

Norbert's Notes
Beware the Elephant (147)
In which I free a mind and trap my own

To help him understand himself, and what happened to him when the lich tried to break his mind, Grimwald attempts to seek guidance from his ancestors. Yet as he does so, the dwarf seems more troubled than ever. As he mutters under his breath, I can hear unsage advice being offered to him, in barely audible whispers. For many minutes, he tries, and tries again. Yet as the strange voices fall silent, the confusion has only grown. Is it the taint of this place that is warping his access to his ancestors? Has his mind truly been broken? Or is something alien still holding on to him?

As I consider the plight of the dwarf, so I consider my own. I think back to my night of rest, to the strange vision I experienced. The many eyes of the other-me, all opening... me, shocked awake. I am certain it was not born of this place. But it was not solely born of my own mind, either. What did it mean?

There is another thing to consider. In the night of my vision, we were attacked. Well – obviously! Of course the Onis attacked us again. And of course my companions could take care of it, after they themselves woke to the threat. But my – well, Watson's - warning wasn't heard or heeded. How could it have been, if none of my companions truly know who or what he is.

I should probably inform them. Try to explain how he communicates, and how they can communicate with him; how he is not just a pet, or an animated piece of crystal, but a self-acting, semi-independent fragment of my own personality. A part of me. After all, another time he tries to warn us, and is ignored, we may not be so lucky.

Maybe I should. But I cannot bear to tell them the full story of what he is or how he came to be. Not that I fully understand it yet, myself...

It was back in Cormyr, after having tracking and infiltrated another adventuring party that threatened to upset the local balance of power, that I found myself contemplating my new role as investigator for the Kingdom's Spymaster. Midnight raiding, dungeon-delving, and rope-swinging with this group of trouble-makers, I found myself strangely, and to my great alarm, attracted to the promises offered by this new life. New sights and sounds! New knowledge, buried deep in the earth, hidden high in tower keeps, guarded by traps and monsters! Only to be uncovered only by those with the will to set out and find it...

And yet these thoughts, and my new attraction, were anathema to me. The self-imposed limits of society serve a purpose, after all, and those that seek out new experiences and thrills, rather than keep their impulses under control, are wont to harm both themselves and others. And so, after the operation had been completed, and I had made my report to the Spymaster, to her satisfaction, I gathered some provisions, and retreated to my home. There, with the doors barred and the curtains drawn, I went on a journey. For four days and

four nights, staring into the light of an everburning candle, I traveled into myself, and in a terrible battle, isolated and tried to cast out my lust for adventure.

And I failed. For I brought with me, from the depths of my mind, a crystal... a copy... well. Once I emerged, with gritted teeth and clenched fists, I found myself holding it, and soon, it jumped free. This was Watson – the epitome of my heroic impulses, the essence of the adventurer-me. I looked at it, and we spoke, and we did not understand. Worse, I had not cut him out from me; I had copied him, retaining my own impulses, and giving this part of me life outside myself. And however principally opposed to all of what he represented, seeing eye-to-eye with it, I was quite unable to destroy this part of me. After two years, I am still trying to figure out my relationship to it - him - me. So how could I explain this to my companions? How could I explain to them what it means when they hear my crystal voice, warning against attack, or urging them on? I cannot.

Grimwald completes his rituals, and catches up to the party. I join them, and we learn of a new pattern to the madness of this keep. After setting free the phoenix, the party has now freed a dragon, and is convinced that there must be two more creatures of power trapped here, one for each outer tower, being fed off to support the structural integrity of the keep.

We decide to free them, and break down a wall, which strangely resists our efforts at first, then gives way when we randomise our pattern. Darkness greets us, and within it, a dance of little lights. Upon closer inspection, they are not will-o'-the-wisps, or the many blinking eyes of some monster, but rather, a long chain of crystals, suspended from the ceiling. Within them, there is only one light, but it is jumping so rapidly that it seems to be in all of them at once. Grimwald approaches, but is rebuffed, as – rather than seeing his own reflection - a huge, grinning skull laughs at him from inside. We pull him back, just before he manages to strike the crystal. Reed and Cuura (who has returned from her foray with Efira) are alarmed, and start a thorough inspection, not of the crystal, but of the dwarf. He recounts how his appeal to his ancestors has failed him, how he has failed everyone, and then just sits there, in sullen silence. In the background, I hear them console and then study him, looking for evil inside. And I care – I do care... but I am drawn towards the crystal, drawn towards it, trying to see within. In a stroke of genius, I find myself enlisting Watson. He is only too eager to try to communicate with whatever presence lies within...

< a maze, a hallway, filled with glass and crystal and light, a tunnel with a million refracted doors and windows, moving... ever moving... we must find the exit, find it, let us go... >

A being of enormous power, looking for all the world like a grumpy old dwarf, greets us with an iron fist, nearly smashing Watson before we can even speak to it, then jumping through to another tunnel... and we are cast out.

The dancing light continues to move from crystal to crystal, and we reengage. Watson enters the crystal again, and as he distracts the creature within, I see through the outer wall of it. Burrowing into the astral plane, I bind the dwarf with strands of ectoplasm, enter the crystal, and speak. I try to convince him that we are not his enemy, that we are here to free him. But as he struggles against his astral bonds, and nearly breaks free, I see that my words are

meaningless to him. A strange urge works upon us both, compelling us to escape, to leave this crystal hall, to flee, to move to another tunnel, another crystal, and another, and another, and another...

Before it can get hold of me, I retreat into my own body. With the astral bonds still holding, and Watson distracting him, I manifest a power upon the dwarf to make him move forward through time - to this place, as it will be, moments from now. The light inside disappears, and with my physical body, I manipulate the hanging chains, and move the now-empty crystal far to the side.

In a few moments, the dwarf should reappear in the exact same spot where he was, freed from his crystal prison, and we will have scored another victory against this keep.