

# THE DIARY OF VERONWË FEYWARDEN

Before setting out on the journey known as “the Agonies of Moral Turpitude” I was called to a meeting with the church elders of Corellon Larethian along with other newly appointed Feywardens and we were briefed as to what was expected of us in the next phase of our education - exploring the world. We were not being sent out merely to discover the world and the creatures in it, and certainly the object of the exercise was not to acquire wealth and/or artefacts.

What we were charged with doing was to look behind the actions of other intelligent creatures to understand how they perceived the world, particularly in terms of good and evil. To that end we were told to go out into the world, join groups of explorers and travel with them into areas that tested them and us to the limits of life and death as these situations normally bring out the best and worst of people.

The goals we were given were as follows:

- To Learn about our travelling companions’ morality and goals;
- To challenge/test them to see to what extent they would turn out to be open to persuasion, i.e. whether they would prove to be easily swayed or hold strongly to their convictions. We were forewarned that dwarves tend to be very fixed in their beliefs whilst humans are easily influenced and relatively quick to change their opinions.
- To see to what extent we could mould their opinions to the elven tenets of justice, kindness, freedom and respect for others.

By aiming to do the above we were told it would allow us to both obtain a better understanding of our own faith and beliefs and simultaneously form our own opinions of other people and races rather than relying on “received wisdom”. When we were satisfied we had experienced a sufficient variety of other civilisations to achieve our purpose we were to return home to share our newly found wisdom with the lord’s favoured.

Shortly thereafter I said goodbye to my parents and my little sister Aranwë, girded my loins, and headed to the far west. I was to travel to a mysterious realm called the Duchy of Ashlar which had been founded by some human/elf half breeds some centuries earlier. Here, I was informed, I would undoubtedly see life in the rough and adventure would not be hard to find!

# The Adventure Begins

Having set out on my journey have joined a group of folk that are set to explore the most dangerous area for leagues around – the Gloamhold. We have started at last by exploring the pitiful ruins of a settlement on its very doorstep, once called Greystone. I am snatching a few moments whilst I stand guard at the entrance of what looks once was a blacksmiths to pen these thoughts whilst my colleagues look inside.

I have been pleasantly surprised to find that, despite their reputation amongst elvish folk, some humans and dwarves are not as uncivilised as I have been led to expect. In particular Thangrim has shown signs that he is resourceful, brave and generous and Tolirath the Mysterious has also proven to have a generous heart.

At this rate my long held views, admittedly obtained through third parties rather than direct observation, are in danger of being turned on their head. In one respect, however, the seeming inability of my new compatriots to detect their own scent and the lack of any recognition of the need for regular bathing has sadly proven the tales all too true.

In one other matter I have also been surprised. One party member, Goldogrin, who appears to have spurned the normal elven way of life from an early age for a life of thievery and who I therefore expected I would not at all come to respect, has demonstrated a willingness to take the lead and consequently put himself at risk of injury. Even though this may turn out to be purely for his own benefit in the long run nevertheless his daring is impressive.

I await events eagerly now with more optimism than I held at the start of the day. The party appears to contain several strong willed individuals and it has taken no small amount of gentle persuading to keep us on the path we set for ourselves, of ensuring the village contains nothing to threaten our retreat should we need to, before we set off underground without bruising their fragile egos. I must go as I hear some banging coming from within....

# THE GRASPING CLAWS OF DEATH

The party proves its bravery and is rewarded, Thangrim has a funny turn with some crabs, we search dark cave entrances and Goldogrin is sorely wounded.

I sit here sipping a human-brewed alcoholic drink as I reflect on an exciting day. One not without injury to my new comrades, indeed Goldogrin lies at death's door upstairs as I write, but a rewarding one nevertheless. The sun looks glorious as it sets in the west, making even the Shard look mysteriously alluring perched upon those high peaks, visible even from here across the water.

Picking up the story from where I left it last time, a lot seems to have happened in a short space of time. The banging I heard whilst standing at the entrance to the forge was being made by Auric as he worked on opening a door next to the long-disused forge. When he finally managed to get it open, a group of emaciated figures immediately lurched into view slaving and howling as they advanced, maybe attracted by the noise, or maybe the prospect of a fresh meal. The strong taint of evil was almost palpable as they rushed forward down the hall towards us. Let me tell you the door was closed a lot more quickly than it was opened!

