

# The story of Grimwald

## *Chapter 13: Entering the twilight zone*

Our swift blows have ended the battle just in time to give thanks in prayer to the Keeper for his protection and safeguarding us. After our great victory over the beastmen the bodies are quickly stripped and the valuables secured by the rest while I gather wounded Cuura, Reed, Louis and Paul in a ceremony guiding them in seeking the power hidden in the earth and feeling the nurturing strength of the stone. After the completion of this task I sit down to ponder if we should chop up the bodies, which are rather larger than those of Orcs and if not how to manage enough wood for a pyre in these desolate plains.

When I open my eyes again we are in a new camp miles away from the battle. When I ask it turns out nobody thought of ensuring the eternal rest of the beastmen. When will they ever learn? Cuura and I have shown them time and time again what is to be done and now they come with excuses like darkness, fatigue, breaking the trail, avoiding reinforcements. All their arguments are valid enough in themselves, but not fulfilling duty is bad. I am sure this undue haste and carelessness of the party will come back to haunt us some day.

After the battle a wonderful dream was given to me by the Keeper. I was walking in the great hall of Dumathoin's slumber amongst countless rows and columns of venerable long bearded ancestors each chanting their roll of deeds as they marched towards Moradin's anvil to be remade and I marched with them. I lay upon the great anvil and was smitten by soul forger and awoke.

After waking it feels more like a memory than a dream and when all is still it is as if I can still hear the endless rise and fall of the great chant of the halls reverberating in my skull. I cannot hear it clearly, but as a deep vibration travels through the earth this chant resonates within my mind at all times.

Nothing of note happens during our travels, the Elf is claiming the birds are no longer chasing us. I make some bolts of the silver Snake donated. I have taken special care to purify it as much as possible and watch with interest as I put them in his hands. There is neither a sizzling, burning of his skin nor even a sign of discomfort on his face. He must have acquired some immunity to it himself. His skin does not seem to be as thick as that of the other demon so perhaps sharp steel will do the job on him anyway. The remaining silver I forge into a short combat knife for Cuura so she will be able to deal with the next fiend who comes along.

I am woken from a vivid dream in which I had passed through ancestral holds and struggled through collapsed ancient mines to discover a sacred cave. Just as I am admiring a diamond the size of my head my focus changes and I become instantly aware Jay and Cuura are out of control and Snake is coming at me with a hammer which is clearly too big for him to lift, let alone swing. I am not even startled, it is as if somehow I knew what was happening around me all along. I pray that the water springing from the earth may bring Jay to his senses, but the element is too weak to do the job although I could see it taking hold for a moment. Before I can do anything else Snake presses Cuura's hammer into my hands (how did the little rat steal it from her I wonder?) and Cuura falls upon me in a blind rage clawing for her hammer. Fortunately she does not seem to see me clearly and her swipes are as though she is drunk again. In her wild staggering though she avoids the protection of the Keeper which I try to shield her with. While distracted by my struggles with Cuura the little rat strikes at me from an unexpected

direction and thinks he can rob me just as he did with Cuura, but this dwarf is ready for his tricks! Cuura however seizes the opportunity and gangs up on me to wrests her hammer back. As she flourishes her regained weapon high over her head the Keeper shields her and the steel does not come down swiftly to crush my skull as I feared. Cuura is just standing there in a dazed state, unsure.

When I look around I see that Jay has stopped his rampage and Bruno is wiping some blood clotted hairs from his axe eyeing Jay warily. Snake has the vile gall to tell me that I should do as he tells me, so I tell him he is more pathetic and sneaky or is it snaky than a kobold and never will I obey a foul demon let alone a runty one. Just as Snake is getting me irritated enough that I want to see if he can still swear at me when I choke the life out of him our leader steps in and orders us to be silent. It is clear he lacks the dwarven discipline, but Felina manages to get him quiet.

When I look around trying to calm my anger I see Reed is beseeching Louis in tears that she wants to read the books, but he turns her down and she runs away in utter misery. Such a passion for knowledge, who would have guessed, somehow it does not seem like Reed though. I decide to press Louis for answers and am amazed to find out we are not transporting one book, but four and that Felina and Reed know about this but have hidden this knowledge. He tells me that three of the tomes hold holy incantations and rituals, but that to those who are not chosen to bear this knowledge, reading them can exact a toll since not all their power can be controlled and contained. The fourth book apparently has caused the insanity within our group.

How am I supposed to work without proper preparation? I go to Felina demanding an explanation and insisting on proper preparations for the trials ahead. Felina tells me that she has detected a magical taint on me. Clearly the dwarven mind is stronger and more disciplined than that of Cuura and Jay or I would have fallen to the insanity as well, but how long can I fight it off? Now I know what to look for I notice a strong taint on Snake as well, little surprise there and I think I can notice a minimal effect on Rebecca and Goj as well, but I cannot be sure.

What a dilemma, slowly dwindle away into insanity like Cuura and Jay or to brave the perils of forbidden lore hoping to grasp enough of it to protect myself? Or is there another solution? Tonight I will cast the runes to seek the guidance of the silent one. I don't know what I would have done without the foresight to prepare the rune sticks back in Berdusk! We must consider also what Reed prophesied. This influence must be the dark way, but what is perfection? We must be ready and prepared next time!