

The story of Grimwald

Chapter 22: Hungry Herb, a hag, and to many heads

This group is rather amazing. The hermit tells us not to go someplace because a terrible monster lurks there and they, well except Reed, feel we should go there even though we have been told not to. Are they drawn to danger or so anti authoritarian they feel they must do the opposite from what they have been told? This insanity must be due to all the magical influences we are exposed to. Fortunately me and Reed are protected by the gods. At least I can prepare myself for what lies ahead.

I finally had some time to study the magical items we found. Although their general nature can be discerned we lack the precise categorization and instructions which are necessary to use them optimally. Felina should see to it she acquires such skill, seeing how she becomes absorbed in reading she may find an answer soon.

I also tell Jay he should prepare for the inevitable as well. Clearly Reed's clan must be dying so the ancestral powers are gathering in their last descendant. As her power is ever growing little can be left of her family. The clan must survive, these divine blessings must not be wasted! Jay responds in the typical short sighted way of the human that he will guard and protect her. I explain that sooner or later she will meet her end, but that this does not have to mean the end of her line. His duty should be not just to her, but to her line. Jay apparently still has trouble coming to terms with this greater duty. It simply won't do just to preserve, we dwarves know as no other race that defense will slow decline, but only creation can restore strength lost.

We move through the lake district in a staggered formation when the elf yells out a warning. Indeed I clearly see something moving beneath the surface reflection. It looks huge and seems to come closer, but then it turns away. Suddenly the group opens fire at something on the other side of the wagon. Are there two such monsters? From what I hear they seem to be firing blindly at some movement. Though they are wasting arrows on god knows what a monster is definitely here on this side so I keep watch while they fall for the distraction. I pray to Dumathoin to keep me from sinking into the treacherous water when with blinding speed two tentacles spring from the water and lash out at me and Reed. My bolt goes wide and before I can grab a weapon I am entangled in a vice like grip by tough tendrils. Jay rushes to the aid of Reed and severs the tentacle but before he can reach me I am pulled into the lake. The power of my earlier prayer has prevented the monster from drawing me under giving me time to pray that my friends will find me and light starts to stream from my armor. I sense the bright glow of Cuura trying to yank me from the tentacles grip as we both struggle in vain against the beasts' pull towards the deep. Eventually Cuura has to go up for air and I too am starting to feel the burning in my lungs as I struggle in vain against the unyielding tendrils, if only I had solid footing I could exert more force!

Then I feel as I did in the room with the centipede skeletons that I could be safe and plop onto dry land. Relieved I gasp in the fresh air, but find myself staring as some greenskin! I immediately grab my waraxe and swing at it, even as it latches on to me. For a moment it feels as if my strength is flowing away from me, but my body's hold on it is more firm than the greenskin's feeble grip. Warding sigils from the book of the dead spring into my mind and my left hand forms a ward against attacks which weaken the body. Not safety, but the lesser and probably more appropriate of two evils has fallen to me. Reed has fresh air and I have the Dwarven physical resilience, a wise switch of duties and perils.

I cringes and so avoids my blow. I see a narrow blade springing from it's belly, Snake must have slithered up behind it. As it ducks and turns running for the water I see it does not look like an orc or goblin, but no less evil and no less green.

Quickly I gather those near me so they may join in Dumathoin's blessing for those who seek sunken secrets. Even as I begin to tell them to save Reed since she is now in the monster's clutches the Elf and Snake dive in after the green woman. Why won't they pay attention to me?

I look for a way to save Reed and find that the Sergeant has thought of an ingenious solution and is now leading the horses to pull on a rope. For an instant I think the rope may be tied to Reed's armor to pull her free, then realizing she wears none I fear she will be pulled apart between the horses and the monster. I must find out what is hidden by the waters and start pulling myself towards Reed with all my strength. The rope was not tied to her, but to the monster which in its attempts to resist the horse's pull let's go of a limp Reed. I grab her and the power of Dumathoin brings us up towards fresh air. She takes deep gasps, thank the gods we have been in time.

