

Grimwald's chronicles entry 142

Due to the proper preparations being made by the fortress' architect our group has become split. Huge blocks of hardened stone have separated us. Fortunately none of us were caught, otherwise those not wise enough to be encased in a study shell would surely have been crushed or suffocated. The blocks are quite thick so our not getting caught was fortunate indeed. But since the follow-up attacks either depend on personal intervention or have fallen into disrepair the only effect is that we will lose some time tunneling through. The stone is quite hard, but due to my adamantite weapon and the power of stone flowing through my body lending strength to each blow the tunneling goes more quickly than ever before. The ancestors are right, warcraft and mining are deeply interrelated and mutually beneficial. By the time we break through and Cuura shoves the last pieces of rubble aside we find that our companions have disappeared without a trace.

At first I worry that they might have fallen victim to some ingenious defense, which also disposed of their bodies. Then I realize that it is much more likely they simply got bored and decided to go out 'adventuring'. I rail at their irresponsibility, lack of discipline weakening the fighting power of our group. Cuura however simply takes what happened in her stride and asserts they are simply going on with what she ordered and as such there is no problem. When all of this is over we need to have a serious talk about command structure. Yes it is possible to lead by task instead of by orders and yes this system is indicated when communication lines might be cut. But this action basically forces their commander to follow their lead, which is having the chain of command all backward! Besides who is their ranking commander now? Since we cannot know we cannot predict how they will carry out their task. We should perhaps change our formation to prevent this from happening again.

We return past the wonderful armory where Cuura shoves me along again just when I see some interesting stuff sticking out of the rubbish. We have to wait a bit until the war machines battering each other are in a formation which cannot strike at us before we cross. When we find the others they are back at the pool room, at a loss where to go and what to do without their leader. Really what were they thinking?

Efyra is glaring around with blood lust in her eyes and saliva dripping from her teeth, clenching her weapons tightly. She looks at me savagely and when I approach to check her fresh wounds a low growl issues forth and she goes into a crouch to pounce at me. I pause for a moment, having been pummeled by Cuura is enough for one day. Although she is in a kind of combat mode or rage she does appear to recognize me and has some tenuous control over herself. After praying for the return of her health her demeanor changes from a drawn bow to a strung bow with a nocked arrow. Well I guess it is an improvement although she is a long way from being a stable, stalwart soldier holding the line. Kendalan informs us that the empty room above was not empty. Curious about what was there except for the disrupted elementals I clamber up, but the visibility of the contents is already fading out offering only tantalizing glimpses.

Now that we are together again Cuura decides on strategy whether we should wage a horizontal or vertical campaign. I argue the advantages of vertical campaigning, but Cuura takes the more traditionalist approach. I am not sure if I should be happy or disappointed at that. We decide to start on one level below the top level. Why we don't start at the top itself is a mystery to me, but at least there is a clear system to our campaign now.

After the invisible room we come to a circular room lined with workbenches and littered with corpses. Suspecting undead I go in first, but nothing stirs. The Kendalan comes in as well and starts running around as if possessed. I try to catch him before he hurts himself or others, but my hands no longer obey me and I end up hooking him in the jaw. Then it becomes obvious what happened to the bodies, they ran to their deaths. Unable to stop themselves, just like us. I see Kendalan coming at me with his sword and try to parry with my shield, but end up bashing him in the face. The first rescue attempts fail, but eventually Efyra manages to lasso me. For a moment I worry that my

heavy armor, stout build and stability will drag Cuura and Efyra into the room as well, but then Norbert twangs the rope upsetting my balance so they can drag me in. I notice I cannot do anything lest the urge to move and strike overtakes me. Then I remember the dispel magic wand and start reaching for it before remembering I used it's charges already and bash Reed in the foot with my gauntlet. Then the dragon goes berserk and attacks Reed. Granddad was right: Never Trust a Dragon!!! Fortunately Reed managed to immobilize it and after a few minutes the effects wear off.

