

Grimwald's chronicles part 92

In the morning the camp is restored to order and inventory is taken. Much fresh water was destroyed, most food remained intact, but some small weapons have been taken. The hunt for the vermin continues. The goblins will probably have poisoned local fresh water sources. I fear disease may develop soon.

The captains decide decisive action is called for to secure our position. Disease will take days to spread and they undoubtedly wish to secure our campsite before that time. From the captives they learn the location of the goblin's lair and the entrances and exits. Several exists are too small for men to pass through, these will be guarded. The larger entrances will be invaded by three groups supported by scouts and sappers to clear the way.

After a march through the muddy terrain we arrive at some cave entrances. The sergeants order the men to beware of trench-foot, a rotting disease common to these marches. I wonder what percentage of soldiers we will lose to various ailments. It is a good thing I stocked up on medical supplies before we left!

Reed, Felina and me are attached to groups which are to invade the lair, while Cuura, Kendalan and Nethander are sent to secure an exit in a nearby a hill. At least their feet will be dry.

Close to the entrance our scouts detect suspicious cracks in the cave roof. The sappers are sent in to shore up the ceiling. They are used to tunneling, but not knowledgeable enough on stress lines and fracture points in limestone. I make some suggestions to the sergeant indicating blocks which may come loose, but an accidental jab of a beam against the ceiling brings down a hail of stone on top of the sappers. Fortunately no one is killed or trapped, but many have been wounded. While the sappers tend their wounded we are forced to press onwards to meet up with Reed's group. Reed's group has come under attack and we cannot allow the goblins to slip through our lines.

The goblins which attacked Reed's group employ their usual hit and run tactics and manage to slip back deeper into their lair before our group can head them off. We dare not pursue because of ambushes and traps. Meanwhile Felina's group has run foul of some spiked pits causing some wounded. Truly a cowardly way of waging war these goblins have!

The many side branches of these tunnels force our group to spread out to prevent the goblins from slipping past us. Soon the number of tunnel entrances which we are forced to guard become more than the number of squads we brought. A clever strategy of the goblins. Since we are at a stalemate unable to advance without opening our lines I volunteer to guard the right flank by myself, while the other squads advance. With our squads spread out the goblins launch their counter attacks. Reed's flank is attacked by packs of wolves, while I and the spearmen of the left flank are ambushed by bands of goblins. Their primitive weapons are no match for Osthalion's defences and their flint tipped spears shatter on the adamantine plates. I call on Moradin to smite the goblins with his holy power and in a burst of sacred light their darkness is removed from Dumathoin's realm. I rush to the sound of battle where the spearmen are fighting of another band of goblins.

When out of the tunnel where they expected their other warband to emerge from to destroy the spearmen they witness a flash of holy light and then me emerging the goblins lose heart and withdraw. As they are retreating I spot a goblin wearing a necklace of teeth, possibly some sign of authority. After a short hesitation I decide to charge after the retreating horde and strike down the marked goblin with a *foe hammer*. The rest continue their flight. It seems I calculated the strength of my blow correctly since the adorned goblin is unconscious and stable rather than dead. On Reed's flank a pack of wolves has been slaughtered and the rest ran away. Although I feel jubilant that we are driving back the enemy I can imagine Reed is feeling less jubilant considering the killing of "innocent" animals. While Reed's and my group were ambushed Felina's group ran into trouble as well, but through her *web* spell she prevented her units from being flanked and drove the enemy back. Reed's party finds an underground lake. This must be the goblin's own untainted water supply.

Although we fended off the goblin counter attack our advancing units still take casualties from traps and the occasional javelin volley before the enemy slips away again. This defence in depth approach is highly effective and even used amongst the Hidden, but the goblins have too little depth and we too much resolve for it to work in the end. Our wounded are shuttled to the rear and tended to while fresh units rotate to the front as we push forward relentlessly. Our scouts find that the tunnel I am in opens up into a larger cave. This must be one of the two breeding caves our captives informed us about. As the scouts enter the cave they are ambushed by a horde of goblins routing them. I pray to Moradin to bestow his *righteous wrath* on the sapper unit I am with and bolstered by the sacred blessing of Moradin we stand firm and break the goblin counter attack. Then I pray for *holy rain* to drip from the ceiling. The sacred energy in the rain bites into the evil goblin flesh as acid and the last goblin resistance dissolves.

The men rush forward and break open the casks of tar and soon smoke starts forcing the remaining goblins to the surface. Although I understand the necessity of eradicating evil I feel there is little glory in such a victory over the unarmed and helpless. When the smoke clears we begin with the grim work of getting rid of the survivors. Fortunately I am not pressed to participate in the slaughter personally, but I did help make it possible. Apparently a similar scenario happened at the other cave. The entrance was warded with a stun field which allowed for a devastating counter attack, but Reed's fireballs crushed their break-out attempt.

When we make it back to the surface we find many of the men on guard have been severely wounded. Not so much the escaping goblin females and young are to blame, but an orcish warband which attacked them. In their usual stupid overconfidence the orcs split into three groups to attack our three guard groups simultaneously rather than focussing their superior numbers on one at a time.

The group commanded by major Oresund abandoned their positions forcing the enemy to give chase. The spear- and swordmen drew apart their frontline while withering fire from the archers and light cavalry eventually caused them to withdraw with heavy losses. Because of their heavier armor the swordsmen were forced to weather an orcish charge and suffered some losses, but over all it can be considered a victory. Unfortunately the escaping goblins got away from our troops, but many of them were captured by the withdrawing orcs.

The group commanded by captain Phic split the orcish front and then performed a successful counter charge of the swordsmen under command of lieutenant Borad. This routed their leader causing the rest of the orcs to abandon the battle as well. Still losses on our side were substantial and when the goblins made a run for it only half hearted attempts were made to kill them all.

The group under the guidance of Cuura also chose to hold their position, but unit cooperation seemed to be substandard. I am told their group survived merely through the magical powers of Kendalan, the awesome blows of Cuura's flail and, according to the men, Nethander's courage. No doubt he was trying to save his own skin which got misinterpreted. Still the Cuura's cavalry charge proved fatal to the unit which will gain her the anger of her commanding officer. I think the men they saved will praise their saviours, but the officers will be less impressed. All in all we lost too much already this early in the campaign. Let's hope reinforcements will arrive soon.