

## Grimwald's thoughts part 61

Now that Nethander is no longer corrupting us the prisoner isn't bullied or tortured anymore but accorded some measure of respect even by Cuura. Amazing what his absence does for us.

I still feel troubled though by our encounter with the Punishers. I was like them once trying to protect the order of society from threats. But now I realise that there can be no true justice without mercy like that we are according our prisoner. Reed is teaching him this, but he still has a hard time comprehending the concept, but that is to be expected from a tyrant worshipper. He is clearly looking for a way to escape, but with at least two people on guard he doesn't dare try anything. Most priestly magic such as *hold person* or *command* can easily take out one, but not several guards.

Lately I am having strange feelings while praying in the morning. A sense of expectation from the earth, followed by a sense of loss when I mount the pony. I would prefer to walk, but there just isn't the time to march to Candlekeep. There is also a feeling of being watched and followed. I know we are being hunted, but this feels different somehow, more like interest in me rather than hunting. These feelings persist during the day but dissipate towards the evening.

It turns out the hobgoblins and the half-orc had some nice potions which we decide to keep. It was a good thing they didn't get the time to use them. They were probably the bribe the priest used to get their help. After laying them to rest we continue our journey westwards.

Despite myself I am starting to get a bit worried about Nethander. We are now past the enemy lines so to catch up with us he will have to try to sneak through. He may have been taken captive. I am sure he will manage to survive with his turncoat ways, but I don't think all the lying is good for his already burdened soul. Besides he might get a taste for acting evil again.

Further west we occasionally hear some rumbling noises like thunder, but the sky is clear blue. Didn't Reed say something to warn us of this? Somehow this does not bode well and Reed and I are agreed we should seek an entrance to the underdark to escape detection. We veer a bit towards the south where I see more erosion of the topsoil which may form caves.

After some hours we come across the ruins of deserted farmhouses and our elf spots a building which is still standing. Felina and Kendalan decide to go ahead while we wait. The farms have been deserted for sometime and fallen into disrepair. The normally green fields seem a bit more dusty rather than green around these parts.

Our scouts signal the all clear and lead us to a tavern of all things! It appears the innkeeper Dorlas and his daughter are the only people for miles around, but with almost dwarven tenacity he sticks to his place and trade. There is hope for this human! Especially since he knows his trade. The rabbit stew is the best I ever had!

When Jay and I inspect a small fort we find many shattered bones, clearly blunt weapons trauma, but also torn armours and according to Jay all the victims were of one party and attacked by something which can walk through walls. Looking around the neighborhood we see the ruins of a walled city surrounded by a great moat. Jay and I come to the same conclusion: these must be the ruins of the city of Kamjanets.

My ancestor Thorwald described the city as the "Rock of Battle". Hard igneous rock set into a sedimentary plateau, surrounded by a great moat between 30 and a 100 feet deep and wide, surrounded by many lesser towers and forts connected by a network of tunnels. According to his lore this place was in his day ruled by "the divine lord of Light" and protected by the "knights of the Light". It was home to the abbey of the eternal light. It was considered one of the great fortresses north of Shanatar in those days. Thorwald tells us the walls were of stone as white as fresh snow and that every morning all damage done during a day of siege was mended as soon as the light hit the walls due to the divine blessing the fortress-city received.

Jay tells us that a great warrior-prince of Shoon, named Al-Jzhared, came to these very walls. He led an army with a personal guard of 10.000 veterans called the "immortals" and had never before been defeated in battle. Upon seeing the walls he asked his lieutenant: "Who built this fortress?". His lieutenant answered: "It is here by the will of a god.". The great warrior-prince then replied: "Then let a god take it!" and marched away. How does Jay know these things?

Jay and I recalled the stories of at least three great sieges which bled to nothing upon these walls, but seeing the state of the place some unknown disaster must have befallen it many centuries ago. Perhaps the Shoon managed to overcome them in the latter days of their empire, but nothing of the fall was recorded in dwarven history.

Reed and Kendalan get the innkeeper to tell us what he knows of the history of this place. He came here when he was a little boy as part of a larger group of settlers led by two brothers Ozias, the priest, and Kolakas, the monk, serving the god Ilmater. Especially the presence of Kolakas inspired much confidence since he had bested many evil men and monsters.

At first everything went well, there was plenty of stone and foundations already laid to build shelter, the wells were cleaned and the fields plowed and all was good. Ozias led and advised the people, but Kolakas became restless and started exploring the old ruins being absent sometimes for weeks at a time.

Then one day he returned, but few could even recognize him, he had changed into a terrible monster and started slaughtering the very people he had come to protect. Ozias managed to drive him back and trapped him in the lower ruins, but the people were convinced a terrible curse must lay on this place and left. Only Dorlas, his wife and Ozias remained behind, but Ozias became a hermit living alone in the ruined city and would not let anyone approach.

Then about 10 years ago a band of robbers came searching the ruins for loot and seeking to make camp there. When Ozias tried to warn them they brutally slew him. A few days later all robbers were dead and Ozias' ghost started haunting the ruins.

Reed feels just like me: we must get to the bottom of this mystery and help lay the tortured soul of Ozias to rest. So we go to the ruins. It is decided the Banite is too much of a risk if anything should happen so Oddvar and Kakanos stay behind to guard him.

Once in the ruins Reed calls out the ghost and it responds to her summons, but its power and presence is more dread inspiring than we had thought and half our party scrambles back to the moat in utter panic. The ghost seems a bit confused by Jay's response to his appearance that he will gladly deal with him, but is a bit busy calming Reed right now. Fortunately I manage to provide a good example of steadfast resolve and help the party not to forget our purpose which calms the others down enough to engage the ghost in conversation.

Even in life he had no contact with anyone and death has not improved his conversation skills, but we manage to convince him we mean no harm and that we cannot be stopped. Since he feels no one should come to harm and therefore we may not progress I offer him to come with us. He walks forward and I feel some pressure at the base of my skull. My ancestor, loremaster Thorwald, appears to nod and I give in to the pressure.