

Grimwald's thoughts part 39

It seems others know what I should do. I do not know what I am anymore. I do not know my place or purpose so I simply obey. It seems best, normal, but the words of Miliki haunt me... "Work on your aim." I had aims before, to become a useful member of my clan... gone. To work as a weapon and armor smith in the Everfire... gone. To seek out knowledge and ancient civilizations to boldly go where others had gone long before... gone.

I feel uncertain about my path as a rune caster, once I sought their power and secrets to strengthen my clan, but now I no longer have a clan. I also sought the skill to safeguard the resting places of my people, but I don't feel like a "hidden" anymore. I think I have become a "wanderer". What to do now? Let's ponder this. Perhaps I could return to the North and guard a hold as a Hammer of Moradin. Nah what clan would entrust their safety to a clanless. Perhaps I should study law and become a Justice Hammer? No, what dwarf would bow to the judgment of a clanless outcast. Maybe I should find a tomb I could guard and become a Tomb Guardian. Hmm I don't think my party would let me. Ah, perhaps I should aid Cuura in leading her army by training myself as a Warpriest, no one else has much military experience! But this is the domain of Clangeddin and he has not sought me out, no my duties must lie elsewhere. Occasionally I look at the star sapphire, my way to atonement to Dumathoin.

I am to be a Guardian of Souls thus was revealed to me, apparently there is no need for them very often or I would have heard of them. It can not be that my purpose is to do battle with giant, orc and goblin since their threat is a constant one. Perhaps my path is that of the Evangelist? No if I were to do this work Moradin would have reforged me. People's attentions tend to wander when I speak, regardless of what I say. As we pass the Behir cave I wonder if I would be suitable as a Deep Warden or Stone Lord, but seeing the Elf shudder I feel perfecting such a calling would mean abandoning the few companions I have left. I had an entire people, now just these few. What a dwindling, I feel your pain revered ancestors.

Ancestral spirits... what could halt one's passage? Being faithless or untrue, traits exceedingly rare among my people. But a spirit can also be bound to unlife for many an age and grow twisted with hatred of the living. It may even be held captive by foul necromancy or the spawn from the Pit and Abyss. There have been outbreaks of powerful undead and evil outsiders. Few and far between, but always there were those ready to turn the tide. Am I being called to prepare? How to go about this? I know very little of the outsiders and not enough of the greater undead. Quite a few clans have disappeared as the old dwarven kingdoms in the North fell. Some fell to the evil outsiders, are they held as thralls in the lower planes or have they been denied their rest by liches of old Netheril?

The guardian books, which have crossed our path can teach me, at a price, but perhaps a price which must be paid. They hold these fell powers in check and if I can learn enough to safely master the Evil Book I will be well armed. But I must be careful, what happened to Nethander could happen to me, to become the very thing you seek to fight. Still these are formidable foes. Most people manage just enough skill to deal with one kind, like the Knights of the Chalice, Exorcists and Hunters of the Dead. Still those powers and skills exist and if I am to attain them I'd best get back to work. Who was that saying it just a moment ago? Ah we are back at the Ghaleb Dur, yes back to work. Quite right.

We return to the forge and I set myself to the task of repairing our armor, especially that of Zhae. I really should put a greater enchantment upon it! Quite a challenge that boy! That night Reed rouses us from our beds. She has seen a fire. We prepare and go out to investigate. On the way there I notice I am not noticing Snake anymore. He must have slithered off just before we got to the burning farm. Cowardly creature, but perhaps with some wisdom. The neighbors are in quite a panic, no one has seen the family, but they are afraid to investigate. While Cuura organizes the peasants (she is getting a lot better at this) Kendalan moves in to investigate.

The ambush is sprung and Cuura and Kendalan are pelted with arrows. A military tactic, archers targeting the enemy archers first. A good thing Reed has stayed clear of the fire or else she would have been the prime target. Cuura and Kendalan are sent scrambling for cover. Good thing too, those archers are fiendishly accurate. My healing restores them to fighting condition and I call upon the divine powers to hide us while the others seek out our foes in the darkness.

In the distance I suddenly see lights flaring up and an archer mounting his horse and running of chased by Kendalan's Wolf. He must have been at least 500' away. Quite a marksman. I hear Jay's battle cry. That boy is getting himself in trouble again. I'd best get to him as fast as I can. An area is covered with a *glitterdust*. I see two shapes engaged in melee, then one becomes outlines with bright *faerie fire* hue.

