

Grimwald's chronicles entry 134

For many days I have pondered my change of path. It is obvious to me that there is much more I can learn about armor and protection to which I have devoted myself. But the recent events in the war on the High Moor and on Evermeet have also show the limitations of this method when applied above ground. You may become like a mountain, an impenetrable rock fortress, but like waves of water the enemies can flow around you and threaten your weaker allies, whom you had sworn to protect.

During the war we fortunately had Cuura who through the menace she exuded and mighty blows could not be ignored and who could by herself tie up an entire flank by, but as soon as I was forced to fight without her two of my companions perished because my enemies ignored my ineffectual blows. I have to work on my voice and posture to become more commanding and intimidating like Cuura, but that is only half of the solution. I spend several hours consulting the venerable battleragers in the Halls of the Ancestors. They too possessed the power to disrupt and bind the enemy and must have inspired the barbarians to adopt their fighting techniques.

Their advice that I need to lose myself to find my power I find hard to apply, but the essence of their technique becomes clear to me. Somehow normal dwarves and humans block their inner powers, battle rage is like a volcano erupting. The rager slowly builds up the inner power during combat and then their normal personality is wiped away when their inner power erupts. After their rage subsides the damage caused by the eruption causes the exhaustion and just like a volcano it needs to become firm and build up pressure before erupting again. While powerful this technique leaves great periods in which one is weakened and deprived of the ability to rage.

I recall now the many weeks Jay spend punching rocks. "Your hand should not fear the rock, the rock should fear your hand", his master told him. The inner power needs to be greater than the outer power to establish such powerful blows and fear and pain were holding him back before he managed to concentrate and discipline himself. People like the Reed's ninja, Jay and monks must have found a way to use the power of their spirits to empower their blows, but the first step Jay has shown me must be the mental discipline not to let the limitations of the body stand in the way of what you want to achieve. I steel myself and set to work.

The lack of a master to guide me quickly becomes obvious, bruised skin, skinned knuckles, ripped tendons, torn muscles and broken bones from pushing myself beyond my limits without proper technique but despite the pain these undesirable side effects cause I persist and my strikes are becoming increasingly powerful. Jay says that sacrificing yourself for glory and victory is indeed the path, but I get the feeling I am doing more harm to myself than I would to my opponent.

Then Jay reminds me that every technique is powerful and weak at the same time. Only by combining styles can you become a true master, I go into the *mountain stance* of the Stone Dragon style and let the *stone power* flow into my body through my feet. I feel the heavy energy of the earth solidify my body and now when I push beyond my usual limits, my body empowered by the essence of stone stands up to the strain much better, while my blows are more powerful than ever before.

The same night I have a dream of standing on a mountain top and the flows of power from the earth and the powers of the heavens coalescing and mingling in me. When the union is complete I open my eyes and find myself wide awake in my bed. The dream does not fade over the days, but stays crystal clear like a memory. It must have been some divine vision through which Dumathoin is showing me his approval and the hidden gem under the mountain I must find. I should feel awed by his divine power or at least confused and addled like Reed after she has had a vision, but it feels just like a happy memory, like forging my first ax with Grandfather. I look forward to the competition tomorrow where I can try out my new technique and see how the true masters of fighting respond to it.

I am wondering what kind of barbarians live in Chult. The tiger woman has a strangely calculating look about her and I am unsure if she is wearing the tiger skin or if it is wearing her. I ask her why Reed is calling her Yuka a dinosaur instead of lizard, since it looks like a riding lizard to me. She replies that lizards are much smaller where she comes from and the big ones are called dinosaurs. It is obvious though that she is as ill prepared as most adventurers. She does not know the language, nor exactly what she is looking for except that it is called the "Eye of the Tiger". There should be students of the sublime way who follow the *Tiger Claw* discipline at the tournament, if she can win their respect they might be able to help her on her quest. Perhaps I too can attract a tutor to guide me in the *Devoted Spirit* and *Stone Dragon* disciplines as my dream instructed, my technique may be crude, but at least I have a solid foundation to build upon.

At the dinner Snake abuses the gratitude and goodwill of our host by insulting the other guests either to get them to duel him, to torture them while they are prevented by etiquette from leaving or to disrupt the authority, unity and leadership of the city. Hmm, probably not either but all. The school's master is successful in foiling his attempt to make his own son shame him in front of his guests. His demonic side is clearly in control again.

Fortunately Reed and Felina are watchful and try to contain the damage earning the respect of the magistrate with their efforts to restore order.

I am ready to submit to the magistrate's authority and support him, but Norbert, who has been here longer has advised against it and it should be Felina's decision to do so anyway. I patiently await wondering if and when Felina will decide the magistrate can be trusted. I would like to offer my services in seeing to the problem in the graveyard. I should ask Felina to request the magistrate's permission to serve in this manner some time soon.

