

Grimwald's thoughts part 38

We encounter the wayward members of our group. They claim to have been enchanted or mesmerized in some way causing them to abandon their duty. I thought this did not happen to elf-kin, but either they made up some lame-excuse or Felina's defenses are not as strong as I thought them to be. If they were lured away it is unclear who did it or why such a thing would be done so I take it they are simply fearful. It is not my place to judge and Cuura seems to accept their explanation.

The blood tracks lead us to the lair of the displacer beasts and after searching the place we move onwards. We also discover some hobgoblin remains. The others seem rather dismissive of their presence. Little do they understand the power of unity and coordination. Let us hope we will not be taught the graveness of their mistake. I doubt they could even tell the difference between a black orc and an Uruk-Hai. Why can't they understand the need to control the breeding places of the goblinoids, have they not lost enough empires to them? The hobgoblins at least do not breed as rapidly and have barely enough wit to understand arcane powers. Otherwise their armies might well have overrun Faerun.

When we crest a hill we see a huge blue snake, unfortunately it sees us also. As it charges, Reed asks me what it is. The ancestors answer the Voice of the Gods and explain to me the powers of the Behir. I barely have time to relate this information before the beast surges towards us. Counting on its ferocious appetite I throw my hammer with some beef tied to it at its mouth after praying to Dumathoin to heat the metal. The trick works and the beast snatches it in flight, but then surges towards me – no not me but Reed who just seared its flanks with her power. I recover from my shock and try to stand firm and stop it from reaching the Voice of the Gods, but its huge mass forces me aside like a pebble in an avalanche.

To my shock and horror the beast swallows Reed in one quick gulp! I have failed to protect her! I am twice cursed! I fail in the one thing a dwarf should excel in: I cannot hold my ground. I utter an unintelligible cry of pain and despair and start swinging at the beast's tough scales, but with little effect. Fortunately Reed switches places with Zhae and the others quickly bring the beast down. As the beast slumps I rush for its jaws and start forcing my way towards its gizzard to rescue Jay if he hasn't suffocated and dissolved already. As I tunnel inwards I find that Snake passes me scabbards, branches, shields and other materials to help wrest a passage and aids me in forcing an opening. Clearly he has much experience in dealing with cave ins, so much for his story of being from a city, but I am happy for it. Jay comes forth alive, but steaming with acrid fumes, I pray for water to cleanse him as Reed rushes to meet the one who could aid her. She is so busy thanking her Saviour that perhaps my failure has slipped her mind, but it burns in mine.

I bring nothing but harm and danger to my friends, what a wretch I am. No wonder I am to be sacrificed for this goal, it is probably all I am good for. My grandfather told me many times I was good for nothing, but at least I can sacrifice myself for my people as he does. Felina keeps on intruding on my despair for some reason.

The beast's scales turned away my axe so I explore the possibilities of crafting some barding or shield out of it. Felina offers to aid me in this and we set to work as Snake goes looking for the Behir's lair. When we come to the lair Snake has already looked it over and found some things. Among them one of the true treasures of the earth, a star sapphire. Devout dwarfs often dig years before being granted the boon of finding one and now one is offered. The blessings Dumathoin bestows to these treasures spring to mind. But to what purpose should I bring this gem? It is given into my care. Yes I must care for the treasures of the earth, protect and enhance them, not merely face my doom, my duties are both light as a mithril and heavy as lead. I must maintain my balance.

Then a cry rings out and a blast of acid strikes me. Some strange monster hovers before the cave. Felina cries out to stay clear, but Jay caught up in his earlier heroism is heedless of the warning and

rushes to meet the beast. When will the boy learn patience? The monster savagely tears into Jay and I fear for his life as he goes down hard. *Again* Reed pulls his soul back to his body. It is clear Felina is right, but if I do not sacrifice myself a worthier than I will die, because I brought us here. Without a further thought I rush forward struggling with my cumbersome shield. This time I shall not be forced aside, I will protect Jay! Our whole group rushes into the fight and the beast is brought down just before I would have faced my doom, my soul held here by the gentle admonishment of the Voice of the Gods. I should inscribe a rune on my shield. In emergencies it just takes too much time to wrestle my arm into the gauntlet. Felina tells us the beast is a Chimera. I think none of us will make the mistake of closing with it again, not even Jay.

The next day we travel onwards and find a dwarf corpse left unburied. I feel it is my duty to take care of this fallen brother, but feel compelled to move onward and return later. As we continue more dwarven corpses are found. They died in a circle, clearly facing an enemy with superior numbers and the ability to overtake them since they seem to be headed away from the mountain. Among the remains a clan hammer is discovered. I read the ancient dwarven runes, this is the hammer given to the gold rock clan father at the birth of our race. Unfortunately I cannot remember more about this clan. When I have the time I should pray for guidance. What drove these dwarves back? We are not a people to turn back once embarked on a course.

As we continue gigantic shapes start appearing along our path. Ghostly giants radiating malice and cold hatred. The slain, the conquered, waiting, waiting, eternally waiting. Why do they linger around these ancestral grounds? My people took not only their lives, but also their souls, their rest. This is something even they would not do to us. We were wrong. This is an abomination, the dead must rest and pass away into the earth to be reformed. As we continue the path forks and splits many times and the malice and chill grows with every step. One step from the right path, one moment of fear or hesitation can doom us all. I focus my mind on the destination the Ghaleb Dur showed us. I must remain true to my purpose and remove this burden from my race. This karma as Reed would put it. I must not waver. As the light is dimming and the shapes draw ever closer and more numerous I know that even for a group as valiant as ours there will be no tomorrow if we fail.

