

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

### Chapter 148: Happy! (3rd ride of Mirtul 1371 - Feast of Lanterns)

After half an hour of uncharacteristic quiet, Nethander finally reacted to Norbert's 'situation'. Although I could not join him in his conviction, as I could definitely see two sides to this conundrum, I was most gratified, and worried, by his sincerity. He really believed Grimwald would condone an evil act. True, there was something inside Grimwald – and I did not yet dare mentioning what I thought it was – that was Evil, but his soul was not tainted. Or so I believed or thought I saw. The path of confrontation Nethander took was his default path. That was normal, but again something to worry about. Cuura showed that she was growing into her role as leader. The spirit was highhanded and disinterested in Nethander's opinions, but none of his words or actions showed any incline of selfishness. I would need to make sure that if I died and the spirit took less than proper care of Norbert's body, that Kendalan would use the correct prayers to grant Norbert continued existence.

Leaving the broken elephant behind I wondered how long it would take for nature to use the breach left by the nature spirit and reclaim this evil place. The outside of the castle had been corrupted too, but I prayed nature would find a way to restore itself. I paused for a moment. That had been an improper thought. If I wanted it to be restored, I better make sure myself. Why trying to free captured nature spirits if I was unwilling to make sure they had a home. I chastised myself for lazy thinking and decided to put it on my list, so I would not forget.

- x Find out what the flute was all about;
- x The tale of the lost planet;
- x See what my aunt meant by binding her closer to our group;
- x Return to the dwarf/elven underground place used by the orcs to attack those caravans;
- x See how things were with the ex-Ettin priest of Lathander;
- x Revisit the pool of the Twelve and the cave of the Twelve; Actually, that whole Twelve thing;
- x Visit the Glass City in the Woods of Sharp Teeth;
- \* Give the remains of the ruined elven temple to that Elven princess;
- x Find out what attracted Felina and Nethander near the Cloud Peaks;
- x Revisit the Fortress of Light and see how things are going;
- x Learn from the Netherese underground halls and revisit the Deep dragon;
- x Find the remaining pages of the Elven Tome;
- x Find the lich Azatoth, convince him his world view is wrong (tricky), and learn about the Daemon;
- x Discover the background story of our lieutenant Tamara Landis and her 'aunt' Tamalandis.
- x See if the elven enchanter figured out the calishite runic enchantment;
- x Return to the Giant place and read some history;
- x Discover what was going on with the elder Medusa, and the Netherese floating city;
- x See how Rebecca is doing;
- x Prepare for the next assassin to make his move;
- x Restore nature around the Warlord's castle;
- x Remove the Fiend (and entourage) from the High Moor; Find the demonic book; Free some creatures;
- x Ask princess N'letur to keep the Marshes moist; Check it;
- x Ask princess N'letur to close the Pit on the Moor; Check it;
- x Rebuild a bardic college? Cli is mentioned in both Baldur's Gate and Neverwinter;
- x Help restore the Greenfields; that includes the Banshee;
- x Check on my no longer family: they're still blood; Find out what Sis is up to;
- x Find out why we are time-traveling (we can do that last).

*M*emorizing my slowly growing list, we continued towards the door that had even Oni's treading carefully. It turned out to be shielded with lead, and closed from the outside by a rather simple bar. Whatever was inside they were not trying to block a physically strong creature... Or perhaps it was so strong they could not possibly contain it, but as long as it was unaware of the outside... We had to remove it as a threat.

*O*pening the door we saw a sculpted room with a huge stone head surrounded by a kind of urn like vases in the middle. The head itself was sculpted by human hand, although something felt off in a horrible malformed way. The room looked like it had been formed by somebody familiar with skeletons and muscles, yet these too were twisted. I stared at them, trying to come to grips but even as I heard my aunt urging action, I felt out of control and a very little girl in a big and oh so nasty world. Grimwald cast a *protection from evil*, but he had to quickly limit the spell to about 7 feet or it would break on the presence in the room. Then Nethander stepped inside to be overwhelmed by whatever was present there... Although Grimwald and the Spirit might know. It immediately became clear what the creature needed: life force. Nethander tried to stab himself with his sword (looking extatic doing so), but I could hear the sword refusing, resulting in a grizzly dead-lock (bad pun).

*S*tepping forward, Grimwald tried to save Nethander, but doing so he disrupted his shielding and was also absorbed. I feared for a moment, but then found that our dwarf's obsessive structure protected him in a limited way: he did not attack but challenged Nethander to a duel. The time won was alas lost when ropes thrown disintegrated when they past the boundary. 'Norbert' mentioned that the room look identical (not mirrored!) in his rogue glass. I shuddered. My knowledge about the Far Realm was severely lacking, but that was one of the signs that a creature was very close to that place. Cuura has taken the lead and started firing arrows at the head. Cold iron damaged it, so Kendalan opened up too. Most of my support failed horribly: I miscast a *prismatic wall* and a *ray of stupidity* was like hitting a warrior with a wilted piece of celery.

*T*aking damage the creature reacted with dozens of draining tentacles. Even as I felt parts of me being sucked out I saw how this creature had a fatal flaw: its offense was near unstoppable, yet it had little concept of defense and focus. Draining us meant it could not hold Nethander and Grimwald in thrall, and Kendalan pointed out that the head was the power storage of this... being. Cuura and Kendalan shot a volley, 'Norbert' punched it with a fist that made the stone crack, and just when the eyes started to gleam oddly, Nethander bounced past blocking the visage with his warded shield. Offense and no defense. The head absorbed what it tried to send and turned to true stone. And life returned. The tentacles went for blood this time, but Cuura and Kendalan had already spotted the nexus, and Grimwald and 'Norbert's shattering hits destroyed its last anchoring... Had this creature no insight in consequences?

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