

WRFB1 Daellin Farstriding

Many years ago, when Daellin was a much younger elf....

As a new member of the Farstriders, he had been given the honorable assignment at the farthest northwest watch post on the borders of the great Mierani Forest. The Elves of Mierani had much to worry about. They worked hard at keeping all manner of folk out of their forest, but they were also tasked with keeping something in. What that something was, Daellin did not know, though he assumed that in time, he would be made privy to that information. Whatever it was, he knew that he was not to talk about it with non-Elves. All of the Elvish watch posts along the borders of the Forest had at least one Farstrider, and many of the larger, more important stations had several. The Farstriders spent their initial years in service to the



Elvish lands, and watch station duty was a good way to do this. It was also a well known secret that the best posts were reserved for the 'best' Farstriders, and the remote and uneventful posts were reserved for the new, uninitiated and troublesome Farstriders. The station that Daellin had found himself in was about as far away from anything exciting as he could have gotten and still been in the forest. Nonetheless, he was excited to be fulfilling such an important role to help his people once again regain the beautiful and mighty Mierani Forest.

When he got to the station, though, he was disheartened. The ragtag group of Elves stationed there were about as interested in watching anything as they were being sung to by a Goblin. The soldiers and rangers there were more interested in playing cards, gambling and drinking liquor traded from the Human horse clans of the nearby Velashu Uplands. His welcome was equally as pleasant as he reported for duty. It seems that the Farstriders were not as well respected in these parts as in other parts. He was quickly given the job of policing the south west quadrant during the early morning hours of the day until noon. His camp duties consisted of water carrying and disposal of the piss pots of the others. Not happy with his orders, but ever loyal to the Farstriders, he did his daily duties diligently.

His recent situation of being assigned to this post was nothing compared to what had just happened though. As he had been returning from his morning patrol duties, Daellin detected a thicker, more foul smelling smoke as he approached camp. Assuming the others were just burning some trash or something, Daellin continued on without hesitation, but when he arrived

at camp, he saw the source of the foul smoke. The bodies of his companions were being tossed on a burning pile by enormous, orange-furred Bugbears. The vile creatures were dragging the limp forms of the Elven soldiers toward the center of camp. Each of them bore the marks of intense violence and the heavy flails and morningstars that the Bugbear's were known to favor. From his vantage point, it was hard to tell the exact number of Elves being tossed onto the pile, nor was it possible to discern their individual identities, as most of their faces has been badly damaged.

He scanned the area and saw at least 15 Bugbears in the immediate area. Then far across the camp, he saw what appeared to be a shorter figure, 5 or 6 feet tall, wearing heavy robes, its face blocked by a long hood. This figure was speaking to a small group of Bugbears. He then saw several other hooded figures moving near the other one. He counted at least 4 of these Elf or Human sized forms in all.

Daellin began to panic. What was he to do. There is no way he could engage this band of marauders. It was a good 2 day hike to the next outpost and he had not yet learned the magics that would allow him to Dream-Send yet.

Forcing his turbulent emotions down deep into the subconscious nether regions from which they spring; Daellin slowly fades back into the woods. Against overwhelming odds he knows he has no chance. Turning tail and running back for help with the bodies of his companions still feeding the enemy's fire is even less palpable however. Concentrating on remaining silent he stealthily creeps back into the woods until safely enshrouded within mother nature's hiding embrace. Keeping the marauders just within eyesight he watches and waits for his opportunity. He knows he must follow them back to the hideout and reconnoiter it.

The Bugbears and their hooded masters do not retreat back to the mountains or toward the shore, though. After another hour, they gather up their gear and head south, deeper into the forest, directly toward Celwynvian. Directly where he was tasked to keep them out of!

It was a good 2-3 day trek, he believed, to the abandoned Elvish metropolis, though he assumed that the long legged Bugbears could probably make good time. They could easily be faster on their feet than him. He changed position to keep them in view and try to guess as to their motives, but then he remembered the single instruction he had been given when he first agreed to duty at the Mierani Forest watch stations: "Keep ALL intruders out of the forest, and keep them away from Celwynvian at all costs!"

