

Grimwald's chronicles part 70

Snake comes up with a sneaky plan to lure our enemies into a tunnel and then to block it from both sides and crush them. A good plan. I argue that I should be part of the anvil and hold the tunnel exit to prevent the Umber Hulks from spilling out into the cave, but Cuura claims that glory. I just hope she has listened to me rather than Snake's sweet talk about how the mercenaries' crossbows will solve all problems and bring them down before they get a chance to act.

As we worm our way through a narrow Neogi tunnel I feel as though I am being polished like a gem by the earth. Better able to let the ancestors who sleep in the stone pass through me, to be moved by them, but also to bring forth different facets. My wand's *silence* keeps us hidden in the earth's embrace until our trap is sprung. As we prepare for battle I feel a wonderful clarity being blessed by the ancestors, almost like a precognition how every action against the Umber Hulks will play out.

We attack the rear guard quickly downing the Umber Hulk riding Neogi. While Jay takes care of the Bugbears our arrows down the Umber Hulks. I even put an arrow through an Umber Hulk's eye. I'm getting to be almost as good as the elf with my bow. I was just a matter of the right technique, not rushing things like Cuura and Kendalan do. Just waiting for the right moment to perform the right action.

Then Snake's evil self breaks free again and he attempts to stab Reed in the back, but I get to him just in time to prevent it. I try to force back his evil side by invoking *Moradin's truth* hoping he will remember our friendship, I feel the holy power pass through my hands into his shoulder. This however enrages his evil side even more and he twists away. I do not follow this feint since I have seen him practice this move with Jay and indeed he then swiftly turns and tries to brain me with his rapier, even though I foresaw his move his sneaky, spindly blade gets me through the throat almost severing my artery. He is really trying to kill me!

Fortunately my elemental friend comes to my aid and brings Snake down hard. I jump on top of him to pin him down before he can do more harm, but true to his name he writhes and twists and escapes my grasp and slithers away. We regroup and stand our ground, against us united his evil self finds it stands no chance and retreats leaving his normal personality in charge once again. Nethander then apologizes and claims the Umber Hulk's confusion caused it all. He seems sincere, just like he seemed sincere when apologizing for trying to get Reed killed by the elven grudgebearer, just like he seemed sincere when he almost dropped me in the wizard's spiked pit. He is just too slippery with words to trust! I don't know how Durlag's tower changed him. The others may think he is improved, but I'm not so sure. I think the evil is simply better hidden.

We have no time to ponder this however since the gigantic Neogi spidership is starting to move. We rush through the slave camp with Cuura raising a rebellion and getting the freed slaves to prevent their escape. Kendalan and Reed fly into the spider's belly as the ramp is being raised. Jay jumps onto the ramp and pulls me up just in time as the ship is lifting off. The Neogi send one of their beholderkin thralls to try to buy their way out seeking to escape justice, but I am having none of it! Although I smell it's corruption it would not be fair to kill a sentient being unable to control its own actions so we allow this thrall to try to abandon its evil ways. When we get to what must be the control room we find our way blocked by a door made of a strange material.

I search my metalurgy chants for a clue but find none. Then I remember my grandfather once showing me an ingot of the same bluish metal. He wanted to make something out of it, but the ingot was too small. Blue star metal was its label, apparently exceedingly rare. Such a door will be defended without a doubt. As I urge Nethander to pit his wits against that of the trapmaker Felina's magic addled mind decides to wave a wand, I hear a hiss and smell a pungent odor and all goes black.

When I open my eyes I see a concerned Kendalan leaning over me, but the after effects of the poison make me feel I am swerving through the air. Then I see how Kendalan is bracing himself, the whole room is indeed dancing around insanely! I sit up and see Reed staring out the window with beads of perspiration on her forehead from concentrating on a spell. The others are pondering a cluster of levers and switches. By the gods they killed the pilot in mid flight! Idiots! I get up quickly. The panel on the left bears planar markings so I tell them to stay away from it. The controls are made for a lot more arms than I have, but there must be a universal wisdom guiding such designs. Muttering prayers to the Hidden Keeper I start working the controls. Then a flash, almost like a memory hits me, a thought how this is much easier than flying a mountain. I shake away the insane notion of flying mountains, let alone guiding them and start trying to control the ship as I see a cavern wall looming up. Somehow though it all has a strange familiarity to it. We manage not to slam into the rock wall, but can do little to stop our fall. Then a ledge can be made out below. Excited by this Cuura tries to “help” pushing some levers all the way. She almost tips the spider on it's back before our companions can drag her away from the controls.

The ancestors guide my hands over the controls and I manage to hit the shelf and fortunately we don't crash through it or slide off. The ship's legs are crushed, but we come away unharmed. After several minutes the others who were gassed start coming to their senses and a search of the ship grants us a great treasure: another blue starmetal door! and some other stuff.