We reach the shoulder of the mountain. Before me stand an axe which has cloven the bedrock, not far an oath temple and haunting music seems to rise from a small vale nearby. The sadness in the music draws my heart to come and bear the burden my people laid upon this mountain. My companions are fearful and feel we should seek knowledge. Seeking knowledge has always been my first reaction too. How is it that I changed and now listen to my heart first and knowledge later? Perhaps I should return to my old ways? I sink down in prayer and ask what must be done to bear the burden. It is a burden of the hearth which must be borne first. The heart is the reason and cause, not the mind.

I lay down all that I used to cling to and surrender myself to my doom and pass into the vale. There a ghostly giant creates a song of woe and doom, rivaling, yes even surpassing the chants at the temple of grudges bewailing the passing of old Shanatar. I sit down and guided by the music I let myself drift into ancestral memory to take the burden of my ancestors and the burden they put upon these people. Our people have gone the way of the giants and all but slipped from the world, as we curse the treacherous humans from the south, so they have cursed us. The pain is too much to bear for the dead and for the living. For the second time in my life I feel unable to contain overwhelming grief and my tears fall on the earth. I feel forgiven somehow, the music has ceased and in the silence I find that my own hatred towards the southerners, giantkin and greenskins has cooled. The pain is still there, but I no longer seek to lay it upon anyone but myself.

I go into the oath temple. It takes me a while to read the old dwarven runes. It is much as I feared, my ancestors forced themselves an access to giant held land and drove their people into extinction upon this mountain. The oath can only be undone by the clan gold rock, I assume they have been slain to the last dwarf by these giants in battle over these lands. Until now I have not wavered, but this is the deepest treachery any dwarf can commit which lies before me now. One belongs to one

clan. To lay claim to the gold rock clan I must leave my clan. The worst punishment known in dwarven society I must lay upon myself. For a moment I think of my father and grandfather, how they have labored to mold and shape me. How I now betray their efforts by leaving and all their toil will have come to nothing. How I may never more visit the deep forges and sit at the feet of my elders. Still my sacrifice can remove the burden the gold rock clan bears for setting this right. These ancestors deserve their rest after their toils. It feels like my soul is torn from my body as I renounce the axegrinder clan and I fall upon the unyielding stone, broken. I sit there for what seems like an eternity before I find the will again to get up and claim the hammer and thereby membership of the gold rock clan by my right as the bearer of the burdens of the dead.

Then I stride towards that magnificent axe. Unrivaled in it's quality, sheen, luster and glory. The very epitome of praise to Dumathoin, a pinnacle of craft. I try in vain to spare this gem, but it will not budge. This treasure too, with a worth beyond measure must be given up to pay the price. With a heavy heart I lift up the stone hammer to shatter the axe. At the merest touch both fall to dust and I feel the gold rock clan has played it's final role and it's power leaves me. Alone?

No I am surrounded. A council chamber of sorts. Arguments, anger at me, gestures and words but I feel this argument has been here long before I came to be. I committed sacrilege and am to be cast out, I do not fully understand all the reasons, but it is so. Silently all I have given to Dumathoin is returned, shunned by the Silent Keeper, he will have nothing to do with me anymore. I feel others arrive. Three presences. They do not feel dwarven. Powers behind me, watching, but not interfering. One is gentle, soothing even, a memory springs into mind of how Reed held on to Jay, motherly love. I feel this must be the goddess Reed is serving Quan Yin. The other has no such gentility, rather excitement, I am caught, but when I think of her I feel there is a chance. No not merely chance, but Chance, Tymora is here. I get the feeling some bets are paid of as I make the correct guess. What other powers would take and interest? Is Ilmater interested in my suffering or Tyr in the balance or is it Helm who sees me fulfilling my duty. No it does not feel they are here. This power is not here because it is her responsibility or duty at all. She is here because it is good to be here, because I did good. Yes I recognize her now. The power that came to Kendalan, many months ago, Miliki. She is not here to judge me, she is here because it is good to support good.

I focus more on the argument. One force feels paternal, it supports me, I feel an opportunity, a chance to be remade, Moradin! The other whose silent anger I bear, the one who seeks to reject me as an oath breaker and destroyer of beauty, he who in who's halls I dwell after death, my Lord, Dumathoin. The other feels like my hearth mother when I still lived in the clan hold, Mya the mother of the dwarves, I feel her care for her child. The other one who is also silent I feel how he seeks to gain from the argument, greed, Laduguer, envious at his brother Dumathoin. What can I do? I feel I must act. I am no longer a youngling therefore I cannot shelter behind Mya. I cannot abandon my ancestors, they have aided me and I will not desert them as I have my clan and the oaths of my people. I would be lost without them. I shall bear their wrath and that of my Lord. I shall try to build to replace what was lost. Rebuild yes, this is a time of reforging, the purpose is reforging, a New Shanatar. Rebuild dwarven glory, not merely holding on to what the ancestors created. I must follow Moradin. But what is Laduguer doing here. I do not understand. What claim could he lay upon me. I gather my courage and confront the lord of Greed. He bids me to leave him be. I feel it has been decided.

I am a Guardian of Souls, there are few if any others in this era of our people. I feel I must remake myself. I was guided by knowledge, the holiness of what was before. I feel I can no longer hold this as my highest ideal and as soon as I realize this I feel many doors which were wide open, becoming mere cracks through which whispers of the past still escape, but I cannot easily pass through them anymore. I have been partly molten, but what shape will I attain?