

# The story of Grimwald

## *Chapter 4: Books and Birds*

Well we won the day without any losses once more although I am a bit worried at the manner of the attack. These are not dim-witted orcs chasing us, there is a larger mind at work here. If it were not for Kendalan's watchful eyes their plan would have succeeded and we'd have been robbed hardly a day after we left. The conscious man starts babbling nonsense. I wonder if he has been poisoned just like Jay, but Snake starts babbling back about animals and such. I turn to see if Kendalan is getting this, but he has a blank look in his face and is staring as well. Then the Snake turns to us and starts explaining what the man is saying. Apparently they were speaking in some secret code only the two of them know. There is more to this Snake than meets the eye, but he has foolishly betrayed himself trying to save his comrade. It is obvious he must be in league with them, but Felina decides to bide her time. Indeed it is better to allow a known agent to operate rather than risk an unknown being sent. Can we trust Snake to speak the truth about anything? Was he the one who led them here and is now trying to free his accomplices? It is rather suspicious how he showed up just after the fight.

We are told they were hired to rob us and bring the book to their employer who apparently made the plan and provided the skeleton. Fascinating runes, I will study this vile magic some more to see how it works. From their description I think some illusion of disguise was used to hide his true identity, or could it even be a her? After their release they tell us where they were to deliver the book, gratitude or a trap? Felina clearly does not trust the shifty bastard and decides not to follow his directions. It is odd though that he spoke of being a guild member. Have the humans organized crime, but hardly managed to do that to the rest of their society? How strange. I find it rather offensive that their guild master has chosen to name himself after a noble smith's tool. Just bizarre.

Reed has been inspired again, but what to make of it all. It is clear that there is danger and hidden forces, but what is the talk about perfection? Dark bridge doesn't sound good either. Was that what I saw when I detected the magic flowing from the wagon to the skeleton?

Cuura is finally taking an interest in her equipment, but rather than asking me for a good sturdy steel helmet she brings me scraps of petrified bone to make a helmet out of! With all of us searching and some magic by Felina to see what is still missing we manage to piece together most of a half-petrified small stone giant's skull. I have to say that it is indeed large enough and Cuura should be able to see out of the eye sockets quite clearly, but it is much too brittle. I will have to build an inner helmet as a frame and then fortify the bone by drilling holes and threading copper wire through it and tension it up. It is a challenging project, but should provide our leader with a distinctive look so she will easily be recognized and feared upon the field of battle. If we could find some fangs to put in the skull that would make it look even more fearsome. I look forward to this project but first I must finish making the tools.

According to Kendalan we are being followed by birds, even though everyone can see there is nothing but clear blue skies out there. Ach these vagaries about plants and animals and what they mean. There is stuff like that around everywhere. How can anyone make sense of it? I see birds too, but apparently that is not important, just the invisible Kendalan birds are. Pfah. Cuura decides we should try to elude them by traveling at night so they will lose sight of our location. We do so and hide our wagon in a steep gully. Although the plan was good a bird flew around and according to Kendalan this bird is one of the strange ones and therefore we have been spotted. Even though it is a big bird I hardly think it

would dare attack us by itself. Everyone seems to be of the opinion that these birds are merely agents of some other power. A bit like ogre's bullying orcs and orcs bullying goblins I guess. So who is at the top of this chain of command and how to find out?

We quickly find out that getting into a gully is a whole lot easier than getting out of it with a large wagon. We spend the entire afternoon trying various schemes until finally Snake and Cuura understand that instead of just trying to rush things along a perfect and organized preparation is what is needed. I wonder why I did not insist on it in the first place as I usually do? Anyway we unload the cart, get everybody to help, organize the horses and I pave a path up the slope for the wagon and it works like a charm.

Snake seems to be a healer of sorts for sore muscles. I guess with the amount of group members who are weak as water his services will be needed a lot. I don't think all this pampering will make them any tougher though so why bother with it? A little discomfort hardens you!

It is hard to find the time to work on my smithing tools with all this gallivanting through the day and night, but the unseen crafters of the Silent Keeper aid me and I have nearly finished making the tongs. According to the others we have lost the birds while I was doing an afternoon nap so perhaps now we can get back to a more regulated schedule.

I am awoken when the wagon swerves wildly and shudders to a halt when Cuura and the Elf are attacked by a large batlike creature. I see Cuura lashing out with her hammer without any effect and the Elf's arrows don't manage to pierce it's skin. The beast lashes out with it's tail spike as it glides silently from out of the darkness. Snake seems to have some rapport with the beast since he can easily follow it's movements as the black against black shape circles our wagon with barely a whisper. Sometimes I catch sight of it as it passes one of the lights Reed made appear and it's crazed eyes and fangs seem chillingly unnatural in that short flash of light. It might be a creature of the lower planes which is invulnerable to normal weapons so I grab the silver axe Cuura gave to me. Meanwhile Snake is hissing and barking at the shape and it is doing the same while Reed uses her gifts to batter the creature with spells. As I rush out to confront the menace it disappears into the night. Cuura and the Elf have been stung by the poisoned stinger which carries some swift paralyzing agent. They are otherwise unhurt, but just a bit shaken by the bat creature's near invisibility in the night sky and it's invulnerability.

While everyone is recovering from the attack and awaiting more danger Jay leaps out of the wagon ready for battle. I am proud of his disciplined manner and wise preparation, but the others seem to be angry. I guess they have not served as guards long enough to know that it is a guard's duty to hold the enemy at bay so the rest of the troops to prepare for battle. They probably prefer everybody rushing at a horde of orcs in their underwear! By the Elf's withering comments Jay is forced to sleep in his armor for now. I try to get a word in edgewise to defend Jay but it seems nobody notices me not even Jay.

I do not know if silver will help, but I suggest we use the day to make some bolts and arrow heads in case it returns since if it does it will not come alone. Unfortunately I have no cold wrought iron and I have yet to master the runes which bestow magic powers on weapons and armors. I wonder if we will ever be well enough prepared for the dangers we face with all this dashing about Cuura insists on! Next dusk I shall pray to the Hidden Mountain Gem for the blessing which will make a weapon magical in case silver is ineffective and pray for the swift restoration of our leader's mobility. Oh and for the recovery of the Elf too I guess.