

Grimwald's chronicles part 69

With a shock I realize Snake is no longer standing in front of me and I find myself back in the past or should I say the present? The others look at me quizzically because of my strange behavior, but I can see Reed and Kendalan have been through the same experience from their knowing looks.

The scouting mission becomes a shouting mission as the guards call for a “limb ripper”. Clearly they have failed in slipping past the guards unnoticed. Reed's fireball silences the guards, but merely angers the “limb ripper”, an Umber Hulk, which comes charging our way. I prepare Cuura so she won't fall under its gaze, but by the time it comes close the many arrows Kendalan has put into its chest have all but ended the beast.

As our scouts probe further they come upon a cave where orcs and goblins are moving crates under the direction of a strange spider-like creature. For a moment I think it may be a Drider, but from the description I gather it must be a Neogi. A race of evil extra-planar traders and slavers who can dominate other creatures. They are themselves physically weak, but use Umber Hulks as their enforcers.

We surprise the Neogi with a volley of arrows bringing it down instantly. Before we can grasp the situation Jay rushes forward towards an Umber Hulk as the orcs and goblins bolt into cover. Jay is cut off from the rest of us and picked up by a huge scorpion while another one blocks our path. As I rush forward to battle the scorpion it pins me with its huge pincer but Moradin shields me from the monster's wrath and even its stinger bounces off harmlessly against my *divine shield*. For a moment I am frustrated I cannot swing my hammer, but my ancestors inspire me to crush his joint with my gauntlet using a *Foe Hammer* maneuver. The barrage of attacks quickly overcomes the scorpion and together we bring down the remaining two scorpions as well. Jay has however managed to get himself mangled again. When will the boy learn?! Even Moradin himself, always a proponent of bravery, has gotten exasperated with his blessings being used up to heal Jay. By leading Jay in prayer he is mollified somewhat and grants him the return of his health. But he better change his ways or one day Moradin will no longer bestow his blessings upon him.

The orcs and goblins fled and while the rest rummage through the crates I feel it is time to pay homage for our victory and sit down to pray in gratitude. Reed having been contacted by the drow informs us there is a Neogi vessel nearby. I cannot imagine what kind of device could carry so much cargo to their home plane and back to ours, nor how it would find its way, but it must be intricate device, maybe an inter-dimensional tunnel. According to the drow it was damaged and is now being repaired. More of these vile invaders upon our plane is a plague which must not be allowed to spread since they would no doubt be a resource to the enemies of the dwarves in the underdark.

Although I am eager to destroy this threat I am forced to accept the limitations of our situation. The Neogi are slender beings who can easily maneuver through narrow passages, but I cannot hope to fight and pursue them in these places. Rather than facing them in a fair battle, we are forced to resort to stealth and assassination to prevent our quarry escaping. It is true that our victory over these vile creatures is important. I just wish there was a more honorable path available to reach that victory.

While I wrestle with the situation which forces us to use strategies almost as sneaky and treacherous as the Neogi themselves, Snake takes to this task like a fish to water. While he, Felina and Reed, who changed her shape, manage to help the slender Kendalan and dexterous Jay crawl towards the enemy the stalwarts of the party are forced to bide our time.

Through the *message* spell we are updated of how they managed to free some slaves. Snake shows his surprise at finding out that I no longer wish to eradicate any and every orc or goblin we come across like I used to. I know that perhaps I should, but killing trapped unarmed creatures just feels wrong. We must not allow ourselves to be made as barbaric as them!

After killing which probably was an important Neogi and his guardian Umber Hulk they come upon a group of two Neogi and three Umber Hulks. Too much for them to handle safely so despite the noise we decide one of the stalwart warriors should join them. Since I have contact with my elemental friend who can push me through the passage it is decided I should join the attack. With the help of Reed and the elemental I manage to squeeze through the passage and we box in the enemy party.

Although we thought we caught them by surprise the Neogi must have managed to grab hold of Kendalan's mind since his arrows went scattering around the cave. Fortunately our attack disrupted them enough to allow Jay and Snake to strike the killing blows after which Kendalan behaved normal again. My elemental friend managed to break one of the Umber Hulk's charge, but the remaining Umber Hulks turned out to be ferocious combatants. Without the *stone power* sustaining me in battle I might have been brought down by their powerful blows, but I endured. Guided by the knowledge of my ancestor's many battles against them I struck true and deep and we managed to bring them down. Snake offered them a quick merciful death, but I saw little mercy in his face. It seemed to make him feel better to slaughter unconscious enemies. I must talk to Reed about this, perhaps she can get him to stop feeding his dark soul.