

Grimwald's chronicles part 95

Together with Lieutenant Dark we are dispatched to make contact with a village of the bear hand tribe. Apparently it is their custom to only allow strangers to pass after they have performed a ritual competition with their village champion. Something about honoring the strength, endurance and wisdom of their totem animal I gather. We are to travel two days towards the cliffs in the north east of the moors and gain permission to use their territory for our pincer movement.

We arrive at a big cliff which has numerous cave dwellings. Too many openings to be truly defensible, but better than being out in the open. We are informed the village is called "Hillsfar" and that their champion has taken the best hunters to catch some mountain goats, but should return any day now. Cuura never known for her patience and eager for battle and her chance to prove herself decides to ride off to find the village champion. The rest of us are made welcome by the town elder. Reed and Kendalan start talking about ugra with the Elder while I and the lieutenant take a look around.

The caves honeycomb the cliff, it seems to be a natural complex which has been slightly enlarged by wear over the last decades. The village has about a hundred people. Slightly less than half are men of fighting age. Not long after nightfall the elder is summoned by the guard because a strange creature wishes to meet him. We go with him to the cave entrance where a beautiful winged female awaits him. Even though her voice is soft and sweet like honey she makes my beard bristle. A quick *detect evil* reveals the beast beneath the beauty. When we draw closer Nethander and I both recognize the feathers in her wings.

An Erinye, cursed fallen angels now serving the dukes of Hell. I quickly look up the references in my *tome of ancestral knowledge*. Apparently they are not harmed by silver like other devil kind, but the sacred and holy energies which were once their own now bring harm to them. Like other devilkind they are immune to perils of their environment and are not harmed by fire or poison. Devilkind has some resistance to acidic and cold environments as well, but in their underground dwellings lightning is not a common occurrence so Kendalan's spells should work. The ancestors tell of the Erinye's power to charm their victims and they retain their resistance against mortal magics. They are also known as skilled archers. The Erinye tries her charms on the elder and attempts to sway him to accept the devil's dominion. I let Reed, who is much more skilled at this than I am show the elder the folly of making a deal with a devil. By the gods, it is almost as bad as making a deal with a dragon!

To impress on us that resistance is futile she points to the next line of hills which is now crested by a large figure wrapped in a cloak of flame. I quickly grab my tome again to determine what we may be facing. According to the ancestors the generals of the dukes of hell are beings called Pit Fiends, what powers these devils possess it does not mention, but I am sure they must be formidable. Why would a general of the infernal armies bother with a small tribe of barbarians? It does not make sense. We excuse ourselves to discuss our options.

Reed favours scattering to the four winds so at least some of us will survive. Hardly heroic. I tell that my ancestors have long held their ground against odds sometimes even worse than these. Many a clan was destroyed and many a stronghold sacked, but our reputation, honor and glory are unblemished and live on eternally. The elder however does not seem heartened by the comparison. Then Rock reveals a third option is viable. There is a deeper cave system which would allow the tribe to withdraw deeper into the earth, but there is a few hundred feet of limestone between this cave system and the other one. I quickly inspect the stone and estimate the time it will take to tunnel through: three or four hours at the minimum. More time than we will be granted, but perhaps not more than we can take. Reed is still doubtful, but Nethander manages to convince her this option is better. He is agreeing with an option brought forward by Rock and me. What is his game? Is he merely seeking to survive or is he making some sort of shady deal with the enemy as we speak?

Reed leads the others to a parlay, which I feel certain the enemy should honor, to buy some time. In the meanwhile I give the tribespeople and Bear a lesson in the basics of tunneling and order the sappers to oversee the building of barricades and illuminated kill zones at the cave entrances. We have barely gotten the tribespeople organized when the party returns already. I make my way outside and pray to the Lord of the Underearth to shield us from this evil and a stone tower erupts from the earth to stand guard between the village and the enemy. Kendalan and I take up positions at the top of the tower and we get the ballista set-up. I tell the sappers that this tower is a blessing of the gods who support us in our fight and that no devil hide can stop a well aimed ballista bolt. They roar a great cheer and heartened start cranking the ballista.

