

- Clever Girl -

Prior context was needed in the knowledge of things yet to come. Henceforth, the beginning of the story now starts with how the beings of mounting desolation arose. - Olus

Time set at 1491 approximately five months after the events that unfolded in the setting. Setting: A section of forest within Faerun referred to as Neverwinter Wood. Recreational activities began in an attempt to help regrow the forest after a terrible calamity resulted in large sections of the woods being burnt asunder. Druids and Dryads, Elves and Half-Orcs. All of these groups banded together to help in the efforts of restoring the trees and wildlife. A heavy blow had been done to both the lifeforce of Silvanus and Chauntea, even Mielikki felt the effects of the travesty. Whilst the latter chose to help in the best efforts of the forest, Silvanus was infuriated by the reckless abandon of humanity and was subject to the vulnerability of persuasion. Leira, goddess of illusion, convinced him that a form of justice was required, as she too had lost a chosen recently to a group associated with the ones responsible for the fate of the forest. She proposed a variety of new beasts, created to keep the natural wild order within the forests that Silvanus strived for. Hesitantly, he agreed. Among these beasts formed of the divine, there was one such called the Chimerus Prime, or as humanity has since dubbed it, the 'Polychromera'. This is the first recorded interaction between this beast, and humanity.

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Everus Gold was an avid adventurer in his craft being a half-elf cleric who spent much of his time assisting those with injury around the walls of the hidden city of Sylvia. The magic around the city would cause it to change places every day. Those that knew of the magic also knew on what cycles it would be easiest to get back to the city after leaving it. Everus longed to travel outside the city and on one bright morning, that wish was granted. He and four other adventurers: a ranger, rogue, artificer, and druid, were tasked with investigating a missing persons incident that had occurred earlier in the day. An old dwarven male had not been heard back from in over two hours, which differed from his usual routine, and many had known him to be one who stressed the importance of keeping that routine. Understanding the nature of this person, the adventurers set out in the hopes to find him swiftly. However, this was not the case. Hours passed on end with no luck in the search while trying to find any evidence of his whereabouts. High and low there were no direct signs that pointed anywhere. The concern of the search party only grew as the day bloomed and withered into dusk. Eventually, time had just about run out and the party were gathering themselves to leave when the ranger of the group called out:

"I got a lead!"

Everyone rushed over to observe the findings. Upon the branches the ranger gestured to there was a haunting clue, dried blood. Immediately the ranger knelt down and gathered his senses about him, entering a meditative state. The others only stood and watched intently. The minutes that followed once again dragged on far longer than they felt they should have. Then the ranger stood up.

“Six miles southwest, a monster.”

Everus pondered for a moment as the others began to discuss plans and strategies. After a few moments of banter back and forth he presented his two-cents.

“A walk that far puts us quite a distance away from Sylvia. We won’t make it back to the city by nightfall. Either we make our move now, or wait four days until the next cycle is close enough.”

The rest of the party agreed that the wait would be a devastating blow in the chances of finding the male alive, if at all. Thus, they trekked further into the woods away from the hidden city. Everus had made sure to pack heavily, taking several potions and scrolls with him in the event that they would need to venture away from Sylvia.

The next morning, the party arrived at a cave that led partways into a mountain. A den of sorts. Everus lit a torch and advised the rest of the group that he should stay in the back for the benefit of having his healing readily accessible. The decision was approved. Reaching into the depths of the cavern the party began to smell a foul odor. Corpses must have been present in the cave at one point or another as dried blood spatters became noticeable on the walls and floors, the next discovery was bones. The bones grew in size and multitude as the heroic assembly moved deeper in, assuming that this beast must lay at the end of the tunnel of crude and carnivorous carnage. They expected that something of this stature would prove quite a threat if it were to continue wreaking havoc on man and beast alike in Neverwinter wood. What they didn’t expect was to hear a voice.

“Help...”

