

Grimwald's thoughts part 37

My ponderings about my own doom are intruded upon by Reed. She explains to me regret about how we handled the ogres. A good reminder that being doomed does not necessarily prevent one from doing one's duty and also reminding me that doing one's duty can doom someone. She ask me what she could do for penance. What indeed? She was doomed by her choice as I am, fallen as I will, but can there be redemption? This is not a thought which had entered into my mind. It is not a dwarven concept, one bears one's burden, rather than be relieved of it. Yet her goddess might grant such a boon. Perhaps if there is hope for her there can be for me... Her idea that a right can mend a wrong and that there exist a balance, which can be shifted, but not disturbed is intriguing. I inform her that I will need to ponder on this further, but do not add this pondering is for my own sake as well. This would make her feel better about trying to alleviate her own burden and I could not do that to her.

Cuura has been too gentle with Nethander and Felina and they dared to disobey and abandoned their posts. I hope she will punish them strongly enough so they won't sneak off again without informing her. They must learn to fear her wrath more than the enemy. As a warleader she must learn to deal with desertion in the ranks so this will be good exercise. Most desertions are on the eve of battle and those two have a nose for danger so we can expect some hefty challenge. Still it may prove valuable to have a hidden reserve. I will have to explain this concept to Cuura one day since her warband tactics will not stand up against a modern army. She is from a strange place. Tossing gnomes. This is not something the barbarians of the world's edge mountains engage in.

As we travel through the foothills I make my companions aware of the dangers such a land brings from marauding giants. Few of them have lore on giants and their ways so I try to strengthen their minds when suddenly a gigantic boulder slams into the ground next to me. I quickly lead my companions away back out of the ambush. Given the lay of the land we will remain more mobile diverting to our right so we won't be caught pinned on a steep slope by an avalanche of boulders. Cuura even starts to grasp the dwarven wisdom of traveling underground, but we cannot find deep enough caves.

As we travel through a shallow vale a huge creature leaps forth swinging three spiked clubs. Three? An aberration with three arms and a foul temper comes charging at us. I open my mind to my ancestors so I may be guided by their knowledge of these creatures. The silence is resounding. Am I the first dwarf to meet such a horror?

I have no time to ponder this mystery as it is quickly turning Jay into a pile of mush. I pray for the strength of my ancestors to fill me and charge at the abomination solidly planting my axe in it's leg. Jay's blood spurts out of him as the heavy blows flatten him to the ground, but using the power of prayer I call him back to his duties for the danger to Reed still remains and he returns from Dumathoin's sleep to bear his burden. I feel however that the weight of returning him from the deep is also born by gentle Reed and some measure of divine mercy bestowed upon him. Overwhelmed by the number of attackers the giant soon meets his end.

The giants body is too big to crush his skeleton to prevent his rising as an undead, without serious delay, but since the lands here don't feel as tainted as the green fields we will just have to accept the risk. Searching the vile giant I find he has much hidden treasure, Dumathoin smiles upon me as I unearth much gold and gems which will be fine offerings on the altar when I return. My lord smiles upon giant slayers almost as much as Clangeddin does.

We continue our journey and some of the marks on the giant's body start to make sense. We are surrounded by big catlike creatures with spiny tentacles. Our elf tells us these are called displacer beasts. Again I open my mind to the ancestral halls to hear the lore, but again not even a whisper can be heard. This cannot be! My heart quails inside me, I have been abandoned by my ancestors. I am set apart, outcast. Clearly they wish to have nothing to do with my oath breaking, this is a

burden I must take upon myself. Even though my people have abandoned me, my companions still remain. A clan of clanless, doomed and tainted and now I truly belong to them. The pain is almost too much to bear. Fortunately Dumathoin still considers me unfallen for the moment and his blessing shields our group as we take the initiative and Cuura sets out to lure the displacer beasts to her.

Cuura's gambit works and the beasts rush to overtake her. The displacement is even baffling the spiritual maul I prayed for although Jay has little trouble finding them. His master must have taught him to use all his senses in a fight rather than be misled by his vision. The pack of beasts is hit again and again by great balls of fire hurled by Reed, but a few of them have noticed and break off to hurl themselves at Reed. I step forward and swing my Urgosh straight at the displacer beast who doesn't even break his stride. As the axe meets no resistance it takes me a moment to regain my bearing. The beast did not flinch because it was not there. Now I may have discovered a key to fighting them myself rather than relying on my ancestors.

I set off to kill the beasts besetting Reed and now my axe and spiritual maul strike blow after blow and soon all are laid low. I am not sure whether it is my new found trick or the gods which use Reed who support me, but I am glad of it! The last few scamper off into the hills pursued by Cuura and her horse.

Cuura rides back towards us, foam still dripping from her mouth and urges us to press forward. For a moment both fear and duty tell me to follow her, but we are out of spells, wounded and Felina and Snake still haven't caught up with us. I try to counsel her that we would be at a disadvantage in our next encounter. For a moment I think that in her rage she will attack me to cool her anger, but when others join their voices with mine Cuura reluctantly agrees. She has learned to gauge the morale of the troops and treat them accordingly. She will become a decent warleader one day! It is too bad most of the furs are badly singed. If Felina were here to skin them they would be worth a handsome penny I wager.

As the party finds a good place to set up camp I clean my companion's wounds and dress them with moss. I find some time to ponder my situation. What is the doom awaiting me on the mountain? Should I even be endangering my companions like this? Jay nearly died because of this quest of mine and even Reed could have been taken by those beasts. Yes they are my companions and members of a group have a duty, but they are not doing this out of their sense of duty. Who am I to still talk about duty when I am about to break not merely a word or even duty but even a vow or oath? Yet is it not worth doing so when a new Shanatar could arise? Could Reed's concept of doing the right thing be more true than being true to one's word? There may be a higher good than obedience and adherence to culture, custom and law, but I cannot sacrifice what is not mine to do so. The Ghaleb Duhr did a fine job of organising the green stuff for a greater purpose, but indeed sometimes an order may need to be upset for a greater one to rise, like the great rift civilisation which rose where once the drow ruled.

I wonder what will happen to me after I die. Dumathoin has not forsaken me, but my ancestors have. Will I be allowed in the great halls or will my imperfections need to be purged immediately by Moradin's forge? How I long to be part of the lore and history of my people, but if I must let go of my past and heritage to create a brighter age for my people I shall!