

Norbert's Notes  
**Weapon Stitches (142)**  
*In which we do not take proper care*

Efira has proved to us all the danger of isolation; if we are going to be reunited with the rest of the party, we have to keep moving. And so we do: we make sure that none of her unseen attackers are left alive, she ramsacks the now suddenly uncovered alchemical equipment, and we get on with our business. There is only one way to go: back to where the kobolds had ambushed us earlier.

Strangely, the mutated kobold corpses - all 30-something of them - are gone. It is as I feared, then. This sudden attack was coordinated, and their master has gathered up their bodies. I am sure there will be another attack soon.

Further up the corridor, we find two more bodies - but these of humans; soldiers, it seems, covered by the shreds of the same imperial uniform. It is unclear what happened. By the looks of it, they may have killed each other. Maybe one of them was possessed? Still, we may assume that these here were honourable men pursuing an honourable purpose, likely part of a force sent here by the emperor or his authorities to quell the threats emanating from the keep. We decide to do them a service, taking a jade signet ring from one of them, to return to his family or descendants.

A little further on, we are surprised to find Grimwald, angry and disparaged at us for having abandoned the 'leadership' of Cuura, as well as the horsewoman herself. Unlike Grimwald, Kendalan and Cuura don't seem to see the problem with our taking the initiative to find them rather than waiting for them to come and find us. It may be good to have clarity and unity of purpose, but the dwarf takes his 'loyalty to leadership' far too seriously. His blind following of whomever presents themselves as a leader to him, to my mind, is his biggest handicap by far.

Regardless, we are now reunited, and move up the corridor towards another tower. Yet when we hit another door, opening up unto another large room, there is a general feeling of apprehension. Attacking wardrobes. Evil champions. War machines. Invisible stalkers. It seems like every room presents another death trap. This one looks empty. Who dares go in first?

The dwarf, followed by the copper elf, moves into the room; cautiously, and a bit less so. Both of them start to investigate and report, shouting back to us in the corridor. We wait quietly, ready to respond. No threats seem to present themselves, although both Grimwald and Kendalan nearly trip over the many, many skeletons that litter the floor; all of them, they notice, strangely without any hands or feet...

Almost imperceptibly at first, then quite noticeably, both of them begin to speed up. They start walking at a brisk pace, then break out into a sort of trot. Soon, both of them are running

around the room at full speed, moving in circles . We shout at them to come back at us, but neither is able to, and soon, they are nearly flying, reaching fantastic, superhuman velocities, while still speeding up. Grimwald, in his thick and heavy armour, begins to resemble nothing so much as a cannon ball that can't decide where it was launched from or where it should go; Kendalan, almost panicking, is like a bird with a broken wing, flying in desperate circles, trying to maintain balance. There is no sign of them slowing down; quite the contrary. We understand now what gruesome fate befell the owners of these bones, running first on their feet, then on their hands, until they had simply been broken and burnt off by the friction. And yet, we have no idea how to stop this curse. We dare not enter the room, at least. Hoping to slow him down, I manifest a spot of grease in Kendalan's path. He slips and falls, hurting himself, but at least coming to a - very - temporary stop. Efir, meanwhile, manage to lasso Grimwald, and we assist her in reining him in. With a neat fishing trick, I first let the rope go a bit, then pull it back in again, and with Cuura's and Efir's strength, we do indeed manage to pull in Grimwald, who immediately flops down to the floor and stops moving.

Kendalan meanwhile still hasn't gotten up, but has now begun to crawl at break-neck speed. Reed gets something out of her backpack, and tries to stop the elf by hitting him with a glob of viscous goo. She manages to slow him down a bit, but soon enough, now glued to the gruesome feet- and handless corpses, he's back to crawling - but at a break-neck speed.

Draeni, Reed's companion dragon comes to the rescue. She catapults in and out of the room, dragging the hapless Kendalan with her. Removed from the direct effect of the room, he manages to do as Grimwald, going prone, and trying to hold still. But now Draeni is affected, and she, having flown off into the hallway, rebounds and launches herself at us! I step back, turn around, and, with a flourish of my cloak, hide behind my shadow. When I dare to stand still and show myself again, Reed has managed to impale the little dragon in the nicest way possible, immobilising it with an extendable pole, and we wait for the spell to wear off.

Now prepared, Grimwald ventures into the room again, though this time, anchored to us all with a long piece of rope. He draws out his warhammer and proceeds to demolish one of the altars to the side of the room... then is nearly crushed in his armor as all the other altars, slabs of stone and all, are torn loose through some gyroscopic motion, and smash into each other - and into him.

