

Grimwald's chronicles entry 137

The ugra here is behaving even more strange than usual and causes us to lose track of our scouts. After a while however we find ourselves suddenly in a clearing. I feel a great power lurking here and call my armor instinctively. But due to the chaotic befoulment of this location it doesn't arrive in the proper manner but piece by piece and dragging the chest and Cuura with it. Cuura takes what has happened in her stride, nonplussed as usual. After collecting and reassembling the armor, in which Nethander hesitantly assists, we are ready to continue. Reed has reformed with our scouting team so why is Nethander so friendly to help me? What is he up to this time? I double check everything he did, but it all seems to be working perfectly. What can he be planning?

According to Kendalan who talked to some kind of bear the warlord was assisted by sixteen evil mages who lived in the four towers of his stronghold and many have tried before us to eradicate this evil. The track to the castle is uneventful, even though we hear many strange noises in the woods. Evidently Cuura and Efira's bellowing guided by Kendalan's nature lore is sufficiently intimidating so none dare oppose us.

Cuura instructs us to find the secret entrance to the keep. I am about to say that this would be very difficult indeed given the density of the jungle, size of the stronghold and that an ascent would be preferable, but then Nethander casually comments that he found it. How did that happen? Is it Cuura's intuition or do dark minds indeed think alike? I am quite baffled by the discovery and don't know what to make of it. Efira however has already started the climb taking along extra ropes from me and Kendalan, while Norbert is studying the traps and locks at the secret entrance.

Efira has scaled the cliff when Norbert pops the lock and small red flowers start cascading down on us. I smell one fluttering past and immediately regret it. A cloying smell like a thousand rotting corpses nests itself in my nose and I start to gag. With tears streaming from my eyes I stumble away from the falling flowers. The flower's nectar starts burning my skin like acid. I grab a flask of alchemist's fire and burn them from my armor and pray for a create water to rid Kendalan of the vicious ugra. After a few moments I can stand and see straight again and we find that Nethander and Cuura have disappeared, as we approach the door we hear them calling, but Kendalan thinks they may have fallen victim to some spell. All the more reason to go in and save them, but we cannot let Efira face the dangers of the keep alone either. Then Cuura makes the decision and orders me to join her so I tell Kendalan and Norbert to take care of Efira since they being armorless should have an easy time of scaling the cliff. Reed feels she would serve best by joining Cuura. Strange I am not happier to have Reed back with us. I should be exultant we merit her mercy and have the voice of the gods returned to us, but I guess a part of me is still laden with feeling of guilt. Yes, that must be it. I should apologize to her when we take a break and request atonement for us all, but I should discuss this with Norbert and Kendalan first, maybe if we can all agree we can drag Snake along in atoning as well. That would be something!

We make our way through the tunnel and try to link up with the other group, but find a crypt of some sort. While I am studying the lay-out to determine threats and plan our strategy Snake wades in an issues a challenge. Chaotic though he may be he does have courage... and stupidity. We are attacked by five ancient warriors. I try to shield the idiot, but the warrior with the pike is truly a master at his craft and manages to strike him squarely in the chest. I still don't see how he got by my shield block so easily. Cuura and I quickly dispatch our opponents. But the warrior spirit continues it's fight with Cuura's body. I try to remind Cuura of who she is with a remember truth grasp, but she instead reminds me to watch my defenses, my armor holds, but unfortunately my ribcage doesn't and I begin gurgling blood as broken ribs pierce my lungs when her flail strikes me solidly in the chest. Fortunately Reed manages to help Cuura snap out of it.

Snake is now giving me a pleading look since he apparently bit of more than he can chew....again. But I would not think of dishonoring him or his ill conceived challenge. His enemies however behave rather dishonorably in going after Reed so I end up fighting those he challenged anyway. "How did he manage it?" I wonder while fouling a blow with my shield. Setting three undead warriors and a specter of some sort to attack Reed instead of himself, without my vigilance his evil ploy might have worked! The specter is incorporeal so I pray for Moradin's hammer to strike it and am joined by Kendalan's thunderlance. The specter causes the evil goo in the pool to erupt and it's vileness sucks out my very life. But it knows it is doomed and with it's dying breath curses me to be doomed until his soul is set free. We dispatch the last of the enemies, but Cuura has again become host to the undead. Clearly it is fated and her attraction to undead warriors is no trifling matter, but I do feel I should have prepared her better to withstand their evil powers. Reed tries to banish the spirit but it resists her spell. I try to dispel the evil and although buckling under a hail or blows from her flail manage to end the spirit's tyrannic rule over Cuura's body.

While still recovering and getting back our bearings Norbert starts complaining of his pain and tells us of his defeat of twenty-five kobolds. For a moment I think Norbert has become possessed as well or feeble minded, but after a quick detect evil find that he must be truthful. I guess that by halfling standards that is quite an exceptional feat, as is walking a night and a day without a break, or skipping elevenses. Something dwarves find so common it is not worth mentioning must be something else for the little folk. I guess that even fighting instead of hiding and throwing sling-stones is exceptional in itself. I am not sure if I should commend his bravery or berate his foolishness though. He does not look tough enough to last long in the front-line.

But how to proceed? We have little time left before disaster strikes the city if it hasn't done so already and still a mighty task ahead of us. I would have preferred to slowly grind away the outer defenses before advancing onto the warlord himself rather than risking being caught between hammer and anvil. But I doubt if we are durable enough to do this and still be able to defeat the warlord himself. Also every encounter gives Snake a chance to rid himself of Reed, I am unsure of how he controls the undead, but when I catch him in the act there will be hell to pay!