

## Norbert's Notes

### **What is Good? (135)**

*In which I am confirmed in my worst suspicions about both nature and Reed*

The savage – Efira – who came in with Grimwald seems to have saved all of the fighters at the armed tournament, erecting a wall of fire to hold off a giant swarm of wasps. I didn't think she could do that sort of thing, but regardless, in reverent tones, the locals have started calling her 'the Lady of the Wasps'. Nethander, of course, has begun to exaggerate and exhibit his martial prowess at every occasion, to the point where the locals can't stop but look at him with admiring and somewhat fearful glances as he crosses the street. And one of us, for some reason, is thought by some of them to be an Oni; a vengeful - but honourable? - warrior spirit of sorts. I don't know how this happened, but far be it from these charlatan to dispell these people's illusions about us, of course, as Nethander is invited to a meeting with the head of one of the families organising the tournament.

Felina and I escort him, covertly. The matriarch tells Nethander of an ancient curse that has been loosed upon the city, and asks him to ask the Onis to go and fight against it. He handles the matter with some delicacy, and allows her to speak without making any boasts about our control or communication with any Onis. She claims the curse originates from an ancient castle of a local warlord – one who was disloyal to his Emperor around the time of a struggle between the competing empires of Shou-Lung and T'u-Lung. As punishment, the Emperor's 'Four Winds' defeated his forces, and sealed him in his keep.

Whether this is actually what is going on or not, at least other people are now coming to the same conclusions I did: something chaotic, something evil is going on, something outside of the usual order. I think of Grimwald, who confided in me that a soulless child, one of with empty eyes and a gaze fixed at him, visible only to him, that had occured to him before, in another city in chaos, occured to him during the ruined Festival. I do not think that we should count the abduction of our fisherman friend's son, nor, *perhaps*, the assassination attempt against Master Wang. But this sign of Grimwald's, and the destruction during the Festival of Lights, which would have been a thousand times worse without our intervention, and the attempted collective assassination of a few dozen of this region's skilled warriors by way of wasp, really do spell trouble. And now we have a lead.

With it, we also finally gain access to the Magistrate and the Wu Yen, who grant us access to the city archives. It seems there is indeed a curse at work here: every thousand moons, bad omens occur, and terrible things start happening; things that upset the order of the Emperor. Floods, earthquakes, graves spilling their contents, and even, at one time, some sort of plague that caused the death of nearly every senior official. We question, with all the tact and diplomacy the silvertongues can muster, the Magistrate

and the Wu Yen. They seem genuine. I go over the papers to ensure they are not manipulated in any way - they seem genuine. Furthermore, Reed impresses me with her knowledge of astrology, as she confirms there is indeed a particular planetary alignment occurring now that occurs exactly every thousand moons. She also informs us that this time, it will last even longer than usual.

After a short discussion, we decide to take on the role of the requested Onis, or the Winds, or, well, try to put a stop to whatever is behind all of this, if they are, or at least investigate the keep a bit closer otherwise.

We move through the underbrush, but rather than labouring and stumbling and getting entangled, the branches and twigs and tall grasses all move aside, as the Elf reaches out to the plants and clears a trail for us. His love for nature seems to be reciprocated - for now. Surely, this is the way you are lured in. For those who develop a connection to the world of plants and trees, unorderly and unpredictable in its raw state, the feeling that the wilderness accepts your communication must be empowering. But I've learned the lessons of my father, even if he never did. I wouldn't *trust* a forest as far as I can throw it. Kendalan may be in the vanguard, but I bring up the rear of this line of fools, and with every 'easy' step I take, I can see the grasses close up behind me, and the bending branches snap back without a sound.

A few minuets later, after carefully climbing down a deathtrap hillside, I am grabbed, bitten down upon, and nearly eaten by a demon tree. Its wooden jaws clamp down on my body, trying to crush me. This is most undesirable. As the splinters start piercing my legs I focus on my reality... shifting it, delaying myself, finding myself ahead in time, at a better time, where the creature is no longer standing, where I am no longer trapped, where my companions have brought the thing down. I let time pass, and to their surprise and relief, come tumbling out of the air after a minute or two. The tree has been brought down like so much lumber. I dust off my coat, and we continue on our way.

Not much later, still wading through the thick undergrowth of this endless forest, we are attacked again, but events go very differently this time.

Oh, Reed! I can hardly believe the blind embrace of the dogmatic ideal of a higher good that must have lead you to this state of mind. Trying to *force* me to apologise - which I will not - and grabbing and threatening me - and for what? For defending my life and that of my fellow travellers, her friends even, against a band of abominable spider-apes, trying to poison and trap us, and, to our shame, trying quite succesfully I might add (as if we had been the animals).

My apology, is what she demanded, and when I did not give it to her, seeing no reason why, she nearly lost control and burnt me to a crisp! Reed the diplomatic! I managed to escape from that fate only through some quick thinking and judicious use of my powers. Bearhugged by this woman, with red flames emerging from her skin, I turned myself

smaller, and smaller still, until I stood at her feet, inches tall, tiny and unthreatening, asking her: '*why are you doing this?*'

There was no answer, but she let go of me, and as her anger seemed to subside, she retreated to the middle of the clearing. Then, remaining silent, and holding onto some sort of staff, she disappeared. I can only hope she has gone to meditate, and restore some sanity to her actions, but I am half certain she has rather gone back to those foul-looking creatures to attempt to make peace. Her companions, far from being concerned over this sudden outburst of irrationality, stop short of blaming me for not going along with her follies and suggest I should have offered an untrue apology - but how could I have?

Clearly Kendalan and Nethander, who also defended themselves, are familiar with Reed to such an extent that they have developed not only a tolerance to even her most erratic behaviour. They exhibit what they must believe to be a 'pragmatic' approach to these outbursts of angry moral rectitude. To them, compromising their integrity must seem a small price to pay. It isn't, of course, as they may one day come to understand. But apart from the damage they are doing to their psyche in faking, without qualms or consideration, their sincere regrets, the worst of their crimes may be that they are empowering and affirming Reed in her delusional perspectives on *what is good*.

This incident has confirmed my worst suspicions about Reed. Whether she knows it or not, once who follows her dogma so blindly, is so focused on saving others, and yet binds so much power to herself is not only a paradox, she is a threat to the balance of the world around her. I have to reflect further on what happened today, but my earlier feeling that perhaps she Moon's mirror serves as an important balance to Reed seems to have been confirmed. Regardless, after today's events, I will be cautious around both of them.