

Grimwald's chronicles part 74

After the battle it turns out Reed still has some healing power left so after tending to the worst hit we are on our way again. Since our position is now known Felina and Cuura guard the rear to protect us from any pursuers. The stairs wind upward for a long time bringing us close to the surface before our keen eared scouts hear the sounds of a battle above.

Nethander scouts ahead and reports a dozen bodies, a heap of Zhent uniforms and one warrior in the open and another one hidden. We think we can take them in a fight, but how to prevent them from raising the alarm? Fortunately Moradin revealed to me the *footsteps of the divine* which allows me travel beneath, on or above the earth for a short while. In combination with the gift of Dumathoin, *silence*, which should prevent any undesired attention we can take them quickly and silently and so we set out. To our surprise though the warrior does not draw her weapon and the hidden one reveals herself.

Reed stays the hand of Jay and Nethander and in the parlay it is revealed they are here to help us get past the Zhent encampment above. Even hardly out of the dragon spawn's stomach Jay was already hungry for the next opponent and now looks crestfallen. Truly a warrior's spirit in the boy! If we manage to keep him alive long enough he will become a great warrior one day.

Our new companions reveal a plan to disguise ourselves and sneak through a Zhent army camp of around 500 soldiers up above. A risky proposition if we are discovered, even if we could prevail against them the war would be lost for their reinforcements would surely butcher us. Dressing up Jay and Cuura is probably easy enough, but Felina and Reed really don't move and look like soldiers and would attract attention. Kendalan, Nethander and me would stick out like sore thumbs. Dumathoin would not mind my hiding and it has preserved our people through the wisdom of Moradin who appointed him to guard us through the harsh times in the North. Moradin however has not forged me to hide the glory of his people, but to allow it to shine. Now through the Thunder Blessing his people return to the North and so shall his glory be revealed. The time for us to cower in the face of our enemies is over. I did not bow to the deep dragon nor shall I bow to the Zhents.

A tremor goes through the floor and I notice my earthen friend is trying to come closer to me, but cannot move through the hewn stones. Of course this is the solution; to use the Mountain Shield against our enemies and preserve our honour. I explain my plan to my companions and we are agreed to tunnel our way closer to Candlekeep and to breach the surface in an unguarded place. One of our new companions leaves to draw away any pursuit while the other stays with us. We find a narrow tunnel leading to a small cave. Thanks to my experience in working The Hidden One's realm we block it in a natural seeming way to discourage any exploration.

After some rest the Voice of the Gods is granted a new form and under my guidance and with our earthen friend leading the way we excavate a tunnel towards Candlekeep. I worry at times if Kendalan will not panic when loose earth and pebbles fall from the ceiling on top of us. I know it won't collapse, but I can imagine the lack of knowledge in the Elf could allow him to panic. He seems quite composed though and has clearly mastered his fears. Strange such an incomprehensible fear while being guarded by stone on many sides. It is not as if you are in a forest, unshielded and blinded by strange noises and motions everywhere with danger finding its way to you from all sides, that at least would be a reasonable concern.

We are fortunate in our breaching point since we find ourselves with a clear line to Candlekeep and some distance from the Red Wizards and a Zhentish cavalry unit. Kendalan's elven powers combine with the divine power of Reed providing plant cover and we rush towards the keep. We are however less fortunate in our choice of companions since our new 'friend' teleports in the Tiamat priest, the dragon spawn's master and her hidden friend. I immediately call upon the power of the stone to shield us and it rises up entombing them while we make our escape. Nethander and Reed decide to fight a rearguard action and manage to slay the master of the dragon spawn, who spurned the

protective embrace of the earth. The Red Wizard is kept too busy to notice us, but the cavalry is closing in. Moradin's *holy smite* strikes many of them from their horses, but my *impede* fails to halt their leader's mount. While Moradin's *spiritual hammer* is hammering at them Reed comes into range and removes the threat destroying the remaining soldiers in a great conflagration. Their commander as a lone survivor turns about, I hesitate for a moment, but do not bother to recall the hammer chasing him since he will be out of range soon. Nethander's arrow catches him in the back and the entire unit is now destroyed. Even though the killing stroke was not mine I feel a pang of doubt. The servants of evil must be crushed one and all, clearly this is Moradin's will and I feel happy at this great victory, yet the victory here belongs to Reed... and there was no mercy in it.

He fled and did not surrender, clearly he meant to fight another day so it needed to be done, but how will Reed cope with this behaviour of her protegee? She is no fool, but stubborn as a mule in trying to change the wayward, yet surely she must have the wisdom to see his indelible taint and the danger he poses to all of us including herself!

All of us pass through the outer gates into the safety of the keep. We endured many dangers in this journey, yet prevailed and grew strong under our burden. Now at the end we find a trove of knowledge, what reward could be sweeter? Praise Dumatoin! Praise Moradin! We have prevailed!