Pulling out his bow Daellin checks for tension on the string, not sure just how soon he might have to put it to use. Stepping into the clearing he quickly scans the area for any gear he can salvage. Knowing that he's going to have to travel fast and may end up being a gruelling ordeal, he's looking for any lightweight supplies. While scrounging he keeps an eye out for any stragglers that may have been left behind. Daellin's only hope is that perhaps he can pick off a few of the bugbears on the journey to Celwynvian. Perhaps even enrage them enough that he

can lead them into an Elven patrol.



As he gathers up what little supplies he can find, he manages to run into the one Bugbear that was left behind. The large creature moves as softly as the wind and nearly got the drop on Daellin. The smell of blood on his clothes tipped Daellin off at just the last second as the orange raiders heavy flail head crashed through the space that the Elf's head had just been. The weapon smashed right through the flimsy wall of the storage shed that Daellin was looking in. Quickly, Daellin rolled away from his attacker. He brought his bow up and let an arrow fly. It stuck shallowly in the bugbears heavy leather armor. "Yer going to have to do better than that, Elfie!" it growled at him in strangely accented Elvish as he yanked his flail out of the wall.

The Bugbear sprung at Daellin with a lightness and speed that belied its more than 8 foot frame. The creature must weigh over 300 pounds easily, yet it moved like firepelt pouncing on its prey. Daellin quickly back peddled, realizing that he may be overmatched by just this one foe. "Where ya going, Elfie?" the Bugbear taunted. Daellin let another arrow fly, this one finding its mark in the approaching Bugbears neck. A spurt of dark blood sprayed the front of his armor, but he merely looked down, grabbed the shaft of the arrow and yanked it out, breaking it in half as he did so. "Like I said, yer gonna have to do better than that!" He swung the flail and raised it over his head as he advanced, this time a little more slowly, toward Daellin.

Quickly pulling another arrow from his quiver, Daellin readies it across his bow. "I think scoring first blood is a fine place to start. Care to see where we'll finish?" Daellin fires again at the approaching bugbear, this time aiming for its weapon arm.

Daellin's shot is true and pierces the Bugbears forearm. It lets out a loud growl as the flail drops to the ground. The Bugbear lurches forward and reaches out with black, meaty hands, wrapping them around Daellin's left arm and his bow. The Bugbear smiles as he yanks the bow away and raises his right hand, now curled into a fist. Daellin tries to pull away, but realizes that he will never break free of the powerful creatures grasp. He fumbles around on his belt for his knife as the huge black fist smashes into his face. Daellin has to shake the stars out of his head from that blow. As his eyes clear, he sees the fist coming in for another blow. He yanks his head out to the side and the punch narrowly misses, glancing off his shoulder instead. The blood from the Bugbears wounds are now covering Daellin from head to toe. His fingers find his hunting knife at his belt and he pulls it out of its leather sheath. As the Bugbear winds up to smash him again,

a wide, toothy smile on his face, Daellin jams the blade up into the creatures midsection, underneath the leather armor. He pushes hard and turns the blade as the fist once again hits him. He reels back from the blow, the Bugbear having let go of him as he sinks to his knees and then to the ground. Daellin stands, shaking a bit and wipes the blood from his knife. He looks down, the Bugbear still wears the same, wide smile.

Was that good enough for you then? Perhaps you shouldn't have underestimated this "Elfie", but I'm glad you did. Sheathing his knife Daellin searches the dead bugbear. "There has to be a clue here somewhere. Something that will indicate why they are here and what they are after." Daellin thinks to himself. "Surely the slaughter of this outpost wasn't some random coincidence.

