

Grimwald's thoughts part 53

Felina uses a wand of *knock* she found to release all the locks from the treasure room door, but she turns to me for a way to pass the traps. I am glad she sees that the proper way of using correct authority is preferable to trying to bypass the system. I hope I will not let her down and guide her to the proper path. Every great journey starts with a single step, this may be hers.

Since we are about to set things right I offer to help Nethander get rid of some parts of his taint. This leads to a barrage of disagreements from the rest of the party. Apparently they feel that even though part of him does not belong on this plane of existence he should not be altered. Reed even accuses me of not understanding that changing the outside, does not alter the inside.

I understand this very well and this was indeed a great reservation. In a more human guise he could more easily hide his true nature to the detriment of others. But my show of faith in his human side is not appreciated. I yield to their protestations, but warn them that while a strong taint remains, his dark ancestry will seek to assert itself. What will he choose when he finally meets his dark ancestor? Perhaps today we have doomed ourselves and led him to betrayal. I can only hope he will seek salvation rather than doom...

Any dwarf can see the shrine to Mya is not the way it should be. Clearly this disruption of the proper order is a message to kinfolk. I find no illusionary walls and start my observation of the shrine. Nothing seems to be out of place except the place itself. The only thing which is perfectly crafted is the statue of Mya, Moradin's consort. As I inspect the craftsmanship it strikes me the statue is about the size of the fused pass runes. I decide to hold them next to the statue to compare them. No not about the size, the exact size. They would fit her niche as well as she does, but the niche pillar is also the only thing keeping the sagging ceiling from collapsing. Still they must have fused to provide passage in some way.

Caution is good, but fear is pointless, I put my reservations aside and try to switch the rune stones and the statue. The statue crumbles in my hand and so does the pass rune, I am too far from the exit. Realizing my fate I surrender to it and await it, but it does not yet come to pass. From under the surface of the fused pass runes a new statue of Mya emerges and the statue becomes a different pass rune. The switch I made is made again by the objects themselves. I give thanks to Mya and Moradin and continue with the proper authority to the treasure room.

To test if besides having the authority I am also worthy of entering the treasury the hall changes to provide me with a challenge. I regard the types of stone, remembering their properties, analyze the vein structure and fault lines and identify the stress points in the construction. I do not know if this is a result from the deep fall which caused some fusion between me and the earth, but I seem to feel the stone as if it was my own body. I spot the immediate risks, the long term erosion and earthquake hazards and think up various ways to correct them in ways which bring out the stone's beautiful vein structure to honour Dumathoin. Apparently satisfied that I am indeed of the earth I hear a voice state "Pass, master...". Yes, a wise construction: authority should always be coupled with worthiness. But with power come responsibility. I should return to restore the halls north of Berdusk some day.

The treasure room has been roughly looted, nothing remains except the wood pulp of shattered boxes and one intact, but open box in the corner. Odd that. I start restoring some order to the room using my mantle as a broom when Felina offers to aid me. She orders the debris to gather in one pile. Felina then suspiciously approaches the box, but it lashes out unexpectedly, a mimic! Once again my vision changes and I feel the shield wall surging forward putting the full weight of massed heavily armoured dwarves behind a crushing stike. Surprised I find that the blade of my urgosh has pretty much cut the mimic in half. I never struck such a fine blow nor saw one except from Jay. Reed helps me overcome my state of confusion, she saw them too. My ancestors sharing their strength and striking with me.

Cuura starts searching the remains of the mimic, while I investigate its internal structure, but we find nothing which could transform stone to flesh. Felina however senses something in the pile of debris. A small matchstick sized splinter suddenly turns into a quarterstaff! What a marvelous magic! It could turn a hand axe into a battle ax, great ax or even pole ax. A warhammer into a maul, a lance into a spear, a sword into a dagger. One perfectly crafted weapon would be all a dwarf could want. Surely if I could offer such a gift to Dumathoin it would go a long way to compensate the loss of the oath ax I destroyed. The staff of transmutation turns the statue into a living Nethander. Fortunately his soul managed to hang on to our world rather than returning to the lower planes.

Now that we are complete again we go to the guard station. Nethander tries to get me to twist the purpose of the automatons but I do not yield to his attack on the order of things. We find two weapons which are still in good condition. I am overjoyed that the symbol of both my gods is returned to me. Once again I am found worthy to carry a hammer! Then my warleader steps in and lays claim on the hammer. What is this cruel twist of faith? Are the gods mocking me? I know she has the authority, but have I not proved myself worthy? Are the ancestors who fight with me not worthy? What about their claims? Yet who am I to challenge Cuura's claim?

Then I feel a more warrior like part of me shove aside the scholar in me. I feel the resolve to hold on to the hammer, with force if need be and explain its holy significance to Cuura who relinquishes her claim to me. I understand that since the hammer is also her chosen weapon that it stings to use a flail, even though it is a fine one. If only she was as skillful as Jay in adapting fighting styles to various weapons. Hmm I can transfer my skill to my tools, perhaps he could transfer his skill to a weapon. Yes I feel it could be done with the proper rituals. It won't be easy though, nor cheap to bind such power.

We have explored the accessible parts of the tower, but I feel there must be more. Nethander with his usual lack of respect feels we should dig past the excavation. I am curious, but dwarves do not sacrifice themselves lightly. The evil behind may be beyond us, drow or perhaps even a dragon. Nethander argues that since ages have passed the danger must have passed, but if it was indeed a dragon ages merely make it more dangerous and even death can make a dragon more dangerous if it comes back as a Dracolich. Reed with a vacant look in her eyes states that we will come across one. The whole party falls silent for a moment while pondering their own demise. We cannot hope to prevail against such a creature unprepared, but preparation has just begun. When we get to Candlekeep I must read up these creatures. There cannot be that many, perhaps we can even find knowledge on the one we will face someday.

After some experimentation with the machine and the new pass key as well as restraining Nethander's destructive urges we find a way to the lower levels. There we come across the throne room, but as soon as we enter what was his personal guard rises to protect the throne. I show my authority, but this does not suffice as I am peppered with many crossbow bolts. For a moment I consider asking Moradin to strike and wipe the room clean, but then I still will not have shown that I am worthy to pass and hold a symbol of his might.

The ancestors speak of the many battles against skeletons and the many fracture points in the bones. I call to the stone beneath my feet and feel the ponderous power of the stone beneath me rise up toughening my body as my hammer crushes those who dare stand between me and my goal. The audacity that they dare strike at a servant of Moradin makes my blood boil and the indignation fuels my counterstrikes and each time my hammer connects it shatters an undead.

Even so standing alone against the hordes grinds away my body's power. Then Nethander of all people braves the hordes to fight at my side. He twists weapons out of their fleshless hands, while I foil their strikes against my shield brother. Slowly we cut a path to the throne. Moradin, pleased with my resolve and success rewards me for braving the pain and danger of the undead by returning some of my strength so I may continue my fight in his name. Then I see my way clear to the throne, but my shield brother is still beset by the undead. I may succeed in ending this fight, I would have gained the authority to do so, but would I be worthy if I abandoned a shieldmate in battle? No! No

authority for the unworthy! I stand at Nethander's side and bring down two skeletons then he himself urges me on while he fights a rear guard action. I gain the throne by strength of arms and faith, but the undead do not heed the loss of what they were protecting. Time and death have taken the last shred of the minds. We lay the last of them to rest.

I look across the room's floor strewn with scattered, smashed and burned bones and pieces of armour and weaponry. Rearranging them all for their last rites will be quite a lengthy task.