

Grimwald's chronicles part 72

After resting for a few more hours I praise Moradin for leading us to victory and helping us to slay one of the hated enemies of His people. Then I go to the dragon and perform the *burial rites* to ensure it's restful death. The ritual leaves me drained, but it was a worthy adversary, which now deserves it's rest, rather than being corrupted into unlife. I just hope Snake didn't devour it's soul while I was sleeping. I should have kept watch over it's body.

After the prayers I *commune with the earth*, through the divine power I once again feel one with rock from which we sprang and know it as I do my own body. It marvel at it's size, beauty and complexity, exploring my new contours while mentally planning a route towards candlekeep. After preparing for our journey I pray for a *sending* to warn the mercenaries of the duplicity of the Tiamat priest and the evil of the Auril worshipper, fortunately they are as yet unharmed by them. Even after Reed's merciful prayers I and the other warriors are still left with deep wounds so I pray for an *aura of positive energy*. I feel the essence of life itself flow through me and spread in the area around me allowing our wounds to start knitting, after another growth spurt endowed by Kendalan I am almost back to my normal self again. As we are leaving I return to the site of our battle and pray to Moradin to mark our victory over His enemy and a rune engraved granite pilar erupts from the floor bearing the runes: "Here the Accidental Alliance, through the leadership of Cuura and the blessings of Moradin destroyed it's first dragon.". I thank Moradin for this honour He has bestowed on us by placing a *runic marker*.

As we gather our belongings we find that no one has seen Nethander. Not surprising given his tendency to wander away, but it is decided we should look for him none the less. After a few minutes we find he has hidden himself in the webbing and seems to be in a coma or stasis. We cannot say for certain if the webbing has induced this as it probably did with Odvar or if he lapsed in the coma due to the massive damage the dragon did to him. I barely survived it's fury and I am a sturdy dwarf! Lesser magic can do only so much healing. Perhaps there is great damage requiring *regeneration* or *heal* spells.

After some arguing on my part everyone is agreed we should work harder and work longer days to make our way to Candlekeep, well everyone except Felina that is. Since not all of us have the stamina of a dwarf or barbarian warleader I pray to Moradin to grant *unfailing endurance* to all of us so we shall not falter due to fatigue or exhaustion. Reed is even hopeful we might make it to Candlekeep in a single day. Obviously she has no idea how hard traveling through the twisted turning passages all alike can be when you are trying to make your way forward. Without Moradin blessing me with *commune with the earth* we might have spend a week or more finding passages wind the wrong way or have caved in. As it is we should be happy to make it in two days since we can now persevere longer on our journey.

After a short discussion it is decided it is safer to be less cautious. Now how did we arrive at that strange conclusion? Anyway instead of inching forward awaiting reports from scouts slowly slinking about we proceed at a good marching speed. In the underdark such a bluff may well succeed, since just about anything knows this is not how you should act if even any bit uncertain about your victory.

After a short while we come upon a slave who survived the ambushing of a drow patrol he was with by Quaggoths. By the gods! The idiots don't even know Quaggoths. I am in the underdark with people who aren't ready even to leave the hold's hearth! For a moment I envision myself as a hearth guard drilling the children and playing games with them to teach them about the big dangerous world outside the hold's lower gates. I find I have neither the maternal caring feelings nor the necessary years to pamper these younglings and briefly tell them what to expect from these frenzied savages.

Still I had expected more Quaggoth bodies seeing the number of drow ripped to shreds. We quickly find our why it is so. These drow are not Loth worshippers but follow some weaker rival deity. They even had the human convinced he was not their slave rather than regally humiliating him like Loth worshippers enjoy doing. Sneaky bastards those drow! Anyway Reed and I are agreed we don't want undead drow anymore than we want living ones and she performs an appropriate ritual incinerating the bodies. The light must have been visible for a incredible distance so after the burning we go quickly on our way. The misguided idiot or sneaky spy of a human tries to lead us to a drow camp, but I am not one to fall for drow charms and we quickly find another way upwards. I should see to dispelling their *charm* spell when we rest for the night.