The only thing that Daellin finds of any significance, besides the Bugbears gear, is a small leather pouch with 25 gold coins in it. The coins are like none he has seen before, though the markings on them bear script similar to Elvish, he cannot read it. He shoves the pouch and coins into his belt pouch. He cleans himself off, pokes around his eye and cheekbone. Both are quite sore to the touch and feel considerably swollen. He quickly finishes gathering his gear and prepares to head out. He realizes that at some point, the main force of raiders will undoubtedly realize their rear guard has not checked in and either send someone to look for him, or bring the whole squad back. Daellin momentarily weighs his choices. He can follow after the band and risk getting caught and killed, or he can head to the east, along the edge of the forest to try to reach the next watch post over and warn them of what has happened.

Reluctantly Daellin realizes that he must go after assistance. To die trying to stop this group would only allow them to succeed in penetrating the forest. Even if he must wait to avenge his fallen comrades he has to make sure that these marauders do not achieve their objective - whatever it may be. Knowing that he is doing the right thing Daellin heads off to find help. He vows though that these scum will pay for their vile deeds even if he has to track them through the entire Mierani Forest.

Daellin runs for the entire rest of the day until his lungs are burning and his feet are ready to fall off. He feels that he has made good time, but he is still many hours from the next outpost. The branches and leaves whip at his face and skin as he runs. His chest heaves and burns even though the cool autumn air feels good against his sweating skin. The smell of the Bugbears blood becomes nauseating every time he stops, so he does not allow himself many breaks. As the sun sets, he is forced to slow down. Though his keen Elvish eyes allow him to see in very low light, on this night, there is no moon, and heavy cloud cover has blocked out the stars. He presses on anyway, even though he is as blind as a Human on this dark night. He does not risk lighting a torch for that might alert possible pursuers to his presence, and dying in the dark from an attack from behind is not his idea of duty.

He presses on in the dark, moving slower, but continuing to move. By morning, he is nearly dead with fatigue. He has run for nearly 24 hours now thinks he must be getting close. Suddenly

he is surrounded by Elven archers who are shouting out to him to get on the ground and to identify himself. He happily falls to the ground and calls out his name. Realizing that he is actually one of their own, the Elves spring into action, helping him up, getting him some food and water. Within a moment, he is feeling a million times better and after a quick magical healing by one of the rangers, Daellin feels as almost as good as new. He tells them what has happened at his outpost and they quickly take him to their station commander. When he hears the report, he quickly mobilizes his small outpost runners. He then retires to his chambers and sends a magical message to some of the other outposts to warn them of the intrusion.

The commander, an aged Elf by the name of Janalor Irithyl, commends Daellin on his courage and duty, thanking him and beseeching him to rest and relax.

"Sir, you don't understand. I don't have time to rest and relax. My comrades are dead. All of them. " Daellin begins in a rush. "If I had only been more diligent in my duties ... maybe things could have been different ... I could have warned them in time. Now it's too late. They were slaughtered. But I am still alive. I should have fought along side them ... died with them. I can't rest, not until I have avenged them. Do you understand?"

The commander looks at him with wise, old eyes, "Yes, of course I understand. Do you? There is no way that you could have saved your comrades, but because of your diligence to your duty, you may well save others. That you have brought this information to us, we may act on it. When you are ready to fight, you will find it, have no fears. I do not intend to let you rest on your laurels until the deed is done, but I need you fresh and at your best! Let us feed you and mend your wounds, then you can join a patrol heading out to track the invaders." Some food is brought to Daellin and a healer enters and tends to the remainder of his wounds.

After some time, he is given permission to join a detachment of 10 mercenary rangers heading out in the direction that Daellin believed that the Bugbears were headed.

Before joining the ranger company Daellin pays a final visit to Janalor. "I wanted to thank you personally sir. You have given me an opportunity to regain my honor. Nothing I can do will bring the fallen back, but I can make sure that those foul marauders will never harm another living soul ... or die trying. I understand what you said about not being able to help my brethren, but I respectfully disagree. It was my duty to protect them. At the very least I should have been at their side sharing their fate. Reassigning me to this company will allow me to keep the vow I made to them. For that I am indebted to you. I hope to one day have the honor to repay it." Reaching out an arm to the commander he shakes his hand firmly. With a grim smile he salutes and takes his leave.

