

Grimwald's chronicles part 71

As we leave the ship we make two startling discoveries. Odvar did not make it up the ramp but got caught in the webbing and somehow became encased in weird material. A sad way to die. The wrapping makes him quite light so we decide to take him with us so he can have a proper burial at sea as is customary with his people.

The second discovery is that we are being expected by a lady who is apparently from some other time. She is however misinformed as to our time of arrival and the composition of our party. This means that somehow we have to misinform whoever informs her. That means lying intentionally! What a mess. I hate temporal magic! She starts handing out 'gifts' for each of us and for the red haired mercenary. The 'gifts' are quite a bewildering array and we cannot yet fathom their purpose. I got a diamond infused with some shadow essence. Why would anyone wish a beautiful stone with such a horrid taint? What purpose could it hold?

The lady warns us to watch but not interfere. Before getting much clarity the lady vanishes leaving behind some interesting books which we decide to bring with us. While I am poring over the books Reed and Cuura made a discovery: the ships webbing reduces the weight of objects wrapped in them. Now we can carry the doors, Odvar and the treasure without too much hassle. Wonderful!

We start down a damaged tunnel leading into the rock away from Throrgar's pit. We come upon various weapons which were probably used by drow or their servants. The abandoned weapons and damage to the tunnel leads us to suspect aggressive burrowing creatures. Bulette, Ankegh, Delver, Rock Lizard, Umber Hulk... Hard to tell which it could be. A bit further down we come upon the remains of a second group. But I find a broken blade, the other half of which lay with the other group. As we ponder this riddle the answer becomes apparent. A gigantic purple worm begins to gobble up Cuura! Too late I think that we could have used silence to hide from burrowing creatures. We mass to assault the monster and save our leader. But within seconds the beast goes limp. I am sure this is not how it is supposed to go. Purple worms eat entire patrols, destroy outposts, slay heroes. They don't just go limp after a few seconds of fighting. Is something wrong with it? Was it sick or wounded? Did the gods slay it to protect us? Or are we become terrifying in our might ourselves? We peel of some choice scales and open it's gizzard to see what it could have found too hard to digest. We are rewarded by several rough gems of great beauty.

We make our way further down the corridor which ends in a great hall, probably many miles wide. The pillars were crafted with Netherese magic rather than honest work. What an insult to Dumathoin that his realm is worked with such disrespect! After regaining our bearings we make our way to the west when we become aware of a procession of automatons. Mindful of the warning we received we observe but do not interfere with the caravan. Felina climbs up a pillar for a better view of what is being transported. I am shocked to find that the cargo consists of maimed children! I feel a great injustice is being perpetrated right before my eyes and that the innocent need to be protected. They are not being harmed at the moment, but who knows what sinister plans are being hatched! I start after the column when suddenly Reed stops me reminding me we should not interfere. I argue that I am not interfering yet, just finding out more which is perfectly fine. While we argue the column moves away and suddenly there are great discharges of magic at the head of the column.

I rush forward to ensure the children are safe, but when we arrive at the place of battle we find no moving statues, nor children but another Netherese mage looking rather irritated. This mage seems to be using some illusion or preservation spell to maintain a normal human appearance, but somehow part of it failed and her skeleton hand is showing. Her accent however seems waterthavian so it may be it is not a netherese mage, but an undeadish grave robber. Moradin reveals to me there is little use in pondering the details, her heart is impure and her presence disturbing and that is what counts. We however have a more pressing mission to perform than to guard against the harm stray evil mages may cause in the underdark. Since she appears to be alone.

The underdark will take care of her soon enough. I start to walk away from this unknown threat, but Reed strikes up a conversation. Not only does she entrust this grave robber with the present for the red haired commander, but she also betrays the location of the Neverwinter mercenaries to her. Carelessly risking her own life I can accept, but risking the lives of others and entrusting their possessions to someone like that is unacceptable! Then she pledges her service to the evil lady as well! Gods how she has fallen! Maybe she is going insane because she cannot speak to the stars anymore or because of using too much arcane magic. No it must be all the talking to Snake, if you can speak to a tainted creature like him then why not bargain with other evil? Perhaps it is good thing Jay rushes anything which seems malign, at least it prevents Reed from corrupting herself by making deals with it. It must be Snake's influence, he started this by making a deal with the Zhentarim mage. It seemed logical and necessity at the time, but this is what it is leading too! Us becoming servants of dark powers! Felina and Cuura should put a stop to this!

After the grave robber or nethese wizard leaves Reed and I discuss our different positions. I agree Auril is not the worst of goddesses. The dwarves of the North have had good relationships with Auril worshipping barbarians. They respect our strength and endurance and thus leave us alone seeking to prey on soft and weak towns people and merchants instead, but weak, maimed children won't deserve to live according to Auril. Part of me acknowledges the necessity of such harshness, but I find the very lack of mercy disturbing and so should Reed!

The rest grows tired of the intense day of fighting and we set up camp so they can regain their strength. I pray to Moradin so their worst wounds are healed and sleep can do the rest. In my dream I see Moradin's forge and I see how his hammer blows create the spark of life which can be blown into his creations. Then the dream changes and I am in the halls of the ancestors and I feel how their chant can bring those yet in the land of the living to them. This time it feels different somehow, as always they chant the songs of the great battles, teaching me how to fight, they also chant the rolls of the loremasters reminding me of the deep lore, but now they also sing praise of the great creations in honour of the Hidden Mountain Gem and the clans. I hear them so clearly as if I am standing among them chanting myself, but I cannot hear my own voice. I notice the ancestors form rows of clans. I recognize them: the silver spears, the golden axes and my own clans gold rock and axe grinders I notice that I am stepping away from the din of my clans, leaving them once again, and I begin hearing my own chant. I feel something in me starts to stir, awaken and press against some resistance, beginning to free itself, to unfold... Then suddenly Reed's voice screams through the chant calling to arms and I am ripped away from the sacred halls.

In a state of confusion I get to my feet grabbing my shield and weapon and rush to the front lines. My weapon feels light and I find the holy sword of Tyr eager in my hand. A dragon is mauling Nethander, but he must taste too foul and the dragon spits him out and turns to Cuura and Jay. A man fitting the description of the paladin who went with the mercenaries stands within a *blade barrier*, one of the more powerful clerical prayers, so he must be more than a mere paladin. It quickly becomes obvious the paladin is a worshiper of Tiamat as he brings forth his holy symbol calling upon the *foul might* to transform him into a great warrior. Cuura's blows deflect from the dragon scales with tell-tale sparks of magic. I grab the scroll of dispel magic and it's holy power rips the evil enchantment asunder. The priest tries to *harm* me but his prayers cannot compete with the holy fire burning in me! Then I stride forward and with a great cry I *lead the attack* ripping the dragon open and block it from harming my companions. The beast rises to the challenge and lashes out at me with all it's fury while being *healed* by the Tiamat priest, who sensing my power and resolve counsels a retreat. My companions heartened by my *leading the attack* valiantly strike the beast and despite my many wounds I throw caution to the wind and press our advantage, it may kill me with it's counterstrike, but we will embrace each other in death and I shall join my ancestors without shame at such an end. My holy blade whirls in a deadly arc ripping the scales from the dragon's chest, which I follow up by burying it to the hilt through the weakened scales. I rip the blade free wondering if this will be my last stand or the beast will attempt to flee when I see it buckle and sag. As it slumps to the ground I make our Felina swatting the dragon blood from her

blade on the other side of the dragon. I triumphantly turn to the giant sized priest, not even death can mar today's glory. He growls in pain and frustration *wording* his *recall* to a place a safety.