

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 63: Soul Possession (3rd ride of Elesias 1370)

The creature of fire just plowed on, even though I had damaged its... its... It wasn't undead, it wasn't even a true daemon, it was a tainted human, alive beyond its proper time, crying for its library, telling us to leave it be. It was the former high priest of Lathander, fallen to corruption.

I knew, even as I launched the attack, that I shouldn't have. Forgiveness is my Lady's business, forgiveness and compassion. So, I, we, tried to return this creature to the man he had been. First we needed to calm his anger, and Felina's exquisite dance did part of that. Then words of apology, and a gift of healing from me, as I accepted the burn of fire as a proper punishment.

We started to talk. It wanted our souls in exchange for power. Nethander seemed interested, and I wouldn't be surprised if everybody else thought he was truly interested, but Nethander is too clever to fall for this. Hopefully he will see that as the big rewards of Evil aren't worth it, so too are the little ones. His 'interest' made the fallen priest offer different things, things Kendalan and Cuura, Felina and myself, could use to slowly talk him into an untenable position. In the end he admitted that for true power he would need his soul back. So, in exchange for his passiveness and one sentence spoken, we would try to return his soul to him. He let us pass down, after he had given us access to the chronicles of the temple fortress.

The chronicles told us much, filling in details, and finally giving us the whole picture. The fortress had been built to hold prisoner the soul essence of a greater Daemon, a creature of suicidal attacks en honeyed words. Long had it held its charge, but, as these things go, slowly the spirit had reached beyond the walls of its prison and summoned wave after wave of attackers. Each, no doubt, thinking they had valid reasons to attack his place, but the voice behind all this had been Its.

Of course the leaders of the temple found out, but here too its influence was felt. Instead of working together the priests and paladins preferred different solutions... and the schism was handily used. The priests tried to split part of the soul from the Manual, and they succeeded. But they did not succeed in trapping it. Around that same time another attack almost overwhelmed the defences and the head of the paladins, the Lord Commander, surrendered his life so the essence was kept. Alas the head of the priest, the flaming man we had met, had already fallen, and the temple was doomed.

It wasn't told how the Manual was removed from the temple – probably several true believers managed to get it out – but the hatred was bound within the walls, captured in the sword of the Lord Commander. It slowly corrupted the place further, but captured and with the Manual removed, it lacked the force to call on help. Weak, until it felt Kolakas searching the place.

I would have expected a follower of the Crying God to be stronger than that.

I'm not quite sure how Ozias kept his brother contained. The temple wards held back essence, but not persons. Likely Ozias, as a living person, needed to refresh his own wards daily. Then the brigands came, killed him, and Kolakas was finally free. Still, there must be wards in the very walls of the fortress, because It hasn't yet left. Wards in the walls and the fact It has no subtlety, no twisting mind, just urges. But it is just a matter of time... to little time.

We finally arrived below the temple, at the underground defenses. It felt dwarven, or at least dwarven inspired. We didn't know where to go, so we trusted Tymora. In a way she was the best possible goddess for Nethander, as Sune was for Cuura. Both close to their personalities, but both also positive, non-evil. For a moment Grimwald managed to get hold of his body to assist us, then we were on our own again. Only with Grimwald 'gone', did I sense how much we depended on him. He was our anchor stone, a term so obviously true that I felt a wave of premonition.

He would die because he refused to bend. But his end would be a beginning, for he did so before.

We found lots of restless dead on our route. A spirit hunting for a body to possess was easily thwarted – although I felt sorry for it. We weren't the ones destined to lay this place to rest. Once we had taken the true darkness away, it was to the followers of the Morning God and the Crying God to make restitution. My fire removed lurking undead, hiding between the bones for a chance to strike. Slowly we reached the point where the invaders, so many centuries ago, were finally stopped, likely because their master was taken from them by a dying Lord Commander.

Then something flitted behind me, striking me, and leaving me in agony.

I had a glimpse of it, and it didn't look very dangerous, although the pain told me I had encountered the master of this place. Perhaps I felt that way because he was so clearly incomplete, only his love of pain, his revelry in discomfort and dismay left. My body could not stand up to the pain, but my soul learned a lesson here.

A bridge of crumbling stone crossed an abyss. Down below a dim red light and heat patterns spoke of lava. Nethander was the first to make it across, being bombarded by big rocks. Felina needed to dodge globs of molten rock. Then Ozias tried to do that balancing act, but his body was not his own. Grimwald fell, and Zhae could not hold the rope, cut by the laughing Kolakas.

Position was like water, air was willing to listen, and I fell, and I flew where Grimwald had been. This was enough playtime for It, because he left us alone. Bored perhaps? Or a sliver of the true Kokalas the managed to convince It otherwise?

A new hall, filled with cistern's. The keep's water supply, now tainted and poisonous. Felina and I manage to find a trace of magic, what better place to hide the soul of a burning man than deep under water? My Lady and runes from Grimwald shield me as I dove down, finding a necklace with a flawless gem. There was a spark there, the soul of the tainted priest.

We continued, but suddenly hungry spirits were everywhere. Cuura was invaded, but we bound her before they could command her body. We checked the passages, staying away from the chasm, and found a huge cave. The far wall is riddled with arrow slits, a wide moat filled with slime and stone spikes. There was a door, barely open, and I could feel a multitude of undead roaming that place.

This was where the sword was placed. We needed to enter it.