

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

### *Chapter 52: Looks can be deceiving (2<sup>nd</sup> ride of Elesias 1370)*

We left the Queen's bedroom. A long corridor first passed the room with automatons, then we found two doors: behind one was a kind of mumbling, behind the other a creaking rope. Felina and Nethander softly discussed which route to take with Cuura shielding them, while the others waited silently. There was no longer 'noise' around Grimwald, but our priest had changed. It felt like... like he had found himself. Suddenly he and Zhae looked the same.

Choosing the left door we discovered a room with a strange man studying a damaged painting. I found it almost impossible to read him: his stance, features, and manners are just to normal. We could do little about the painting, but Grimwald saw a piece of sculpture that should be high on the wall. He asked that strange man – quite politely for our dwarf – and the fellow nodded, morphed into a squad 10' tall giant, picked up that heavy thing like it weighted nothing, and, after putting it in the designated spot returned to human size. His facial features were different. Grimwald whispered something about a 'Phasm'. He was clearly a shapeshifter, but I felt no taint. Some offer of food was well received, but he showed he did not need or want our help.

The other chamber was far more grizzly. A beautiful and glowing ax on a pedestal with runes, with a dessicated corpse hanging from a creaking rope. Grimwald started to dig for his components for an augury (he learned!), but Nethander was not willing to wait, assuming that the corpse might be an undead playing dead. An interesting concept, but there were several things wrong with is approach. For one, if he suspected, he could ask me to check. Second, if this was a dead person it was impolite to just tap against it. Third, if it was, then getting within reach was dangerous. Was I wrong to not check on my own initiative? They all knew...

The Murderer/Morgh grabbed Nethander, then paralyzed Zhae as he charged in. I released some of my fire, even as Kendalan shot. Grimwald tried to show the undead the power of his deity while a lunged for the axe. Alas, our dwarf low self esteem was not enough to channel Dumathoin's will and the axe turned out to be a trapped illusion. Nethander managed to wriggle free, Cuura stepped in with her usual grim determination, and Grimwald... was it Grimwald? It was still the same dwarf next to me, but his actions were smooth like he had trained from the first days. He blocked an attack on Nethander, forced the Morgh to focus on him, then pounded him of balance. Nethander and I could do little, but Cuura used the opportunity and pounded it to bits.

Nethander was grumpy. He hated needing to depend on others. His fighting style was dangerous yet it depended on the vulnerability of his opponent. As often Grimwald failed to understand, as I helped Zhae on his feet again. My guardian must be unhappy to that he failed in this fight, but it was not his way to complain. Perhaps I should point that out to Nethander.

Back to the corridor and a trapped door. Acid. Nethander tried to disable it, but it still activated when Zhae smashed the lock. A trophy room full of empty glass display cases. Our elf spotted something off from the corner of his eye and we found a mirror that ignored those illusionary walls.

Through a wall we get to another room, almost completing the U around the main hall. A hooded woman sat there, exclaiming she was happy to see us after being locked up for a week. Nethander and Grimwald played their little game of distrust, and Kendalan and Cuura stayed behind a bit. We stepped closer and she threw of her hood, snake hair wriggling. All of us managed to turn away from that horrid look, but Nethander and Grimwald. Our dwarf just ignored the call of stone, but Nethander... I knew what he felt! I released fire, hitting her, then Grimwald blast her with a lance of sound, killing her instantly. I turned to Nethander – stone – then tried to figure out if we'd got anything to return him to us. I found nothing.