So without warning we were confronted with our first foe, the first chance for my compatriots to show their metal and for me to further my goals as a journeyman Feywarden.

After some debate the general consensus was to adopt a plan I put forward to try to use our ghoulish foes' eagerness to get at us against them. We would let the door open a few inches and as they undoubtedly would expose themselves as they tried to claw their way through the gap we planned to pepper them with missiles safely from a distance. That way we wouldn't risk injury or worse as I had heard that even minor wounds from such creatures could cause paralysis or disease.

My comrades all seemed eager to have at it and so it wasn't long before we had the anvil moved up a few finger lengths behind the door that even now the ghouls continued to push and bang against. I stood with my foot on the anvil and heaved the door open whilst the group lined up, bows at the ready.

As this was our first fight I was interested to see how my new friends handled themselves in action. At first everything went to plan, no sooner had the door opened a crack than the first ghoul tried to push through, its efforts stymied by the dead weight of the anvil. As it tried to reach around for me, Goldogrin, Dulannis, Auric and Glouryn let fly. Dulannis proved to be a deadeye shot, either that or have the luck of the trickster Erevan Ilesere himself as he skewered one through the eye with his first shot!

After that things slowed down a bit, maybe it was the excitement of the battle or possibly the diabolic stench of the creatures as they tried vainly to reach for us, but after that initial volley the skill of my colleagues at firing missile weapons seemed to wane, scoring no hits in the next few minutes. Seeing this, Thangrim who had been standing aside sword in hand in case our foes managed to push through the door, could not restrain him any further and launched himself forward, thrusting his sword through the gap to get to the foul creatures. Whilst brave this meant that the plan had to be revised as no one else could get to our foes without risk of shooting our eager friend in the back. After a few seconds of cut and thrust Thangrim managed to cut a second one down, but a third, its enthusiasm curbed at least for now, stood back out of reach. Glouryn gave up on any further attempts to shoot through the door finding it beyond his skill to sight through such a narrow gap, whilst the rest of the party waited for sight of a target. Seeing this, I called upon the holy power of Corellon Larethian himself to force any remaining foes back and Auric helped me move the anvil so that we could swing the door wide.

As was becoming ever more apparent, Thangrim, proved ever eager to lead the charge, once again wasted no time in charging forward into the tunnel to confront the foe, this time almost to his undoing. Around the corner stood another foul ghoul which furiously began to claw and bite at him, perhaps its blows were given more force as it was finally able to get at a living foe. Before the rest of our fighters could advance Thangrim was sorely wounded and my fears as to their unholy nature was proved true as something infected his newly opened wounds and he was utterly paralysed.

Seeing the peril Thangrim was in Goldogrin rushed forward and hauled him out of reach of the grasping claws just as the rest of the party, having now exchanged their ranged weapons for those useful at close quarters, engaged the ghoul in close combat disregarding the risk to their lives.

As the fight raged I moved up to tend to Thangrim, carefully skirting our foe, however, before I could make any progress Dulannis was sorely wounded in turn. As he was in peril of losing his life I was forced to call upon our Lord to summon forth healing magic to firstly heal Dulannis so that he could remain in the fight. Now that the balance of our party was finally trading blows with the monster it did not last long, a mighty blow from Auric swiftly laid it low. Peace now being restored several of the party began to search the rooms behind the door, finding only a pile of coal. Whilst they did so I once again called upon our good Lord to heal the wounds of our eager friend Thangrim, though could not break him out of his still state. Luckily he shook himself out of it shortly thereafter none the wiser of the peril he had been exposed to. Though I did not mention this to any of my comrades, on one point I was highly pleased, to see that our Lord's healing grace extended to those of a non-elven race for until this point in time I was unsure that it would be so.

Perhaps it was as recompense for the good we had done the world but we quickly discovered a trove of treasures including some that were magical.

