

The Story of Grimwald

Chapter 16: Power is Relative

What a fine mess we landed in! Shackled like slaves in the middle of an army camp! For some unintelligible reason even in this circumstance some of our party persist in their resistance instead of biding their time. This results in the women being stripped of their clothing and me being kicked around by the guards. The only one to benefit from this resistance seems to be that little rat Snake who at the first opportunity betrayed Rebecca and the rest of us to the guards.

I wonder what curse has befallen us. All around us strange fireballs erupt scorching several soldiers severely. Reed is saying it has something to do with some birds. If these are the same birds they have come a lot closer since we can all see them clearly. Well perhaps there is indeed a threat in them as the rest argued, but for now they seem to be striking at our captors.

Fortunately the commander seems to be in too much of a hurry to break camp so not all of us are stripped bare and none have been tortured. I feel we have the birds to thank for that as well as the commanders haste. Felina has managed to charm one of the sergeants. I wonder what he, being a warrior after all, sees in such a frail creature. We dwarves are much more sensible in preferring sturdy women. Anyway it is a good thing to have one of our captors under her influence.

We march triple time all through the night and at dawn all the horses and soldiers are weary for lack of sleep, lack of rest and a murdering pace. Yet the soldiers bear it all silently, they are a lot more hardened than the militia units I trained with. A scream sows panic among both men and beast, even Cuura is panicked for a moment. The scream was so short, but never have I tasted such cold, such hatred even in the longest of recorded dwarven grudges. The commander decides to offer us up as a sacrificial piece in a chess game to turn back the menace pursuing us. It must be the undead I have felt two days ago.

The sergeant argues that we should stand united to do maximum damage and manages to get some slaves and Cuura's horse as well as all our equipment from the commander. The army retreats to a safe distance to rest and prepare a counter assault or so I presume.

Louis informs us that the holy books have been known to aid their keepers in protecting the vile book from falling into the wrong hands. Paul equips us with some explosives and brews which strengthen the body. We arm the slaves and prepare as best we can.

We see a mob of three score of skeletons come rushing over a nearby hill, but suddenly they halt and the clattering of bones falls silent. The silence seems even more oppressive and frightening than their mad dash. After a tense several minutes a group of zombies, they must be the lost Zentarim patrol, crest the hill and come plodding towards us. The undead army starts a step by step approach. Reed who took a stand in front of our position with some offerings falls back into our line. Small fireballs keep on harassing our attackers as the birds circle them. Just when the skeletons get within striking distance and prepare to pounce they halt again. Out of the dead, heavy silence a voice comes to us. It is soft, yet clear, but it feels as if someone is using my innards and nerves as violin strings. An elf appears out of thin air, it is half translucent and bearing regal looking clothing. But those eyes burn with an intensity, it is hard to look at, many a dwarf would seem meek in comparison to this elf. The wisper demands we give up the book. It's voice keeps on swirling around in my head. My beard bristles and my axe arm starts to tremble as a rush of foul, hatred and utter despair billows up in my throat. The shaken shield wall is shored up with barked orders from the sergeant and Cuura and I quickly pray for the silence of the Keeper to protect us so this evil power will not find a hold on us. Fortunately Reed has forewarned

us so that this time I am prepared. It seems that some elves have mastered the skill of turning overwhelming grief and loss into burning genocidal hatred and even put dwarves to shame in their intensity.

The battle erupts, but we are ready and many prayers shield and guide our group against the undead tide. Kendalan brandishes the book of light and skeletons collapse consumed by holy fire. I open myself to be book of the dead and feel myself moving into the skeletons as if putting my hand into a gauntlet. I have not one body, but several and with the same ease as I move my fingers I use the skeletons to strike down the other skeletons. I am still seeing out of my own eyes, but my focus now lies in undead bodies. Gradually I notice they start moving as I direct them and I can draw back into my own body while maintaining a link with them. Instead of an undead spirit taking possession of the living, I have now dominated them. A shudder runs through my body as I feel a change coming over me. It is drawing me away from where I was and I feel as if I am more in the world of the living dead, yet stand out because I still cling to life.

When I manage to focus again on the battle around me I notice that some living corpse is making of with the chest which contains the book. I rush out of the silence and stretch out Dumathoin's might over his gifts to the industrious. The corpse is burned by the searing metal of the chest and the box falls onto the grass which starts to burn as the metal becomes a bright cherry red with heat. The undead elf is at the box and performs some magic while I request a blessing of my craft as a smith and feel my axe become even more keen to rend the foul being apart. I swing a high decapitating stroke to swift for even this quicksilver elf to dodge, but my axe plows right through it without any effect. Apparently it's shimmering not just removes it from sight, but even from our world altogether. I should time my next stroke better. Before I can strike again it flies away after a skeletal giant which is running away with our book.

I hear explosions behind me and the elven spirit is struck heavily by some magical bolt from behind us. The counter attack must have started! The giant halts to wrest open the smoldering chest while the spirits anxiously await its success. All it manages is to make his hand bones crack with the heat, while the spirit looks on in furious frustration. We quickly overtake the skeleton and strike it down as the spirit flies away fleeing the counter attacking army.

Yet what have we won? Will these soldiers make any better use of it than the undead would? A man with long black hair and a commanding presence strides closer to his prize. We stand powerless before his army and magical might. He studies us, each one, even me, with a practised eye and says "Weldin?". Seeing resistance is futile now Reed bows and nods. Instead of calling for the commander to imprison us he asks "Candlekeep?". Reed responds "perhaps". He takes some time as a general studying the lay of the land and finally offers to help us in exchange for a yet to mention favour which we will perform, no questions asked. Reed manages to bargain to down to no murder and Cuura requests supplies. This agreed upon we are escorted to the village of Greenest.

There is some puzzlement as to why we are not merely allowed to escape, but even helped by this strange master of armies. Why did the commander slay three of his men in a rage after his talk with this mysterious master? Why is Jay looking so much more uncertain and shy? Why am I only noticing him now? Where was he during the battle? I remember seeing him, but somehow he who was a rock now fails to have weight.