

Grimwald's chronicles part 65

By the time we arrive back at the inn we find that two horses are missing and the innkeeper and his daughter have sought refuge on the attic to escape Kendalan's enraged bear. It is odd that our foe has had the decency to leave the innkeeper out of our conflict and hasn't harmed the bear nor our horses. It reminds me a bit of the behavior of the ninja who was after Reed. He could have butchered his way to her, but he felt that harming anyone except the target was wrong or dishonorable. We may be enemies but I respect their adherence to their code of conduct. This prevents feuds from snowballing as they do among the goblinoids and drow and thus preserves an orderly society.

I give blessings of good health to my brave comrades and turn towards the rising sun to thank Moradin for this great victory and beg his aid in retrieving the books. As I do so I notice the ground becoming aware of me, but now know this to be my elemental friend.

While the others collect the baggage and entrust our reborn human to the innkeeper I spend some time talking to my new family. The elemental seems quite bright for it's kind and after a few tries it understands we can speak to each other only when the listener is wearing the helmet. Terran as a language does not seem that complex and I think I could produce the sounds and learn how to speak it in a few weeks. Apparently it is attracted to my prayers and feels that I do good. It's definition of good is still unclear, but it is extremely helpful towards me. When I ask him how it could help me it says it can push me, make beings fall and feels how many beings are around him. A very useful spy or watchdog indeed since few would expect the earth to do such a thing.

Cuura is anxious to start the pursuit, but rather than being bound to the pony again I ask my new friend to give me a push. The earth rises up slightly beneath my feet so I am standing firmly on it and it begins to glide through the earth very rapidly I quickly realize two things: it can glide through the earth at least twice as fast as I can run and it is not looking where it is going when it comes to obstacles above ground. After almost colliding with one of the horses I place the helmet on it and get my friend to stop and start explaining the riding signals Cuura taught me so I can guide my new friend. Reed feels that even this greater speed is no match for the wizard's horse and blesses my friend with even greater speed. Although at first it is adverse to the notion of being more mobile (it turns out it is already one of the more mobile of it's kind, which is seen as some kind of shame among them) I explain to it how happy it makes me by pushing me so I can stay stable and motionless while still being with my other friends. This notion pleases it greatly and it continues pushing me.

Before setting out Moradin grants me a vision of a tattooed warrior, a sad gnome, dead Ettins and ruined towers. Apparently a place north of here and we set out in that direction. Before we get very far we come across the site of a gruesome ritual. Reed's prisoner has been sacrificed along with the horses in some dark summoning ritual. I can imagine how Reed must feel now that the prisoner she felt responsible for has met such a dark fate. Still she does not burst into tears, well not yet anyway, but begins playing her instrument.

I heard of people using music to console themselves, but this seems hardly the time and place to do so. I am about to say something about this when suddenly a huge threatening spirit appears. It seems entranced by Reed's music and before long she starts bargaining for passage with it. I remember from the old tales that spirits of the wild are often interested in beauty so with the help of my new friend we place a great standing stone and I start weaving a pattern into it. The spirit honors my craft by granting me the distinction of being the first dwarf it allows to pass. I am happy not all spirits of the wild are mischievous bastards as the dwarf who was my grandfather used to imply. After some effort all of us are allowed to pass through some kind of portal which hopefully has put us in a position to ambush the thieving wizard.

Our infiltrators quickly and quietly take out the tattooed warrior. On the one hand I am happy they complete their mission with such skill, but on the other hand it cannot be considered a fair fight. Two against one, attacked by surprise, he did not even have a chance to strike a blow, hardly an end fitting to a warrior. We could not allow him the opportunity to warn the wizard so this was necessary but still regrettable. I quickly apologize to his spirit as his belongings are transferred to Cuura.

My cousin in the earth is understanding towards our plight. He himself is questing for a sacred relic, the pickaxe of Garl Glittergold. This wizard apparently has quite a collection of valued items under his control. I assure the gnome I will do my best to prevent him being drawn into our fight against both our wishes by isolating him with a *protection from evil* and *silence*.

We don't have to wait long before we see the wizard racing towards us on a nightmare. Although the beast itself manages with its rider to evade us with smoke and shifting to the ether Reed has managed to rob it from the books. The mage will have to give up or face us.

The first blow he strikes is a devastating one paralyzing our entire party except Jay and me. I sent *Moradin's hammer* after the nightmare so no matter where it goes it won't escape my lord's wrath. Realizing that Jay and me will not be able to win an artillery duel with a mage I rush to our archer and the blessings of Moradin restore him to his duties. The mage however counters Kendalan's arrows with a field of grasping *black tentacles* and *repulses* Jay as he heads for the books which I abandoned to aid Kendalan. The earsplitting sound of Moradin's hammer turns out to be enough to split a nightmare as well as it fades from this world after being pierced by my *soundlance*. With his means of escape removed and Jay repulsed the mage hesitates for a moment and then turns to face me as I rush back towards the books. Before he can blast me with some foul spell suddenly Reed jumps onto him! As he wastes precious seconds disentangling from Reed I push past the repulsing field and feel inspired by the power of my ancestors and strike him with a *mountain hammer* stike which blasts through his defenses. I only barely managing to hold back the ancestral rage which would otherwise have brained the mage.

After the binding of my captive I notice Reed going at him with a dagger. Although I respect grudges and hatreds and expect treason and slaying of a protectee to foster such a thing I had not expected Reed to take a knife to a helpless prisoner. Nethander may be becoming more like Reed, but unfortunately it seems to go the other way around as well!

I quickly step in to protect my charge. Reed "explains" that she is merely trying to remove a *stoneskin* spell before he comes to to ensure his docility. I cannot argue with the voice of the gods nor about the danger a desperate mage of his skill could pose, but is just wrong stabbing an unconscious prisoner! I reluctantly decide to keep an eye on the situation so I can intervene as soon as Reed draws blood. First the warrior and now this, effective but hardly honorable, but how to change their ways...

Reed quickly negotiates with the mage for his release in exchange for his promise to return the artifact to the gnome and leave us alone.