

Grimwald's chronicles part 68

We find ourselves under the open sky. For a moment I yearn for the shield of stone, but then realise I must have been here some time. How did I get here? Not all of us are here though. Kendalan, Cuura, Reed, myself and Nethander. What happened to Zhae, Felina and Odvar? Bear, Horse and my earthy friend are here as well. After some discussion our last memory seems to be that we were in the underdark. For a moment we think we must have been teleported, but according to Reed and Kendalan the plants growing here indicate early spring, not late summer. Perhaps we are in some elaborate illusion?

Kendalan feels a nearby hill is paying attention to us so we go there to make contact. Is this some faerie realm? Looking around at the stunted trees and scraggly heather I can hardly imagine it to be so. After some invitations of Reed and Kendalan remain unanswered our elf declares the presence is gone. It is strange though our elf cannot describe what he saw. He seems to be able to tell the tiniest details, but now merely seems to have sensed something. Kendalan thinks something may have been here since the grass is depressed in some place, but he cannot tell what it was. Kendalan also cannot tell if we walked here or just appeared. Not being able to find even our own tracks. Nethander thinks we may be in a dream, this must be Kendalan's nightmare then. We discuss our last memories and theorize the ancient mage must have done this to us, but we are at a loss as to the how and what exactly has been done. Practical as always Cuura says we should head out and find out more so we go.

A bit down the road Nethander declares a message was left in how twigs float in a shallow mud pool offering to assassinate a mage. Is he making this up? No he *seems* sincere. The soft mud around the pool is undisturbed and Kendalan cannot think of how the twigs could have been placed like this by a physical person. By why would a spirit of nature be offering to assassinate our mage? Either Nethander is torturing poor Kendalan by proclaiming a message where there is none or something strange is stalking us. Could it be someone like that ninja? Reed must be thinking the same from the look of her. Without Zhae we will have to guard Reed extra well. Scary to think someone is close enough to listen in on our conversations, but we don't know they are there. Probably smart enough to stay out of range of detection spells as well. This is just getting weirder and weirder, it must be dream. Well at least I hope so.

I decide to ask my earthen friend if he can sense anyone touching the ground around us. He leaves and a bit later I sense a moment of excitement, quickly followed by confusion. Something must have disappeared at it's approach. I think it best not to show my reaction to this news, my friend's ability to sense it may be the only good card in our hands against this invisible stalker.

After walking for a while the scenery starts bringing back memories. The red painted marker stones alongside the road are similar to the ones I passed a few years ago coming south from Waterdeep as caravan guard. It seems an age ago that I tried to set up a smithy in the south so I would suffer less competition, I can hardly believe it has only been a few years although it is hard to tell the date, my beard seems longer though.

Then I am made certain. The fortified inn and squat tower our caravan rested at halfway the high moor loom on the horizon. The caravan master claimed an insane mage lived in the tower. Could it? Nah couldn't be the same as we encountered in the underdark. Besides according to my grandfather all mages go funny in the head after a while. The mage in the underdark was a good example of how bad it can get with a few ages. It is fortunate Reed and Felina don't have such long lifespans so they will be spared this gruesome fate.

The inn is just as I remembered it, perhaps it is my dream then and I am just dreaming up the others. Since it may just be dream I might as well enjoy it and order some excellent dwarven ale and a hearty meal. Kendalan comes back to tell us there is an elven prince living in the tower who is granting us an audience. He has spoken to her servant apparently. There is the proof! An elven

princes living in a squat block of stone! Weird dream. Still dream or no I should behave properly and go upstairs to polish my armor and the rest of the apparel. I wonder what we should offer as a token of respect to her highness? Too bad I don't have time to set the gems into a pendant or ring tonight.

The next "morning" my dream becomes even more joyful, besides the elf not being able to find things I now get to enjoy a hungover Nethander. I know I should feel compassion, but my dreams are my own to enjoy are they not? I mustn't forget to do penance when I really wake up and thank Dumathoin for this enjoyable dream.