Much to my surprise Norbert makes the offer of assistance. Although I am glad this deception is over and dealt with I am for a moment confused as to why he spoke for the party instead of Felina. Then it dawns on me that probably we are not stepping into the light yet, but into the twilight hiding who truly leads us. It is wise to try to shield Felina, since she is remarkably vulnerable, but I wonder as to Norbert's wisdom setting himself up as the prime target for any attacks against our group by implicating that he is the secret leader of the party by speaking for us. He gains my admiration for his bravery though, shedding the safety of his child disguise to volunteer as the prime target, let's hope it won't turn into a sacrifice. It will be a good test if an attack comes to see if the present company is treacherous or not by whom they target.

In the middle of the night I am roused and called to Reed's room. For what I wonder? A flower. Hardly significant to my mind, there are lots of those things around everywhere. The tiger lady however tells us that this flower is not local and is poisonous. That is a bit odd and how it got here is also a mystery. Norbert carefully examines the flower and manages to follow the trail back to the planting of the seed. I am very impressed by the depth of the knowledge he divines. There is some discussion if it is an attack or warning. A warning of a serious sort to my mind. I immediately decide that Reed should be put under constant guard and set up a schedule.

Norbert is heavily dismayed at the prospect of being forced to be in the presence of Snake. Reed has borne the weight of minding Snake for too long already and it is changing her. We need to share the burden hoping we won't all be corrupted by his presence. I tell Norbert I have faith in him and hope he will indeed prove a capable ally in delaying Snake's inevitable doom. According to Bear magic is used to check up on Reed. Is it the enemy or our secret ally making sure her message has been heeded? What role does the soulless child play in all of this? There was one of them in Baldur's gate, two in my clan and now one here. Are they stalking me? Is it my fate to counter them? I decide to share my burden with the group. I am the one to bear it, but I must not allow my failures to endanger others and warn them.

Kendalan implies that the selfish woman might be Reed's sister. Surely an absurd thought since Reed is anything but selfish so I am sure no such taint could be in her line. Unless it is one of these

nature balance effects which tend to upset any progress countering every good deed Reed does. But no it feels too polarized to be natural. Nature tends to be kind of wishy-washy about everything, till things get totally out of hand and then it overreacts. Kind of like Kendalan and Reed. No, such polarity must be a contest between deities, seeing who's chosen is the best. Two chosen in one family, such a powerful line! Too bad the tradition of her line wasn't more firmly devoted to Quan-Yin. Foolishness of choosing your own deity rather than following that of your clan. It can split clans or families apart this way. Still selfish as she might be, she still does her duty of caring for her sibling. No not duty, the honorable thing.

The next day we go to the castle to enter into the contest. Everything is well arranged and members of my order are clearly well integrated into the system. More so than servants of Quan-Yin it turns out. This is a personal test so I wonder if I should interfere. Still her destiny is one of greatness and I feel I should support her in attaining her destiny. The error of my decision not to respect the judge's decision quickly becomes apparent when Reed manages to get herself entangled by the revolving practice post.

Who put us up to this? Reed trying to be a warrior which is not her calling and me refuting the decisions of authority to aid her. Snake has played us both! Damn him and shame on us for being foolish dupes to his ploys. By corrupting Reed he is now dragging me down through her. Oh where will his deviousness end!

But I cannot blame him for the shame I brought onto myself in the tournament. I prepared my strikes and katas together with Jay and the execution went very well. I struck the targets with precision and my *mountain hammer* and *foe hammer* blows together with my discipline produced powerful strikes. Then I look up at the end of the kata and could see kids dragging their mothers away in boredom and an old man, not saying anything, but giving me a sad look, which says it all. Just like my grandfather did when I cracked a sword while hardening it. I did fine in blending the ingots, shaping it, balancing it, but then managed to ruin a perfect piece of work by not treating the whole in the proper way. I have treated the kata as a way to fight and damage a foe, not as an art. I bow my head in shame and leave the perfectly groomed practice grounds, whose honorable tradition I have defiled. I must ask Felina's aid in trying to regain some honor over the next few days. What did Reed tell me? Any story has a setting and introduction, beginning, middle and end. I should behave as if telling a story rather than just do the middle bit. Imagery, build expectations, unexpected twists, yet keep to the storyline. I have much work to do before tomorrow!

Despite Reed's narrow admission and tangle with the practice post she attracts the honor of a challenge, just when I think I could not be humiliated more deeply. Still it is good to be reminded of the severity of one's flaws. Apparently the challenger is the abbot of a monastery no less! He makes a beautiful challenge clearly explaining the superiority of his school and methodology. I make a mental note of his arguments they are rock solid! The general decides to honor the challenge made and invites us to an audience. Norbert thinks he saw Reed's sister and goes off to try to see her. To ensure his safety Kendalan and I decide to follow him. For a moment I am nervous about the guards who will prevent my unwarranted access, but Dumathoin shows me through *divine insight* exactly when to be where and we meet no challenges. Still I would feel more comfortable if we would be operating under the correct authorities, this feels wrong somehow.