He's still alive though, and the magic is dead, so the tactic is counted as a success, and we move on again. On the other side of the room, we find another dead soldier, the bones of his feet still intact. Somehow, by luck, dexterity, or sheer force of will, he must have managed to steer himself to the door - but smashing through it, was pierced by a spear-like splinter of wood, and bled to death, alone, here in this corridor.

The evils of this place are too many to count. I decide to trust nothing from now on, and to try to disable and neutralise as many parts of this keep as I can. This, as it turns out, is a mindset that is hard to communicate to my fellow travellers, especially to Grimwald, for we soon enter a smithy that has a roaring furnace and is stocked - floor to ceiling - with quality weapons, a number of them, in fact, made of \*gold\*.

We get into some disagreement: I wish to take all precautions and simply disable these

weapons, which may be used against us, and at any rate cannot be used \*by\* us. They could be cursed in a million different ways: to attack us when touched, to attack us when lifted, to attack us when wielded against an opponent, to attack us when wielded with noble intent, to attack us in our sleep, whenever the clock strikes midnight... chances are, these weapons are evil, and we should melt them down into the furnace.

The end result, of course, is that we do nothing of the sort, and Grimwald leaves the place with a giant, ten-foot long golden sword. It's a dangerous thing to do. Even if it's not cursed, it's too cumbersome to carry, let alone wield. Is this a lingering influence of the mind-affecting spell I suspect was woven on him when we entered the keep? Or merely a dwarf's natural inclination, his doubly so, to want to possess a finely crafted weapon, let alone a golden one? My drive to neutralise the threat posed by this armory is unsuccessful. I do manage to convince the group to at least block off the entrance to the smithy, so that the weapons cannot be used by anyone sneaking up on us from behind. Instead of taking proper care of things, we throw up a hasty barricade, and continue. As we leave to trek through another corridor, I glance nervously over my shoulder. Who of the warlord's minions, skulking around these towers, will take up those weapons against us? Still, the group advances, and I follow.

We are soon greeted by a voice, echoing through the corridor. 'Stitches... stitches... ahahahaha!' Its owner is nowhere to be seen. Shivering, we come upon another room - this one, covered in sheets.

Hesitantly, we move into it, and pull one of them away. From behind the covers, an undying image of suffering flesh emerges. Suffused, the old and the new stitched and restitched together: not with the intent to heal, but with the intent to prolong life, and, by extent, its anguished existence. For how many years - how many hundreds of moons - has it been here? Reed and the others study the quivering heap of flesh, but soon are challenged by the disembodied voice we heard from afar.

'We musn't... the patients, oh no... stitches... stitches... have to take care of the patients... ahahahaha!' Its macabre enthusiasm is enough to drive Kendalan back out of the room. I hide myself between some equipment; the others, however, go on a careful offensive. Grimwald takes up a pole-arm, and starts cutting away at the sheets that are blocking our view from the rest of the room.

As they fall away, row after row emerges; all 'patients' in this perverted hospital, all kept half-dead, in the care of... what? A ghost? A spell? Is it automated? What intelligence or intent does it have? Again it challenges us, and I too slink back out of the room, until we know what we are dealing with. An aerial bombardment and exploding 'potty cart' follow, and Grimwald is covered with human refuse and remains, dripping fluids best left unpondered. Admirably, he is deterred nor overly distracted in the task he has set himself, and before long, all the sheets have fallen down.

The room now cleared, and all its horrors uncovered, 'Stitches' suddenly falls silent.

As I gaze upon the room, I realize: I cannot stand for this. I may not be a paladin, but twelve years in the orphanage at Tyr have taught me some things. Life is valued, but death may be cherished. If we are correct, these bodies - these... people... have been kept in suffering for hundreds of years. Their minds must be broken by now; warped and twisted for the pain and suffering they have been forced to endure. There is only one right way to proceed now, and that is to help them out of their misery. I do not look forward to the job, but as they cannot be restored to any meaningful life, they must be allowed to have death. It seems like the only

proper care we can take of them now.

I discuss my reasoning with the group, but am misunderstood. Some of them even argue that it 'would take too long'. Who are they kidding? A knife a man, one hundred sufferers, one hundred mercy cuts to make. They make excuses. Weak-kneed these adventurers are, spineless, without principles. Sure! It takes courage to fight monsters, courage, in equal measure to stupidity, but it takes another sort of courage to know and do what is right. How can they let these poor creatures go on like this?

And yet, if I cannot convince the group, I can also not do it by myself. Reed would surely stop me, and I cannot have her against me here, in the middle of this cursed keep. She, meanwhile, starts singing a song. Something to heal them? I Hope Not! She tells us she has woven a subtle magic that is meant to allow them to go 'as their nature wills them to'. Is she restoring one hundred broken bodies, only to make them host to one hundred broken minds?