The elven servant is another clear indication I am dreaming. Just the kind of elf I imagined when I was a child. Very tall but you could snap her in two easily, twigs in her hair, smeared with muddy browns. Hardly a princess' handmaiden. She is wielding dwarven short-swords, inscribed with dwarven runes "To the memory of Feraun" one says. She also has a dwarvencraft buckler strapped to her arm. I recognize the work of one of the master smiths in Mithril Hall, he doesn't sell to outsiders and only forges for his clan, fine workmanship but hardly fitting this tall elven girl. Clearly a strange dream that an elf would be accepted as an honorary clan member. I wonder though why I am dreaming up this weird mix and why she is acting so negatively towards Reed. Her armor is interesting though. It is not very sturdy, but seems to blend into the background. She seems to have the strength to wear something heavier, but the speed and grace would probably be lost when wearing something really sturdy, an interesting challenge. This elf even speaks passable dwarven as if she has been speaking it for many years and knows our hold's customs. A dwarvish elf, perhaps this will turn into a nightmare after all. I think an offering to Dumathoin would be more appropriate rather than a mere prayer.

The tower itself is a single block of blue granite bedrock. Quite impossible to fabricate except by a greater elemental lord. The door is weird, reminds me a bit of the mimic which chewed on Felina. The first hall is quite spartan with a dragon's head trophy mounted on the wall, the servant takes us to a stairwell in which we can float up and takes us to a mad wizards lab. The thought runs through my mind "just as I dreamed it would be" before I remember I am indeed dreaming. We pay our obeisances to the lady who seems rather inconvenienced, but the servant is having great fun. Strange these chaotic elements in my dream...

Nethander and I spend some time examining the lab and then I am led to THE SWORD. It is like a paragon, an ancestor. It is essence shaped in crystalline adamantium, could such a substance exist outside a dream? Still I am awestruck by the power of the essence of sword. Then some disturbing news sets in. According to the princess/mage maybe it is not a dream, but an ancient magic which has caused us to drift in time. We would be reliving our future or something like that. Or even worse existing in multiple forms at the same time.

Nethander's bad manners gainsaying a noble get us escorted away from the lady's presence, fortunately she is not ordering her servant to have him killed for disrespecting the lady of the land. The servant takes us to the kitchen and brews some tea for us.

Alone with us the servant elf displays an interest in evil mages. I know that look. I have seen it many times in dwarven holds. We call them "grudge bearer" I am sure the elves have names for them as well. Dwarves so overcome by the endless pain inflicted upon our people that they become vengeance incarnate. They leave their clan and hold to search retribution against the races which have caused our race so much harm. They hunt them down and cause as much harm as they can to even the score as much as possible before they die. I once heard one say: "it is a good thing goblins spawn as much as they do, otherwise there could never be enough to satisfy our grudge for the millennia of crimes against our people.". They may be champions of our race, guardians of our holds, but they are dangerous, relentless, merciless hunter/killers as well and often a bit insane, even if they are making lavender tea and serving in noble households.

Then the evil takes over Nethander once again and he says Reed caused an evil mage to be spared.

This is a death warrant if ever I heard one! The ungrateful little bastard! The evil in him must fear Reed's goodness and purity trying to get her killed!

The elven killer doesn't even flinch but it is clear she could kill Reed where she sits. I see her eyes flit over me and Kendalan, calculating if killing Reed is worth having to kill an elf and a dwarf she likes as collateral. Grudge bearers have no sense of personal preservation when it comes to their prey. At least among dwarves, I am hoping it is different among the elves. Perhaps the rules of hospitality will restrain her until we leave, but I hardly dare hope for such civility among grudge bearers even in a noble house.

Kendalan has also recognized the grudge bearer for what she is and quickly tries to bring Reed to safety, while Nethander is finding out the futility of trying to reason with a grudge bearer. We quickly make it out of the tower while shielding Reed. I just pray this is merely a nightmare and that we won't really have another enemy hunting Reed.