We consider going around the room, but even if we post warnings it may still claim victims so in the end I go in to try to disrupt the workbenches. After smashing the first one they all uproot themselves and fling themselves around the room. Smashing themselves on the walls, floor, each other and my head. Well at least they are broken and the room is now safe. At the far end we find the remains of one of the emperor's guard who died valiantly in service to his lord. After the cremation we take a jade pendant and ring left to return to his family.

The next tower turns out to be a weapons forge. For some reason the others consider a forge to be a threat. Forges are dangerous, sure, but not a threat surely. Since I am the best versed in the workings of forges I offer to go in alone and make sure it is safe. The hearth responds to my presence eagerly awaiting to do it's duty again after ages of neglect. But I contain my curiosity and continue my exploration. They have interesting combinations of metal and stone in maces and even cutting edges and spikes. Then I see a large solid gold falchion. I study it. It is too slow to be used against a nimble opponent and it's great mass would decrease it's speed so that a decently armored soldier would be brushed aside but essentially little harm would come to him. If the opponent would however be a giant the energy which can be put into a blow would be enormous as would the damage. I test the hardness of the metal and taste and smell it. No alloy, but pure gold, hard as steel. It must have been reduced to it's essence. It must be a process akin to the distillation of magical silver from normal silver. Clearly this bears further study. My companions react panicky as if a weapon by itself is a danger. They are merely tools, sure they can help, but they are nothing without a driving force. We make our way through unscathed, but rather than being relieved they insist on looking for trouble. Destroy all the weapons as well as the forge they argue. Has some evil, chaotic force robbed them of their senses? Moradin's sight shows nothing of this so it must be their own thoughts. Perhaps their fear has gotten the better of them and is now turning them into paranoid destroyers of all which might be threatening. I'll have to watch them closely to prevent them from sliding into evil depravity as might have happened to even a man as stable and sound as the abbot.

The last room on this floor turns out to be an infirmary. It is a maze of draped cloths which I start cutting my way through when we find one of the victims of the crazed healer. He is not really alive, but not totally dead either, nor undead. It is like an artificially suspended animation. It is obvious that this cannot continue, but killing innocents is wrong and without this elaborate care they would surely have died long ago so removing the doctor would be killing them. I judge we cannot do anything for them until I can return with heal spells or an aura of positive energy. I am harrassed by a crash cart which soaks me in various bodily fluids which makes me retch, but removing and cleaning my armor is not wise at present. A plod on my armor squelching horribly with every move I make. It is not pain, but the irritation and chafing and just the mere thought of what is festering there. I shudder to think of what those who follow Ilmater might have to endure, but I feel I can do no less as holy warrior of Moradin.

On the other side Norbert again argues that we should not leave things undone as we move along. Once I thought as he did. I could see no further than the best solution for the situation at hand. Now I see a city in fear, lives in the balance a holy duty to rush to their aid before more disasters strike. I have a purpose beyond the here and now, yet what I used to do was right, what Norbert proposes is right. Am I becoming too much like Cuura, rushing forward towards some great victory or death? Is that right or wrong to do? What of my grandfather's teachings: without life, there is nothing. Should we not protect ourselves better so we may serve more in total rather than risking ourselves recklessly? But what of the others, but we are no use to them dead, but that way also lies cowardice. Are we all succumbing to some evil twisting or am I merely thinking too much. Fortunately Reed is

with us to keep us on the narrow and true way. Or is she herself corrupted, leaving us like that? Being on the verge of frying Norbert because he defended himself. Can I trust anyone except myself? Can I trust myself?

The room below holds the remains of some great machine, probably meant to shoot down dragons. It exploded, but if I could have some weeks here would be fascinating to reconstruct. It might be valuable knowledge for my besieged brethren in the spine of the world. So much to do so little time. The next room should be the blood pool again, but the wall only allows the bearer of jade to pass. Still with this room, pool room and living room and armory being secured we have cleared two of the four levels already. Now should we proceed with the bottom or the top level before assaulting the main fortress?

Cleric 4/Crusader 1/Prestige Paladin 3/Stalwart Champion 5