

The story of Grimwald

Chapter 8: Half of a double problem

Ah finally we are back to a more crafted place. Poor as it may be in its planning and construction it is a lot better than the wild chaos the Elf fondly calls nature. Lazy buggers those elves. At least the humans are more constructive and try to make something out of it. What glory would the rock have if its treasures were not sought and crafted by us Dwarves into things of great practical use and beauty. Well what the Elves do make is well done, but there is so much more to do and they just leave it lying there. Maybe they feel as I did when we were in the caves, overwhelmed by the amount of work needed.

Finally I will have the chance to properly equip our group. Where to start? There is so much to do. Hmm, since I have to fight in the front lines with a shield now I cannot use my grandfather's two-handed axe so I will start crafting a lighter one. When that is done I can start to work on a decent warhammer, a dwarven warpike and a light crossbow. Then I'll see what weapons the rest needs before I start on the armors and shields.

What the hell have they gotten themselves into now? I make a short trip to the pole turner to get the haft and they are all bleeding and cut up, their armors damaged. Well if this doesn't teach them the value of good armor nothing will! Cuura at least has decided it's time to better guard her body. My prayers reveal protective magic woven into the leather and metal she now wears. If only I could grasp the power of the runes I could weave such enchantments. At times I feel the magic lingering, but it just won't stay in the runes I craft. My skill must still be unworthy of The Keeper's blessing, I must redouble my efforts.

Cuura will certainly become a great leader one day. Even though I was laboring in a supportive roll she still grants me a fair share of the spoils of war. One day I will be able to proudly say: "This silver axe here was granted to me by the great Cuura herself" I worry though about the practicality of both this silver axe and my grandfather's axe. In the militia we were taught that fresh troops are crucial and that therefore marching lightly is essential. Glorious gifts did not save the lives of those Cuura slew nor will they save ours.

Cuura has asked me to set some stones. Since Dumathoin's has favored her many times I shall craft her an appropriate gift hiding the stones in the necklace. Cuura does not seem pleased. I hate to admit it, but she may be right. Her fiery nature conflicts with the slow, solid, withdrawn crafting I did. I have heard of a great jeweler crafting fine pieces here and lead her to him. He does honor to his -- ah what is the human word for clan ah -- guild indeed. I feel inspired to apply his techniques to my runecraft. Less overt, but deep in meaning. Perhaps this is the key I have been searching for, the Keeper be praised for guiding me.

Before I can substantiate my theories we are asked to see Weldin the head of the guards for this region. He tells us of another Ettin roaming the lands south of the river. I feel torn between the need for proper preparation to deal with such a monster and the necessity to aid our allies, but Cuura quickly makes the decision: "The small folk shall not stand alone." While the others gather their gear I have to rush the finishing touches to my new waraxe. What a hectic life around here. How can one get one's work done properly in these parts?

The tales of the halflings speak of the ferocity of the monster, but also of behavior unknown of trolls. It often visits a shrine to the Morning Lord where apparently it wails at night. We find some carvings which are probably made by it. I have never known trolls to write. Even my grandfather told me no such stories. We lie in wait to observe and plan before rushing into danger. I am glad that Felina is backing up my wisdom and prudence in this matter, but the beast does not show.

While Cuura rides to town to inquire which halfling may visit the shrine and know more about the beast we hear alarm bells and rush to their call. The Ettin attacked a farm and ran off with a cow having severely wounded two halflings. Cuura managed to organize a platoon of halflings and rushes to the chase with Kendalan as her scout ordering me to bring the troops. I call a double pace march, but within a few steps I notice the halflings concerned for their kinsfolk are thrumming around the well and have set themselves to building stretchers for the wounded. I see some movement out of the corner of my eye and see a dripping wet halfling clasping a dislocated shoulder and bleeding profusely from a head wound. I immediately tend to his wounds while the other halfling is lifted from the well as is a dripping wet Reed. The halflings start to wander off with the wounded and I realize I have failed my commander. I am no warrior or even priest of Clangeddin who inspires courage and confidence. I can read the fear struck into these halflings by the wounds inflicted upon their kin. When the Ettin comes they will scatter as goblins for a battlerager. I speak some words, but lack the craft to forge steel into their hearts as Cuura did. They ignore me and return home.

We set off to find Cuura and Kendalan and the vile beast. I wonder if I should resign my sergeant's commission with the captain and request a transfer to the position of specialist again. Well it is not up to me to decide the proper discipline measures for failing her orders.

As we strive to find the trail we are aided by an unseen being of great strength and finally crest a slope to see a huge meadow with a ruined tower. At the base of the tower lie the prostrate forms of the Elf and Cuura. What possessed them to go so near to what is probably its lair without gathering their strength? No matter, whether they were lead astray by foolishness or evil magic they are my group now and I must rush to save them. Boulders rain down on me as I speed across the meadow carried by Felina's arcane craft. As I reach them I find that they were merely pretending to be grievously hurt, probably to lure the beast close in false confidence and our arrival has foiled their ruse. I should have known they could not really have been so stupid as to go after an Ettin with just the two of them. What exactly they planned on doing when it came to devour them still escaped me at the moment.

The Ettin is quickly surrounded and since it seems to be half asleep we decide only to fight its active side for fear of awakening the ire of its passive side. My new blade strikes true, but I notice that while my grandfather's axe felt a natural extension of my own arm the one I crafted requires more concentration and effort to wield with skill as I dodge and weave to misdirect the Ettin's blows. Even in the heat of battle the cadence of steps learned in the clan hold playing "Beware of the Troll" moves me - so long ago but never forgotten - and many a blow is dodged as games of youth take a serious turn. Seeing even its great strength is no match for our concerted efforts it collapses the entrance and withdraws into the tower. Remembering the lessons of my grandfather I know there are only two choices left to us: pursue and slay before it can regrow its wounds or withdraw and prepare. It locked itself into the tower so I rush in to finish the vile beast and call to my group to follow me. I find, however, that as with the halflings where I lead, none follow. How I have forgotten my place and earlier failure as warleader. I realize my proper place and duty and seek to reclaim it. I call out to the slowly awaking head to arise and pay heed to the Morning Lord's duties. I startle myself as my voice rings out strong and true full of conviction and fervor. It feels as an epiphany, duty flows through me as fire and passion does through Cuura and I am disoriented for a moment. Luckily the ground rushed up

to support me since I am quite dizzy. Maybe it was not the epiphany but the fist of the Ettin striking my head and I fall into Dumathoin's slumber in earth's embrace. To rest in the earth again as the ancestors and the craft and lore. There I see the runes. How they flow with the magic of the earth. And there is... Felina?!? ARG Ettin. Silent Keeper grant me strength. The Ettin seems to be fighting itself now. It worked! The other head has remembered it's duty! I pray to Dumathoin to guide it's course and it completes a spell and the Ettin disappears.

In the aftermath I feel a warm glow as if my hidden inner gem shines more strongly. I felt this the last time I awoke from Dumathoin's slumber as well. My grandfather never even hinted that it would be so, that by coming closer to the Silent Keeper's domain we return more strongly still. Why had I not even considered it? The most precious is always buried deepest so only the worthy can find it. But this is the way of our people. Always on the brink of extinction we create our finest craft and deepest lore. I am glad the Keeper has rewarded my dedication to the craft and journey close to his Sleep. Now finally I also see the wisdom of my grandfather in sending me into the world. How often would I be near death plying my trade as a mere smith? This journey also shows me the value of community. I could not travel like this without others bringing me back before I delve too deeply and bring about my doom.

This must be why Reed has changed so much recently. She also must have been touched by the deep lore granting her not only power, but also deeper understanding.