

Grimwald's chronicles entry 144

We barricade ourselves in the armory to rest and strategize. Reed is guided to blow up some onis and trusting in her guidance almost wanders off by herself before Kendalan and I escort her. How can one so guided still ignore dire warnings like the black lotus? Or is she at peace with her fate that she will die soon and realizing the futility of our efforts to thwart doom? The fire sears the stone and incinerates the onis, it seems even hotter than I remember it. I guess being on your home ground is good also for humans.

Efira and me are going over what we know of the stronghold and realize that there are only three corridors per level and that these corridors have level floors. So what is in the space where there is no corridor? After some discussion it is decided that we should find out and not only focus on the evil we know, but also seek out the hidden. Dumathoin will be pleased.

After some tunneling through the wall of a tower we find a dark space with a faint point of illumination. I move through the opening and feel some power sucking my life force out of me. Shuddering I step back. A briny taste is left in my mouth. Salt. Water which has all movement and life drained from it by the negative plane. But how to get to the mysterious sparkly hidden thing? Tunnel over it or under it? If we had a scroll of negative plane protection we could try to run and fetch it. Kendalan steps forth and starts tying rope after rope to an arrow. Surely not even he can make such a shot in a low corridor dragging many pounds of rope. Magic flows from his lips and hands and his arrow flies true. The arrow is trapped between the bars of the cage and when we drag it closer it seems like a phoenix caught in a gilded cage. The water and negative plane are canceling out his powers of fire and reincarnation keeping it suspended in a half-life.

We take some distance and pull it free from the demi-plane of Salt. Immediately upon it's release it dies and is reborn in a blaze while the tower shudders for a moment. Reed falls to the floor awestruck at witnessing the symbolic essence of her beliefs. No wonder the humans have taken so many centuries to amount to anything, just being reborn without the guidance of the Soul Forger to shape them! After having been trapped for such a long time it must be itching to tend to it's duties so I tell it the quickest way out of here. After a swift flap of it's wings basking us in a warm glow it flies off.

My companions rush to the conclusion that there must be others like the phoenix who we should also set free. I remind them that not all what is hidden need be grateful for it's release and also that these powers are not insignificant and we should study what effect their release will have. I take some time to asses the construction techniques used in erecting the fortress, which are sound and not reliant on magical enhancements or forces. Also the stone which would surely turn to dust after long exposure to the negative plane does not seem to be affected or in an accelerated rate of decay after the removal of the phoenix. I would seem the constructor matched their powers quite equally.

We continue upwards to find the tower from which the kobolds issued which were allegedly slain by Norbert. There are no kobolds to be found and the nature lovers start blabbering about the ugra behaving badly not growing where it should. Doesn't it always misbehave? Just yesterday it tried to eat Norbert! Hardly anything to worry about, but somehow Efira comes to the conclusion that a bioplasmic transformer must be consuming the ugra and turning them into kobolds. Apparently some beings called Yuan-Ti had a creature capable of this in a compound and used it to transform the bodies of almost dead or rebellious slaves into more obedient creatures. Ah yes here it is in my "*book of earthy knowledge*". Roughly spherical, four to seven tentacles which can reach up to 30 feet. Once absorbed into the sphere it can copy the shape of the original. Since I am the most stable of all we decide I should lure it out and then chop of it's tentacles. We can then safely deal with it and it's spawn.

The room is covered in heaps of stinking slime. Reed starts tossing fireballs and the smell invading my nostrils makes me gag and then I remember. The explosion in the sewers, fire bursting out

everywhere over the city. The smell of burned beards, mingling with that roast dwarf and smoldering offal. The great city in flames, death everywhere, chaos in the tunnels. I stumble away, so much death, loss of life, loss of beauty, loss of order... Ogres rampaging through the tunnels? Wait these are not tunnels and those are Oni. Efira is struck, but slashes away at the Oni which is teetering. The oni raises its great sword ready to strike. Should I interfere in a single combat? No challenge was made so it is not a duel and besides there is little glory in killing such a small giant and that sword is quite big. I cave its skull in and hope Efira does not mind. Fortunately she just smiles at seeing the oni crumple at our feet.

Then tentacles lash out. Why are they there..., why am I here? I quickly try to correct the situation to be more according to our plan. Kendalan is wisely prepared and fends off the attack, but Cuura is grabbed by two tentacles. I can only cut one so I pray for Moradin's aid in erecting a *blade barrier* but the blades are turned into whips of magic by the monster's defenses. Cuura trashes and squirms and through heroic effort manages to keep herself from being devoured. In the next few seconds of furious fighting we kill the monster which turns into snotty goo flopping down from the ceiling onto Cuura. She is used to being covered in gore and tasting the blood and guts of her opponents. The goo must be vaguely reminding her of something, I have rarely seen Cuura look so pensive.

Then I am struck by the memory which welled up. I never lived in a great dwarven city. I grew up in a small hidden hearth and was then brought to my grandfather. There was death and chaos there too, but at the hands of the greenskins. Totally different smell altogether. Yet it seemed so real, was it an illusion caused by poisonous gas? Why can I still remember it then? How the tunnels run, what crystals mark the intersections for underground navigation. I remember the whole place, but how can that be if I was never there? I must have been on the surface for too long. My brain is getting air-touched and going all bendy like happens to the elves. I really should spend next winter underground in a forge somewhere, not merely in a city. Good hard work for sixteen hours a day for a few months should set anyone straight again.

Damn Cuura was almost absorbed and Reed helpless before an oni and the whole plan spoiled it must have been Snake again trying to gain dominance. Why don't people stick to the plan? Reed looks shocked at my implications and Cuura said it were her orders to burn the place. It fumble out an apology to all. Reed looks hurt and uncertain, Cuura puzzled and Snake smugly triumphant as he accepts my apologies. Now I am confusing our oracle and fail to observe the commands of my superior officer and worse of all I have done it myself. If only they weren't here I could get rid of Snake's influence once and for all. All would be so much more organized then.