

## *The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed) as told by Draenimaullair*

### *Chapter 136: No Panda (3rd ride of Mirtul 1371 - Feast of Lanterns)*

*F*lute playing was something I had always connected to satyrs. Skillful, yes, but sorely lacking any structural thought and often quite loose morally too. Yet when we closed in on the place where we had encountered those spider-apes, my companion started to play, and I knew that I could never dismiss that instrument again. She wove a simple melody, yet behind it the joy of living danced with the sorrow of loss and death. I felt all emotions drain away, to be slowly replaced by a feeling of intense loss and regret. The creatures that had attacked us... the melody corrected my thought... tried to stop us trespassing... they were there taking care of their dead. The song wrapped around them like a living thing, telling them, telling me, about choices that seemed right to those that were afraid, yet were only a poor excuse, telling about how things should never be, yet were. There had been hatred, anger, urge for revenge, but only sorrow stayed behind. Sorrow and a little spark that told that life continued. I suddenly knew I wasn't the only one listening, that music like this could be heard in far places.

*A*s my companion walked she worried about her aggression towards the halfling Norbert. His lack of regret heavily weighted on her, but she considered her response to be out of order too. Was it because the fire that was so much part of her had returned? I found that unlikely: I was a creature of fire and nobody ever said that gold dragons were aggressive creatures! Oh, well, perhaps some creatures did, but they did not count. She also mentioned a pressure she could feel building, inevitable destinies. Again I felt nothing, but in her voice there was a tone I found hard to gainsay. Something was going to happen, and I suddenly understood why the dwarf listened to her – and dwarves were not known to be good listeners.

*R*ealizing my companion had halted, I tried to understand her pose. She was listening, and as she turned this way and that I discovered a pattern: I heard the others move around, but their location changed every minute or so. The dwarf and the horse woman were easy to pinpoint, but next was, unexpectedly, the elf. After a bit it became apparent that some had found a fixed spot and we quickly found the half-elf, tainted elf, and that dinosaur woman. Why did my companion look so sad? In any case we were told that the 'second' circle had several moving enchantments in them: fire, regrowth, and some dislocator magic. Would I been older, then such puny magic would have no hold on me.

*E*vasion was the halfelf Felina's art and she decided not to fight the magic but instead find the path true. My companion explained that in the local world-view such power as this would need another component: the nothingness that could be compared to the eye of the storm. Felina nodded and within minutes pointed out where the 'hole' was moving through the forest. Ever so often it came close to the first circle we were in, so it was a matter of careful timing to make that small step. I will need to protect my hoard carefully: if thieves were as smart as that halfelf then most traps were a futile waste of effort.

*W*e were met by a kind of bear. Black and White. With a straw hat. And an aura of power that mummy would have been proud of. He assumed the worst because we intruded, but my companion and the half elf Felina said the proper thing, and even the tainted elf acted in the correct manner. The dinosaur woman reacted to the threat by puffing herself up, but the others had been so skillful that her posing was clearly interpreted in the best way. It was odd, this creature had nothing to do with dragons, yet it reeked of them, wrym style, deep and subtle. We sat down and it explained it was bound / created here to keep the evil inside. Bound by 'the four winds', four dragons that had assisted the human emperor to keep the land from being destroyed in a nasty civil war. I knew little of human history, but seeing the current state he did a reasonable job.

*E*ver so often, this panda bear explained, heroes would come to slowly reduce this dark place. Some would return, often they would be lost in the darkness. Such was the power of the place that no spirit could enter, just mortal man. He clearly saw me for what I was, yet he looked with interest at the humanoids: friendly at my companion, impressed by the half elf, polite to the elf(!), and oddly distant to the dinosaur woman.

*L*etting my companion's friends reach the inner circle was just a matter of asking permission, and we readied ourselves for the evil inside. My companion was shaking. What was she afraid of?

*L*eaving the ever moving stillness into the inner circle, we saw another person appear. His sword came first, as reality ripped and was healed again. The elf from Evermeet, the elf that had such a hold on poor Lyria. He looked at us and I could see some kind of regret, some kind of apology hiding deep within his stoic face. He explained - and it felt like he seldom did so - that he needed Felina's services, and that it would be for quite some time. I started to object: Felina belonged with us, but before I could voice my objections, I felt Karma. Oh, would I never feel such pressure again! It was unbending, necessity mixed with love and utter sadness. It would happen, it already had happened. Felina was lost to us, only her memory remained. I tried to smile, so much we could have told each other, so much left undone, but time and fate moved on, and I saw them leave to a brightly lit other place... Why?

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