

No Wealth, No Ruin

The cacophony of overlapping voices shook the world like an earthquake. Eyes opened wide, startled.

'I... I live?'

Confusion. He remembered dying. Remembered dying countless times. How? Wait - no. He? Was that right? She?

he voices rose again, a tidal wave proclaiming countless identities. There was no way to tease apart individual threads. They, then, until this could be figured out. Could...could this be figured out? The susurrus made it hard to concentrate, hard to think. They clawed their way out of the swirl of voices for a moment. They looked around.

A stone building, or what remained of it. Pavers on the floor, partially ripped up. Walls tumbled down, debris everywhere. Recent, it seemed. Was this how they had died? In whatever attack had destroyed this place? Most assuredly not; the voices were in unison on this. That was new. Or was it? They winced at the headache. Elsewhere, then. So... why were they here? They saw something on the floor, and reached out to brush away debris, then stopped. The hand was distinctly unfamiliar, with an almost amber colored skin. The thing on the floor ignored for a moment, they paused to examine themselves. Strong, muscled limbs; tusks; that amber skin; a nakedness that spoke of recent resurrection... 'What am I?' they wondered.

For once, no response from the voices. That seemed to be even more worrying than the previous swarm of answers.. They added that to the list of other mysteries, looking back to the floor. A section of inlaid tile made an arc in the floor that wasn't destroyed; one of the voices supplied that it must have been a permanent circle of some kind. Earth, likely, given their apparent resurrection. But...the circle was clearly broken, lacking power. And with no one there to use it even if it had been functional... how were they here? What had brought them back?

'WE DID,' came the resounding reply, a union of the voices again, despite it making absolutely no sense. Confusion washed over them, as a few of the other voices argued and debated the impossible. Their head throbbed.

'ENOUGH!' they roared, cutting through the din, and the other voices fell into stunned silence. 'My head! My rules! Too loud!' The voices, when they returned, were quieter, more sedate. That settled - for now - they started to search the ruins. Clothing, water, food, weapons... even clues as to what had happened or where they were would be helpful. A torn pair of pants, belted with a strip ripped from a tapestry, had to suffice as clothing, and a broken table leg would need to serve as a weapon. Food would apparently need to wait. As for answers... none from the ruins, but a picture started to emerge from within.

The voices started to report, occasionally overlapping, but frequently not, as if each understood this needed to be marked. Voice after voice after voice recalled the same - the horror of being torn apart, their spirits shredded and cast aside, victims of the same foe: the Vreech. That name was supplied by the first, and all agreed, though not all knew the name. Some lacked the intelligence to put more to the name than a shapeless fear; others could describe the creatures with almost tactical precision.

None, however, could illuminate their situation - why they were all together, how they'd reformed a body, what they were now... even what to call themselves. They walked amongst the ruins, subconsciously following an outward spiral pattern. A few more things were found in the wreckage: piles of clothes that spoke of dissipated bodies, which provided some upgrades to clothing and, eventually, weaponry and armor. Caresses of...something across their skin, like the whisper of breezes that moved no branch or leaf. Even a bottle of wine, miraculously intact besides a smashed cabinet. Finally, a scent in the still air: decay. They followed it, finding the first of the permanently dead. Analyzing the decomposition, they guessed it had been several days, perhaps a week. They didn't question the knowledge; the voice was certain enough, and there was no way to test or verify. The state the body was in left little in terms of clues as to what had happened; the Vreech was a likely explanation. The search continued.

Several more bodies were eventually found, all in as bad a shape. A backpack and a few more items were gathered along the way, giving them a chance at survival, though still no information as to where they were, or where to go. At least, for now, the riddle of identity seemed to have quieted, with the more pertinent mystery taking precedence. Whatever had happened was fairly recent, but no one had come back here to salvage, to bury the dead, to carry on with life. So, either the survivors had fled...or all who had lived here had perished, to resurrect farther away. After a few more hours of fruitless searching, they picked a road leading out of the ruins.

Eventually, there would be something along this route, either another ruin, or a settlement that had survived. Either would be acceptable. As they got farther from the town, they noticed the phantom breezes seemed to stop. Something particular about that town, perhaps? They pondered that mystery until a clattering rock alerted them that they were not alone. Goblins. A large enough group was dangerous to a lone traveler, a voice noted, and they quickly counted over a dozen, causing another voice to hiss in a display of territorial anger. Blade and club rested easily in their hands, and they were filled with a surety that they - and this body - could handle themselves in a fight. These cretins would regret this.

They rushed the Goblins, hoping a rush would scatter them, but these appeared to be bold, despite one of their number dropping almost immediately. The Goblins darted in and out, harrying their larger prey, nipping and darting out. They killing another two Goblins before they lost their footing on a loose stone. They recovered, but the Goblins swarmed around them, and they lashed out at the smaller creatures, laying into them with a furious desperation. Existence had just started for them! It would not end as quickly. IT WOULD NOT!

The words bubbled up from deep inside, almost instinctual, as their hands flared brightly with magical energy. "With necromancy I create a Chaos Storm!" The chaotic energy surged out, hammering the surrounding Goblins into the ground. Several voices cried out in horror, but were quickly silenced - no, devoured! - by the other voices. This....this felt right. They exulted in the swell of power as Goblins fell - or fled screaming. Control over the forces of life and death was theirs!

In that moment, they realized who they were, the name settling around their shoulders like a mantle. Deathspeaker Gra'Rok smiled, surrounded by corpses.