Daellin and the ranger company move through the woods at a great pace. After 2 days of travel, they finally catch up to the remains of the first unit sent after them. The Bugbears, bolstered by their hooded masters, nearly destroyed this band of stalwart warriors as well, though they report that they took out a good number of the Bugbears in the most recent skirmish. With the

reinforcements, the Elves feel confident that they will be able to overtake the invaders before they reach Celwynvian.

Daellin spends what little free time he has talking to the survivors. He's still considered inexperienced by his peers and is trying to change that. The upcoming battle scares him but he is determined to avenge his fallen comrades. He's already checked his bow strings three times today. He's sharpened his knife already so much that shaving with it might be dangerous. No matter what happens, Daellin hopes that he acquitted himself well and does honor to the Farstriders.

The stories that the survivors tell are horrifying. The Bugbears are strong, silent and absolutely bloodthirsty. Springing from shadows to slay Elf upon Elf. At times, they explain, the Bugbears were supported by shadow demons that seemed to appear out of nowhere. The survivors also say they noticed a few of the hooded beings as well, but they remained elusive and out of sight most of the time. Several survivors say that the hooded ones were supporting the Bugbears with dark magic and summoning demons and other evil allies.

None of this information makes Daellin feel any better, and why was this group of strange interlopers heading south, toward the great, abandoned city Celwynvian, and deeper and deeper into Elf lands. All of the Elf commanders had the same information too, and none of them seemed to be able to decipher it either.

For three more days, Daellin and his group track the group through the forest and finally catch up with them at what looks like an ancient ruined village. On the outskirts of the settlement, Daellin sees some crumbling stone walls and foundations that what must once have been some residences or outbuildings for this small Elven village. The commanders set up in one of the less ruined structures with thick tree canopy cover as a roof. Their quarry seems to have stopped in one of the larger structures about 200 yards further on in the forest. Some heavy foliage, a hill and ravine and small, rocky stream separate the Elves from their target. No sentries can be seen and no movement is detected either, though the scouts have assured command that none have left the location. Daellin is approached and asked if he wants to join the group moving in to get a little more reconnaissance intel on the Bugbear marauders.

Eager to have an opportunity to avenge his fallen comrades, Daellin agrees. He checks his gear one last time. Armor, bow, sword and knife all are ready as ready for battle as a he could hope. His traveling gear safely stowed away.

He checks in with the commander leading the mission. Daellin hopes his inexperience isn't too obvious. He hopes to impress his new friends. In the end though he will settle for just not making a fool of himself.

Daellin goes and finds the others that are set for the scouting mission and listens to the plan. There are five scouts go in, one coming in from each direction while the commander will fly

invisibly up above, at a high enough distance to keep an eye on everything and hopefully not be detected if they have magical safeguards up. He says that a mage has made a pass over the perimeter of the village and has spotted no magical traps or warnings, though, of course, he encourages everyone to practice due diligence as always. Daellin is set to approach from the north. He will have to cross the hill with the gullies, though that may provide him some possible cover as he moves close. The stream may also be usable to approach the building.



Daellin accepts his orders with a grim nod. He heads out upon the appointed path making sure to take his time and taking advantage of all natural cover. He will head toward the center of the hill at the base of the large tree.

Using all of his training, Daellin maneuvers himself into position. He sees one of the other Elves off to his right approaching through the ravine. Daellin moves up and over the small hill, using the trees and gullies as cover. At the base of the hill he moves into the thick copse of trees and manages to make it to a small ruined building just a handful of yards from their target. He catches a glimpse of the other elf again, off to his right, taking up a position in another ruined

structure. Daellin looks and watches, but sees no movement or sign of activity coming from the target building at all.

Daellin takes some time to watch the area ahead of him. He has a hard time believing that there are no guards. He listens to the sounds of the forest for any clues. The sound of his heart pounding in his chest and the blood pounding in his ears makes it difficult to focus. With extreme care Daellin slowly draws his sword from its sheath. He's not looking for trouble but knows that it pays to be prepared. He takes a few deep breaths to calm himself. Realizing that he won't have the opportunity to avenge his friends unless he acts now, he approaches the ruined building crouched and endeavoring to move silently.