Reed and the others have barely reached the caves when with a great howl orcish hordes make their presence known. Behind us a great *wall of ice* springs up to prevent our allies in the caves from supporting us. Clearly they wish to destroy us piecemeal. A fireball melts away the *wall of ice* in an instant. A new *wall of ice* forms to protect the approaching orcs from fire from our tower. Then a great ball of fire washes over this wall scorching the first ranks of the orcish advance. Then a third *wall of ice* appears sealing the defenders in their caves. Kendalan I and the sappers stand alone. Driving the orcs forward are two ferocious looking bearded devils wielding glaives. Kendalan, I and the sappers aim for the closest devil and a hail of silver tipped arrows and a ballista bolt turn it into a pin cushion. Overwhelmed by this ranged assault it teleports away to lick it's wounds, but the other orcs storm the tower braving the lightning balls Kendalan is tossing. I order the sappers to retreat to the interior, while Kendalan and I prepare to repel the attackers. Reed arranges an exchange with a sapper so she can assist us while I pray that the blessings of the *holy storm* will become a *triad*. Flying small devils appear, Spinagons, throwing fiery spines and capable of creating *stinking clouds* and *producing flames*. Their projectiles are well aimed but they are scattered by Kendalan's magical defences and my well forged armour alike. Meanwhile I manage to push back the invading orcs, but Kendalan is no match for the brute strength of the orcs and he is thrown down from the tower and surrounded by an orcish mob thirsting for elf blood. Then I throw the vial of holy water up into the air, it bursts open and a *holy storm* of holy water drenches the screaming orcs. Even the few who manage to escape the holiness of the water dissolving their evil flesh are struck down by the earth itself which tears up their feet and legs. Meanwhile Felina and Snake have escaped the ice and dispatched the other devil leading this assault and all becomes dead quiet again.

Their attempt to take the tower was thwarted and an uneasy silence falls over the battlefield as the enemy must now surely be appraising our strengths and trying to find our weaknesses. I order the sappers to take down the ballista and move it to the caves since our location is too vulnerable and our view too limited to do us much good. They are somewhat relieved to be ordered to assist the tunneling effort, but the fact that we held the tower has surely given them hope and faith.

After a while a new *wall of ice* appears creating a blindspot between us and the caves on our left flank. We cannot tell how the assault on the caves is going, but I think that our friends can manage to hold so narrow a front indefinitely. We ourselves are faced with a mob of orcs and six Ogres seeking to squash us. I crouch into the *roots of the mountain* stance, this tower will crumble before they manage to uproot me! Kendalan electrocutes two ogres with his *ball lightning* after which I finish them off with my bow. I swiftly transform my bow into a dwarven warpike and plant my *steadfast boots* firmly on the stone a prepare a warm welcome for the charging Ogres. But their charge never lands. They are sloshing through the *entangling* grasses which breaks their charge, but allows them to come within striking distance of my warpike. After this they run away howling, more afraid of an elf and dwarf than of their devilish masters! Hah! The orcs however have now reached the edge of the entangle and become entrapped. A swift transformation of my warpike into a bow allows me to rain deadly arrows into the frontline together with Kendalan. The orcish sergeant however manages to keep his wits about him and orders a concentrated volley on me. A score of javelins plummets to my position as I brace for impact. Against such a rain of projectiles coming in at varying angles even my adamantine interlocking plate cannot shield me fully and

several javelins slip through. Inwardly I curse myself for my lack of preparedness. I should have transformed my shield into a tower shield then this would not have happened to me or a shield crystal of arrow deflection surely would have saved me from harm. The orcs let out a ragged cheer at their succes. What no pain? I feel no pain. Poison? No. I pluck the javelins from between my plates, no blood. The diamond ward crystal on my armour seems more dim however. The adamantine of my armour, the earth power of the roots of the mountain and the diamond ward have lessened the impact so that the javelins did not even break my skin. Cuura would use this to break their morale here and now. Even if she did get hurt she might manage to do it. What would Cuura do? Lets see. What was that? Ah no orcs left because Kendalan's hatred caused them all to be electrocuted. So much for my chance to shine and be intimidating. It turns out I was prepared enough this time, but still I could be more ready.

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