

## Grimwald's thoughts part 40

Although we are still weary from last night's fight the morning prayers of Kendalan and Reed take care of most wounds. Although we are not that well prepared we decide to set out in search of the abducted farmers. I guess it is essential we do not allow them too much of a head start or they could end up being taken deep into the underdark.

Snake has reported the disappearance of the head of the major's household. Reed thinks it is due to the failure of the plot to gain leverage through the disruption of the logging. I am not so certain. He was still in a useful position. It is not like the Zhentarim to concede anything, they are poor losers. If trickery and bribes don't work they tend to turn to brute force. Given the remote location of the town I think it may be that some disaster is brewing and they are securing their resources. Well we will just let Felina worry about that while we rescue the family.

Nethander actually stood up for me against Cuura and forced her to listen. Still with kobolds around we are certain to run into traps and Nethander is the only one who seems to know what to look for.

We make our way into the mines and hang left making it harder for right handed defenders. I am glad at least Nethander paid attention to what I told them last time. The traps we encounter are a lot more elaborate than those we ran into in the other part of the mine. They must have been here longer and only recently moved into the other part of the mine where we encountered them first. It may even be another tribe of more advanced kobolds we are dealing with here.

Nethander has a hard time spotting the traps and although the signs show that we are heading in the right direction with ever more deadly traps all his near fatal encounters with traps undermine Nethander's nerves and he starts talking about going another way. When we come to a split in the narrow tunnel Nethander starts blabbering about missing his head and curtains. Perhaps his mind cracked under the pressure of the constant danger? From the press of bodies I gather he must be backing away from something and is crying hysterically. Damn Cuura's decision to put me in the back, there is no way I can help this way! I hear the bampf of little balls of fire so it is not just in Nethander's mind. I pray for *guidance* so I can make sense of the babbling going on in the front of the line. The acrid smell, flowing curtains aka a *black ooze*. No organs to puncture, no parts to sever, but squishing it will work. Cold will slow the liquid, while lightning empowers it. Nethander and Reed are ill equipped to deal with it so Cuura works her way forward and splatters it.

Nethander is now more reluctant than ever to move on. I keep reassuring him nothing can live near a big black ooze so that it is very safe here. Nethander thinks the lower passage may be flooded, but with all these traps I feel it must at least once have been an access way. Fortunately I still have my airbubble prayer so I have some time to find a way through. It turns out the water while acidic and foul is not that deep and we can wade through.

It does show me though that I am no leader. Only Jay followed me while the rest waited for me to return. Why do they listen to a tiefling rather than a dwarf when it is a dungeoneering matter? My arguments are sound and based on experience and many dwarven tales, while Nethander merely says he believes it to be so. No, I will never become a great leader...

The tunnel leads to a garbage pit. Nethander's darkness provides cover while Reed does a *fly* and *teleport exchange* so I can pull up the others. When we move out of the darkness we pass a dead kobold guard. The wound suggests Nethander's doing. I hardly noticed he was gone.

When we come to the backdoor Nethander smells a trap and it is a good thing he smelled it before we all did. Burnt *othur* is extremely potent and it would have been very wry to lose Reed to poison after just having saved her. It has been known to kill even dwarves so the humans would all be in trouble. Nethander turns himself into a mist and wafts away to turn off the trap.

I devise a strategy to take out most of kobolds in one fell swoop. Given the kobold cowardice and tendency only to fight with a overwhelming majority we plan to send in Jay alone and after the

kobolds have gathered around him Moradin can smite them. Jay rushes in while Reed and I hold our spells in anticipation. The kobolds swarm around Jay and then all but one fall down cut in two. The only remaining kobold runs away yapping to spread Jay's fame and causing all kobolds to scatter. Before the chance is utterly lost I call upon Moradin to smite them and over a score of them are crushed by his power. The kobolds run around in disarray, where are their leaders? I rush to the prisoners to prevent retreating kobolds dragging them away. Then I notice Nethander blocking the kobold leaders from leaving their tent so their tribe is leaderless under our onslaught. A deed worthy of a dwarf. Perhaps I misjudged him when I thought him afraid, no that is not it, but he now sees more than mere self preservation. I guess spending so much time training with Jay is blessing him with virtues. Yes I will give him a Chance! Though doomed and tainted he may be the chance will be his if I can help.

But just like Jay he has bitten of more than he can chew. I call back Jay who is bleeding profusely so he can go into the fight looking more alive than dead. But before Jay can make it to Snake Cuura barges forward and slays the kobold leader and shaman while Kendalan's arrows nail the sorcerer to the tent.

Reed in the meanwhile has ceased her calls for peace and is now talking to the cowed, leaderless mass of kobolds. She tries to negotiate a release of the prisoners and peace by claiming this territory for her tribe. When I make my way to the prisoner cages the kobolds still dare to block my way, but they are uncertain. For a moment I feel strange. A few weeks ago I would have tried to slay as many of them as possible to buy a few years of peace for the people on the surface. I would have cloven any kobold in reach of my blade. Now I feel I should not press the matter and allow them to find a better way. The choice is theirs, not mine whether they will live or not. Though they are enemies to our people I feel this way is not wrong. Not anymore.

While I stand confused a kobold champion comes forward, probably a contender for the chieftain position, and calls Reed's bluff. Reed sees that he is not truly an obstacle, but merely making sure his bravery against their foes will ensure his leadership. Reed demonstrates her powers and the kobold champion leads the kobolds away without loss of face.