

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

### Chapter 142: Weapon Stitches (3rd ride of Mirtul 1371 - Feast of Lanterns)

I heard a crack, and saw that the pool wall had lost its dark glitter. Above me I heard Efyra ransacking the lab (she really seemed upset by what happened), and Norbert proposing to continue. He was right, there was a time for sadness and memory and a time for action and deeds. Up we went, through a destroyed room where I saw the remains of nature controlling circles, to the corridor where the thirty odd goblins should be. Should be, but weren't. Hmm. Hearing some sounds in the distance we returned to the pool room where Grimwald was angry that we did something. Why did he feel the need to blame Nethander? His fixation got a bit worrisome. Cuura, of course, found our actions logical, and I didn't need to mention that they were a whole assault team in themselves.

Noting Efyra's blood-lust Grimwald cured her wounds which left her in a lot calmer state. Ah, Boar. Some creature get more aggressive when hurt, and Efyra acted like them. Quite logical, if perhaps a bit risky. We informed them about what happened and, after some discussion decided to clear the floor above first: there was a now visible door in the room of air elementals. In the corridor we found two corpses in death's embrace. Their remaining clothes suggested imperial soldiers, possible one of the teams mentioned by the Panda. It looked like they had killed each other. Some twisted mind effect seemed most likely. We took a jade ring to identify them and I cremated their remains.

Stillness greeted us. Stillness of death. Scores of bodies, skeletons really, were lying on the ground. With stone benches on the edge of the circular room. I felt for undeath, but to my relief I found none. Just mortal remains, lying in an eye twisting pattern. Grimwald entered, carefully making his way towards the other exit and Kendalan followed him, eyes looking everywhere. Then we spotted a small horrific detail: most of the bodies no longer had whole hands, nor feet. As we warned those inside we found that they had sped up. Quicker and quicker they went, but they weren't able to actually target the door opening. Running in circles until their feet would be gone and they would die of blood loss... The curse of the room made every move a danger: Kendalan grabbed his sword – what an illogical move – and the parry from Grimwald was a full fledged shield bash wracking the blade. Efyra got out a rope, and with Cuura's strength and Norbert's timing managed to pull Grimwald out of the room. Norbert managed some kind of grease effect and I got out my rod of viscous globs and we managed to slow Kendalan, but not enough. In the mean time Grimwald figured out that any action of his resulted in an assault on others... in this case on my toes. I had been hurt a lot worse, but a broken little toe still *hurt*.

Acting with honor, but with perhaps a slight lack of insight, Draeni flew in, executed a perfectly timed wing-over, and pushed Kendalan out. An older dragon might have been immune to the curse, but she wasn't. She flew one, accelerating, then turned and flew straight for us. Kendalan, like Grimwald was smart enough to exactly nothing, and Norbert did that flapping dress routine Felina used to do. Oh Felina, I so hoped you would find your Karma. Then I got a flash of insight, and quickly retrieved an extendable pole from my backpack. As she flew over I quickly pinned her to the ceiling, then used one of the safe-words her parents had given me to tell her to hang still. She did, and we just needed to out wait the effect. Did I see Grimwald looking angry at my charge? I knew he distrusted dragons but I feared for a pattern: to show every action by some others in the worst possible light. Was Grimwald changing, or was he changed? But if this place could affect him, then why not the others? I had to listen better, and listen to myself: it wouldn't do to accuse somebody when I was the one tainted!

Next was the weapon-smithy. Perhaps it was a karmic thank you for Grimwald as we had let him go inside the haste-room and smash one of those side tables. One down, the balance was lost and they smashed themselves (and Grimwald) to bits in a hurricane of timber and stone. This was where his adamant armor really paid off. Another imperial soldier had almost made it out of the other door. We took a jade pendant and ring and his ashes. Smithy... with golden weapons. Gold. Jade. Obsidian. And steel, wood, and other materials of course. Grimwald was, logically, totally incapable of seeing it as a threat, and Norbert was the most vocal in putting

forward that it was so likely it was foolish not to assume so. And he did have a point. Yet there was more at play here than some weapons that might become animated, or used by a horde of skeletons. There was a deeper battle here. I knew it, even if I did not know its exact essence. Cuura and Efyra, the two most vulnerable, were untouched – at least as far as I could tell – and Grimwald and Norbert, the two mentally strongest acted the harshest. With Grimwald I had experience as source of my unease, with Norbert... I just did not understand him. Was there something that attacked the more lawful inclined? Yet Draeni was even easier in her actions than I had expected, my compliments and hints seldom rebuffed. I had to see and let things play out. And I had to reflect on why I did things. When I had time I had to ask my mistress for advice.

**I**n case the smithy was indeed nothing but that, we blocked the door we entered through so no one would be able to sneak in our rear (if there was no **phase door** or something like that to each room). We continued to the final room on that floor. Yet in the corridor we were greeted by a disembodied voice. Creepy. It mentioned stitches, the 'joy' of caring... I suddenly felt a pit in my stomach, and by the look of it I wasn't the only one. The door opening was a faintly lit outline, with multiple shrouds obscuring whatever was inside of the room. We closed in, the voice insanely talking about his wards. We discovered humans, wrapped and bandaged, but something was terribly off: patches of skin were crumbling with age, yet others were new, and just stitched on. Grimwald cut down the hangings with his weapon, and we found five platoons of these... people lying here. Not dead, not undead, but alive far beyond their time. I did not dare to use straight healing magic: somebody was already influencing their bodies to much.

**T**hen Norbert proposed to give them all the rest of death. I understood he meant it in a positive way. Indeed this was no way to live. Yet the decision should be theirs, never ours. Sometimes there was no right choice, but I knew deep in my heart that Norbert's solution was wrong. Maybe my solution of singing my bardic healing song was wrong too, but I was fairly sure it would not harm their healing, and I combined it with my calming song. Perhaps a truly good night rest might enable them to decide their own fate. What else could I give them?

**E**arning for their release I missed Grimwald's interest in a destroyed apparatus. Useful for shooting down dragons. I felt Draenimaullair twitch, but she showed admirable control (of which I informed her) and let the statement pass. The corridor next indeed ended on a blind wall, where Jade was the key to move through as Cuura proved. Yet she couldn't get back because she did not have any obsidian and the door at the forge was blocked... I better get her.

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