

Grimwald's thoughts part 51

There is pain... There is pain... Much pain... Good. Pain is good since that means I am alive. As I try to move I almost black out from the pain again. Gods! I have to focus... concentrate... concentrate... Can't remember ever hurting in so many places. I curse the weakness of my resolve. My ancestors had no such weakness, they fought and did not stop for anything less than death. I almost drift back to unconsciousness again, but as I do I hear the songs in the halls of the Silent Keeper. Pain is Strength, Pain is Focus, Pain is Victory. It strikes me with a power of revelation. The voices reverberate into the bones of my skull and I become aware of an urgent droning in my ears. Pain brings me closer to death and the powers in that domain, the voices of the ancestors. I feel a new closeness to the great warriors who went before. I know now their pain, their wounds, their battles, their deaths. Somehow a link is forged and it is in a way as if I am them.

I feel awake and alive and sharper because of the pain. My words are slow and slurred, but my body is tensed and ready. Pain is not something to be contemplated, but rather to be acted upon. Before I felt only the advice of the ancestors, the rune songs which taught me about my foes. Where to strike, what to beware of, when to pounce and how to move. Now I feel their anger shake me and rage fill me. How one would dare to harm one of their children! Their desire to shield and protect starts to fill me. The strength which is awakened by the pain is older, almost forgotten, almost ... divine. Closer to our divine ancestors. Buried behind the runes and songs, but now rushing forward to merge with them.

I feel the stone beneath me. The stone worked by dwarves. The domain of the Hidden Keeper. The secrets and powers buried seem to spin around me. It is almost as if my fall into the unknown has annealed me with the earth. Two pieces struck together by the force of their contact. As if some of me has passed into the earth and some of the stone has been imprinted in me.

I feel dizzy and about to throw up, but I also feel strange power flow into my body. My body does not seem to respond anymore to my will. It moves with the ponderousness of a great boulder. I feel heavy, but stronger. One with the stone, impervious to harm as if I am stone rather than flesh. I feel imbued with the power of stone. Strange.

I start checking my limbs for broken bones. All limbs are able to move without the sharp pain of bone fragments digging into flesh. Constant pain intensifying as I tense my muscles. Bruises, sprains, no big swellings of internal bleeding. I will live. Next... Be prepared. My urgosh. Ah there. Now slowly. CLICK. Oh gods what now? Nothing is happening yet so I am okay. What happened... Oh yes the stone giving way, falling into a dark stone pit for a long way, then darkness, now here. I am probably in the same pit I fell into. When will the ringing in my ears stop? It is dark so the hatch must have sealed behind me. No help to escape this trap. It has not triggered yet so perhaps if I move back and slowly take my weight off... Sound of stone moving, I roll aside to avoid the trap, but stone slabs start moving out of the wall forming a stairway. No trap.

Then light and concerned voices. I try to stagger to my feet and tell them hatch will seal. Felina comes down the stairs looking concerned. I try to tell her my injuries are superficial. But she orders Reed to heal me anyway. I do feel less pain and more focus after that, but for the ringing in my ears.

Then I hear Kendalan's fearful yelp as the hatch slides shut and his whimpering as the slabs slide back into the walls forcing him deeper down into the earth.

Cuura shows me a shield with severe scraping and slowly a story emerges of twisted elementals one of which pushing me down the stairs, but the party conquering the other two keys and rescuing other survivors of an earlier adventuring party. Felina and Nethander check the doors while I inspect the health of the group, but thanks to the healing wand they seem to be in good condition. When our scouts declare the way is safe we progress into the deep hold. I think we must have passed the outer defences so I expect there will be less traps in this area.

We come to a great hall where we find a three sided open column rising to the roof. The geometric stonework is beautiful, but the function eludes me for the moment. With his usual rashness Jay offers to take the risk of stepping into it. Why is he so risk prone? I cannot imagine his master encouraged this behaviour. Is he seeking to continually test himself. Does he seek to prevent harm to Reed so she won't do it? I should have a talk with the boy. Except that we find that the keys have merged we find little use for this strange feature.

Nethander has found an illusionary wall. How does he manage to spot these things? I can't see it. With his usual disrespect, even towards the solidity of stone he passes through it. Even though my mind and experience tells me this is just an illusionary wall I feel stone is solid and so is this. I am glad to see Cuura also believes in the solidity of stone, too bad she won't become a dwarf... The rest eventually guide us through with our eyes closed.

