

Trial of Truth

Khallil Duir Griffen

Part I – Introduction

My full name is Khallil Duir al Nawfal iben Griffen, or with titles, Brother Khallil Duir al Nawfal iben Griffen Sentinel of the Tree. Commonly I am known as Khallil Duir Griffen. I currently reside in the Forest of Forsythia by the grace of my good friend Lady Kyara Braethen. Many of you may not know that I have studied with Brother Bartholomew of the Tree to become a Druid in the Fellowship of the Tree. It has required a great deal of training both physically and mentally. Following the November gather I left on a quest, with the blessings of all the holy men present. This quest is known to the order as the quest of the initiate. It is made up of a series of trials. As of Yule I had completed most of the trials and I took a short diversion to be with family. I then set off to prepare for the last of the trials. It is my experiences during this last trial, the Trial of Truth, I have been given permission to share with you.

Part II - The Story Begins

I will begin with the Yule gather. I had met up with E'ile at her Aunt Igraine's as had been planned. I was terribly exhausted and Igraine was a most gracious hostess. I bathed, rested, and prepared to journey to the Yule Gather with E'ile. We ate a good meal and then headed out. At Yule I talked with Brother Bartholomew about my previous trials and he counseled me on the next, and last, one. The morning after Yule I returned to Igraine's with E'ile. I then dressed in my white robes and headed out to the prescribed place to meet the Druids who would escort me to the Cave of Truth. All went as planned – I met them, was blindfolded, and we solemnly walked on. We camped two nights on this leg of my journey. I then recall a flash of bright light that pierced the blindfold, and then once again I was in total darkness.

A voice commanded me that if I was ready, I should sit upon the ground and reach my hand forward until I grasped the stone in front of me. I was on my knees holding the smoothest rock I had ever felt. It was almost soft, as if my hands could penetrate into it. All of a sudden a feeling went through my body, a sort of tingle, and then the images began. At first I did not understand, but then it came into focus. With all of my senses I was reliving my life since my earliest childhood. Every last detail was surging through me so fast – those I had consciously remembered and those I had not. My mother, father, and grandfather were around me. It moved on to my youth among a group of Druids. I saw wars fought with so much senseless killing. I saw the time I left to find my own way. I relived my time in the desert in every painful detail. I was trying with every fiber of my being not to fight it and just take it all in. I saw myself come to the place I met the Druids and then it all went dark.

Part III - Telling My Ordeal

I awoke on a bed in a well-furnished room. I was told that I was deep in the Cave of Truth recovering. A young man came to me and said he was the scribe. He stated that he was sent to help me by writing down as

much as I could remember. This journal would be kept in the archives. I would also be given a copy. I was told that I was the oldest being to ever go through the Ordeal of Truth and that everybody was concerned for me. I had been warned that even young men sometimes go mad. My body was in pain and I was completely exhausted. My mind was whirling with images. This young Druid sat at a small desk and said, "Just talk and I will take care of the rest."

So I began. He recorded my vision in first person present, as I spoke it to him, and that is how I present it to you.

A great war is waging in my homeland and total defeat by a dark force is imminent. I hear my father and mother talking about the last days of their barony. I see images of my father and my mother, a Wood Elf and Desert Elf respectively. My mother wears the robes and circlet of a sorceress. My father and a male Desert Elf, my grandfather, talk of a powerful magic sword. I then see the sword they refer to as Aldathule - it is the very same sword that sits at the side of my bed as I speak this story. My grandfather tells that, Aldathule, or tree spirit, was a gift from my mother's people, given to my father by my grandfather on his wedding to my mother. My grandfather goes on to tell that it is embodied with Faye magic of the old world. It is unbreakable in battle against evil and it is ever sharp. I hear many stories as I am nestled in my grandfather's arms.

A great banquet is thrown in grand Elven style. My father's people know they will fight to the last man in the coming days but on that night it is time to celebrate and reflect on past glory. It is a holiday of sorts but I do not learn the occasion. I hear my father call my mother Warda and she calls my father Iames (Zhay-mes). I hear others refer to my father as His Lordship Sir Iames Griffen. They refer to my mother as Lady Warda ibat Ziyadul Amin Faris al Griffen. From this I learn that my family name is Griffen. I see my family crest hanging behind my parents. It is a white griffin, on a black background. During the night my father walks outside holding me in his arms to talk with my grandfather. I notice my father giving my grandfather his cloak. It is a large black cloak with a fur cape, and a large griffin clasp. As I stare at my grandfather in my mind's eye, I realize that he is in fact my sword teacher in later life. This is a startling realization to me.

I paused to think on this. At the suggestion of my scribe, we took a short break and food and drink were brought to us. Then I continued my story.

I hear my grandfather's name Ziyad, spoken. I can hear from my mother that things are looking very bad. She tells my grandfather that she has created a portal to another world. She tells him of a group of Druids she knows that will take care of me. She convinces my grandfather that her plan is for the best and that he can do more this way than fighting a war she knows is lost. She gives him a note written in the common language to leave with me. She also gives him instructions to leave me in a special place with the note. Then he is to go into the desert and wait. She tells him that when I am ready I will find him. My grandfather travels with me through the portal. He follows my mother's instructions exactly. He kisses my forehead and leaves me.

