

Grimwald's chronicles part 82

Work at the smithy proceeds very well. So well that I get to spend some time away from the smithy practicing my terran with Rock. Perhaps I can teach him to fetch some time. He is much smarter than other elementals I heard of!

Then Cuura raises my hopes again of her being reforged as a dwarf. I guess the time spend underground has done her good. She has the desire to find hidden passages in our cellar and although unpracticed her intuition seems to be right. A part of the floor is newer than the rest. What was blocked by the new construction? Ah, the desire to uncover the secrets hidden in the underearth. Clearly a blessing of Dumathoin. With Jay's assistance it doesn't take long to break through the barrier. Unfortunately we have tunneled into the city sewer not an entrance to the underdark.

With a few *stone shapes*, chisels and *unseen crafters* it doesn't take me long to make Cuura's vision come through. We now really do have a hidden passage in our cellar. I just hope we won't have a need for it, but it is good to be prepared.

Jay, Cuura and me spend some time honing our fighting skills, while Reed practices her music. The music is beautiful, but she seems to expect something more from it. Perhaps it's very beauty and perfection sets it apart from us, belonging to a lower vibration. I can imagine this is hard for one such as she to understand. I wonder how much time it will take her to realize this. We bridged the gap between our world and the heavens, now she has to do the same in the opposite direction.

Jay is clearly the most innovative of us three coming up with many different moves. But as a true craftsman he frets over their imperfections. Practicing with him like this I sometimes feel I should remember something similar. Some innovations he comes up with feel familiar, even though I have not witnessed them before. Was something not totally melted when my soul was reforged? Why?

I try to rid myself of these thoughts and focus on remembering the ancestral skill of using the goblin and orc swarm techniques against them. But it is hard to evoke the right reaction from them which will hamper the other. I guess trying to use this technique on Jay and Cuura is a bit more challenging than on goblins and orcs, but if ancestral memory serves right it should work on all races. I know I can do it, my body just needs to incorporate the memories better.

Cuura's accuracy is excellent, but she would do well to practice following through with her attacks. There is little more intimidating than a single blow felling several enemies at once forming a circle of death within five feet from her. I try to explain what I know from the technique, but since my strength comes from the earth it cannot be used on Horse. I hope she will find a teacher more suited to her style. Surrounding an enemy leader and bringing her down by sheer force of numbers is something she will need to learn to defend against. Horse can not always be with her to defend her and carry her to safety.

Reed tries her hand at cooking now that Kendalan is away with his scouts. I don't know what strange herbs she mixed through the food, but it makes my tongue burn and my nose run. I should know better than to eat other than traditional fare. Treacherous Ugra! I quaff some ales to wash it down, but even ale won't cure it. Eating in her style is akin to taking chainmail rings from the coals. They use tongs to pick up small bits of food and bring it to their mouths. Perhaps the smiths in her country are a bit more skilled than here getting more practice this way. With dwarven food the hammer and chisel are more useful than tongs, but I think the same principle applies. Perhaps I'll bake us some dwarven waybread tomorrow.

A strong banging on the door turns out to be generated by a dwarven visitor. His accent is Galenan, not the Shanatar of the local shield dwarves. I wonder what he is doing here in the west? Even though the shield dwarves of the east did not have to bear the loss of great Shanatar and witness their northern kingdoms be ground to dust by millenia of orc invasions they are only marginally

more open than our Hidden. Rampaging demons, giants and foul magics reaping their toll on our people in the east has made them nearly as steadfast as us and a bit more hostile. He goes about his business inspecting our hands. Clearly searching for Nethander. Rather than letting this play out forcing him into asking questions, which we might trade for answers Nethander's presence among us is betrayed foolishly. Hardly the dwarf to repay such looselippedness he marches away having gained what he sought only to be set upon by Felina. The memory of Felina throwing herself at me in such a way chills my blood. I tell the dwarf that in my experience it will pass rather quickly and he marches away again. The components he carries and the lack of amour suggest he is one of Moradin's blessed. What is such a young dwarf doing so far in the west? Well I'm sure Nethander will get some answers out of him if he is not here to kill Nethander. His clan is of some influence, perhaps they even have a representative in citadel Adbar. He might be from there. I wonder how things are going back home...

