

## Grimwald's chronicles entry 133

I have finally found time to talk to the elven grudge-bearer. She is intent upon following the migration of the barbarians to the Green Fields "To make sure no harm comes to them." She seems quite serious when she says this. What threat could there be to hundreds of barbarians and dozens of ogres? Still she seems genuinely worried about their well-being. When I ask about her past she asks me to tell her about our negotiations with the Pit Fiend. I tell her about the challenges and the argument we had about who should risk their soul in our attempt to break his hold on the High Moor. She then apologizes profusely and begs my forgiveness. "For what?" I ask? She then confesses that she had three chances to kill Reed and thus save her soul from it's inevitable corruption, but for selfish reasons, desiring her to use her power to help the elves, she did not. She is genuinely sorry and close to tears.

I tell her it is not too late, we may still succeed in retrieving the book in time or striking another bargain to free her soul if we fail. Uziel, for that is her name, responds that it is already too late. Reed has started making deals with devils and if turns out well what is to stop her from making a next one and a next one until she is utterly lost. But now we are too late for killing her would only serve the Fiend's plans. I argue that indeed people are weakened and corrupted by magic, but this sacrifice can be a worthy one and serve their people, but Uziel's argument is that there is no sacrifice, just blind ambition. Power seeking more power until finally power is all that remains of what was once a moral being.

Now it is my turn to seek for forgiveness, for it was I who urged Reed to seek more power for the good of our group. I did this knowing the bad effect magic has on one's soul. Have I led her to corruption, sacrificed her in the same way Uziel thinks she did? Are we worthy of such a sacrifice? Still the gods have chosen her for a reason, she is meant for greatness and has to be guided to it, this becomes more and more obvious by the day. Uziel points out that with Reed's skill at conversation it was easy for her to arrange that my offer would be turned down by our 'leaders' so she could strike the bargain and that because of it the worthy souls of the paladins will be eternally doomed. "Wake up dear dwarf, can you not see who truly leads and governs your group and your decisions? It is she, behind her mask of frailty and modesty and selflessness, who is using you all! Her 'sacrifice' is desiring a position of eternal life in a position of authority and power!", Uziel says to me. Uziel's mind goes to dark places when it comes to humans and magic, she is clearly paranoid, scarred and haunted by her past, but her observations are sharp and not without merit...

Although the morale is quite low among the barbarians and regularly fights break out we manage to keep things in check. The fresh supplies we secured using the rewards we received for our service to Neverwinter go a long way to restoring hope to these people forced into banishment. I am slowly growing into my position as Cuura's second. My mere presence helps to restore peace and order and I see that several of them are starting to be inspired and follow my example. I circulate stories of how my people were forced from their homes, but never forgot, and returned centuries later to reclaim them. The fact that I am myself an outcast, but with my honor intact as shown by divine judgment also seems to matter to them greatly. Still it is clear that it will be impossible to have sufficient control over this horde without a well trained professional corps of peacekeepers and officers. There are continuous scuffles between the Sky Riders, Bear People and Troll Hunter tribes to say nothing about how they treat the stragglers who find their way into our ranks. I find it hard to locate the people I need however, the ogres command enough respect through their strength, but their temper and judgment are not be relied upon. I should consult Iliana's legal codex, have her appoint a Marshall and start instructing the barbarians before we get to her domain.

Cuura came back from Shou Lung and since the party is in a city she feels I should attend to them rather than her. Not to upset the local population we set the mirror to appear a few miles from the city. Upon entering Shou Lung it is clear why people here tend not to wear armor, let alone heavy armor. It is sweltering. I go to a local riding a lizard and ask her which way I should follow to the

city. She looks at me in confusion. Clearly my pronunciation is off or the accent is incorrect. I repeat myself more slowly articulating carefully, but still the local woman is confused. I have to say I imagined the Lung people to look more like Reed, rather than Cuura. The woman has a squat, powerful build. She does not have Cuura's grace, beauty or commanding posture, but seems rather slumped and disheveled. She is wearing an interesting armor though, the skin of some animal reinforced with mithril chain. Casting *detect magic* I detect some odd magical emanations from it. It is as if the essence of the beast was somehow bound into it's hide. Then to my surprise the woman speaks to me in dwarven "Where is the city?". I had not expected the locals to speak dwarven and even if they did I would have expected the Galena dialect, rather than the Shield to be spoken this far to the east. After a while it becomes clear that she is a stranger in these lands as well and that the locals are upset by her riding lizard.

To prevent further disturbance I ask Rock to find Felina for me while I try to rent a shed from a local farmer so the riding lizard can be put out of sight. The local farmer recognizes my robes so Reed's instructions were correct, but somehow the fright instilled by the beast has led him to expect all kinds of disasters and he begs for my protection. Perhaps lizards are considered a bad omen locally? I assure him nothing bad will happen and try to convince him to rent a shed to us, but apparently this does not fit into his schedule. Fortunately our leader arrives and settles the matter.

When we arrive in the city I am told there is much amiss. There have been assassination attempts and disruptions of the public order and the local people are working under misconceptions about our mission. While the first two problems will require some effort to set straight the last one we can set right more easily, but Snake objects of course. Norbert however enlightens me that the correct order of solving the problems needs to be different. Since preparation is important we split up to familiarize ourselves with the city and prepare for upcoming events. There is a martial arts competition to be held over the next ten days and a dinner with local dignitaries tonight.

Kendalan and I seek out to find a traditional competition bow for the zen archery contest. I am curious to see if my improvised technique matches the findings of the local masters and how I can improve myself. The roles are now reversed as I inform Kendalan that neither the hand, nor eye guide the shot, but it is the greater essence pervading all which must be recognized as the guiding principle. Unfortunately I have as little success in teaching him my method as he had in teaching me his. On our quest we do come across a fascinating piece of armor. This must be the mountain pattern armor Reed told me about. It's construction is intricate and precise requiring much planning.

Snake informs me that according to local tradition priests of the Red Earth compete in martial arts tournaments and are known for their powerful blows. So to uphold tradition I should compete, but the art of striking powerful blows is one I still seek to learn. I will doubtlessly be a disappointment to the spectators, but by studying my opponents techniques I could learn to harness the very skill which I am lacking and be better prepared next time. I feel rather uncomfortable going into battle without protection of spiritual or material nature and most of my skills are tailored towards aiding my allies. I am once again insufficiently prepared, but only through perseverance this lack of foresight can be corrected at this late stage.