

## Grimwald's chronicles entry 148

My ceremony is as much a failure as I am. I set up the incense and candles, just like I have seen my grandfather do dozens of time before, but rather than feeling the deep, rumbling thrum of the ancestral halls I merely manage to catch my own confusion. Voices appear but they lack the deep wisdom of the earth or the scouring flame of ancestral indignation and their advice is shallow and fleeting. Clearly the air element has infected me with confused thoughts, or is it the water which is urging me to give in to my feelings? Perhaps all the cold the lich was battering us with has doused my inner fire? Either way it is neither earth nor fire so hardly worth listening to. I try several times, but all I manage to do is to pile failure upon failure.

My companions return, they need me to be strong, to carry on. I have abandoned them to danger in a fruitless, selfish attempt at saving myself, how low can one fall... I am hardly worthy to be amongst them, but still we must go on on behalf of the innocent citizens. Even if I cannot save myself I should at least try to save someone. My weakness will not aid them so I must persevere on the path set before me and see it through to whatever end.

Cuura leads us to the next wall to be breached, but already the second blow of my maul shows just how useless I am. Failing even at the menial support work involved in this expedition. I cannot even put a dent into a wall anymore. Pathetic! After some experimentation we find that by altering combinations of materials we can prevent the defenses from anticipating our next move and thus catching them unprepared damage them.

Once through we find a number of crystals suspended at varying intervals with a light jumping from one crystal to the next. I try to see what is creating the light and see a gaping, evil skull reaching out trying to devour me. I grab my warhammer to smash the evil, but my companions pull me away. Reed then informs me that there is no undead presence and Cuura opens her heart to see into the hearts of others. I am happy that she is now doing what I used to be able to do as well. Using her own purity to find if something is wrong with others. Reed and Cuura tell me there is nothing evil or undead out there. I am befuddled for a moment, how could I be wrong again? The Cuura points a finger at me I feel it stabbing straight into my heart and yells "There is the evil!". I cringe. I have become the very thing I have vowed to protect the innocent from. I am worse than worthless, I am a menace. A disease growing in our company, a corruption spreading from within. I HAVE BECOME NETHANDER! I sit stunned and stupefied as Reed is fussing about me. Trying to save me or to incinerate me I no longer care. Anything but this!

After a while I feel words of power flowing through me. A sweet melodious voice, yet strict and unbending. I recognize it as Celestial, I feel some essence recoiling in horror and fleeing, some hard coldness bouncing the words back from the surface on my mind and some other presence burrowing deeper into the dark deep recesses of my mind. On the surface all is calm now, but the evil lurks just below the surface ready to strike just like a bullet. Reed tell me she has driven away some evil besetting me, is unable to alter my ancient curse and could not reach the depths to which the other power retreated, but that it seems to be shut out for the moment. At least for a moment I am no longer an instrument of evil other than my own. It will have to do I guess.

Norbert informs us that the crystal is inhabited by a grumpy dwarf. Besides being clanless I almost became a kinslayer. What a narrow escape! According to Reed the local dwarves are rather odd liking ugra and such nonsense. I just hope that whatever insanity has beset the local dwarf population won't spread to me before we finish our quest here. Maybe I am experiencing the first stages already? Theorizing we come to the conclusion that the spirit must be trapped in the crystals and that by the power of chaos it is prevented from freeing itself. Such a spirit could be brought back to life if we could find a soulless body for it or perhaps a construct. Norbert announces he will attempt to make contact with it. Norbert manages to lure the dwarven spirit into his own body while moving himself into a crystal. Such a noble and useful sacrifice! The dwarf repeatedly asks me about my duty. I feel many duties, to our people, to shape the gifts of the earth, to my liege, but

somehow the way he speaks of duty I feel that even my most sacred duties pale before him. I feel inept, lacking. He is searching for something I lack even beyond and greater than my lack of a clan or my lost purity. Something greater I have lost. Inwardly I tremble to think of the gaping inaptitudes undermining my resolve to serve the gods and follow the path of righteousness. I don't see how I could have held up without clinging to them, and yet I somehow proudly I fooled myself into believing I was serving them. What arrogance and self-deception.

Cuura gives my position over to Reed as I can no longer be trusted and we proceed to the next imprisoned being. This turns out to be a greater nature spirit. Kendalan and Efira try to appease it and also the dwarf recounts of how it is deceived and trapped by this deception. Kendalan launches into a dwarf-like tale of all that happened without any of the embellishments, comments and opinions which characterize so many stories. Such wonderful qualities he has. I did not know he had it in him to be so coldly factual. I guess Norbert's influence is doing him good. After this beautifully dispassionate chronicle of all being set right the spirit realizes it's anger and frustration have no place in such a course of events and that it too should find it's proper place and return to it's roots so as to allow the story to continue.

Cuura and I also marvel at the dwarf's skill at martial arts. Cuura hopes some of that skill will be retained by Norbert's body, but I fear his focus is more on mental than physical perfection. Still I feel that even this high degree of physical control and perfection is to the dwarf a means to an end rather than the whole of the path as it is for most practitioners of the Sublime Way. But what then could his duty be?

The next tower houses a gargantuan construct. Efira declares that it's construction is flawed and that it is likely to explode. Still it is a massive masterwork of forgecraft. It seems like such a waste to let it explode but who knows what innocent lives it could claim if we won't deal with the treat it poses. While the others retreat to a safe distance I enlarge my shield and brace myself so Efira can trigger the fatal flaw in it's construction. We are rewarded with a spectacle of a crack running through the construct which held the chaotic entropy at bay for so many hundereds of years. Finally, like a dam breaking and flooding a mine, wheels and gears gush out of the construct before it tears itself apart in a rain of finely crafted metal. We are flung into a wall by a 20 foot metal tusk which struck the shield squarely. It reminds me of the stories my grandfather used to tell of the great constructs which our people build to crush giants and battle titans and genie in the days of Shanatar. Perhaps, perhaps we can catch a shadow of that age with Efira's skill and my smithing. It is as if I can see them clearly marching forth relentlessly. Almost as if I was there.