

Grimwald's thoughts part 33

Apparently the rest of the group made themselves useful trying to ensure the town has enough wood for the smelters. I am proud of their efforts on behalf of the community! Ah this is the life! Hard work in the forge daily, respect of the community and even free motivated labor and cold iron ore worth at least 800 gold pieces to assist in the crafting of dwarven quality weapons. The only way life could be more perfect is if we were underground! Grandfather was right, this could never have happened if I had stayed in Neverwinter. Here we can be celebrated heroes besting criminals and driving away fell beasts. We can be sure our pursuers won't make the mistake of underestimating us again. In the past they left retrieving the relics to their underlings, but now they have failed their leaders will demand personal involvement of their mid level agents. We have to be prepared for the next round and stave of death and failure for a while longer.

I don't know if the dragon getting away was a good thing. We did not yet receive retribution of an angry mother dragon, which would have leveled the town so I guess it is lucky, but word of our being here might get around to the Cult of the Dragon. If they know we are here they will come at us in force. I just hope that our little victory will not lead to a worse fate for us and the town.

The enchantment of Cuura's armor has been the most complicated and expensive ritual I have performed so far swallowing up a third of our party's gold. She was furious at being cooped up for nine days spending the whole day repeating dwarven rituals and praying together. I think she was also upset having to do it over again and again and again if she did not get it completely right. I though she would throttle me on several occasions. She is learning more patience and restraint, but now I have a deeper understanding of why barbarian people have so few magical objects. Even if they have the knowledge they lack the patience for this kind of thing. Let her ride and hunt bears through blizzards for nine days and she would be exhilarated I imagine. She was quite upset to learn we were still not completely done since the enchantment which would allow her to radiate her wrath would take an additional five days to complete. I would rather have wrought these enchantments in durable metal runes carved into her breastplate, but she insisted on using the Ankegh armor. The weight is not right, but Jay's teaching of speed and mobility doctrine demands such a light weight solution. Also it would be a great sin to forge her a mithril breastplate and then to enamel it in green to match Cuura's colors. I know that hiding things of value is good, but not to be able to take joy in the luster of mithril just doesn't feel right. Disrespectful to the Lord of the Underearth, miners and forgers if the great beauty is not shown. Just wait until the armor brings her back from the dead, then she will see it as a trifling small price to pay for such a great blessing by the gods!

Cuura had even expected me to make a simple round buckler like her tribal people use. She does not yet have a good grasp of the dwarven craft, this buckler is meant to survive for many more generations of her people and even of mine so they will remember her and be proud of their heritage. I guess it is harder to see the start of a legend than when the whole work is finished. Every dwarvencraft item is unique, a homage to the Lord of the Underearth and the Soul Forger both and of the smith to the person who has been bestowed the honor of having one forged for him.

Reed and Jay although seemingly not that knowledgeable in the ways of the dwarves grasp this concept intuitively. Perhaps the people of their lands have already come closer to perfection than the humans of these parts. May this be where the new flood of newly crafted dwarven souls stems from? Their feeling of duty to the community, honoring craft and their teachers and stoic bearing of great doom is quite dwarven. Still they worship strange gods so how could they be claimed by Dumathoins Sleep and the Soul Forge? Reed even performed many parts of the ritual gestures and phrases without me having to show them to her. She is indeed divinely inspired and hiding her power under humbly saying that it felt right. Jay is the only one so far who has managed to stay focused enough to take in the work in it's fullness. I am ashamed to say it took me many more repetitions to learn it from my grandfather than he needs from me.

