

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 66: Labyrinth (3rd ride of Elesias 1370)

We finally rested. It was less than a *ride* since we left the gnome village, but I felt longer. Grimwald tried to tell us about proper behavior in the upper Underdark. He worried to much – we were no longer the same group that left Berdusk to determine the fate of the caravans – but there was much lore to absorb. We would just have to learn as we went, and remember that many hunt by lure. We sent the horses and Bear to the druids. Bear and Horse are smart enough to understand this. A note asked them to bring the horses to the inn. Their future was uneventful, so if we lived we would find them again. Our future... the stars show nexus after nexus.

I wasn't sure what I expected of the dark corridor we entered, but after a bit it started looking constructed to even my inexperienced eyes. We arrived at a broad stairs down, and I wondered who build it. It didn't feel dwarfish, and I understood that most other underground building races lived much deeper. Nethander took the lead and returned to tell us about a unliving human, standing alone in a great hall. My sense told me of his connection to the negative plane, but beyond that he did not strike me as especially evil, more... weary. He talked a language of ages past, but Grimwald's helmet helped. He, in turn, understood enough draconic to make some conversation possible. He came after 'the cities fell'. 'Fell' as in 'dropped down'. I had no knowledge of the history of these western lands, but I should ask as soon as I met a sage. We indicated we wanted to go due west and he told us three of the eight corridors led that way. One deep, one long, and one through a labyrinth. The labyrinth of Rage and Bane. Yet 'deep' meant extreme danger – Grimwald was clear about that – and we did not have the time for 'long'.

Felina and Nethander weren't to happy about this.

I told the creature it had completed its duties and it crumbled to dust, its soul finally free. Whoever ordered it to stay here had some explaining to do.

The maze, what can I say about it? Build by humans, that was clear. Magic loving humans. It repaired markings made on the wall, unless one (Cuura) had a starmetal dagger. It also had intricate runes/writing on the wall in different colors depending in which zone we were, but it almost felt like somebody had taken things with meaning and created a kind of art from it: beautiful, but lacking content. I made copies of certain parts. Perhaps a language expert could learn something from it.

I just followed Nethander who, after a failed systematic approach, reverted to trusting Tymora. I had a feeling it did not really matter, because the path was not what this maze was about.

At a dead end Grimwald tried upping the ante and started swearing and displaying anger in the most obvious way. The runes turned red and not long after a bullheaded creature charged in, taking Zhae by surprise. He really, really, should be better protected. It pained me to say so, but as he showed he could not do so himself, so I would need to get him better armor or any other thing to protect his skin. The battle itself, like so often, is quickly over, my attempt to keep the creature from being killed thwarted by the other's effectiveness. Our dwarf really started to master the bow!

The runes turned white and we continued, this time led by Kendalan. Our elf was a lot less panicky underground then he used to be, but he still didn't like it. It felt like we wandered randomly, but we arrived at a a mushroom patch. It had been quiet for to long: Nethander and Grimwald had their misunderstanding again. Our scout saw an unclaimed resource, Grimwald a field to be shared by the needy. Would it kill them to explain things instead of assuming fault?

There was also a fountain, smelling of alcoholic drink. A *different* alcoholic drink for each of us. Interesting, but I don't drink. Odvar did, Nethander filled a waterskin, but nothing special happened.

At least as far as I could tell.

Then we found another door, behind it a second minotaur – for that was how these creatures were called. It could move around the maze quicker than we could, and managed to enrage Odvar – who flailed around him wildly, attacking both friend and foe. Kendalan wore the brunt of it, before I could intervene and calm the man. Nethander played the duel card, then worked together with Cuura to down the beast. I could see Grimwald fuming: he was right, and so was Nethander. They were both wrong too. Perhaps Karma was duly distributed, for Nethander won, but was pretty mangled – more so than he had expected.

With the runes turning white again we hoped we had finished this maze.

I wondered what the others had learned. I wondered what I had.

Human female Paragon/3, Wu-Jen/1, Naturalist/3, Ancestral Hierophant/2