With the roles reversed the solid footing of the horses exert a strong pull against which the monster cannot resist, and when it is brought to the surface I notice Cuura and Jay ceaselessly pummeling the creature's huge hulk. I lead Reed back to the safety of the group and a worried looking Jay. Suddenly I hear an agonized scream from across the pond, the green woman is fighting Felina. Felina manages to fight her off and as she stumbles away I get a clear shot and plant a bolt in her. One less green skin!

After a few hours of searching and chopping we have a nice breastplate, the straps have rotted, but they can be replaced. It should do better than my chain mail since I can mount spikes on it to prevent another creature from grabbing me like that. When we get to town I shall make some nice spiked armor for myself and Cuura. We also found a well crafted heavy crossbow. The string must be replaced and the wood needs to be dried carefully so it won't split, but it is more finely crafted than my light crossbow. In a few days when the wood has dried I will give it a try. Also we found some holy water, apparently the green woman was trying to corrupt the blessing, but her lack of knowledge of runes caused her to fail.

We resume our journey elated we bested the dangers when we hear yearning yelps. The Elf feels it is a trap and we approach cautiously at first, but the agony and urgency of the yelps gets to us and we quicken pace. Bearing in mind the Elf's suspicions I halt a few hundred yards from the source and ask Dumathoin to reveal what is hidden by the intervening terrain. I see a group of lizardmen beset by some many headed monster! Apparently Felina has just read about such a beast and starts relating verbatim a treatise on Hydra's as they are called. When we reach them I ask the Hidden Keeper to grant us the secret knowledge of where the beast will strike so our wounds will be lessened and few and we may retaliate more accurately. Grown overconfident by the power of these blessings Jay, Snake and the Elf abandon all caution and seek to rush past the Hydra distracting it from eating the lizardmen by offering themselves up. Cuura rushes in to distract the beast while keeping away from its snapping head's showing both courage and skill and wisdom in battle. I feel proud to follow such a fearless leader who is showing more and more caution and wisdom! They all manage to survive their mad dash and start chopping at the necks of the hydra. I join them a little later but fresh and unwounded and strengthened by my prayers. Jay and I start lopping off each head which comes our way while Reed's fire cauterizes the wounds. I feel almost invincible so supported by Dumathoin and every swing costs our enemy a head. Jay however becomes too hasty again (will the lad ever learn!) and chops off two heads before Reed is ready to cauterize the wounds and four heads spring back to replace the two he removed! To augment Reed's fire I yell to the Sergeant to throw the oil left on the wagon, but Reed has moved close to the beast and as if in a trance asks us to step away. I hesitate for a moment, but feel the voice of the gods may not be questioned and grudgingly yield ground to the Hydra.

Fire erupts from every orifice in a blinding wash of light and heat, being accustomed by smithing fires I manage to keep staring and see flesh charring, bursting to flame and whisking away as white ash within seconds. Only charred bones remain where once was the hydra. I felt invincible just moments ago, now I feel humbled.

The lizardmen are joined by a dreadful beast called a Gray Render, but their shaman takes us in so we are recognized as part of its tribe. The shaman also tells us of ruins, from before the moon became different. I ask Reed to try to calculate the years the shaman is telling us about. Apparently the ruins predate the coming north of my ancestors. These must be ancient Giant ruins or something even stranger. The giants used powerful runes before their decline and I feel I must seek out these secrets hidden beneath many layers of time. The rest feels knowledge is not worth the risk. Fools! Knowledge is worth far more than any treasure!

Jay however asks me how well kept these secrets are. Indeed even forewarned as we were today we barely made it out alive being not prepared against grasping tentacles. I ask if we can prepare against the perils in the ruins, but we are lacking in skill and tools to face these perils and so must postpone this delving until we are well prepared. I shall start making a list to better outfit our group so we have a set goal to work towards.