destroying the unnatural body by fire.

Getting the gnome out of the cage was easy, but Grimwald had to apply much of his healing skill to make sure Felina did not succumb to mummy rot. It was rather lucky that only one of us had been infected, because I doubted if he could have saved two: it was a rather horrible way to die! The gnome was grateful and allowed us to take various items he had crafted. They were not as strong as magic, perhaps, but they gave us extra options, and extra options were never bad.

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