I grow up with this group of Druids in a remote forest. I feel that I am different from everybody around me, although they make me welcome. One of the elder Druids tells me that I was left to them with a note bearing my name and asking them to look after me until I was ready to leave. He says that when I leave I will set out across the vast desert to discover my path. Some of the Druids believe I am of the fairy realm and have somehow been trapped amongst them. I overhear gossip of this from time to time. Very few among the Druids know of my mother or the note - to them I am an enigma. They are unfamiliar with Elves and my mother never revealed her true self to them. I learn culinary arts along with the other children. A local ranger

teaches me the ways of the forest. I learn quickly and seem naturally inclined to track animals and know plants. My teachers are often amazed at the rate I learn. I also learn to heal the sick and how different plants are used for healing. A time of war comes to the villages near where the Druids live. The Druids and I care for the wounded.

I gasped for air and took a deep drink from a mug of warm tea that was provided to me. The next memories seemed physically painful. I was cold to the bone but continued my narration.

A band of enemy slavers break into the infirmary and kill many helpless wounded. I pick up a sword and in a rage kill all of the enemy soldiers. When I recover from the rage, I realize I do not belong among these people and that I must go and find my way. An elder Druid, who had been a boy at the time I arrived and knew of the note, points me out toward a great desert to begin my journey. The Druid is some one hundred ten winters old and I look like a young lad although I am only a dozen or so winters his younger.

After many months in the desert I discover an older man who looks very much like me and, like myself, has pointy ears.

I now know he was my grandfather. Tears ran down my face. If only I had known then, the questions I would have asked. I wanted to stop, but the young Druid insisted I keep telling my story. Through my tears I carried on. I began to speak again, my mind on fire with images and thoughts.

He is badly wounded and I care for him. When he recovers he explains that he is an Elf. He tells me that I too am an Elf from a distant world. He tells me his name is Ziyad Ulatin Faris and I should call him Ziyad. He is elusive when he speaks of his past. He does tell me that I was sent to this realm through a long ago sealed magic portal when a war in our homeland went very wrong. He also tells me that he was sent and it was prearranged that we would find each other. He teaches me Elven medicine and sword skills. He also instructs me in philosophy and how to read ancient Elven languages. These things the Druids could never have taught me.

We practice for around 300 years or so. He tells me many stories of our homeland but never with many details. All my attempts to gain more knowledge of our homeland are met with long stories that never answer my questions specifically.

Did my mother know I would become a Druid? Did she know of the stone of truth? Was this path set before me so I would gain this knowledge? These questions were there for me to ponder. I realized I may never have answers to them. My thoughts cleared. My resolve to become a Druid hardened. I was sure I would recover my strength and make it through the ordeal. I continued the story.

When I wake one morning I find my teacher gone, and the sword Aldathule left for me, with a pile of other items. Among the items is the black cloak my father gave my grandfather, the cloak my father gave my grandfather that cold night shortly before I left.

Remembering this day and all its emotions again brought me to tears. With what I knew before the stone it was a painful memory. With what I know now it is ever more so.

I am again totally alone. I set out wandering the desert, intent on discovering a way back to my homeland.

How foolish I was, I should have realized that if there was a way back, Ziyad, my grandfather, would have brought me home. Then again, how could I have?

I soon encounter a tribe of wandering mercenaries. It was a tense meeting, best left for another story. I travel with them for a few years and obtain some wealth. Never before in my life had coin and gold mattered. I learn that you can buy things with this coin. They show me that I can trade coin for things I want. Before this, nature had provided for me, and I fashioned, found, or was gifted, the things I needed. I learn more about this world I am now a reluctant part of. It is a ruthless world, full of war, slavery and civil unrest. I become bitter and jaded. I know this cannot be right, but for the moment I am alive... at least in body. Through one of the women of this wandering tribe, I meet Kyara, a dancer. From the first time I meet her I feel a bond of friendship. I learn she is an Elf and is good at hiding it when she needs to. She takes me in and shows me another world, a world of Fey. In this world I am not alone.

I started feeling better and stronger. It was easier for me to talk. The good part of my life had started. I would meet E'ile and fall in love. I would start my lessons with Bart and learn the ways of the Tree. Most of all I would find a new family and a new life. I dismissed the scribe and started to make preparations to leave.

Part IV - The Journey Back

I had passed the ordeal. Even though I was exhausted and it would be a long journey, I hurried to make myself ready to depart. It would be Gather time soon and I would find my family at the Moonlit Mug, especially my beloved E'ile. There was also much to tell Bart and then the ceremony. I was informed that the council had agreed that Bart was to initiate me and make me a full member of the Fellowship of the Tree. The council told me a communication would be dispatched to him letting him know I was on my way and that I had passed all the ordeals. One journey ends and another begins.

Part V – Epilogue

I made it to the Moonlit Mug, as those of you who were there know. Exhausted, I was welcome by a very worried E'ile and an expectant Brother Bartholomew. With the energies of the clan around me I quickly began to revitalize. Bart and I traveled the route of Druids, through the roots of trees, back to the Grove of the Tree to prepare for the ceremony. We returned to the Moonlit Mug for the ceremony. Brother Bartholomew, with the help of Starshadow, Galatyne, Rahne, and Stalzer, raised me as a full Druid in the Fellowship of the Tree.