In respect for the dragon scale buckler I forged for him and the blade we are now making together Jay wishes to learn the art of metal working to more fully appreciate the gifts and care for them. It fills my heart with joy and pride and it might even put some more meat on his bones if I work him hard enough like my grandfather did me. Working the iron without using too much heat to make it malleable requires a lot more strength and skill. I let him work the forge, but keep a close eye on him so he does not ruin the properties of the metal. The theoretical knowledge I have from my army and forging experience are quickly turned into combat maneuvers by Jay. We will forge him a blade light enough to be so swift it can fool the eye and provide it with a razor's edge so it can slice through the protective layers between plates. Although I find the idea alien I feel the phrase "water splitting stone" is appropriate for the kind of moves he makes. We should weave this idea into the form and decoration of the weapon. Enchanting Jay's blade will deplete the last of our gold though so the rest of us will just have to wait until appropriate sacrifices to Dumathoin can be found. I would have liked to have enchanted my own weapons and those of Cuura as well, but the natural resilience against magical forces of the cold iron makes it harder for enchantments to hold and sacrifices being what they are we simply cannot afford another five thousand gold pieces. If only we had more gold I could provide us with mantles protecting us against hostile magic as well, which is sure to be flung our way by our enemies to compensate now that Reed is reaching her potential.

Snake came to me with a question about a wound which would not heal properly. After examining it I found that the problem was not so much the wound, but rather that his life force was not flowing. Apparently he had been studying the book of the dead for several weeks! I tried to talk to him about it, but he started lecturing me. He was not just telling me what he read, not only what he knew, but also what he felt to be so. He was actually feeling what being undead is like! Knowledge always comes at a price, for him who is tainted already the added curse of being undead may not seem a deterrent. Fortunately Kendalan came to my aid flatly refusing to have anything to do with an undead. "Either I leave or it does!". Such vehemence from our normally soft spoken elf does me good. There is steel in him! To bad it comes and goes.

Reed confirmed my suspicions, but still the taint in him sought to doom him. In a way it is unavoidable, I have seen it. Perhaps it has something to do with his mother pulling at him somehow. I doubted for a moment if I should not simply abandon him to his doom, now was as good a time as any and safe for the rest of us. As an undead traveling with us he would eventually turn on us, but now we could rid ourselves of him. Still every good side has a downside and we dwarves have a tradition of staving off doom for as long as possible while still accepting the inevitable. I continued to argue with him. Eventually he was prevailed upon to ask his mistress, a fickle human goddess called Tymora. Fickle as she may be she cared for him at that time as showed him that he would neither living or dead, but continue in the middle, towards his doom. Reed had been pulled towards a clean death, I had merely shuddered inwardly and turned my fear into prepared defenses, but for Snake the lure of power was stronger than his resistance to corruption. I do not know whether to fear, loathe or pity him.

From what I understand the mayor has been tricked into selling supposedly worthless logging rights, which are suddenly becoming a lot more valuable because of a magical blight affecting the only other forest. Planting a new forest would not work since the one placing the curse would simply curse the new growth as well. My thoughts turned immediately on the Zentarim who have a virtual monopoly on the iron trade in the North and the Heartlands. After some thought I think it must have been them. Most merchants are too greedy to wait for a decade or more to reap profits so it seems likely the interest is in the power which goes with the logging rights, not so much the profit. Also not many others could offer things to entice a dark druid, who according to Reed and Kendalan must be behind this. I am proud to say the party worked very organized and methodical with lists of suspects and factors to consider. The only way to counter such a well organized and professional force like the Zhentarim is through excellent preparation and planning. The Zhentarim are greedy slavers who enlist orcs and intimidate with brutality, but they also wipe out any threats

to their slave and iron caravans and thus help control the treats to civilization in the north. A rather mixed blessing. Still we were told they were after the books we carried and were then released. Very unexpected, typically they would have made an example of us torturing us to death publically. Would it be wise to antagonize them further?

One valuable fact we found is that the shift boss at the mine is quite corruptible and may let us discover what was hidden in the sealed tunnels. The mayor hinted at valuable ores. Could there be a vein of gold or silver here or even mithril or maybe, one dare not hope, adamantium? Such a fortuitous blessing by the Gem under the Mountain may not be ignored. My grandfather told me of the great power of adamantium ore and crystals blunting even the sharpest blade and shattering the heaviest mauls. We must explore to find which tunnels to open and which are to remain sealed lest we unleash a horror into the mines the town is unprepared for.