Following our victory Thangrim, to our puzzlement, took some parts of the foul ghoulish creatures back down to the harbour, placed them into a bag and slung it down into the harbour. Within seconds it was swarmed with evil-looking crabs. After some attempts he hauled some up and placed them into a sack. Once again, as the rest of us looked bemusedly on, he rapidly got himself into trouble as the crabs began to bite him through the hessian fabric, upon which he worked himself into a fury at the hapless creatures and leapt about stabbing his foes to death to our general merriment! He explained afterwards that he was using them to pick the skulls clean so he could have one as a trophy; we weren't convinced! Whilst this was going on Goldogrin and Dulannis tried to pin down the source of some strange noises that led them to believe we were being watched from above. Dulannis even used his arcane powers to climb up a steep slope as easily as a veritable squirrel, but to no avail as our hidden watcher was not located.

After this we started exploring some of the caves around the base of the hills. Goldogrin wished to use the opportunity to hone his skills at sneaking. So whilst he investigated them, watched from a distance by Thangrim, ever eager to be the first into any action should it develop, the rest of us waited outside. Most proved to be simple dwellings and offered no hidden threats. After some vaguely interesting discoveries of carved stonework Goldogrin put his foot on a trapped stair, injuring himself badly whilst in the process of climbing them and I had to rush in to summon the last of my healing magic to prevent him from bleeding to death.

Following this incident, as I had now run used up my ability to heal any further injuries using magic and as Goldogrin was in poor shape despite benefitting from my Lord's healing power, we decided to call it a day and returned back to our boat.

As we sailed away we saw that a number of people were signalling to us from higher up the mountainside. Whilst we returned their waves we were in no mood to return this day to investigate.

Looking back on the day's events I can only feel reassured as my colleagues appear to be steadfast in their bravery and my choice of joining this group appears to have been a good one. I have already learned a lot and put my Lord's teachings to full use in defence of the party.

As I look up night is almost upon us, the last rays of daylight are rapidly disappearing. The Gloamhold suddenly doesn't look so appealing and has taken on an aspect of foreboding and dread in the gloom, how quickly do things change.

# FIRE & SHADOW

The party sells its loot, makes some useful contacts, clears evil from a temple and as we search dark tunnels Goldogrin is wounded again

We awake to a day of low cloud and drizzle. Looking out of the window of the inn everything looks gloomy and dismal. Passing by I see street urchins picking up bits of detritus and cram them into already bulging sacks in the hope of exchanging them for a loaf of bread and a place to sleep. To an elf human life appears brutish and short, yet somehow their cities appear to have a vibrancy that is lacking in elven communities where, to a human at least, little would seem to change from one season to the next. It almost appears that, as they know they don't have long to live, humans constantly rush around to extract every last ounce of enjoyment they can before they expire.

Checking on Goldogrin I see that he is going to be going nowhere this day and probably next also, indeed, even healing magics are going to be of little use until he recovers some strength. I instruct our hired guard Barlon to keep a close eye on him to ensure no one disturbs his rest and head down for breakfast.

Imparting the news of Goldogrin's condition to my colleagues and not wanting to return to the ruins of Greystone without our scout, we resolve to use the time to find merchants who will buy the gems and other valuables we obtained yesterday. So we head out to visit various buyers and sellers of curios and gems and spend our time haggling in order to obtain a reasonable price for the items in our possession.

Curiously I discover that whilst my new dwarven compatriots' stolid demeanours are admirable in a fight, this trait is not so useful when bargaining with a merchant. I consequently find myself taking the lead in several such situations even though it is not an area I have had a chance to develop any skill, especially with the ever-so-excitable humans.

Later in the day we head over to the Temple of Serat and manage to trade the magical scroll we found for several potions of healing. Whilst I regret parting with such a wondrous item, having some additional magical healing in the party will enable me in particular to take a more active role in a fight, secure in the knowledge that I can be magically revived should it prove necessary. In addition we agree with Anatha, a priestess of Serat, that we will explore her god's ruined shrine in Greystone during our next visit and return any temple artefacts remaining therein to her.

Having dealt with our finds I distribute the cash in equal measure to all members of the group and agree with Thangrim to purchase a longbow between us so that I can use my skill with the weapon to our advantage when required.

We spend the next day planning, purchasing equipment, practicing and resting. I find that my skill with a longbow has not diminished and rapidly gain a feel for the human-made weapon, which though not as well-crafted as an elven made weapon is good enough. In addition I finally manage to heal Goldogrin; true to form when hearing of our trading exploits he grumbles that he would have obtained better deals had he been on his feet.

