

## 29: Expected Surprise.

Today I had my first one-on-one experience with Grimwald the dwarf. After purchasing my new armor I came to the conclusion that it needed some extra magic added to it. The reason for it was twofold, the first being the fact that not getting hit in combat is the key to survival, the second one was a more straightforward practical matter; I just didn't fill the armor. It was much too big for my torso. I had seen the handy side effect of magically enhanced armor on Zhae's chain, magical armor sizes itself to the wearer.

To make things short, I went to the Grimwald's smithy to ask him if he could somehow improve my new armor. I had the cash from the encounter with the priests from Shar and could pay for it. In that past I'd heard Grimwald's ramblings about the importance of good battle equipment and knew that he couldn't argue with me on that point. The only problem was to convince him to get Dumathoin's blessing on such a "foul and demonic" creature he believes I am. Grimwald asked my permission to try and figure me out and he used all kinds of magic tricks on me and it looks like I have passed his petty tests.

It took a while and a private consult with Reed, but finally he accepted and I was allowed to accompany him in a ritual to receive Dumathoin's blessing! For me the ways of the gods remain a mystery, but I must say that Grimwald's practice of religion differs from the priests I know from Calimport. I can only say that his view of religion is a lot less self-centered than Calimport's priests usually practice their craft. I also spoke to Reed about this matter because the concept of religion intrigues me more than I'd ever imagined. What I understand from Reed is that the gods are some super beings that thrive on the faith people put into them. That part I had guessed correctly. It seems that gods give power to priests so they can awe people into believing in them, but and a big but indeed, I must conclude that they do not seem to do this out of pure megalomania. What I've heard from Grimwald and Reed it looks like they have a bigger agenda than just collecting power. From the ritual I understood that Dumathoin for instance really seems to care for beauty of the caverns underground. Grimwald described him as the Keeper of Secrets Under the Mountain. He hides the secrets of the earth until faithful dwarves are ready to be guided to them. Gold, gems and precious ores are certainly an integral part of every dwarf's dream so they benefit from their faith as well. Also Grimwald told me that Dumathoin watches over the safety and security of all miners and that he is the protector of dwarves. I can go on with this, Grimwald certainly did but I think the short version will do for now.

Reed's goddess believes a completely different thing indeed: she stands for giving second chances to people. This will probably explain why Reed is so keen to drive me into the good direction and keeps on talking about Kama or Karma. All these agendas do not seem to be too selfish to me. What strikes me even more is the information I retrieve from the book of the undead, Gods also have a saying in what happens to you in the afterlife! If I scroll forward to the aftermath of our fight with the Guardinals I again have to conclude that what they say has a big truth in it. Felina's sergeant has been raised by the priests of Helm and clearly didn't like the consequences of his faith in Bane in the afterlife. In fact he was so frightened of what he saw that he decided to repent his life and join the Helmites.

I think I've made up my mind and will start to keep my eyes out to a religion that suits me. Dumathoin is really not the god that I can find myself in. It will have its benefits off course Grimwald will surely spread the blessings of Dumathoin more generously over the faithful followers of his own faith. But somehow I really don't think this will be the best interest for me into the future. Reed's faith may be good to me in the future, but I can't see myself bothering

to much about what others do with their lives so I keep on looking for a God that suits me more. Well all I can say is; Priests be aware, here's someone that's ready to be awed!

I already mentioned a fight between us and the Guardinals and will fast forward to that event. All day I felt like I was being watched, even Kendalan felt being hunted or something. Then in the afternoon until I ran in to those bastards in an inn. They were clearly talking about us and when I attracted their attention they acted too hard not to notice me. I tried to stay in order to overhear their plans but to no avail. After hanging around I decided there was nothing to do at this time. The good was that I wanted to pick a fight with them anyway, routing a competing party will surely benefit my reputation as an able guy.

I returned to the group to inform them of possible trouble and Felina and I returned to the inn for possible information off their plans. They'd already went in for an early night so that plan was ruined. Felina even tried to climb up to their window using an invisibility spell in order to listen at the window shutters. When that didn't give us more information we just went inside to fuel the fire a bit more. We told the remaining patrons exactly how I've humiliated the fighter on the practice yard earlier. Felina told this story with such a nice touch that even bards would have been envious to her oratory skills. That girl can be a good companion when you want to make some fun.

After our little adventure in the inn we returned to our rooms and awaited the mayhem that would surely follow. Only to discover that it would come sooner than expected. In the middle of the night we were surprised when a fireball exploded in our room. In an adrenaline rush I jumped out of my bed and somehow evaded the worst of the blast. I gripped Blades rapier and rushed for the other room to surprise the bastards outside.

While running I drew the poison dagger I'd filled with some of Shar's poison and jumped out of the window. On the window seal I could see the priest standing besides the smoking remains of what seemed to be a mage, Reed had practice here deadly magic's already. He was still looking very surprised when I jumped from the window, making a perfect landing, striking the poison blade straight into the vulnerable place between the thigh and the crotch. The poison kicked in immediately and he dropped like an ox. Behind me Zhae landed on the ground and I ordered him to run for the front door because I heard the clatter of armor there.

Before making a charge to the door I lingered a moment to end the priest's life and send him straight to his maker. When I finally made it to our rooms again the fight had already been fought, just one assailant was making a run for it through the same window I'd jumped from. Felina was already starting the pursue when I made the leap out of the window again. Clearly the thought of facing two enemies was too much for the fleeing dwarf. He surrendered to Felina at the same moment that the guards were arriving in the distance. I had to make a quick decision, a quick kill and possibly being arrested or seizing the backpack and necklace that somehow survived the incineration of the mage. I chose the backpack and in retrospect made the correct decision for killing a surrendered enemy before the guards would not have been a wise choice.

After the fight we were all arrested and thrown into the makeshift jail the Helmites had prepared for possible troublemakers. Fortunately justice was served quickly, Felina acted again in a perfect way, the priests were almost crying about the sergeants demise and decided to bring him back from the dead. The guilt was easily put on the Guardinals and after a few interrogations we were set free. The remaining dwarf was sentenced to 20 years of labor in the mines, but in exchange for him keeping his mouth with regards to the spoils I stole from the mages corpse, Feline persuaded the Helmites to reduce his sentence to just ten years. A good bargain if I may conclude.

As a final gift were compensated for the damages by picking one of the guardinals prized possessions. Kendalan surprised me because she was the first to grab a small pouch that looked very interesting. Everyone took one of the items and I ended up with a cloak. I'd thought about choosing a mithral armor like Zhae, but it seemed a bit of a waste that I just invested heavily in the shadow beast armor I'd just bought. Fortunately Felina took that chain shirt so maybe I can trade that with her in the future.

All in all these days on the fair have been very interesting, with the guardinals out of the way and talks about our battle prowess going through town I'm sure I'll finally receive word off the interesting jobs I'm hunting for since we've arrived in Nashkel.

Even my relationship with Grimwald even seems to have changed. I think that the events even convinced him that I'm not the demon incarnate he always suspected me to be. He even started calling me Nethander in stead of just Snake. It's really amazing what listening to Grimwald's usually boring ramblings will accomplish.