The only sounds Daellin hears are the sounds of the forest around him. After what seems like forever, he makes it to the edge of the crumbling stone building. He slinks to the edge of an open window and risks a peek in. The inside of the building is empty. The Bugbears and their mysterious hooded companions are no longer here.

Perplexed at the lack of occupancy in the ruins he moves from the open window. With a mental shrug he moves on to the round building to the southeast.

After just a few minutes, Daellin realizes that none of their quarry is present in these ruins. The other scouts confirm this. The intel they had confirmed that the Bugbears had arrived here but had not left. A quick, rudimentary search of the area shows no secret passages or hiding places. Somehow, the large group had vanished. Word is sent back to the main force to send up some mages to conclude what type of magic may have been used.

Unwilling to give up the chase so easily Daellin spends his time searching the area. He's not sure how the enemy managed to slip through their trap and he's not even sure that they aren't still hidden somehow in the encampment. He starts with the central buildings and works a slow circular route gradually fanning outward. He's hopeful that he will turn up some tracks or other clue. He has nothing but free time at the moment while waiting on the rest of his comrades to arrive.

The other scouts appear and report the same thing a Daellin found... nothing. There are traces of the group entering this set of ruins, but none leading out.

Unable to explain the disappearance of their quarry, Commander Janalor Irithyl decides to press on for a while in the same direction the Bugbears were originally heading. Daellin is frustrated at having somehow lost them and is eager to be doing something again.

The Elves travel south and east for two more days, hoping to pick up the trail of the elusive Bugbears. Irithyl has the rangers on a rotating spiral scout pattern, making wide circles to the left and right as the main group heads straight ahead. It makes for slower going, but covers a lot more ground.

Late in the afternoon of the second day, Daellin is out on the eastern flank, in second pass position, moving in a wide arc then turning back in toward the rest of the group. Just as he thinks he is at the widest point in the search pattern he adjusts his course and begins to head back to the west. But then he stops, noticing something, or rather, the lack of something. He is intensely aware of the lack of sound and motion in the rocky forest around him. He stops and focuses his perception on this lack of stimuli and notices a narrow path, not even wide enough to be a footpath, leading toward a nearby rock formation.



Curiosity getting the best of him, he follows the path carefully and quietly. He does not detect any recent passage along this trail, not even any animal tracks or sign. After a minute, he has rounded a weathered gray rock outcropping and finds himself in a little hollow amid the rocks. Standing before him, in a small grassy clearing is a circular stone archway. An Aiudara. Daellin smiles as he inadvertently finds himself approaching the magical portal before him.

Somewhere far back in Daellin's mind is a pesky little voice saying "Stick to the task at hand, remember your duty to the Farstriders!" But it is a small weak voice easily drowned out by the much larger and louder voices screaming "What is THAAAAT? Can that be an Aiudara? How long has it been here? Does it work yet? This is AWESOME!!!!!!" Goaded on by those voices he approaches the magical portal. He strains to detect any aura of magic emanating from the stones. His brain struggles to dredge up every scrap of detail he's ever heard about these lost gates.

At first he is unable to detect the gates magic, then suddenly it seems to flash to life, showering him in a soft, golden light. There is no question in his mind now. This Aiudara is active. 'Where does it go?' is the only thing on his mind. His duty to the Farstriders almost demands he find out did he can make a full report back to his commanding officer, Janalor Irithyl.

Daellin takes note of his location. He checks the location of the sun and his orientation to it. He realizes that his sense of direction may be tested to its limits. He also checks the area around the gate for any signs of tracks. It's a long shot for sure but this could be used by the bugbears or other evil creatures to move about the forest. Gripping his bow tightly he makes sure his sword is loose in its scabbard and steps into the gate.

[to be continued....](#)

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