

The story of Grimwald

Chapter 15: Light calling Darkness

Why is it that everything always has to happen at once? I need to finish the forging of smithing tools and not one, but four interesting books, worthy of deep study, show up. How unorganized! Clearly the gods of the surface world are an unorganized lot compared to the dwarven pantheon!

When I disclose the truth about creation and life and how through working on perfecting and purifying oneself one not merely becomes a work of art, but also worthy of attention to the great soulforger the others rejoice. With pure steel in one's soul one may in the hearth forge find rebirth as a chosen of the gods. Since the year of thunder a change must have come over the halls of the ancestors, perhaps the Dwarves now practicing magic are humans or elves which have finally become worthy!

Jay is tempering himself in the heat of battle with the foul presence which invaded his mind, but the others do not see the importance of fighting against overwhelming odds with little chance of victory. They do not yet understand the dwarven spirit! They coddle him with lies instead of allow him to confront his doom and take strength from the knowledge of his impending demise. I am sure that if he were to kill himself to protect those he swore to protect, the gods would look favorably upon such an act. He reminds me of dwarven battleragers who have gone too far to come back and leave all but their weapon with their clan and head for the lands of the giant, troll or greenskin. An honorable choice, denied to him by misunderstanding companions. The safety of the group is paramount and great doom will follow his lives if he dooms us all!

Reed of all people I would have expected to understand this since this karma she speaks about seems to be similar to standing within one's clan. Perhaps it is her own dereliction of duty, abandoning her family, which is slowly driving her insane and causes this desire to hide the truth and struggle from Jay so she will not be alone in her shame. If this continues I will have to step in to protect Jay so he can face his doom and grow strong under the weight of it!

Reed is taking more of an interest in smithing. She still has trouble with proper control though. She sees fire as an almost explosive force, which wildly eats away at matter. This perception has some value during sieges of course, but in smithing timing, balance and stable steady heat are essential. Maybe she will someday see the everfire under Sundabar and come to understand.

I have been keeping an eye on Snake, now that even Cuura and Jay have turned on us as puppets of the restless book I fully expected him to do the same. His ordeal seems to have passed though and his dreams are untroubled. I guess his skill in evading our enemy in his sleep is more valuable in this situation than our fighters' desire to confront.

Felina's hand has returned to normal, but she still seems shaken by the whole affair. She wants to make haste to reach Greenest. No doubt she wants to forget her troubles by being pampered. What a baby we have as a leader! We won't be able to stay long though or the book will wreak havoc on the town and force us to fight the townspeople it makes into it's dream puppets. How did Reed put it: "haste by halfling green".

Cuura seems to have accepted her curse as a true leader who is not stopped by such trifles and fights on. There is some worry in her now if the gods will not find her too tainted. Perhaps the curse is a blessing since she spends more time worrying about that the gods think of her now! Instead of succumbing she rides out defiantly as the sun onto the night. The gods have apparently freed her from her nightmares to reward her bravery, but I wonder what price WE will pay this time for her foolish bravery?

Kendalan remains his inscrutable self. Peering at empty skies and proclaiming to see special birds. Well birds have come and gone and I fail to see any importance in it. I wonder why the rest does? Fortunately we have runes and Reed's predictions to truly guide us!

Studying the book of death I find it deals with many interesting topics, containing knowledge I had not even imagined. It is hard to turn pages though since they seem to absorb me as much as I absorb them. After reading even a short while I feel tired as if having carried bags of coal all day, still what I read stays in my mind with a calm clarity, even though I cannot fully understand some of the things I read. The first chapter seems to be some sort of primer describing views on death in various cultures, races and religions and contains knowledge on various types of undead. The second chapter is a chapter on signs of undead and how to read those signs so one can infer their presence. The third is a very in depth chapter on the vulnerabilities of corporeal undead. Fascinating, for I always understood that since their bodies are no longer alive they had no such weaknesses! The fourth chapter describes initiation rites for the hunters of the undead. It is not immediately clear what benefits these initiations bestow, but it seems to be some kind of consecration. This very book seems to be a key focus for the ritual. The fifth chapter is on proper posture and gestures and various abjuration and commanding phrases to use when dealing with the undead. The sixth and final chapter is fascinating. Apparently the divine force priests are imbued which can be used to drive away undead, but also can be used to command them. According to this chapter this ability is not linked to the god or goddess one serves as I had always understood. The chapter describes incantation rituals which can grant the ability to command or destroy so one priest would be able to do both! It is a very intricate incantation though and it will take some time to master it.

