

## Grimwald's thoughts part 48

The boy is starting to look his normal self again. You'd think that all these blows would set him straight on charging ahead alone, but he is as thickheaded as a mule. Almost dwarfish in his perseverance. The stone gate is not barred and Cuura can push it open. Fortunately the defences are not manned and we can gain entry without further mishap.

We are then faced with the choice of heading straight, right or left. I am proud of Nethander remembering my earlier teachings and choosing to turn left so the right arm has free swing, while the opponents arm is hindered. We'll make tunnel fighters out of them all yet! Well maybe not the elf... The elf however has learned as well and suggests we kill off everything on this floor and make a sweep eradicating all in the tower. I have heard myself say things like these many times, eradicating vermin, killing every last woman and child. Now I am filled with shame to have these words echoed back to me. These were the ways of my clans. Yet now they are no longer my clans and I am no longer tradition bound and I no longer choose to wage genocidal wars. I myself could not be made to see the fault while I was still clanbound. I wonder what it will take for Kendalan to free himself from his killing frenzy.

I could understand his hate fueled killing of the orcs and goblins, both our people have suffered greatly from them. Taking his hatred to the cave fisher pursuing the beast to finish it off is already harder for me to understand, does Kendalan associate it with the vile drow? Perhaps his hate is akin to my hatred of the Worgs and Winter Wolves. They are mere beasts, but tainted by their association with corrupting evil.

His desire to kill what he does not yet know just to be safe sounds like the words of the Elders of the Hidden to me. The survival of our race demanded such injustices and I would not be here, nor my ancestors, without these measures. Have the elven people in their retreat to the depths of the forests become similar to our Hidden clans? I must learn more of the history of their people. Why did the vile book of darkness spring into my mind again. I feel it's lure and promise, the understanding of hate and vileness which lies within, but I must be patient, if I continue on this path of atonement I shall be pure enough to open it soon enough. Yes I must study harder to contain it's power and soon.

While Nethander scouts ahead I ponder the ways of the gods. The power of prayer is robbed from me in this beautiful bulwark. Yet I notice that as I turn to Moradin something else stirs within me. I feel that my desire to be led by the soul forger is tunneling around the rocks blocking my access to the vein of divine power. I have feelings of divine retribution, how the maker will aid strikes at those who dare damage His work. His power is not just in prayer, but in something else. Could it be that my devotion is in itself a tunnel leading to his blessings? This power does not flow to my mind as it did when I was merely a servant of Dumathoin, this seems to be a power of the body. When I think about it the whispers of my ancestors rise to become shouts, but I cannot make them out yet. They seem to be battle cries...

Then I hear Nethander yelping and while I pull back on the rope with Cuura only to find the fool has not held on to it Jay and Reed rush forward into the hallway. Cuura lights her lantern and follows me after them. Reed says: "Shadows!" and balls of fire illuminate the room up ahead and I see Jay being beset by two shapes of darkness. Cuura is just getting worked up for a fight, but the tale of Torim Stormhand springs into mind how he beat of a multitude of them with his axe and thus inspired to follow his example I rush to Jay's side and tear a black shape to shreds. It seems to have been the last of them, unfortunately for our glorious war leader. I remind Jay that since he is still merely a human I gave him the continual flame for exactly these occasions. When will the boy start using his head for anything other than head butts?

We continue our exploration as a group through the beautiful stonework. This time I decide not to try to cheer up the elf who is out of sorts again for fear of chasing him out. Shame he is unable to

appreciate it though. It is rare to see such wonderful craftsmanship outside of a clanhold and really a rare opportunity for elves and humans to witness such skill. Most of them seem to be preoccupied to become aware of the wonders around them though, except for Felina. Well she is the most civilized of the lot.

When we open a door we are confronted by a floating eye. Before I can sort out the roar of ancestral advice I feel the urge to strike the dangerous defiler of life and stone. Together with Cuura we charge into the door opening and to my amazement the beast explodes into a spore cloud. Hacking and coughing we back away, while Reed clears away the spores with her balls of fire. Now that I am no longer in combat my ancestors voice become more clear. If only I had been more patient with them, damn my impetuosity. The spores turn out to be deadly and Kendalan and Jay are starting to look ill. Together with Reed we decide we must kill the spores they inhaled with poisonous fumes. We force Kendalan and Jay to breathe in foul smoke until they retch and can take no more without suffocating. I just hope it is enough... After a while Kendalan and Jay turn less green and seem to be breathing more easily except for bouts of coughing. I apologize to them for my mistake. It is good I have not relied too much on the gods to do my work for me and kept up on my own healing arts. Yes I must keep on learning and studying if we are to survive. We give last rites to the unfortunate fellow who gave birth to the spore sack and continue on our way.

A little later we find ourselves with no way to go except back or into the central chamber. I suggest a battle plan to make sure we are not caught in any area effect attacks and can flank whatever guardian awaits us suggesting a pincer movement. The Voice of the gods chastises me for being overly aggressive instead of merely defensive in my attitude. The old ways die hard... Here I was blaming the elf and now I am doing the same. I try to fumble my way out with mollifying statements, but I know the truth of it. Why am I feeling so guilt ridden lately? I never had this before... Who am I to judge being so impure and faulty myself, but yet it would be worse for me not to speak up and fight and speak up for what is right. Gods what is happening to me? Is there no worthier champion than I, yet I cannot hide from my duty or burden.

Still shaken by her words we embark upon our plan. The armoured man guarding the chamber at first seems dumbstruck by our presence and then goes into an all out lunge for Cuura and me. His bewildered eyes suggest he is not himself. Perhaps *confused* or under some *charm*. Thoughts race through my mind as I waste precious seconds choosing between dispel magic, protection from evil to finally settle on using my wand of hold person as being the most certain option. Cuura finally having her chance to shine in battle again bashes the man viciously before I can yell out “**under a spell!**” and bring my wand to bear. We quickly disarm the fellow and find he has succumbed to some powerful magic twisting his mind. This tower holds graver dangers than what we have encountered thus far!

There is some discussion on how to best care for the afflicted fellow and we decide to lock him up in a store room with a barricaded door with enough food and water for a week. I decide to leave the suits of armour there as well so I am not weighed down too much.

The central room holds little except for three enigmatic circles on the floor before the stairs. My prayers reveal little about them except that the magic in them is powerful beyond my ken. Unable to learn more Felina chances to cross them and ascend the stairs. On the third floor she is beset by something and we hold a council of war on how to proceed. The most valuable secrets should be hidden the furthest from the entrance so we decide not to sweep from the bottom up, but rather to plunge directly towards our goal while we still have the strength to do so.