

Gueiris Returns to Therma Alba

Gueiris suspected something was off when he had received the letter recalling him back to Highmark this morning. Referring to his Uncle as his father, while true in a sense, his Uncle is his adopted father, was just not something he and his adopted family have done. His own desire to escape from the uncomfortable miasma that Therma Alba had become for him, most definitely coloured his decision to simply accept the letter, without question. When he had looked back and saw the black smoke from Therma Alba, he knew he had been duped. The regret over his selfishness burned in him.

That was at least a half hour ago, and a handful of minutes after he chose to leave his horse behind after a hard ride. No point in endangering the beast, and his own abilities were just as likely to harm the poor thing, as his enemies. Gueiris was no lancer or horseman. Feet on the ground was best.

One hundred yards separated him from the courtyard of the guest house. Shouts and the sounds of conflict could be heard from the estate. The brush had provided convenient cover so far, but it was open terrain from now on. Easy spotting for the two cloaked figures at the edge of the courtyard, if their attention was towards the road. They seemed more focused on inflicting harm on stragglers from conflicts deeper inside. Several crumpled forms lay motionless near them.

It must be some sort of raid, Gueiris thought. There were no signs of sufficient force to take and hold the estate. The reason for such an attack escaped him. It mattered not. Breathing deep, he brought his elemental power forth. His skin turned black and took the appearance of molten rock, fissures of red heat cracking through. Waves of red flames danced along his arms, and his eyes burned with power. Gathering elemental power caused earth to rip up from the ground around him and swirl as it coalesced into stone spears.

One of the figures turned, their attention drawn to the sound, despite the distance. Gueiris could make out red hued skin and horns on their now visible cloaked head. Tiefling like himself. It changed nothing. The earthen spears launched out from Gueiris, projected by his magic. At that range, a hit was not guaranteed, but the oblivious one of the pair was not aware of the strike to evade it, even as their ally cried a warning. The heavy projectiles slammed into them, crumpling them to the ground in a heap of blood and broken bones.

Gueiris ran, even before his strike had landed, closing the distance between him and the remaining tiefling. One hundred yards to go. She looked down in surprise at her companion. Eighty yards. The surprise of the attack and the charging form quickly vanished from her face. Out of her cloak came a crossbow. Sixty yards. She levels the crossbow at the charging form, taking aim and firing, all the while calling out in Primordial. Gueiris brought up his arms to shield his face as the bolt deflected off the stone-hardened skin of his forearms. Forty yards. Panic grips the woman's face as she fumbles to reload the crossbow. Earth begins

to rip up and trail from Gueiris' hands, like hanging chains drug across the ground as he runs. Twenty yards. Forgoing the crossbow, the tiefling draws a curved blade from her waist and takes a tentative step back. Just out of sword reach, Gueiris plants and lashes with the chains of earth. They slam through what little defense the curved blade provided and rend large gashes of flesh from the woman. Screaming she drops to her knees. The earthen chain crumples to dust in Gueiris' left hand and he raises an open palm to the crippled tiefling. A blast of flame erupts out of the hand, searing away any remaining life. Gueiris steps by the smoking form as it crumples motionless, and into the courtyard.

The courtyard is in disarray, although not the disaster Gueiris had feared. Yes, several bodies of guests and staff lay scattered about, and the debris of a still burning overturned carriage blocked the roundabout, but it was not the wholesale slaughter he had feared. The guesthouse doors looked intact, although several windows had been smashed in, even on higher floors. Fear clenched his gut, as he scanned those that were broken. Lavinia's was the fourth on the left. A gentleman would have truly given her privacy, but while he would not have disturbed her, it didn't mean he hadn't tracked down where she was staying, and even considered knocking on her door. Right now, he would have given anything to have done so, to be there when this... this...

His thought was broken by the large monstrous form lumbering quickly towards him. Amateurish, getting distracted before ensuring no more enemies were about. The beast stood over 9' high on slate grey hooves covered in shaggy brown fur. A maniacal horned ape head crowned the demon. Snarling, it launched gout of flame from its mouth at Gueiris, likely the source of fire for the burning carriage. The attack passed harmless over him, shield by not only his infernal heritage, but by the fire magic that burned in him.

Gueiris responded with an arcing slash from the remaining earthen chain, the sharpened stone cutting into the demonic flesh, less effective on a beast of such size. It roared in anger, swinging its meaty clawed hands at Gueiris. He spun away, trying to make space from the beast, avoiding the initial strike, but taking a grazing hit to his shoulder on the second. The stone-hardened skin soaks the blow, preventing the claws from tearing any flesh, the force of the impact causing Gueiris to grimace. He needed to end this quickly.

Stepping into the reach of the demon, he formed a blade of obsidian, powered by both his earth and fire magic, and drove it into the wide chest of the monster. The tip sunk half a dozen inches into the beast, a killing blow to a mortal, but only an inconvenience to a demon. A roar of glee and triumph burst from it, as it raised its massive clawed hands for a rending strike to finish the gnat in front of it. Gueiris smiled as well, pouring magic into the blade which exploded with a column of molten glass, driven straight through the demon, tunneling a hole through its chest two feet in diameter. The force of the blast, staggering the beast backward to the ground where it lay motionless.

Gueiris took a moment to gather his breath and scan for more threats. Spending his magical power so quickly would leave him vulnerable until he could refocus. The innate

elemental power of Therma Alba would allow him to recover quickly, but facing another threat like that demon in succession would be risky. Fortunately, no other opponent presented themselves, hopefully scared off by how quickly the large demon was dispatched.

Lavinia!

Back to scanning the windows. His heart sank when he spotted the broken window. No time to recover. Jets of flame from his hands propelled him through the open window, where he landed in a roll, a blade of flame forming in his hand, looking for danger, or worse, the fate of the woman he loved.