It is clear now that it was wise not to use the scholar's touch prayer to transfer all the knowledge of the book into my mind directly! Given the complexity of the writing I will either have to read the first chapter to gain better understanding of the rest of the book or I will have to pray more frequently to the silent keeper to guide my understanding.

I have taken some time to consider the effect that studying the book has had on me using my skills as a healer. From what I notice I would think Louis is a good indication of what will remain of my vigor if I were to read the whole book and manage to survive. I think that studying just one short chapter won't cause any irrevocable damage, but anything more than that will start upsetting the balance of my mind or body permanently. I think that about half of the book could be read before critical symptoms set in. Knowledge has its price, but I must consider what price to be paid by me will benefit the group most. Perhaps the burden should be shared? The last two chapters are of no practical use if one is not a priest, but the first four might benefit the others as well. I should discuss this with our leaders.

Our scouts ran into an army patrol, but the wise decision was taken to negotiate from a position of strength. I had not expected to see a regular army unit down here since this area is largely abandoned. Still it is better than running into brigands or monsters.

For some reason I cannot comprehend neither of our two leaders stood at the negotiation table! Felina was up on the hill and Cuura stood about fifty yards away speaking loudly and showing bluster. Hardly a show of courage and strength by either of them. Hardly impressive for a leader to be so far away and letting Goya do the talking. When their leaders came forward I had expected ours to do the same, but indeed if we act as if we are merely guards of a trader less suspicion may fall on us.

If only Cuura had let Goya do the talking and indeed behaved as merely a guard! Their commander was about to sit down and start the parlay as roughly equals, when Cuura felt the need to show her obstinacy. Now he has us dragged to his camp under guard instead of simply taxing our passage through his lands. I thought we agreed that in non-combat situations Felina would take charge. Why didn't she? I hate to think it but in this case she would have been a better leader than Cuura.

As we approach their camp it is clear this is a highly mobile cavalry force with little heavy equipment except for a single siege crossbow. Just a single ditch filled with thorn bushes to delay attacks or intruders and some light carts and simple tents. Apparently they use horse nomads from Cuura's home region as scouts and skirmishers. Most of the servants seem to be slaves given their lack of weapons and destitute look on their faces. Most of their force are human but there are many half-Orcs around. It is clear that an army which employs such unruly brutes needs to be ruled with an iron fist and their commander seems to have just that!

I spot a symbol of Cyric on the commander. The army must be a Zhent unit controlling the nearby trade route from Amn to the north. A bloodthirsty lot the Cyricites, but at least the area should be cleansed of monsters and bandits since the power of the Zhents relies heavily on trade. I just hope he does not regard Goya as competition or as trying to bypass his taxation since they know no mercy. It is a good thing they are so isolated here and are not actively looking for us or else we would be in trouble we could not get out of!

There seems to be some tension between the robed leader and the Cyricite commander. Is it just the normal tension between magic users and those who follow the divine or is it more? The mage orders our wagon searched and I fear for the worst, but my companions begin unloading with vigor and place the box with the books right under their noses, but manage to shift it around and show other things. Especially Rebecca seems extremely skilled at drawing attention to herself with her prancing motions, demonstrations and smiles, she must have practiced this craft before, even I find myself entranced. There is a moment of panic as one of the soldiers opens a vial of what Paul calls dragon's breath and becomes slightly singed. This makes the soldiers a lot less eager to grab around our cargo and they choose to examine whatever is explained and offered to them.

Just when we start repacking the cargo and it seems we will be allowed to be on our way a loud alarm sounds from the commander's tent and I notice that the little rat is no longer with us. Damn I should have kept a better eye on him! He must have been trying to sell us out to the enemy commander by meeting him in secret!

The commander wastes no time in having his men disarm us and round us up. Reed is dragged in from behind the commander's tent, was she guided to do something weird by the book or some god or is she sacrificing herself again to protect that traitor? Cuura's loud protests almost get all of us killed by enraging the commander even further (why can't she learn to be silent!), but luckily one of his lieutenants reminds him that slaughtering another entire group of traders would be a bit much given that he already did so recently and does not want traders to avoid this area. Whew that was a close call! The commander decides he will settle for the life of the would be thief and yells for his second to find out who is responsible, but apparently his second has patrol duty so our doom is delayed a few hours.

We are bound, disarmed and placed under guard. I notice some of the soldiers are eying the women, bringing out horse whips and putting irons in the fire. No doubt they feel there are other ways to make one talk and pass the time till the lieutenant returns...