The next day dawns with slightly better weather so we rapidly set out across the bay. As we approach Greystone I search the hillside for sight of the mysterious individuals who waved at us as we left three days earlier, however of them or any other there is no sign.

Setting foot safely on dry land, the village appears to be exactly as we left it. We move carefully over to the ruined temple of Serat and put our plan into action. The fighters form a skirmish line behind which the rest of us ready lit torches and flasks of oil. Advancing inside we slowly approach the votary pool in the centre and it is only moments before we see the fronds encountered in our first visit react and reach towards us menacingly.

Swiftly, as the strange creature which looks like living seaweed attempts to wrap our sturdy fighters in its folds, the rest of us throw our flasks of oil at its body and its whip-like appendages, followed by the lit torches. Whilst the results aren't as effective as we had hoped we do manage to set it alight and it swiftly recoils, retreating downwards back into the pool.

Thangrim, once again caught up in the heat of battle, runs and jumps down into the water determined not to let it disappear from view. His efforts are rewarded as after a couple of swift blows the already wounded creature ceases its struggles and the fronds fall limp and lifeless. Concerned that our heavily weighed down comrade doesn't drown the rest of the party rapidly come to his aid and pull him out.

Having now despatched the terror in the pool we search the ruins and find some offering jars hidden in the wall full of coin, as well as a skeletal figure at the bottom of the pool; possibly the priest who once looked after the shrine.

Having secured our finds we head back to the cave where Goldogrin was sorely wounded during our last visit. This time we all advance safely up the trapped stairs and head into a network of twisting tunnels. It's not long before Auric and Goldogrin, whilst checking a side passage, discover a niche above their heads that appears to be full of stones.

Perhaps he is too concerned with checking his foot placements for hidden spikes rather than checking above his head, but Goldogrin somehow manages to set off another trap and pull the stones down on both their heads. Luckily I'm not too far away and manage to rush in to attend to their wounds. I cast healing spells on them both, but Goldogrin is again almost at death's door and not capable of continuing.

Not wanting to retreat before checking out a recently discovered underground chamber Dulannis and Thangrim climb up to briefly look at a ledge on which some skulls have been placed but, fearing more traps, decide to leave them untouched for another day.

Our visit cut short in untimely fashion again we head back to our boat and home. As we sit on the boat heading home disappointed as I am I am nevertheless impressed with the speed with which our little group has gelled, already everyone is working together for the good of us all.



# POISON MOST FOUL

The party rests and recovers, makes more sagacious contacts, rescues some fellow adventurers and defeats an ancient evil

After Goldogrin has been helped back to his bed the rest of us head to the bar for a well-earned drink and a discussion of this morning's events. There is a quite a lot of lively banter, I assume brought on by the adrenaline generated from the encounter with the strange strangling seaweed in the Temple of Serat. I look on with interest around my fellow adventures with interest, the group appears to be bonding well, despite the disparate races and backgrounds.

Whilst the others are talking, I excuse myself and pay a short visit to the castle of the Ducal seat within which I know is a chapel to my Lord Corellon Larethian, however I am refused admittance. Leaving a message with the gate guards that I wished to pay my respects to the incumbent cleric, if indeed there is one, and where I can be found I return once again to the Orc's Head inn.

Once again we have some gems to sell plus items to return to the temple of Serat, so we head out to the lower city where we report to the priestess on the success of our mission in Greystone, returning the remains of what we assume was the cleric of that ill-fated temple and the votive jars found in the wall, and take the opportunity to quiz her on what may be lurking in the dark waters of the harbour. After hearing of Thangrim's self-inflicted trials with the diseased crabs she suggests that perhaps it is some larger example of their kind, but cannot be of much further help.

After some discussion Anatha provides us with some pearls that we need as spell components for Tolirath to cast identification magic on the potion that we found in the smithy, in exchange for my promise to cast a spell of Bless on the temple's ruins, which I gladly agree to.

Next, at Auric's suggestion we track down a human sage whom he has been told has spent his life studying Gloamhold. We are met at the door of the house by a wizened old man who indeed turns out to be Urmas Alto the sage and introduce ourselves. On revealing to him that we have only just recently twice visited Greystone and are intent on delving into Gloamhold itself he invites us in, his interest obviously piqued.

