

Grimwald's chronicles part 66

After we finally had our rest after two exhausting days of battle and chase we explore the ruins to head into the underdark. Although we are mentally still exhausted by our harrowing experiences our bodies are mended by the divine magic and our minds filled with prayer and arcane lore to smite our enemies with.

I try to prepare them for what we will face there, but how can the wisdom of generations of my people be bestowed in a matter of minutes? What I tell them hardly suffices, but at least they will be a bit more wary. While death in the underdark may come slower than if we would face the dragon roaming to the west it is no less certain if we remain too long or take a wrong turn.

Our party stands a fair chance in combat against most of the monsters and bands of the underdark, but they know the terrain and we do not. On the surface we are surrounded by water and food, but down here competition is much harsher and only the strongest of races and monsters survive here. I warn them that ambush and counter-ambush are standard tactics here. Allowing an enemy to pass and then to stalk them awaiting a moment of weakness. Trapping a band in a dead end tunnel or between hostile forces so none shall escape alive. I hope our scouts will be up to the task and we descend into the night below.

Pretty soon the natural cave changes into a more regular set of stairs. A powerful *stoneshape* spell was used in crafting this. Dwarves may use it but prefer to work the stone out of respect for the lord of the underground realm. The drow employ this magic, but the proportions and style do not match. Most of the savage races do not master the magic and the dangerous mindflayers and beholders generally do not venture this close to the surface. Again I descend into the realm of Dumathoin with it's many hidden secrets.

A bit further down we come across a skeletal guardian who warns us in an unknown tongue. Fortunately my helmet translates his speech and with some effort we learn that humans once ventured here, but did not fare well. He talks of falling cities, but the only city my ancestral memory tells me about is the collapse of the drow capital which boded the end of their empire as Moradin broke the earth to punish them for daring to oppress his people. This was many long generations ago, even before we were driven away from Shanatar so it could not be what this skeletal human is talking about. He tells us three of the eight paths lead us to the coast, a deep road, a long road and a maze. The long road would invite pursuit and ambush at our destination, the deep road invites the dangers of the deep monsters and races so we decide to brave the maze of Rage and Bane. Reed takes pity upon the guardian and it asks to be released from it's duties. When no longer bound it returns to the earth.

The maze is as it should be, perplexing and confusing and designed to hold us until released by it's masters. Cuura and Nethander try to treat it as if it is a mere tunnel and not a maze and are perplexed by the magic of the maze. After some hours I decide to see if the name is not also a sign and start some furious swearing in all languages I know. This turns out to work wonderfully well as an enraged minotaur comes charging at our party so finally Rage is manifesting itself!

The beast emanates it's foul intent and I feel the call to remove this evil from my lord's domain. Remembering the lore of the many dwarves who went before me in battling these brutes I draw a breath and release the shaft striking the minotaur through the throat as it rears back I draw my second arrow and guide it to it's heart. Reed, perhaps fooled by the animal head into thinking it is a mere beast, tries to save it's life, but the lore of my ancestors caused my aim to be true and the evil is smitten.

After some more random wanderings it is finally decided our most experienced and eldest pathfinder should guide us and Kendalan quickly manages to bring us deeper into the maze. When we come to a mushroom patch Nethander tries to take things without properly laying claim or challenge behaving as a common raider. I really regarded him higher than an orc or goblin, but

obviously I was mistaken. Fortunately he does not contest my protection of these possessions from raiders and we continue.

We find another minotaur and I prepare for its charge setting the butt of the Urgosh firmly in the ground, but the minotaur does not charge us. After some confusing moments we are charged, but by Oddvar! I try to immobilize the raging barbarian, who seems even wilder than usual, but the never before used wand of *hold person* turns out to be useless indeed. Meanwhile Nethander has issued a challenge which the minotaur accepts, but their duel is rudely interfered with. Why doesn't any of them understand the rules of fair combat except Jay? Reed, protected by the gods, manages to help Oddvar to regain control over his senses and he slumps to the ground exhausted.

Nethander in the meanwhile does not look the least bit angry that others dared interfere in his duel and aided in bringing down the minotaur. It is almost as if he hoped that the others would seize this opportunity to take the minotaur from behind. Effective tactics, but low and unfair. I really must have a word with them, this way of fighting may bring victory and save lives, but endangers our very honor!