

Grimwald's thoughts part 49

We make our way up to the top floor which seems to be some derelict temporary barracks. Whatever it was that attacked Jay doesn't dare to show itself this time. The place is literally falling apart and extremely disorderly. I wonder what happened to it. As we poke through the rubble it becomes hard not to get disoriented. Underground you can navigate by the type of rock and the veins to know your general direction and position, but here in this chaotic jungle of stone it is hard even for me.

Felina offers to scout ahead and while we draw attention to ourselves she quietly slips into the maze. But not long after she left we hear a scream which is suddenly cut short. We rush after her, but can find no trace. We decide to stick together as a group since what ever attacked is quite capable of quickly overcoming even one as cautious as Felina so it must be a dire threat for any of us. We find our search efforts hampered by the irregular structure and lack of discernible tracks.

Nethander, as usual, comes up with a clever plan. I have to hand it to him, he knows how to get out of many difficult situations. Unfortunately I believe he learned this skill through experience. We start mapping our path using a big bag of copper coins so we can retrace our steps. When we suffer a rockfall I think little of it since we are upsetting an unstable building, but the second time it happens it becomes clear that there is malign intent. As I am pondering what kind of mechanism or creature could attack us in this manner I decide to ask the Voice of the Gods and notice Reed is no longer with us. Our back tracking gives us no clues as to the mechanism of her disappearance.

Jay is understandably upset at his failure to safeguard her and foolishly wishes to sacrifice himself as bait to confront whatever took his maiden. In combat he is indeed one of the most capable among us, but to rush headlong into the unknown is not bravery, but foolhardiness. I wonder when he will be able to see the distinction, maybe in forty or fifty years?

We continue through the maze of twisting dark passages, but find that the maze itself is changing. Where we knew we passed through a wall we find that the hole has disappeared. When I use my wand of mineral detection to track our course I notice someone or something is moving the coins we left and then the copper is no longer copper. Alchemists can transmute metals, but that takes days and this changed in a matter of seconds. I feel as dumbfounded as the wand for a moment and start thinking that there may be a Xorn or Earth Elemental. They sense whatever the stone feels, just like dwarven stonemasters can, and they are able to travel through solid rock, just like orecutter dwarves.

My thoughts are once again cut short This time by a sound which racks my nerves; metal being tortured and screaming close to breaking point. The sound is of dwarvencraft steel. I rush to the aid of the poor abused craftwork and find Reed's Jian still quivering in a block of stone.

Although I am happy to notice the weapon is still in one piece and I feel some pride in this I know the Jian is hardly a military or mining pick made to pierce stone. The blade is too flexible and it should have bent without penetrating the rock. Upon closer inspection I notice what looks like a sandstone intrusion in the rock through which the blade passed, but these things do not occur naturally. An alter stone spell must have been used, fourth circle magic I barely understand or a supernatural ability more likely.

When I share my suspicions with the others Nethander is once again the one who literally thinks "out of the box". The maze itself is a huge trap, which we must escape according to his thinking. Unfortunately Nethander is the only one slim enough to slip through the cracks and creep around above the ceiling. This way he manages to guide a pursuit of our assailant who turns out not to be one to stand and fight. Pretty similar to a, ptuh, kobold in nature.

We manage due to Jay's stone shattering blows to rush to the place it hid Reed and Felina and manage to drive it off and rescue our unconscious comrades. Close to the twisted earth elementals

hiding place, I believe they are called Chagrin, we find a walled up room containing a box which says "master of the guards". If my hypothesis is correct we should find a disc in this to unlock the gate at the bottom of the stairs. My curiosity and excitement almost got the better of me as I pick up the box and was about to open it without having it checked for traps. Such an important item is very likely to be safeguarded so I gently put it down again and request Nethander to make sure it is safe. After a few minutes Nethander declares there are no traps, but when I open it a vile brown grey cloud wafts into my face. Well that serves me right for putting my faith into a tainted creature, I almost had forgotten his ancestry and came to regard him as just one of us.

Fortunately we dwarves are adept at holding our breath and although it stings into my eyes and nostrils and makes my skin crawl the cloud dissipates without further symptoms. I offer a short prayer to thank Moradin he build his children so sturdily. Nethander's look seems to be one of shame. I know he dislikes me, but there is no frustration or joy in his face so I cannot believe he knew of this trap. Or did he? Should I be ashamed of my suspicious nature or ashamed of my foolish trust? Better to be suspicious I guess, at least I will be alive to feel shame.

Inside the box I find a disc of the expected size. The watch commander's key!

We make our way down and find some rooms containing elemental forces. What the purpose is of rooms with ice and fire eludes me. But soon after we find two devices, one of them makes the tower shudder ominously and possibly rotates something. The other device is a line with symbols along it. As I ponder their significance Nethander decides to experiment rather than ponder the mystery first and a huge crash sounds from outside. It sounds like the gatehouse and bridge tumbling into the ravine. We are now trapped thanks to his impetuosity! Well at least that explains the harnessed elemental powers, they must power some destructive ray cannon. That is twice now in a few hours that Nethander has caused harm although he did manage to guide us to Reed and Felina... Perhaps it was just an accident. He himself is trapped here as well. He did not SEEM to strike a bargain with the Marilith outside, the helmet showed his speech to be harmless, but still...

Suddenly I am struck from behind as I pass the stairs. My first thought is of the Tiefling betraying me before I realize he could never have exerted such force as to bowl me down the stairs at speed. Remembering my mountain training I roll myself into a ball to protect my limbs as best I can and let my armor take the pounding. I will not come to serious harm on these gently sloping stairs. I will just slide to a stop at the base of the stairs and rush up prepared against these treacherous attacks. As I slide to a halt over the polished stone at the landing I slide across the three indentations and I feel the solid stone beneath me suddenly give way...