It echoed around the cavern, reverberating in the ears of the party. The voice of an older gentleman in distress. It was slow and staggered in its delivery, but it had the word ‘hope’ written in it, and that was all the party of five needed in order to proceed post-haste. They rushed forward blades at the ready and hands swirling with magic. Bursting into a large open room they saw piles of bones strewn about the walls and a noticeable pool of blood in the center, along with frenzied claw marks that made their way from the floor to the ceiling which seemed to almost

descend into darkness if not for the light now illuminating the room. Among the bones and debris there were no living organisms. No man, no beast, no monster.

“Hello? Where are you?”

The half-elf cried out into the cave walls as the echo persisted. Again, a reply came.

“Help... I...”

The sound now came from both behind, and in front of the party. The ranger noticed that large cracks in the room lead to smaller tunnels on either side that he figured could be leading to a whole slew of cave systems.

“I’m not sure I like this anymore. We can’t pin down where his voice is coming from.”

The group took a vote to backtrack or press on. Ultimately, they agreed to explore the two closest tunnels and see if there were any more branching paths they could find in case they wanted to make a detailed report back at the city. As they squeezed into the first tunnel, they thoroughly searched up and down only to find no bones or any significant pathing as the tunnel was filled with a dusty haze and eventually arrived at a dead end. With no luck, the four of them tried the second tunnel. This section of the cave system opened into a ravine filled with stalagmites and stalactites. Sounding through the room was once again an increasingly distressing vocal.

“Help us.”

“Help.. we.”

“I... We... Help Our...”

“I am...”

The adventurers looked between themselves as an increasing amount of discomfort arose from the words echoing about. One of the members, a rogue, made it to the end of the ravine, witnessing an eerie sight with a horrific realization.

“I found him... them! I found the male... I think.”

The other three rushed over, staring at the nightmarish scene. There laying in a small pile were a number of freshly killed bodies, one was human, the others were monsters. Every single

body was a full untouched corpse or carcass up until the jaw. Everything above the jaw was missing. All of the creatures were missing the top half of their heads.

“What in helm’s hold is the meaning of this?!” One of them shouted.

Everus observed the bodies as his mouth molded into a shape of disgust. Another member spoke up.

“I... I don’t even know how to begin processing this. What do you make of it, Ranger?”

But there was no reply. The group immediately turned around noticing the absence of his character. Everus did a head count. 1, 2, 3, 4,... Where could he have-

“Die beast!”

The shout emanated from the large room, immediately the party bolted back out into the large cavern, swords at the ready. Once more, nothing was stirring, not a soul.

“...”

“Die... Die beast!”

Echoes of the same tonality warped into a new sense of dread as Everus turned to the rest of them.

“It’s mimicking us. It’s using his voice. Dear Lythander...”

With the name falling in vain, the corpse of a ranger fell as well with a sickening crunch as it hit the cold stone floor. The cleric turned to look upwards as a large creature shifted in color to become visible. It was a Peryton, and yet it continued to utter coherent words.

“I am.”

With a hissing screech the huge monstrosity descended on the party, the rogue under its talons as it shifted once again into another monster. A Remorhaz. The restrained party member was coiled by the searing tail and dragged under the earth as the beast burrowed into the ground, taking two crossbow shots in the process. The cleric turned to the floor and walls preparing a bolt of energy. As the rest of the group readied themselves to open fire at first sign of the reappearance of the creature, a hollow silence fell over them. The rumbling had ceased, only the sound of their hearts beating seemed to register a sense of burning tension.

CRACK

The earth split, the blood seeped into the cracks in the ground as an object was hurled from the crevasse across the room, slamming into the wall. Another body missing its skull. Another party member, gone. The three remaining participants of this game of fading mortality turned to each other with the same thought.

‘Run.’

