

Grimwald's Chronicles 139

Two messengers of the Skyrider tribe arrived today looking for the sky elf. Since, to my knowledge, they have not yet met our new arrival from Evermeet they must mean Kendalan. For some reason however Cuura believes Reed should deceive them again by taking the form of an Avariel. Why on earth would such a deception be necessary? I protest and suggest we send for Kendalan. Due to Snake's influence no doubt Cuura tries to find Reed to deceive them, but fortunately the gods are on our side and Reed is unavailable and Snake's venom is stayed for the moment.

After the proper formalities the messengers inform Kendalan that five of their tribe have been taken hostage while gathering water. The warriors of the tribe wanted to free them, but their shaman said that only Kendalan could guide them properly through this crisis. We make ready and ride for three days to the place where their camp was a week ago. To my shame I find that I am slowing down the group's progress even though I am twice as fast as I used to be before Rock was sent to my aid. I would like to start earlier and continue longer to make up the difference, but without good landmarks, such as the taste of the rock or the seams of quartz to navigate by I would get lost. As much as I dislike it, this land requires mobility of it's guardians, or underground highways like the hidden tunnels connecting the holds of the north.

Drani discovers that the shaman has moved the camp to a nearby location to prevent over grazing and that there is a group of buildings about 20 miles from here. While Kendalan and Efyra go to meet the shaman taking along Drani as their messenger, Cuura, Nethander and I go towards the buildings to see if they might be kept there. Nethander spots a sign with a crude bell. It can hardly be called a bell, but it would serve the purpose of creating sound I guess. I pray to Dumathoin to reveal the essence of the sign. Our land. Keep off. For trade ring bell. Very clear instructions, but for some unfathomable reason we do not ring the bell to introduce ourselves properly, but Cuura is convinced to allow Snake to slither his way into someone's home uninvited. No matter how much I may disagree with her decision, she is my captain so I obey and sit down to await Snake's report on the situation. I should see if I could not arrest him next time to prevent such mischief!

While we await Snake's return Cuura and I get into a discussion about laws and customs. Cuura's position seems to be that rules are alright, but that she can choose which set or rules to apply. Her own tribal tradition, local tradition, Shantal Othreier law, Iliana's decrees, party customs. I try to enlighten her that one should always try to obey as many customs, laws and traditions as possible to minimize upsetting anyone and acting in accordance with the great wisdom of our forefathers and elders. Besides we are under direct instructions from Iliana no to let her instructions come into conflict with local customs. So even though we have the duty to protect our citizens we should proceed with humility, even though we have authority. I don't understand why such a self evident concept is not immediately clear to Cuura.

After an hour or two we hear the howling and baying of dogs indicating that Snake's attempts at espionage or burglary have failed. Since we should aid our companion as per party custom I suggest we ring the bell so we will be invited in and can then see to Snake's needs without breaking customs. It is bad form call after nightfall, but in this case I feel we should make an exception to ensure Nethander's safety.

The howling of the dogs dies down and we see some lanterns approaching. About two dozen meters from our position, just at the edge of my dark vision, the group releases a bird, probably to signal what they found. Nice to see how well organized these people are. Moments later we are joined by a dozen men and as many dogs. The men are of sturdy build with brown hair, not as large or fair skinned as Illuskans, but neither as dark, slight and small as Calishites. These must be Tethyran folk who are the predominant culture in this region. In the North there are many jokes about Tethyrans and their dogs who are suggested to be alike in many ways. Still in such remote areas with green skins roaming and small cattle to be protected and herded or for hunting a dog is a valuable asset for survival. Cuura correctly gauges the bond between the men and their animals and befriending the dogs, sets the men at ease. Some of the men are wearing leather jerkins and carrying farm implements, but many of them are toting light crossbows which seems to be the weapon of choice for the group. To my dismay Cuura has decided to allow Snake to guide her actions descending into lies and deceit. I however take a firm stand and refuse to be dragged along as well. Reed, Felina and I have a duty as moral anchors keeping our party from being dragged into the Abyss by Snake's foul machinations and not even Cuura's position as my superior can prevent me from that duty. Dumathoin teaches us that although knowledge should never be twisted it should be hidden for the worthy to find. So I decide to let Cuura do the talking, but whenever something is told which is not the entire truth to correct her in dwarven. Those who are worthy can find the knowledge, but it will be hidden to those unworthy. Still we cannot let her corruption continue if she is to become an inspiring warleader! A great general has no need to hide behind twisting words like some court sycophant!

