

## Grimwald's thoughts part 58

It is decided we should rest for a while to adapt to the changes we have undergone. I had not dared hope for an opportunity to finish some of the work I had started till after arriving at Candlekeep. We can be certain our enemies will have had ample time block our path though.

The facilities here are far too primitive to work adamantine, but I finish Nethander's buckler (I hope he will finally stop nagging me) and Felina's cold iron, decorated, dwarvencraft short sword (it took her ages to make up her mind on the engraving and shape, must be the elf in her). Then Felina's whining about the lack of cushions in the shrine when I ask her to recite the prayers of weapon enchantment. After dragging her through the first day of the ritual I had to suffer her intense look of despair when she found out in the evening she would have to spend three more days in the shrine to complete the ritual. I think the gods may frown on what she did to the shrine, but it was the only way I could get her to complete the ritual.

I also requested Reed hand her Jian back to me. After the Chagrin pushed the slender blade through a stone it became obvious I had not prepared the metal well enough. A silver axe will merely chip, but a blade like this might have been broken. I give Reed the proper prayers to recite and sacrifices to make while I spend the night reforging the silver with rainwater and moonlight. Although I learned this technique from a dwarf I have the suspicion there is something elven about using moonlight and rainwater. Even though the technique may be elven the strength of the metal is now that of fine grade steel, not quite as durable as dwarven steel of course, but that could hardly be expected. At least Reed spends the whole night praying without distracting me or complaining.

By this time the unseen servants finished with the riveting and cutting of the Behir hide and with some advice from Felina we turn it into a decent masterwork scale barding for Cuura's heavy warhorse. I still wish I could make some fine warbarding for Kendalan's bear. A fine specimen, but he will not hear of it. Time will tell...

We have barely left the no-scraying zone when a druid appears out of the undergrowth and requests a word with Reed and Kendalan. Apparently this may take a while so they tell us to go on ahead. I hate splitting up, but waiting around is probably more dangerous for all of us.

After only a few hours travel we spot a plume of dust. Probably a scout outrider. We confer and come up with an excellent plan, I will go with Nethander into the forest luring any pursuing scouts into Felina and Cuura's trap.

After a while they join us with their captive, a lightly armored mercenary. After some remarks from Nethander and Cuura he spills everything and I do mean everything. Shameful. But we do learn that they have probably been hired by the Red Wizards along with many other mercenaries to hunt us down. Apparently the wizards want to use mercs to find us and then finish us off themselves. Cuura and Nethander have some pretty grueling ideas on how to treat the captive, but Felina and I prevail on them to leave him unharmed and just take his weapons and horse.

It is decided we will be safer traveling by night so we continue onwards until daybreak. The others lay themselves down for some sleep while I perform my morning prayers. I have just finished my prayers when I spot a strange bird flying straight towards our camp at high speed. I awaken Cuura while the bird grows to disconcerting proportions. I take my bow and feel the wind, feel the weight of the arrow and turn upwards as the winged creature is diving down on us. My two arrows strike it squarely in the chest, a feeling of mild satisfaction is turned into slight bewilderment as one of the arrows falls loose from the creature's body. Then it opens its mouth and noise of the anguish of souls in eternal torment washes over me. I am so stunned I drop my bow and hardly notice the attack until it's over.

Then I find myself bleeding profusely from several deep wounds with strange vines bursting through my skin, I knew the magical armor bracers just aren't a proper replacement for fine steel. I

stagger back praying to restore my health while the others distract it. I get out my cold iron Urgosh and strike, but the magical cold iron barely manages to scratch it. Even Cuura's blows hardly draw blood. Although the power of Moradin is in me, the lack of proper tools confounds us. The creature has an intense dislike towards Nethander which gives Cuura the time to heal me while surprisingly Nethander holds his own against the large beast.

Then it rises up into the air and casts a mirror image, but even the purest evil is no match for the strength of goodness and I blast it with a Holy Smite destroying its illusions and blinding it. Now I send Moradin's Spiritual Hammer after it as it is crying for help in vain trying to gate in others. This must be a Vrock, a middle echelon demon, immune to the elements and weapons not blessed by the powers of good. Knowledge is power and when it flies down to do battle with us I have dropped my Urgosh and am now wielding Moradin's chosen weapon, the warhammer, and with a bone-crushing blow I smash it back into the underworld. Unfortunately the strange infection of unwordly vines growing in our flesh is continuing. I cast a mass aid to alleviate the damage they are causing and I try a few unsuccessful remedies when fortunately the vines start withering by themselves.

We relocate but are soon tracked down by the group of mercenaries we caught one of earlier. The captain decides to try and route or kill our horses since he hasn't spotted us yet. I take a breath and let it out slowly, I hear their orders and arrows whizzing by and the trotting of their horses, then I stand up knock an arrow and let it fly. My arrow skewers the captain from left to right, a perfect shot and the Elf isn't here to see it, well maybe he is... you just never know with elven eyesight. The captain yells to his men: "The Dwarf!" and it starts raining arrows on me. Fortunately Cuura got our horses to run interference disrupting their attacks. Felina gets on the horse behind the mercenary captain, but fails to unhorse the foe or to unfoe the horse as Cuura would look at it. Cuura meanwhile lifts up my shield to protect me so I can heal myself because the many arrows jutting from my body are sapping my strength and my vision starts to fade. (where is the Elf when you need him for an archery exchange!)

Then a man appears out of thin air and with a quick motion he throws a stinking cloud over our assailants. Both men and horses stagger from the cloud vomiting, the stranger then closes on the captain and with a tap on his chest disintegrates the man. Hardly a fitting end for a warrior to be disintegrated with a tap while throwing up your lunch. He has hair, I see no tattoos and no red robes and he is the enemy of our enemies so we decide to hear him out while the mercenaries run away.

He claims to be from Unther, which is south of Thay if I recall the stories correctly, and belongs to a group opposed to the red wizards. I vaguely remember some stories that the men from Unther tried to enslave the gold dwarfs or made war on them for some reason, which now brings the reasons for not liking him to three. But circumstances being what they are we need allies and we decide to allow him to join us. Cuura and I care for the wounded horses. As we are riding onwards I hang back and pray for insight, although my prayers reveal no poisons, he does use some sort of masking magic and the dead hand hanging around his neck smells of necromancy.

Still since he managed to find us surely the red wizards could find us as well. Where are they? Rounding up the patrolling demons and mercenaries for an all out attack?