

## Grimwald's thoughts part 63

Apparently the insanity is either a ruse or very contagious. Reed seems to be apologizing for doing her duty in trying to destroy the vile fiend, while it is apparently soothed by music and dance. I am sure creatures of the lower planes should have no such tastes. I distinctly remember them being interested in corruption, power and violence.

Whatever is going on it is taking a long time. I notice tendrils of foul energy from the demon reaching out to Nethander who is opening up to them. Why am I not surprised! But by Reed and Felina's distractions the fiend loses focus and after Reed has touched it, burning her fingers to the bone, it seems somewhat more passive. It seems their parlay has worked and the demon lets them pass unmolested and even allows them to search his chambers where they unearth a book which they study for some time with great interest.

During this interlude I spend some more time getting used to this new state and I find that the spirit of Ozias can let me watch and hear through the eyes and ears of my body. I can even exert some limited control over my body I find by guiding its movements rather than controlling them.

Ozias explains that this guidance is a benign form of possession similar to a power of a holy relic which he used to keep his possessed brother at bay. Hearing him out and listening to my companions I discover this relic was the badge of office of the commander of this keep. After death the wielder bestows some of his power to the holy sword to help his heir. The brave commander, true to his vow to keep the demon trapped, lured the demon to possess him after having taken a lethal poison and thus they became trapped in the sword for many ages.

Over these ages the sword gained a stronger hold on the spirit, which I gather must be a fragment of a Demon Lord or Demonic Prince. Apparently this fragment needs both a body and a mind to complete itself. Fortunately we have not brought the book or the two parts would be able to rejoin. If we fail here this may still come to pass. Perhaps the **book** somehow guided us here for just this purpose. Thank the gods that Reed was with us to receive the guidance we should leave it behind.

It was this holy relic and the power and lore of the last commander which Ozias used to craft a ward trapping his corrupted brother until the sword was looted by brigands and Ozias was slain. This also means that just like me, Ozias's brother, or at least his mind, is still in his body forced to witness all the atrocities it commits. My companions hope that by plunging the sword into the heart of the corrupted monk it can pull out the demonic spirit and trap it, else the person possessed by the demon must die while holding the sword...

Our group then makes its way through the lower gate past some excellently designed but crumbled defensive loops to a network of tunnels. Here they consult the gods, well at least Tymora, and are guided to the north. But they lack the sense of stone and I must struggle my way past Ozias to point them the way. Taking control like this I find is rather a strain on my spirit and I feel I cannot hold it for long nor would I be able to do it very often. An experience good to remember when dealing with the possessed or evil spirits, although Reed could probably tell me more about it since she read the chapter on exorcism.

A little beyond the gate we come to a small fort at a crossroads. Rock walls pierced by arrow slits, impossible to look inside so our spies are dispatched to gauge the resistance. I suddenly see an ethereal spirit fly out of the fort towards Reed and recoil in terror as it comes near, then it bounces off Jay's concentrated defenses and settles in Kendalan's dagger cowering and hiding. Reed however manages to sense it and dousing it in holy water dissipates its essence. I guess that even the unlife powers of the undead are not enough to maintain their physical bodies with this many centuries of decay gnawing on them. Only the greater undead will have been able to last after all this time.

The party continues to a huge cavern, again dominated by a central fort, strewn with slivers of bone and rust bearing witness to an ancient battle. Reed launches her balls of fire burning a safe path

through the old battlefield and into a tunnel equally strewn with bones. This must be how far the invaders came until the fortress fell.

The group then reaches a decayed single arch bridge spanning a great chasm with the dull glow of molten rock lighting it from underneath. The mortar between the stones has long since been eroded by the volcanic fumes and the bridge teeters on the verge of collapse. As the party prepares a crossing a green skinned, horned giant appears and steps out of the ether to strike at Reed. It does not put its great strength into the precise blow, but its giant razor claws slice through her leaving her writhing in pain. Rather than push its advantage it disappears laughing. Demons like violence, but usually have little control. Could it be that the monk's mind is altering its natural aggression? If however the demonic spirit can use the monk's skill in battle combined with its great strength it will be a formidable foe with a tough demon hide to boot!

Nethander is forced to dodge tossed boulders smashing holes through the bridge deck as he crosses and Felina is threatened by globs of lava flying up. Then Ozias is attempting the crossing with my body, but even without any armor my weight is too much for the crumbly mortar and we fall through only restrained by the rope for a moment which has somehow slipped Jay's grasp. The green skinned giant appears out of the ether again and with its razor claws begins slowly unraveling the rope. My companions open fire but cannot stop my plunge towards the river of molten rock. Then we feel the invitation to be elsewhere and allow Reed to do what she is best at: saving others at her own peril. Again the demon does not press its advantage and we manage to cross the chasm.

Not much farther we find a system of cisterns catching rainwater filtering through the rock. But just like the rock the water is corrupted. Reed however dives into one of the cisterns pointed out by Felina bringing up a tarnished necklace.

The party's efforts to go further east are blocked by collapsed roofs and another horde of undead spirits which dart around the party and then settle on Cuura before moving on. Reed is sure some of them have entered her body, but Cuura seems unaffected by them. Perhaps they are biding their time or they are too weak.

Two tunnels lead through the volcanic gorge and the party decides not to chance them with an opponent who can step out of the ether at any point and toss them down into the molten rock. Further searches lead to another strong-point in the underground defenses close to the cisterns. We enter a large cave from the east with tunnels heading north, west and southwest. The northwest wall however is laced with arrow-slits, the bottom of the cave is riddled with stone spikes and some slimy substance. The single stone door set into the rock wall is set slightly ajar, but can only be reached by a narrow raised path crossing the spike pit. A formidable defense and according to Reed manned by both undead spirits and embodied undead.

I ask Ozias if we could switch places so I can pray for my companions.