

Grimwald's chronicles part 80

Cuura invites me to the archery competition. I really should inspect the troops to see if my drills are conducted well so once again I force Jay to mind the forge while I am torn away by other duties. At least it doesn't happen as often here as on the road. I use the opportunity to pray for guidance and insight so perhaps more of this taint may be revealed to me inspecting the spectators.

The drills are conducted well, my sergeant would be pleased, and the murmurs running through the crowd show that Cuura succeeded in restoring some prestige to the archery division. The worst taint and slide towards anarchy is not caused by some hidden agent, but by Nethander. He starts vicious rumours about banishing others from competitions and brings several factions to the realization that they could take this as a slight against themselves, which they promptly do. One big step closer towards anarchy. I wonder if there will be blood in the streets soon. I wonder if it is wrong of us to expose cities to Nethander? What price is Reed willing to pay for his chance of redemption?

I spend a few days laying the last hand on our suits of armour, rumours fly about that the men-at-arms and heavy cavalry are staging a show of their skills shunning the rest of the army. The army is really starting to fall apart now. It would be better if one of them could be the indisputed leader just to keep the group together.

Then Nethander comes rushing in excitedly. His attraction to evil taints has led him to become more corrupted. I have to compliment him on his self-awareness and judgement! Now that we have a subject we can inspect at our leisure we find that the taint is not uncontrollable, but merely a tendency to think and act in a certain direction. It slopes the playing field and without constant exertion one slides downward. It doesn't force corrupted behaviour, but works like a mild *suggestion*. Oddly enough my divinations still cannot find any enchantments or charms. Maybe it is similar to the mindwarping the Duergar use, a psionic disease. Is there such a thing? Reed comes with another view having consulted some local sages on this subject. They think it may be *shadow magic*. The sages explained to her that there are two weaves of magic. The shadow weave is less strong, but it's very separation from the normal weave allows it to bypass some obstructions and possibly divinations. Since Shar is the goddess who wove and guards this weave I can well imagine this current predicament of officers losing themselves would be very pleasing to her. Unfortunately we cannot find shadow magic any easier than we can find psionics.

While Nethander is sliding towards foppishness Cuura also becomes infected while partying with the Uthgard tribes and turns into a bully. Cowardly and uncertain by heart hiding it under bluster and intimidation. That may explain why they bullied the archers so much. Most barbarians enjoy bullying, but Cuura has always been the exception. This is probably also why none of the barbarians felt the need to challenge her, which is a common dominance ritual among their kind. Her denials and threats probably seem completely natural to others, but we who know her best see the change. Keeping Nethander and Cuura in quarantine for days slowly is starting to reduce the taint. I know little of the shadow weave, but magic which lasts for weeks and slowly fades strikes me as strange. It is more similar to poison or disease in how the body slowly fights it off. Perhaps it creates a "permanent" instant change upon exposure, after which the spirit slowly finds it's natural balance again.

Felina manages to secure some of the expected agent which is mixed through wine. My divinations show that it is overwhelmingly evil in emanation. This is probably unredeemable even for Reed. To know what it is the others visit some alchemist outside of town. When they return after several wonderful days of being allowed to work in peace they bring the alchemist with them.

From his accent I gather that he is a dwarf from the Galena mountains in the east and a worshipper of Dumathoin. He tells us he distilled the essences of demon blood, which according to him are the incarnations of corrupted souls, into nine components. These components are apparently the main forces dragging a spirit into the abbyss. Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, Pride, Lust, Envy, Fear, Deceit and

Greed are the components he found in the souls of the damned made flesh. Felina finds that five of the nine vices are stored in the wine merchants warehouse: Wrath for the heavy cavalry and their charges, Pride for the men-at-arms just below the knights, Sloth for the Chessentan phalanxes already stationary tactics, Fear and cowardice for the undisciplined barbarians more interested in running with loot than lasting the battle and Greed for Bloody John and his marauders pillaging the countryside.

The dwarf Klyje Grossgrabenstein is appaled at having been deceived and that his work is not used to save souls, but rather to corrupt them. I scold him for not having hidden his knowledge better as our master teaches us. He requests atonement and wishes to help if only we could provide him with enough celestial blood for his experiments to counter the sins. I have a long conversation with Klyje imprinting upon him that the soul is the realm of the divine, not within the realm of alchemy, magic or psionics. It is not some plaything to be tinkered with by mere mortals. Who is he to seek to uncover the secrets of Moradin's forge? Properly chastened he sets about finding another cure.

With his knowledge of alchemy, the aid of the priests of Tymora and Reed's aid we manage to create casks of antidote. Using the purifying essence of silver, the demon repulsing power of the earth locked in cold iron, the power of prayer and forgiveness and the good fortune of the divinely inspired intervention we concoct a special holy water. With Felina's aid the demon essence is switched with the special holy water and the foul condensed evil is annihilated in the temple of Tymora.

I am sure this secret will not leave Klyje Grossgrabensteins lips again, but the knowledge partially uncovered needs to become hidden again so our party will remain on look out for any signs of the other four essences and the evil mastermind behind this plot.