Early one morning Cuura storms into our house and yells "Troll hunt!". Jay jumps up and starts rushing out, but I manage to hold him back so he can help me get into my armor. Perhaps we will find the gold to make it *called* some day so I won't be as depended and a bit quicker in getting ready. Reed feels she should not go, but is forced to come along. I feel thorn between the need to obey the commands of our warleader and the respect due to the voice of the gods. In this domain I decide I should let Cuura lead.

When we get to the stables we find a score of light cavalry saddling up and equipping with flame bearing weapons. The men are quite impressed by our newly forged attire.

The little puffs of smoke rising from the soil as green acid slowly drips from Cuura's menacing flail bring the desired uneasiness. I wonder what name the bards will give the weapon in their tales.

The men don't recognize the dragonteeth on Jay's gauntlet for what they are, but his confidence without bearing any other weapon impresses them. I just hope he doesn't get overenthusiastic again like during training. Sure he is a great fighter, but he has to allow himself to be guided by his line of former masters. When he does this he will strike true, but if he forgets his mind will start wrestling with his lineage's guidance again. He still has to get used to his lineage teaching him in this way.

As usual the men spend more time admiring Felina's face and body than her armor and weapons. Her gold and enamel *amulet of teamwork* depicting a group distracting a blue dragon while one slays it from behind is admired as a fine piece of jewelry, but hardly taken literally.

The bass relief on my breastplate immediately identifies me as a priest of the Soul Forger and people stop there, thinking they know. None think of looking beneath my cloak, where they would find the Hidden Keeper's gem embedded between my shoulder-plates. I hear whispers of men wondering what metal my armor is forged from, hardly being able to believe it could be adamantine.

The lieutenant is busy mustering his men's courage. It is quite different from the dwarven way. Accepting frailty is not something we are used to. We simply demand steadfast strength. I see I have much to learn to become a proper second for Cuura.

The plan is sound we lure a troll hunting party and then use the cavalry as the hammer to crush them between us. I decrease the size of my shield so I can turn my warhammer into a maul and swing it with both hands. It isn't long before the trolls spot us. I pray to Moradin to *aid* our allies against the giantkin with steadfastness in battle and I join the frontline. Just before the green tide strikes I pray to Dumathoin to hide us from our enemy's blows and we feel protected by the might of the Mountain Lord's great shield. My new *steadfast boots* anchor me to the earth as my maul meets the charging troll allowing me to strike with a devastating *foe hammer* blow. A flurry of powerful claws and fangs clatters away on my armor like rain on a slate roof. I make sure I stand still so no openings will allow them to come in and none do.

Cuura's charge with her flail suddenly reminds me of the time cousin Thorvald sat down in full amour on his wineskin. It burst open from the pressure and all its contents spurted out spraying him, the dwarfs near him and even the cavern roof. The troll's tough skin cannot take the pressure and it erupts in a spray of blood and guts showering all around it. A sense of great pride flows through me and I feel Dumathoin is pleased at how I enhanced his gift or ore.

Then the situation behind me forces me to expose myself by moving. Our left flank is being overrun by two trolls and there is a battle in the rear between our lieutenant and three armored trolls. The armored trolls are being handled by Reed and Jay, but the left flank has none but me to rescue them. I tell Rock to trip the one on the right, but the troll's great weight and strength prove too much for Rock. I manage to engage the left troll and force it with my *iron guard* stance and *shield block* to relinquish its prey and face me. While I deal with my troll Cuura rides in to slay the other and saves the flank. White flashes indicate that Reed is stealing Jay's victories from him, but at least the rear should be safe. The cavalry dispatches the last trolls with no losses on our side. A glorious victory. I ask the lieutenant how many more groups we will get to kill before returning to the city, but unfortunately the armored trolls are a new development which must be reported.

The armored trolls are not merely using weapons and armor, they seem to be well forged and well suited, masterwork even. This is no cobbled together plunder. Who is supplying trolls with such equipment? The Zhents seeking revenge on the Flaming Fist? Perhaps in the smithy I can find out more. I should also start praying for Rock. Our enemies are growing increasingly dangerous and without their support he may be overcome some day soon despite his natural caution.

Cleric 4/Crusader 1/Prestige Paladin 3/Stalwart Champion 3