Just when we make our introductions and are about to be welcomed two things happen. Flames burst forth into the night at the buildings and Efyra riding her fearsome lizard approach us. Yuka is about to try to snatch one of the dogs, but Bear manages to prevent a total collapse of trust. Heavily startled by the arrival of the dinosaur and many riders as well as the flames the group huddles back to protect their home. Cuura to my great joy tries to restrain Kendalan and his riders from entering the domain uninvited. It worked! She understands! Kendalan however surmises that we should perform our duty to our party member Drani since Reed is absent to take care of her since it is obvious hostilities have ensued between the dragon and the Tethyrans. Although I agree with Kendalan's judgment concerning the relative importance of the rules I am very pleased at Cuura's proper behavior setting an example to the others. If only we had a few minutes more then we could claim it our duty to come to the aid of our host, but although this would have allowed us entry, we would be bound to aid both sides in this conflict and all because of Nethander's initial rule breaking! While Cuura and I await permission I clarify how all this would not have happened if it were not for allowing Nethander to play her false.

At daybreak (the proper moment) Cuura and I are invited to the farm. We learn that the clan is led by a sturdy man in chainmail with a twohander called Darrell in concert with his brother Darryll who is versed in various arts. We are made welcome and I am requested to provide proper and legal bonds between the Skyrider clan and Darrell's clan. Apparently it is local custom for a land owner to be sovereign ruler of his domain and to do as they please with trespassers. A concept which is alien to the nomadic Skyriders, who took his water, not meaning to rob him, but merely being ignorant of local customs. Fortunately the Darrells have been persuaded that trade is more beneficial than incorporating 'thieves' into their clan and an agreement is hammered out. I ask Moradin to erect a granite pillar to remind both of them and posterity of their bond as witnessed by the earth. They seem quite impressed and pleased with the ceremony.

After a few weeks Kendalan and Nethander return with a group of women who have come to live at Darrell's farm and marry into the clan. Although several of the women were apparently expecting a bit more than drafty rickety buildings and communal sleeping in the hay quite a few decide that this will be their best chance to make it through the coming winter and agree to trial marriages which apparently are customary among the Tethyrans and Illuskans both. If the woman does not refuse her husband thrice within a year and a day the bond is sealed and becomes permanent. A bit less stable and sturdy than dwarven oaths, but the idea of gathering the women together in one safe location to be a treasure to the clan is quite sound and normal. There is some confusion since not all women arriving seeking marriage were properly informed about the custom of being part of the clan's harem as is normal in Darrell's clan and apparently also in the lands they hail from. Darrell however believes in sharing his harem with all other clan members equally and also allows the women to leave the women barn as they please, both of which would be shocking to his former Calishite master or so I am told. Apparently Darrell is seen as quite a revolutionary.

Although he gained some women, several of the new arrivals lure away men from his clan hold to live as a couple nearby. Darrell's authority over his people seems to be both absolute as well as relative. Over the time I learn that in Tethyran culture they have no love of authority, nobles or others who can claim an elevated position and that my proper introduction of Cuura actually worked against her. They do however hold deep respect for people who uphold chivalric values and act as champions for others. Darrell is never questioned and trusted implicitly by his clan, but they themselves also regard themselves as being free and him holding no power over them except that they choose to follow. It is sad that quality does not run more stable in their bloodlines so they could have great lines of kings, since they have stories of many heroes among their people who could have founded great lines. As it is great men and women gather people who look to them in times of need and are obeyed in such times, but ignored at other times. I can see the inherent difficulty of building an empire out of such a culture. Tethyrans support their champions and generally renew their association with them every four years. A Tethyran's standing results largely from what quality of men and women choose to aid them. I am at a loss on how to police such a culture where the law is not recognized as applying on private land and where any person of power may claim lordship and represent law and order as they please. The Tethyran way of dealing with criminals is simply to deny them the aid and protection of their champions and let them fall prey to other criminals or roaming monsters unless they threaten a champion's proteges which will lead to a more swift, direct and bloody form of justice.

Darrell's act of defying the dragon alone to save the clan's women is even now turning into song and story. Apparently both he and his brother were slaves to a senile Calishite who could not remember the names of his slaves and took to calling them all Darrell, so they started devising different pronunciations to distinguish among themselves. Apparently they came up with eight variants. All the men in the clan are runaway slaves, but as their clan grows in number so does the likelihood of slavers coming to reclaim their property. The group which was sent out to meet us was afraid we were mercenaries working for slavers when they first encountered us. Apparently the merchants hire Chondathans as guards and so there is some strife between the freedom loving Tethyrans and the more orderly Chondathans. Calling each other tyrants and bandits apparently.

Kendalan made the mistake of gravely insulting Darrell in refusing to speak with with him on his own land and having his dragon attack him while in a parlay. Coming onto a Tethyran's land

uninvited is already seen as a grave breach of custom. Darrell may be quite happy and pleased with the outcome, but news of this will travel and the Sky Lord will not be well known among the Tethyrans. A man who does not recognize the honour of another man is seen as having none himself and to come uninvited bearing arms is the sign of tyranny. Still how are we to govern these people when they have such individualistic attitudes and clans can spring up and disappear within a generation?

Still things could have gone much worse so we should count ourselves fortunate that the shaman did not take matters into his own hands and started a conflict between the Illuskans and Tethyrans. Cuura however seems to have a knack of relating to these people and an innate understanding of their motives. She is well-liked by them so I have hope we can attract some clans to her banner eventually.