

## 26: Faith and Filth

Cuura decided tis was a good time to bring Zhae into the equation and send Grimwald to fetch him. I took this time to scout the caverns ahead. Grimwald and I are the only one able to see in pitch black and Grimwald makes so much noise sneaking that he would wake the dead. Since I was the logical choice I did what was necessary and put my life on the line for our cause. Fortunately the cave was empty and after a while I encountered a huge cave with a small lake in the middle. On the far end of the lake a broken statue lay shattered on the ground. The water itself had a strange aura emanating from it and I tried to taste it. It burned my mouth, but it wasn't poisonous, acting on a hunch I shielded myself from powers of good and the water reacted. I guessed this was holy water, thus the broken statue was probably from an elven goddess. Focusing on the task ahead I scouted the cavern further, quickly discovering a three doorways close o each other straight across the entrance. For now this was enough and I returned to the group.

After my return to the party with my findings I noticed that both Cuura and Felina did not pay attention to anything I said, I can safely establish that our so called leaders are really just leaders in name. When needed, everybody listens to Reed anyway and most of the time I can persuade the party to do as I suggest. And in this case the ones listening about the lake were Reed and Grimwald, how typical.

Too solve the problem that only Grimwald and I could see in the dark Because, I decided it was better to shield the doorways with my innate darkness to allow the others to explore the big cavern bearing the lights they need to see in the dark.

While waiting on the party members to do their thing I explored the different directions we could go first. In the left doorway I heard a scraping sound, the center doorway sounded like "Moo" while I could hear goblins snickering in the right doorway. In this case it's better to face the known than the unknown so when the party finished their explorations I scouted the right doorway until I encountered an intersection with three new corridors to the left, right and center. While crossing the intersection I was able to dodge a ballista bolt coming from the corridor on the right. With this trap sprung I returned to get reinforcements because I heard Goblins in that corridor. Cuura, Zhae Felina and I charged. Too bad for Cuura the ballista wasn't a trap, they've reloaded the weapon and impaled Cuura during the charge. The goblins were disposed of without any problems and we found a room filled with more destroyed statues and the ramshackle ballista.

Cuura was healed by Grimwald and we scouted the other corridors. This must have been a large temple complex in the past because we found more rooms with religious statues, all desecrated and removed of the valuable gems and gold leaf that once decorated them. In one of these rooms we found more Goblins and Reed forbid us to kill them in this religious place. Grimwald complained and couldn't understand why. I tried to back up Grimwald on this one because I had seen this problem coming, Reed sometimes isn't up to the brutal reality of this world I believe.

Somehow Reed did convince Grimwald that the goblins should be set free and that they would likely perish without their men to provide for them. This surely sounds crude and unnecessarily brutal. Why prolong the suffering if we can end it immediately? The others agreed with Reed and I gave up my complaints, for me this wasn't a big issue to start with and I had my fun discussing.

The remaining parts of the corridors were surprisingly identical to the first corridor. The temple complex was laid out like a tree and all corridors ended with different religious

statues, all destroyed and desecrated. It turned out that the scraping sound I heard in one corridor were a few sheep held in a coral in one of the chambers. In another room we discovered that the source of the “Moo” were a few cows. These animals must be the source of the meat the goblins carried above to the ogre village. More goblin cubs and females were herded outside to their companions near the little lake and were bound together like cattle until we were ready to set them free above ground.

In one of the other chambers we found what seemed to be a secret hiding place under the floor, empty and destroyed. The next chamber I started looking for similar hiding places and somehow ended up in a meditative tranquil state I had never felt before in my life. Reed brought me back into the waking world telling me that I would have likely stayed in that meditative state until I’d died from thirst. The strange thing is that somehow the essence of this deity was still lingering in that room after thousands of years and remained there even after the statues were desecrated. Perhaps I should re-evaluate my opinion about priests being the tricksters they seem to be in Calimport. This peace I felt in my mind can’t be attributed only to magic tricks like priests practice. The wisdom I get from reading the book of undead also seem to point into the existence of gods, souls and the afterlife. I should discuss this with Reed and perhaps Grimwald when I have the opportunity.

The temple complex extended further into the ground, the center axis kept on going until it ended in a cavern filled with signs of noble houses and an altar covered with entrails and blood of slaughtered humanoids. Reed tried to incinerate these remains in order to restore the altar to its former religious glory. If this had any effect we’ll never know, but the smell surely had an effect on our ability to hold our meals.

Behind this room the central axis continued until it was blocked by a mound of filth. Grimwald told us about certain creatures called “Otyuchs” It turned out that Grimwald was correct and I nearly lost my life fighting these nasty creatures. In the end I was saved by the valiant actions of Grimwald, who killed the last Otyuch that was trying to devour me. I should have listened to him telling us these Otyuchs usually live in small groups before I tried to flank the first one, never to old too learn I would say.

Just behind this rubble lay another hall filled with light shafts revealing the stars above and strange mirrors on the floor. Reed learned us that these mirrors could focus the constellations in the sky to form intricate patterns of starlight that will create a gate periodically. Supposedly next period would be in roughly two months time. This was most likely the portal that something or someone used to enter this place and bring the cattle in the complex. Reed thought it was a good idea to disable the gate and carefully misaligned the mirrors.

On the far side of this hall was another locked door locked with by two different locks. I don’t know how she did it, but Reed somehow retrieved the correct key from her pockets. The last key was missing and Felina failed to open the lock with some lock picks, I should learn that trick too once, and we tried to bash the door. At the moment the lock gave way a terrible shriek that filled my heart with fear. I did not have a chance but to flee the scene under the influence of foul magic interfering with my mind. Just a few remained to fight of the hell hounds that were summoned by the magical trap that guarded the door. It turned out to be a difficult battle but in the end they were victorious clearing the way for us to reveal a luxurious room. Besides furniture, red robes and a huge chest there was nothing to be found, but the discomfoting knowledge that one of the notorious wizards of Thay had take residence here. We decided to take the chest with us and open it on a later time.