

Grimwald's chronicles part 64

After a brief discussion a three pronged approach is decided upon, Jay will rush across the narrow bridge, while Kendalan flies and Nethander will use the staff of transmutation while under cover of fog. I devote myself to the protection of our group and pray that we may be safe guarded from this soul devouring evil.

As we ready ourselves for the assault Odvar suddenly appears bearing a message from Kakanos telling us he left with our books. I am not sure if I should regard this as mere treachery or that it is divine providence preventing their fall to the demon after it kills us. Uncertainty races across our group, but we decide not to be deterred by this evil omen and continue with our duty here regardless. On the other hand it may be providence lending us Odvar's aid in this great battle.

The first phase of the assault proceeds well, Kendalan and Nethander occupy and manage to take out a few archers behind the arrow slits, but the door is barred and great skeletal claws reach through the gap trying to skewer Jay. The projectiles however turn out not to be normal arrows but rather burrowing worms which eat into our flesh severely disrupting our efforts although we manage to get to them before they burrow too deeply. The door is made of thick granite and stands firm even against Jay's martial arts for quite a while during which we are exposed to enemy fire. Why oh why didn't I bring a tower shield. Being ill prepared seems to be the curse of our band. Miraculously the attacks are insufficient to make us lose our balance on the narrow ledge. The churning sounds of the gray ooze are hardly a comforting sound while on a narrow ledge pelted with burrowing projectiles. I can't speak for the others but I have to admire the defences, this is a very uncomfortable spot to be stuck in, no way back or forward and no way to fight back.

When Jay finally shatters the door to dust we are able to see the guardian at the threshold, a *boneclaw*. A skeleton enhanced by dark magic to become tougher and larger with elongated bony claws which can reach targets up to 20 feet away. I think our enemy must be shocked by our breaking through the main gate so quickly and Felina and Nethander tumble past to flank the *boneclaw*. They themselves are however flanked by the twisted monk appearing out of the ether next to them with gleeful anticipation hoping to grind them up against the gate guard. They however tumble back past the *boneclaw* and Jay while Reed's ball of fire blasts in through the open gate and back out of the arrow slits. Kendalan's arrows pelt the demon which responds with a gaze, it seems the very gates of the Abyss open in it's eyes and it's evil essence reaches out to Kendalan. A tormented soul takes possession of Kendalan, but Reed and I manage to exorcise it before it can get out of our range or use our archer against us.

After shattering the tough *boneclaw* we occupy the unhallowed courtyard, fortunately my steadfastness also influences my companions and none of us is cowed by it's fearful aura. While the others distract the demon I assault the gates of the keep with a *sound lance* and my hammer. The sound of Moradin's hammer shatters the stone, but my own hammer blows add little. I really should get an adamantine hammer to assault gates some time. Meanwhile Odvar is fighting the demon which is using a style know as *corrida*. When I first heard of it I thought it was a cruel joke. Enrage some dumb but wild animal so it blindly charges again and again, while slowly needling it to death after avoiding every charge. Then finish with a coup the grace against the exhausted opponent. I never imagined this cruel sport could have been inspired by monks battling raging barbarians. Fortunately Reed's convincing words manage to get through Odvar's raging blood fog and make him stop the demonic game before the coup the grace.

By the time the thick granite gate is shattered so is the party. They managed to enrage the demon. It is no longer playing with them but tearing them apart with great claws and amazing strength while deftly dodging many of their attacks or phasing out just in time. The remaining archers join the fray when they sense their master is through playing. The zombies are crawling with maggots and worms which are rapidly covering the burnt patches left by Reed's fireball. Regenerating undead,

which burrow into flesh. These must be the dreaded *spawn of Kyuss*, a dark blessing of a lord of decay granted these undead regeneration and the ability to spawn. The worm crawls into the skull and devours the brain taking control of the body. Fortunately they are not that skilled for we cannot afford to ignore the worms which are by far more dangerous than I had first imagined.

Behind the shattered gate keep is what must once have been a chapel. On a raised rainbow dais with seven steps lies a silver and gold sword untarnished by time or the foul corruption eating away the stones. The entrance into the chapel is guarded by two armoured skeletons which have been enhanced with dark blessings like the *boneclaw*. Their bodies may have become formidable, but their minds are still simple automatons and they do not react to the shattering of the gate.

While Reed and Jay prepare our final assault on the demon I rush in to defend my battered companions. While I manage to foil it's attacks on my friends using the techniques of the fabled *Iron Guard*. I myself am not so fortunate and a few swift strikes disembowel me, while light is fading from my eyes after such a heavy loss of blood I see Jay preparing his stike. Concentrating on maintaining my defences strong while casting I use my shield for cover and call upon mighty Moradin to smite the unholy and a burst of light sears the courtyard burning the demon and undead, but unfortunately not blinding the demon to the peril Jay poses.

But Jay's art requires no such aid, even against an opponent such as this and his blade bites so deep into the demon's heart it almost splits him in two. With a skin crawling wail it's dark essence fleeing it's cloven body is sucked into the blade before it can manage to take possession of one of our bodies. Nethander rushes forward protected by his dark heritage and seals the sword into the chest which is more than here. While I barely manage to catch a maggot burrowing into my skull through my eye socket.

My knowledge of the arcane is insufficient, but I understand that items of holding are less here and more somewhere else, while our chest seems to be the opposite with extra dimensions being more here. Allowing the dimensional barriers to work against something which cannot leave our plane I surmise.

We are all still stunned by our victory over the body snatching demon lord's spirit, but our work is not yet done. After laying the remains to rest we return the soul to the fallen high priest and Lathander's mercy offers him a new beginning. His essence is wiped clean of all previous transgressions and he is granted a human form once more. His mind empty as a new born we leave him in the care of the brave innkeeper and his daughter.

We can now safely quest for the books. Safeguards against our failure no longer necessary so I am sure we shall succeed and be able to continue with our duty.

All of us seem transformed by the great battle. Jay has this look he gets when he finally understands his master, Felina seems even more subtle in her movements and I myself feel that after having my gut's ripped out by a demon no lesser pain will be able to bring me to my knees. But most important of all I find that Nethander held a sword of great power and held sway over a demon lord and managed to quickly relinquish it, perhaps Reed is right that he is not beyond redemption. Today is at least hopeful.