As fast as their legs could carry them, they sped back through the tunnel as a mounting roar continued to shackle their hopes of making it out. Everus mustered every ounce of endurance to send him careening past the others as rocks and debris started to shift out of place, falling and shattering behind and in front of the party. Even then, the sounds grew to a thundering crash before being replaced with frightful screams. One more lost to this vessel of destruction. At this point Everus realized he couldn’t possibly hope to outrun the creature. The sounds of cracking and snapping stopped abruptly before the wail of the creature returned. Everus was only half a man, and half an elf, but he had the heart of a whole city that he needed to think about, women and children would not be safe until this beast was dead. The city must send back a force large enough to take care of such a monstrosity. He ceased in his efforts to move any farther through the cavern. He unfurled a piece of paper inscribed with writing, and recanted the words written on the scroll. Glittering light weaved itself into the form of a dove. Everus hastily scribed an S.O.S. onto a small parchment and tied it to the leg of the dove, sending it away as another crack sounded out. Turning to face the wrathful beast, Everus raised his holy symbol. Then the puzzle pieces began to click, as the view of the creature shifted into focus. Its face had assumed the form of an intellect devourer. Before the cleric was a being that tore into the mind of the other party member, consuming it. The body fell to the floor, and the creature twisted both its body and attention to Everus. It had consumed every member except him. The ranger, rogue, artificer and now a druid. The creature opened its mouth again, but this time the language that was spoken turned into a muddled slew of words from different races. The half-elf did not understand nor did he want to. He raised his hands but in a flash, it melded into an amalgamation of beasts combining several traits into one sinister form, and pinned him down under modified claws. The last thing he saw was the form of its tendrils piercing his body and mind.

Or at least, that’s what he thought he would see. Everus became rather unsure of his predicament as the creature held him in place, unmoving. He looked directly into its slitted eyes and watched as they slowly dilated. The monster’s predatory features began to soften. The claws formed into paws, the wings that had sprouted on its back began to grow feathers. It stepped off of the cleric and began to walk toward the entrance of the cave. Death had merely passed over him. Why? He jumped to his feet and began to prepare another spell. It turned back to gaze at

him with a look of remorse... Remorse? No, he was just imagining things. This horrific beast couldn't possibly feel anything. He steadied his hands and opened his palms to strike and it... walked out of range. Cursing, he ran to the entrance of the cave to find the beast standing out by a pool of water, looking at its reflection. It appeared to be crying. Everus felt as if nothing made sense anymore, it was infuriating. He took a step closer. The creature did not stir. He waited a few minutes before hesitantly speaking.

“What... are you?”

His voice carried a demand for a reply. But none came. The strange hybrid turned around to watch him, wiping its tears with a paw. The cleric pulled out another scroll from his bag.

“You can speak can't you? Tell me what you are!

The words inscribed hovered off the page as he began to detect the thoughts of the creature. And with that, he began to understand. The thoughts running through the creature's mind were of guilt, shame, embarrassment, remorse, loneliness, sorrow. The way that it thought seemed almost human. The creature had consumed intelligence and wisdom. However, with newfound wisdom, it had unknowingly gained sentience, morality, and emotion. Everus fell to his knees as he tried to make sense of the entire ordeal. The beast stirred as its form shifted into a rather large jackalope, and promptly fell to one side, continuing to cry while stuffing its face in its fur. The color of it laying in the sun shone a hue of shifting colors across its fur.

“Well I... You really expect me to just...”

There were no words to describe how torn he felt in the moment.

“Hells, what do I do?”

Everus muttered as he gripped his forehead. He grasped his holy symbol and fell to the ground, desperately trying to think of solutions to this unnatural problem. The two lay there undisturbed for an unreasonably long amount of time. When dusk approached once again, the humanoid lifted himself up and began to walk north. It didn't take long to notice that the creature was following. Spinning on his feet he turned to glare at it.

“Go away!”

The creature's ears flopped down in an effort to elicit pity from him.

“Don’t you understand what you’ve done?!” He scolded. “You’ve killed people and creatures alike as if it’s some sick game! Do you know how many people died so that... so that you could feel sorry for yourself?! I should strike you down. This is all your fault!”

His hands remained calm, but his anger felt justified.

“Go away and never come back!” He shouted.

The beast began to cry again, retreating into the trees of the forest. Everus felt himself starting to tear up too. The journey back to Sylvia was exhausting and deeply troubling. At the end of it all he stood at the gates of the city, his dove resting on his shoulder, still holding the note while he peered out into the forest. His mind would torment him with the question he left unanswered:

‘Shouldn’t I have killed you when I had the chance?’

**All events written and proof-checked by Olus the Observer; celestial scholar of the eyes of divination.*