

## Grimwald's chronicles part 94

We spend some time planning our next move and various opinions are put forward. My lieutenant favors a siege to wear the enemy down, I suggest storming the gates, while Felina and Reed favor sneaking in as if they are thieves, still Nethander's suggestion is worst of all lying and betraying the trust and abusing the commander's hospitality. His plan has only one good side to it: if it goes wrong he will be the only one to suffer from it directly.

We have no time for a siege and Nethander's suggestion is regarded as too risky. Felina and Reed prevail on captain Ogg to let them try their plan. I know I cannot match their persuasion skills, still I should practice and try harder to guide my commanders away from these rather underhanded methods. We will only gain a shameful reputation of creatures slinking away under cover of darkness rather than as steadfast heroes! I see Cuura agrees with me, but after her recent punishment she is on her best behaviour and dares not antagonize the captain. I hope he notices the change in her and will support her inevitable promotions.

Zhae did not even bother to come to the warcouncil. Ever since Reed went traipsing away with that, that bard! Zhae hasn't been himself. He is trying to drown himself in his work avoiding Reed and the inevitable burden of his defeat at the hand of that no good loafer who can only hang around taverns. I hope he snaps out of it soon. I know there is enough steel in him to bear this shame and press forward!

Reed hasn't been herself either for that matter. Ever since she was with that fellow she is irritable and argumentative, just like that bard of hers. I cast various divinations on her secretly, but she seems to be normal still her behaviour isn't. When confronted she claims to be going through a phase and tells me not to worry. Pah, if I don't worry who will?

The sneaking plan fails at the first attempt, but they manage to avoid fireballs and flaming arrows beating a hasty retreat. Sneaking is rather bad and unfair, but failing at your craft compounds the shame. How did they come to be this way? It is not as if I don't try to set a good example for them! I even provide top quality armour so they can bear a good fight, but no they have to go sneaking, sneaking! Still it is fortunate they were caught outside of the walls rather than on the courtyard.

A little later Cuura meets me with Horse. Apparently they have decided to continue without her guidance. Well her armour isn't meant to be sneaky, it is meant to show her station! At least she agrees there is more glory to be had in storming gates. I set about explaining her the various stages of assaulting a fortress, the intricacies of mining and counter-mining, trenches, redoubts, mantlets and the various siege engines and before long Kendalan comes walking up with a human wearing a decent and quite impressive full plate. He is not one for small talk so we escort him to captain Ogg in silence. Cuura and I try our best to impress the commander with our qualities and that of our equipment ofcourse, but he does not pay us much heed and I think he may even have been amused by our efforts.

Captain Ogg continues where we left of trying to impress on the Zhent the predicament he is in to pressure him into a cease fire, but the Zhent commander quickly turns the tables on him implying it is we who are out of our league here in the moors. Within minutes the captain is forced to confess he does not have sufficient authority. The smirk on the Zhent's face says it all. He has the captain exactly where he wants him. I hate to say it, but the Zhent is hard as stone and quite a skilled negotiator forcing his terms on us!

The captain steps out to confer with me and Cuura how to bring the negotiations back on track. The Zhent reminds me of dwarves who have shunned Dumathoin's patronage. They have become consumed by greed to the detriment of their souls. I suggest that the Zhent may have a similar craving, wether a banite or cyricite, he is most likely longing for advancement and succes will get him that. I suggest to let the Zhent lay claim to the glory, for the people the succes if more important than who gets the credit. Fortunately this tactic which appeals to his ego meets with

success and soon he and the captain start hammering out an iron clad contract.

By the time we escort the commander who we now know is called major Locke it is already dawn. When the gates of the keep are opened to allow him entrance the rest of our group is also coming out. Almost like a prisoner exchange.

Locke's calm and confident demeanor however changes instantly the moment he lays eyes on Reed. All he manages to croak in a throat choked with hatred is "YOU!". I see that awful Nethanderish, eagerness to torment rise up in Reed. Teasing him like a dog on a leash. Fortunately Felina jumps up and greets him with a beautiful dance. This short interval allows Reed to get a hold of herself again and she apologizes for having caused any suffering to him. Amazingly she manages to calm him down. It is a good thing Felina was there and he did not see Reed before now! How is it that I see that bard's and Nethander's taint spoiling her purity so clearly, but yet Moradin does not unveil any wrongdoing? Perhaps this is her, what did she call it? Karma.

We camp on a nearby hill and await the return of the rest of our forces now "escorting" the Zhentish caravan. It had a strong escort of eighty guards so it was fortunate we did not have to fight them. Kendalan, Cuura, Nethander and Reed use the opportunity to make friends with the barbarians. The orcs strike camp as soon as they have sold their slaves heading back to their respective hunting grounds.

Reed and Cuura with lieutenant Dark manage to convince the sky people to share their lore with us and even to stay in the neighborhood to act as scouts and after several days the troll hunters come to join us as auxiliaries which pleases Nethander and captain Ogg who spend some time with them. The swift runners and bear hand clan prove a bit more difficult to persuade.

The bear hands don't see the problem as their problem relying on their own strength and the ruggedness of the northern cliffs. A position I can respect. Still Kendalan and the officers talk them into supplying the army if we honour their customs. Apparently to be allowed to pass their territory a ritual competition between champions must take place to honour the strength of both peoples and each little clan has their own champion. At least our army will have a secure northern flank, supplies and a fallback option.

The swift runners falsely believe they can outwit the enemy. I hope their conceit won't be their downfall. Given how the sky people and troll hunters avoid each other it is clear the tribes won't mix or cooperate easily. Too many old grudges, I can see it plain as day. The same grudges kept the dwarven kingdoms of the north from cooperating more closely. Here the barbarians guard patches of berries and sheep grazing meadows as if they are rich veins of ore. Understandable, unavoidable, but costly to compete in this way. Without a high king like there was in the days of Shannatar I don't see how we can change this.

Major Locke has brought a retinue of a dozen men. Clearly not the most seasoned of his troops, but rather the most devoutly loyal to him. Within days he and his men pervade the Neverwinter troops with tales of the moors and the rugged life and many adventures of the pioneers on the frontier of the wilderness. I would not be amazed if at the end of the campaign several adventurous men would enlist to seek their fortune with the Zhentarim. His rising popularity is a thorn in the side of our officers, but now and again he feeds them a morsel of important information to avoid too much friction from building up and the men feel safer with "seasoned veterans of the moors" around so morale is actually improving. It seems that "accidental alliances" keep on happening. The major does seem a sporting fellow. He even congratulated captain Ogg on first getting him to commit to living within the Neverwinter camp and then murdering his bodyguards so he would be vulnerable. The captain was quite speechless. What happened in the keep? I thought they were going to do this without any casualties which could "escalate the tensions". Still it all turned out well, we can bring in supplies from Llorck even and captain Ogg is in high regard among his fellow officers.

With the consent of both majors and the shamans I have erected a runic marker of strong basalt to mark our joining in common cause against the vile hellspawn.

Major Locke has informed us that south of Silvery Moon an orcish champion is rallying tribes so perhaps the promised rangers won't come or will be delayed until the threat has been dealt with. He also informs us that the southern moors are all but lost already and the renegades are being pushed steadily northwest where they prey on the trade routes. Major Oresund decides that we will flank the enemy by marching north east with our flank covered by the cliffs and has send messengers to the Waterthavians so we can attempt a pincer movement rather than meeting the enemy armies head on. What is keeping them so long? It will be hard to prevail against so many enemies without support!

Cleric 4/Crusader 1/Prestige Paladin 3/Stalwart Champion 4