We come across a food storage and preparation area. Rune circles around stone slabs create a stasis effect keeping food fresh and warm. I cannot comprehend their exact working, but it seems to be a limited scope time change. Probably sixth circle magic. Kendalan and Reed indicate that the delicious seeming foods are actually created through disharmony, taking essential essence away from creatures. I conclude they may thus be cursed or if they bestow these powers that the way this is done is not good. Fortunately none of us is tempted to see if they will sing like a lark after consuming lark tongues. The only piece of food which seems normal is on a dimly glowing slab and turns out to be excellent dwarven waybread. Jay suffers no adverse effects from consuming it so I guess we have managed not to succumb to the temptation posed by this feast. Upon closer inspection I notice the glow is more dim since some of the runes have become chipped.

While the others continue their exploration I get out my tools to repair this feature of the hold as is my duty. As my lifeblood merges with that of the stone some of the knowledge held in this part of the hold passes into me. I am indeed changed by my being here, but somehow I do not believe this is the change the gnomes indicated as happening to those who passed within. When will infernal droning in my skull cease?

Our continued exploration leads us past a machine which Nethander concludes is a grape press and some amphora's of wine turned vinegar. As we continue we find an even greater machine with one source of power spreading to various other mechanisms. Three of them are currently activated. One would logically be the grape press. One of the other two is probably responsible for moving the tower's big gun. Perhaps the other powers the gun itself. What the other two mechanisms currently unpowered do is beyond me.

Behind a trapped door we find a sturdy metal door bearing an inscription. It is clear that the treasure room or some item of great importance is behind this door. Felina and Nethander find three traps and together we examine them. The runework is beside quite beautiful also of a sort I have not encountered before. Only the last trap is in a domain I am familiar with Thought. The trap burns the mind out of it's victim. There is a keyhole, so finding the key is probably the best and safest way to get past this barrier. But what is it that lies behind this door? Ancestral relics perhaps? Just a quick peek through the keyhole may provide some clues. As I bow down and get closer, my body has it's force sucked out of it and I stumble backwards. Well at least we know two of the three traps now. I guess Jay and I have more in common than I first realized. Brave, foolish, curious hard to tell them apart from their effects...

We pass a fire trap in a hallway and I hear shouts urging me to come to the frontline. I find Nethander, Felina and Jay confronting four automatons in a guard station. Jay makes a quick step forward which I am sure will put him in the path of the automaton's axe. As the machine raises it's arm to strike Jay slides his blade between the plates and upwards in a move which would have severed three main arteries in a living being. With a squeal of gears the automaton grinds to a halt and slumps to the floor. These machines buy precious minutes against entire orcish hordes, but only seconds against one such as Jay. His skill is slowly becoming legendary indeed! I brandish the reformed key and summon my authority and call upon them to halt! For a split second their attack

falters, but then continues. I must be lacking a symbol of authority, but perhaps we can find it and use the automatons to our benefit. I call off the attack and order us back. Kendalan unfortunately stressed as he is around here takes this too literally and gets burned by the trap in the hallway.

As we continue our search we come across an unfinished shrine to Mya, companion of Moradin and Mother of Wisdom, Defender of the Hearth. It hardly seems like a shrine fit for ceremonies and celebrations involving the whole clan. Even the walls are not straight. Still this should be one of the safest places in the hold. If it were not for her statue I would never have thought this to be her place in this hold. Kendalan seems besides himself with fear even though there is some light of Cuura's lantern and Jay's ring.

As we light a fire in her honour we see DRUUNA DAG'S DAUGHTER on the far wall. We are at the quarters of the queen of the keep so the shrine must be genuine. Still the other rooms are crafted in great detail... Shrines to Dumathoin are sometimes left bare to display the raw beauty of stone...but not Mya's shrines. There must be more here than meets the eye. The others have progressed into the queens chambers, but Nethander is cautioning an increasingly pale Kendalan. Kendalan looks as if he would bolt if it could be in any other direction than a dark narrow passage. Reed tells him to stop his torture. Reed has intervened! Is her silence and passivity coming to an end?

I would have agreed to Nethander's burdening of Kendalan a few months ago, agreeing with the need to force Kendalan to stand firm and be strong. Now I feel I would agree with Reed that causing pain and distress is wrong. Also I do not feel Nethander was trying to help Kendalan. Well as evil goes this is less evil than I would have expected from a Tiefling and it was quite laughable by abysmal standards. But still any evil should be opposed, should it not? As I ponder these issues the rest begin to ransack the queen's quarters. Already it feels as if we do not belong here in the lady's quarters. Men going through her things feels as an affront and I explain this to the party. Felina continues alone uncovering a masterwork blade worked into one of the bed posts.

Perhaps I should take a few minutes to pray while they are busy. This buzzing feeling in my skull is just getting worse rather than better.