Our archers acquire their new target and start releasing volleys of arrows. The shape Jay is fighting occasionally moves aside with a flowing ease or bats arrows out of the air. I have seen such volleys bring down trolls and ogre's, but this one does not even seem bothered. I grudgingly respect his combat skills. He seems entranced in his deadly dance with Jay and they make lightning strikes at each other paused by periods of studying. They way the shape moves, he seems to know what Jay will do even before Jay knows. Not using reflexes to be out of harms way, but some deeper insight into combat itself. How does he do that? Then I see him cringe as Felina drives her sword in his back and the dance changes. No longer a duel between two warriors, with a background of arrows. Now it becomes a dance of destruction.

A burst of Reed's magic flashlights the scene to reveal a shape which snuck up behind Felina. I see the shape twist in agony as the light fades out. Moments later a dead drow drops from the sky just before my feet trailing smoke.

I run up to Jay who to my surprise seem still to be in decent shape and ready a healing prayer. Then suddenly the Ninja turns translucent and disappears. The telltale hue however betrays his new position and Jay runs of faster than me to catch up with him. The Ninja is clearly dismayed that he was not able to remove himself from a battle quickly turning against him and summons a darkness around his hand which he propels at Jay's head just as I catch up with Jay. Jay recoils from the blow and I feel his limp body clashing in to me. Is he dead? Did I come to late? Damn that boy always rushing into things!

I sense a tinge of divine magic and Jay is groggily trying to recover his balance. I release my most powerful healing spell and Jay lashes back at the Ninja. The Ninja seeing the tide of battle turn decides not to rely merely on his fists anymore and throws some darts at Felina and Jay. Felina stiffens, while Jay seems to go whoosy. I frantically search my memory while taking out my healing kit, but the nature of the poison escapes me. The Ninja is backing away from Jay now and Jay, sensing weakness in the mind of his enemy, pounces with a blow I feel resonating through the earth. In the mind the battle has shifted and has been won by Jay. The Ninja throws more darts and hits me in the throat, which feels tingly and stingy for a moment. More poisons. Jay although I sense his sight is blurring and muscle control is fading presses the attack. The Ninja tries to take advantage of his weakness by trying to trip him, but Jay slashes deeply and the Ninja falls to him. Swaying with poison and blood loss Jay tethers over the fallen foe and declares he offers his prize to Reed then keels over unconscious.

I quickly stabilize all of them. Looking back I see Cuura riddled with arrows, but with a big smile bringing up a staggering, mauled, half-orc and Reed coming out of the night sky. I did not know Reed could fly. Well the drow probably didn't know either, hah. The half-orc is trying to make sure we have no hard feelings and kill or torture him. He claims to be a bounty hunter from Amn trying to collect a reward of 2000 pieces of gold for the head of Cuura, the indomitable barbarian horse-woman. He claims a temple of Cyric in Amn made this known to him and counseled him against trying to hold her captive. He was found by the Ninja who offered to work together as he approached the town.

Reed says that the Ninja will be honor bound to relay his failure to his superiors at his monastery and he will be punished accordingly. She believes he will not try to avenge himself on her or Jay, since this would be a loss of honor. It is nice to know that there are more regulated human societies. I wonder which group of dwarves taught them this, it hardly could have been elves. Must have been gold dwarves or could it be the Galena clans? The Ninja is stripped of all possessions which are some darts and vials of poison and a bow and arrows. He is given a knife and staff and send away. I have never seen anyone travel for months through the wilderness with so little. Grudgingly I have to admire him.

Before he leaves he bows to Jay and his eyes turn malicious as he speaks: "Our master has trained you well." Jay seems even more dumbstruck than usual as doubts trouble his mind. I guess the battle of minds still rages on and the vials did not contain the only poison he possessed. In the ongoing discussion he hints at having a more favored position in their master's eyes. But instead of the confident security I saw in them during the fight I see anger and pain.

The longbows we are left with are too heavy even for me to pull so I guess I will need to enchant some items to grant a greater strength so we can use them. We find many vials, including one which makes Reed tremble, like a, well a reed. She tells me this is the one the ninja tried to force down her throat. I recognize the rarest of poisons, the almost mythical black lotus. We decide to burn the lot and be rid of the foul drow stuff as well.

Then we decide to find out what happened to the family. The tracks lead to a small trampled patch. Our elf claims the tracks indicate a band of goblinoids heading into the hills with their captives. We also find a greater carrion beetle left behind. Their kind carries blinding fever and is sometimes used by slavers to infect the water of a community to render it vulnerable to attack. I guess they wanted to get rid of us and probably some priests of Helm first before using it. What have we stirred up in the mines? A lone drow? They always travel in warbands, just like dwarves! Perhaps they took the farmers to replace the kobolds we killed?

Soon we will delve into this matter as we explore the rest of the mine, but that can wait till morning.