It is sad that Noob is out of his wits, he probably knows more about what is down there. Last time I was sent to see if I could get anything out of him he became paralyzed with fear. This and the fact that he seems even more claustrophobic than Kendalan makes me suspect he had a bad experience with a dwarf while in the mines. Very strange since our people were driven away from these lands after great wars against the treacherous humans from the south millenia ago. At first I thought he might have been startled by an ore cutter, they tend to get around and their moving through the earth like a Xorn can be quite startling especially if they decide to take you with them I gather. There was no curse laid upon him as far as I could detect.

Then I was suddenly set upon by a hysterical innkeepers daughter who came rushing at me moments after I had accosted Noob. It was like fighting of a crag cat, the moment you get hold of one paw, the other three claw at you and startle you into letting go and having to start over again. Even Cuura has a difficult time to get hold of the hysterical girl. A concerned mob was gathering and Jay was wisely explaining the need for pain and distress to emerge stronger and we were merely trying to bring Noob through a crucible and meant no harm. Then our warleader decided to strike at what she perceived as our enemy, while our social leader decided to calm her down with a discreet spell. This conflict of jurisdiction led to a rather unfortunate slap and her dropping like a sack of stones. A powerful barbarian warleader smacking a little town girl around and dropping her instantly swung the mood of the town against us. I thought about explaining the situation but decided to leave it for I hope Cuura will learn from this to stick to her jurisdiction in the future.

This most unnatural sensitivity of the innkeepers daughter to Noob leads me to believe he may have run into the tribe of dwarves lost in ancient Shannatar. The only dwarves here to have survived that war of extinction the treacherous humans of the south waged against us after we had freed them from slavery to the outerplanars. The lost tribe who rejected the teachings and protection of Dumathoin and thus became the thralls of the Illythid. I heard they had endured and grew strong and finally overthrew their masters like our ancestors liberated themselves from the Drow. I had not thought of them in years. Have they managed to reclaim the old kingdom and grown mighty and proud again in the underearth? Have they seen the error of their ways and are now ready to rejoin their brethren preserved through Dumathoin's wisdom through centuries of hardships. If Noob's affliction is psionic a psionist may cure him. Regardless we must be on our guard since dwarves, whether shield dwarf or duergar, are unlikely to forget a grudge. We decided not to push Noob further at this point so the emotions of the mob could dissipate.

Once you have a good technique is merely takes time and effort. We observed, set traps and allowed us to be led by stars and divine visions. I spotted a little mannerism, nothing incriminating by itself, but merely the result of being drilled in horse riding. Something odd for one with a domestic profession. He tucks away his pants into his boots in the same way Cuura does. Felina's investigations revealed he had a hidden magical ring. Well hidden, but this is something we priests of Dumathoin have much experience in. Very odd thing to have for a man in his position so we decided to watch him closely over the next few days to discover anything incriminating. With we, of course they mean that I must stare through his eyes days on end for hours instead of chiseling

decorations and runes! Although he has no clear agents I noticed his ring is identical to the one Snake is wearing. I knew the little viper would betray us sooner or later!

When we confronted him about it however he explained to us how he pleaded with the Zhent wizard for our lives and that we owe our survival to his efforts and sacrifice abasing himself and pledging himself to servitude. How he desired to tell us, but was afraid that we would cast him out, not understanding him and judging him by his ancestry as he always was. I did not know Snake has such a selfless side to him. Such a warmth towards us hidden underneath his appearance. Perhaps Reed is right and I have misjudged him. We now have an ally in the enemy camp who will keep repercussions to minimum. Still we must not provoke too much of a response. We are not ready to leave yet and I would prefer not to hasten our departure.

Reed feels we should confront the dark druid, called a blighter. He is probably not a part of the Zhentarim network, but just hired help so we can feel pretty secure about minimizing harm to us if we do not upset them further. I feel however uneasy about the idea of using ourselves as bait. The druid will not come at us alone and after our driving away the dragon we can be sure he will bring a great might to best us if he dares at all. Still I must set aside my uneasiness and fear as the voice of the gods has spoken and it will not do to gainsay her.