

Grimwald's chronicles part 100

Whatever Nethander did to me while I was unconscious I don't know. For the moment I seem to be in possession of my soul and free will still, just in incredible pain with the world trying to go dark before my eyes. Biting back the pain and focusing hard I manage to unfurl a scroll and read the restorative prayer.

I find myself on a mule hurrying away from the amphitheater ruins. I get off and restore consciousness to lieutenant Turlu draped over the mule next to mine. The survivors of the meeting quickly come together hurrying away from the amphitheater with Reed covering our retreat, while I apply restorative magic on our wounded. It seems that my closeness to the ancestral halls has deepened my understanding of heavy armor. I now use it as an external skeleton enhancing my movements rather than being restricted by it. My armor is more like a second skin to me now than ever before, except my shield from which I seem to withdraw rather than meld. Still I cannot complete the intricate movements my ancestors hinted at, but I feel much, much closer. I sense now that first I had to perfect my physical protection and use of armor before I can take the next step and perfect my energetic defenses.

I feel a rumbling in the earth. Rock is wondering if I am solid again. When I hit the ground and stopped pulsing and vibrating he pushed himself against me trying to make me solid again. He must accidentally have pressed the *delay death* rune in my chest-piece against me activating it. I have been very lucky. I must prepare better, much better next time. I tell Rock he did very well and that I am happy to be breathing and that my heart beats again as well. So I was saved by Rock, rather than having my soul stolen by Nethander and then returned again. Well at least I hope so.

In the distance the flash and sound of a fireball erupts, probably the horned devil is continuing it's rampage. Kendalan, Zhae and Cuura rush away to meet this new attack on our camp. Then all of a sudden crossbow bolts start flying and the Waterdhavian captain before me is wounded. I see a bright flash above me, Reed hurled something at an invisible attacker hovering over the colonel. I pray to Moradin and with a *holy smite* his evil is banished from this world. The rest of our assailants is quickly dispatched while Felina is dancing around. I mean really, how can we have a leader dancing around while our officers are being assaulted. Distressing and shameful. It is a good thing we have Cuura as our battle leader and not Felina.

The colonel orders one of his captains to secure a tent and after reading some anti teleport and anti scrying scrolls we enter leaving one of the lieutenants at the entrance to ensure we are not disturbed. Colonel Ribaldi quickly takes stock of his remaining officers and restores the chain of command. Major Locke is chosen to take command of the auxiliaries, a sensible choice given his earlier association with them. The remaining Waterdhavian captains are promoted to majors of the two Waterdhavian companies and captain Ogg is made acting major of the Neverwinter troops. Captain Ogg in turn promotes lieutenants Turlu and Noeri to captain with Turlu in charge of the swordsmen, pikemen and cavalry and Noeri leading the sappers, scouts and archers. In the background we hear more explosions, fire and screams as the onslaught continues. The new majors in turn promote their lieutenants to captains and dispatch them to restore order. One of the two junior lieutenants is to form a bodyguard for the colonel and the other to care for the bodies of the majors, including major Oresund for later revival and to secure the valuables left at the site of the earlier carnage.

The colonel then asks the majors for suggestions. Major Locke suggests we split into four columns each making for Lorkh according to another route. The fiends armies will be so busy fighting and looting one of them, that the other three will probably make it unharmed. Effective maybe, but hardly valorous or honorable! One of the Waterdhavians suggests we keep to our dug in positions and hold out until the enemy is forced to parlay. An admirable strategy, but not so easily accomplished without a better stronghold than these ruins. The other Waterdhavian, perhaps still a bit shocked from his narrow brush with death, suggests we leave the peasant levies to delay the

pursuit while the regular units retreat. He even has the gall to suggest that they are easy enough to come by, just comb the docks and the poor quarter. I am sure with such an attitude he will find himself reincarnated as an orc warleader in a next life. No wonder the Waterdhavians outside are panicking being led by officers willing to sacrifice them to save themselves! Major Ogg suggests we abandon our position here and head for Lork as well, but with a delaying force and vanguard of regular troops. My companions speak in support of Major Ogg and even though the idea of being forced to leave is extremely distasteful to any dwarf a more defensible position is essential against the odds we are about to face so we should head to the cliffs regardless of a further retreat to Lorkh.

Major Oggs plan is agreed upon and we are each assigned a platoon. Cuura and Zhae are to take their troops to support the vanguard's together with major Locke's auxiliaries. We are ordered to take our units to the south where the picket line already has been shattered to delay the enemy advance so the army can break camp and march out in good order. Major Ogg orders us not to lose too many men, to try to hold out for as long as we can, but not so long our own escape is cut off.

As we are leaving the lieutenant of the bodyguard reports to the colonel news of destruction of the horses, armory, hospital and casualty numbers as well as stories of angels descending on the camp urging the soldiers to desert and save their lives as well as fire spewing bats . Walking through the camp it is clear the soldiers are shaken and frightened by the sudden sneak attack and deaths of their leaders. It will take several minutes for the officers to get the men responsive to orders again and several more to get them packed and organized into units again. The next half hour will be critical!

In the absence of Cuura the Voice of the Gods guides us, well that is what I hope anyway. Reed has some strange ideas about warfare, but I am not sure it is inexperienced goofy Reed or the Voice of Gods counseling us. As Cuura's second perhaps I should assume command, but wouldn't it be blasphemy to gainsay the Voice of the Gods? She positions us with a wide gap in the center so we can pull back drawing the center units into a confused heap vulnerable to our missiles. A strategy which was used with success by Goldar Hammerhand many centuries ago, but which is unlikely to fool a mind as sharp as that of a devil. I hope she is right in her assumption that we will be facing only greenskins. Otherwise we may be split up and dealt with piecemeal. I would have preferred a more compact organization. Still she remembered to leave a good field of fire for the ballistae.

My sappers have barely set up their ballistae and spread their caltrops before the enemy is upon us. Thanks to the light spells and fire arrows we have a good sight of the battlefield. Wolf and warg packs are planning to circle our flanks while barbarians are meant to close into melee distance quickly. The orcs coming after them are meant to exploit the situation created. Not a bad battle-plan and one simple enough for these units to be carried out. Fortunately we can see no devils yet so the plan is unlikely to be changed according to circumstances.

My ballistae and arrows make the leaders of the barbarian war-bands pay for their audacity in attempting to measure themselves with well organized troops.

On our right flank the battle goes well. Felina's scouts withdraw by movement and fire keeping out of melee range of the wolves and Nethander manages to goad a chieftain to rush at him instead of ordering his troops into a good formation, a fresh unit of barbarians manages to disrupt his swordsmen, but before panic can break out Nethander pulls his unit back together again. The wargs are limping after having been caught in a *spike growth*. The orcs which were moving in on the flank are stopped by a *wall of fire*.

On the left flank the wolves have been turned away by Reed, the wargs are limping along and the archers are firing volley after volley at the approaching barbarians cutting them down by the dozen. Reed's pole-hedge has halted the barbarian advance.

The foreplay is almost over. Soon the green tide will come and the battle will begin in earnest. Still if their hellish overlords don't interfere I am confident we will prevail. But I am certain they are watching and will interfere. But how and when are still unanswered questions.