As we travel the whining starts again, how they miss their riding animals, how they miss the stars, how rough and hard the stone is, how steep the stairs are, how you cannot see more than 60 feet. I point out the many blessing of the stone, a shield from heat and cold and other weather chaos. The safety of a wall at your back, the strength in you rising to match the stone, the great endurance resulting from hard labour, the joy of knowing no harm can come to your clan until as long as you bar the corridor, how only the cautious, well prepared and well organized survive the perils of the night below. Seeing their faces I despair of their chances of being allowed to be reformed as dwarves.

We come upon a statue hewn from green emerald. I walk around it admiring the workmanship. There is a plaque beneath it: "Karsus, he defied the gods". I have heard the name Karsus before in the lore chant. How the attacks on the dwarves by the Netherese stopped after the death of Karsus. Grandfather was right, magic drives people's spirits insane, defying gods, madness! I seem to remember the lore chant using the masculin and yet the statue is feminine. I ponder this enigma for a while... Then I remember an old miner's tale about emerald golems. How they dug a tunnel back to a deserted outpost and found that the golem had changed shape into a female form over the last few centuries. This is what must have happened to the statue of Karsus!

We are wary of the golem, but when it speaks what it says still catches me by surprise. A deep dragon lairing here. And not just any one, but the dragon which laired close to citadel Adbar. I am sure I does not have fond memories of the dwarven punitive expedition routing it a few years back. Reed is still missing the stars and now decides rather than simply making deals with a cold hearted bitch she now wants to make a deal with a dragon.

Rule number one: **NEVER MAKE A DEAL WITH A DRAGON!**

They are ancient, patient, aloof, prideful and above all sneaky and cunning beyond measure of mortals. Hmm kind of like elves now that I think about it... Perhaps that is why that elven princess and Kendalan compete with them... Anyway it is clear there can be no compromise with an evil dwarf devouring monstrous beast. Death or Glory! and quite possibly both.

I look to Kendalan for support since he has been endowed with some of the wisdom of his people knowing just how evil and treacherous dragons are. But to my surprise Kendalan's hatred seems to have left him. Did I see Reed cast a spell on him? *Calm emotions* perhaps? Damn I should pay closer attention next time! Before I realise what is going on I am helping Reed in talking down some Quaggoths translating to undercommon and bartering for passage. Well I may be assisting the Voice of the gods, but I personally shall not give an inch to the dwarf devourer! Reed's fawning submissive ways and a divinely inspired musical performance by Reed and Felina wins the dragon over and we are allowed to pass unharmed. Although I am happy we manage to travel so quickly and unscathed and that this surely must be why the Voice of the gods was led to behave as she did I feel robbed by having to leave behind so much of what our clans labored for in the hands of an evil dragon. Fortunately the boy knows his heroes and the proper way to deal with dragons :).

For the tiniest moment a sliver of doubt slips into my mind. Perhaps even though in the dragon's hall I heard the ancestors bellowing the Clangeddin Credo "No retreat, no surrender!" and the words of Haella Brightaxe "I wonder if I can make it eats it's own tail?" it was right to submit. Maybe evil

and good is not always as clear a line as in Moradin's teachings. Perhaps redemption and mercy should be valued more. Maybe the ancestors should not always be followed? Before the heresy of Reed has chance to spread and rot the foundations of my mind and faith the ancestor's wisdom is shown to me.

The blue dragon which my prayers and sacrifice of life force have sped on it's way to it's just reward or punishment must have alerted Tiamat and now she has send her Abysshai to slay us. This proves that good deeds against dragons come back to bite you, literally.

Kendalan is reminded of the error of underestimating his people's ancient foe as his magic fizzles ineffectively around the Abysshai. Moradin however rewards my steadfast resolve and is happy to unleash his anger against the devilish beasts and smites them. The holy blade of Tyr tears apart their very beings and before long Tiamat's expedition is defeated. Apparently the demonic rage captured in the knight-commander's blade is valuable to the dragon queen. Dragon queen... party which does not want to make itself known... promise to remove it from your plane of existance... wishes granted... damn tricky manipulative dragons! To think I considered it a valuable reasonable offer. Well never deal with Tiefling either I guess!