We stay for quite a while as we relate to him what we have discovered and he answers our questions; he also gives us some useful background information on the settlement's inhabitants, in particular filling us in on the founding family and builders of the manor house, the Allanens. We promise to visit him after each of our expeditions to update him on what we

find, in exchange for which he promises to give us the benefit of his years of study. He warns us however that if we spend too much time over there we could become exposed to the curse that seems to afflict those who linger there too long, a curse which warps and ages the frame of all so afflicted.

After a couple of days, and with the help of some healing magic from my Lord, Goldogrin recovers; so we head out on the following morning on our third trip to Greystone.

As we approach the harbour in our hired fishing boat all seems quiet, but as soon as we set foot on the breakwater a heavily armed and armoured party appears from behind a wall to intercept us. We check them out nervously, fingering our weapons in their scabbards, but I notice that they haven't yet drawn theirs, so call out to my group to stand easy. It turns out it is another group of adventurers that we had been forewarned were in the area, those calling themselves the Scarlet Fellowship and led by one red-haired lady named Sonya. It seems they had made the mistake of sailing into the harbour and had immediately found themselves beset by the mysterious creature that yet lurked beneath the surface of the murky water. In addition to the loss of their boat, the remains of which can still be seen only yards away, two of their number had been slain and several others injured to a crab of monstrous proportions.

After hearing of their travails and questioning them as to what they had discovered since their arrival, which it turns out was very little, we agree to let them use our hired boat to evacuate and watch them sail off towards Languard.

We head to the temple of Serat and I cast the bless spell provided to me on a scroll, it is pleasing to see that it does appear to have some effect as the ill-look of the seaweed in the pool seems to be driven out and return to its natural colour. After some discussion we decide to check the manor further up the hillside, so head for the tunnel that we had just been informed led that way. Delving inside, after passing through a set of ruined doors it very shortly began to head uphill. Very quickly it becomes web-choked and it is not long before we come across a side passage, down which we espy a malevolent and large form hanging from the roof.

Deciding that if this was indeed some large arachnid we have no choice other than to deal with the threat it poses before we venture further. Thangrim (as ever eager to force the issue) throws a lit torch down the passage which has the desired effect of stirring a huge spider to life.

It immediately charges in our direction, but by this time we have begun to form group tactics and Auric deals it a mighty wound as a defensive line is formed across the passage, unfortunately taking a bite in return. Also, in what could have been a fatal accident and adding to Auric's woes, Dulannis fires an arrow into the melee, hitting Auric in the back.

Luckily the melee is swiftly over as Tolirath chooses this moment to cast his first offensive spell since joining the group, launching a bolt of arcane energy at the fell creature blowing it apart.

I rush over to Auric and immediately note that the spider has pierced Auric with its poisonous fangs and he may be in danger of paralysation or worse so immediately set to work to help clear the wound. Whether it is my skill with dealing with such matters, or a dwarf's natural resistance to poison, Auric shows no signs of succumbing as I magically heal his wounds. Checking the area we discover a couple of desiccated corpses that look like they have been here for many years, dressed in archaic forms of human attire.

Moving swiftly up the passage we come out into daylight directly opposite the creepy old manor house. As I look back down the hillside to see whether this raised vantage point reveals anything new about the village below, my colleagues enthusiastically enter through the front door to see that it appears to empty of all furnishings, though was that the noise of something moving within.

Having completed a search of the ground floor, which took some time, we stopped for a rest. Looking out of the window back towards the sea I could see the boat returning and it appeared that storm clouds may be gathering on the horizon. As the exploration of the manor looks like it may take some time we decide to head back to the boat and return to Languard before we were cut off by the weather.

Sitting as I am now in the Orc's Head writing up my diary I can see we made the right decision as a fierce storm has moved in, the wind and rain crashing against the windows. It may be some time before we return to Greystone to continue our investigations.

Taking some time to reflect on the events of the last few days I feel that I have made significant progress in my journey of discovery. Certainly the advice to join a group that was going to put itself in danger has turned out to be a good choice as I have seen some brave acts of heroism already. What I wasn't prepared for was the rapidity with which the group has bonded, including my own feelings, as I now have a feeling of kindred with dwarves of all creatures! Even their smell seems to have become more acceptable. I can now understand why my Lord Corellon Larethian regards himself as the protector and preserver of all life, not just those of the fair folk.