

40: Choices in Darkness

At the breakfast table I could finally hear what happened in the fight against the Ninja. I heard about the alarm bells and the farmers being raided by a kobold war party. When my friends came to the rescue they were attacked by the Ninja and his two aids. The ninja was taken out by Zhae, helped by the magics of Reed. One of his aids was a half orc bounty hunter who tried to claim a bounty of 2000 gold pieces put on Cuura's head. Apparently the Ninja and the bounty hunter met and decided to combine their efforts. Where the third enemy came from is still unknown. All I know is that it was a drow, one of the scourges of the underdark. Stories of these black demons were known even in the streets of Calimport! How these three met and came to work together is a mystery. Perhaps the kobold mining team we encountered in the mines were working for the drow and I can understand they wouldn't be too happy that we've disrupted their profitable scheme.

I found out that the Ninja's life was saved and he was sent back to his employers to explain his failure. Reed and Grimwald tried to explain the wisdom of it, I just accepted their story and know that I would have handled it differently. To make things worse I learned that the Ninja was carrying Black lotus poison! Black lotus, the mother of all poisons, the most potent poison that will ruin a body within mere seconds. And the fools just burned it! Even worse is the fact that when they were at it, they burned the drow's poison cache as well. A complete stack of the fabled drow sleeping poison ruined. Reed tried to explain about the gesture with the black lotus and the ninja, explaining that this might prevent the ninja's master to send another one after Reed. The destruction of the drow poison however was foolish beyond reason. What's done is done and at least I brought Reed into tears when I came up with the logic of needless suffering of living creatures when they could just as easily have been peacefully taken out of the fight by some poison. Although the logic is pure nonsense, Reed believed it and her sobbing somehow lessened the loss of the valuable poison.

Then we had the matter of Cuura's bounty. We believe this bounty was put on Cuura's head by the Zhentarim captain we encountered in Greenest. This was the Zhent captain that knew Blade personally! Strangely enough I feel I changed. In the past I believe I would have used this possibility to score big points with the captain and earn myself an instant promotion within the Black network, allowing instant access to the captain's stories about my mentor's past. This may be the best lead to discover more about Blade I'd ever come across, but the thought of betraying my friends' trust appals me. Fortunately I'm pretty sure I can persuade Cuura to accompany me back to Greenest in the future to set matters straight. Perhaps I can find out more about Blade then.

Breakfast was swift and we decided to rescue the farmers without delay. We asked the Helmish priests to guard the entrance to their lair and decided to take the back door into the kobolds' lair through Nashkell mine.

Quickly after we entered the sealed-off part of the mine I encountered a trapdoor in the floor. Right then we knew we were pretty sure we could gain access to the kobolds' lair. Foolishly enough I found the trap before walking straight in it, but managed to fall in while trying to cross. My friends saved me and I was ready to face the next one.

Grimwald studied the different routes on a crossing in the mine. We decided to take a left turn and entered a very narrow mineshaft. Again I managed to fall in trap only to find out something alive trying to crawl up to get to me. Again my friends pulled me out and we could continue the trek down the increasingly narrowing shaft. That ended with a dead end horizontally but the shaft continued straight up and straight down. Grimwald explained something about a bad patch of rock and possible cave-ins and the need to bypass certain

patches. I didn't listen too carefully and looked down, only escape being pummelled from above! I quickly retreated into the cave only to bump into Reed. Something oozed back into the shaft and a crossbow bolt didn't even slowed it one bit. I deducted that my rapier would be useless and I would be crushed or eaten by this ooze without even a fair fight. I decided that this was a fight for others and switched places with Reed and Cuura who's fighting style is better equipped to bludgeoning the life out of something.

This trip into the mines was fast turning into a disaster for me. I set of two traps and encountered a thing that would have killed me without even being hindered by my efforts to repay the favour. If it wasn't for my friends, I would be a goner by now.

Still, I'm the only one who is silent enough to scout up front, see in the dark and even has the slightest chance to find the traps, I had to endure everything this mine would throw at me. First we went up, to find a dead end. Then we went down to find a flooded shaft filled with acrid waters that irritated my skin and was trying to ruin my boots. Grimwald pushed us all to explore this shaft and we were lucky to find a garbage chute leading up to a guarded cavern above. Reed used her magic to fly to the hole in the ceiling above us, sheltered by one of my globes of darkness she was able to safely bring a rope upstairs. Then her magic swap trick put Grimwald upstairs with enough muscle to allow us to go upstairs. The cavern was guarded by a lone kobold who fell to my blade without a noise. Finally I did something useful!

The cavern ended in a corridor leading up to yet another level of the mine and there I discovered another trap. Grimwald discerned the poison in the trap and decided that it was a hefty poison. This was not a makeshift trap and certainly an expensive one too. We must have found the permanent lair of the kobolds.

Soon I found out that I wasn't going to be able to cross this trap without setting it off and decided to use the potion of gaseous form we found earlier. This potion allowed me to cross the trap and enter the Kobolds lair without being noticed. Quickly guessed we were facing around four score of the little buggers and more importantly I found the trap switch. With the switch turned off my friend would be able to charge the kobolds. In the back of the lair I saw a luxurious tent that would probably house the enemy leaders. Reeds magic tricks allowed me to communicate through her and I asked her to wait for my signal before they would commence the charge. Carefully I sneaked up around the encampment to pin the leaders in their tent. This would be my hour of fame, leaving the kobold fodder to the others and taking the leaders myself!

Then Beshaba played her dirty tricks on me. Not only did one of the leaders spot me when he came out of the tent, but I managed to get my rapier entangled in the tents fabric when I charged the little bastard. Fortunately Lady luck came to the rescue when I unleashed the magical Bane over the kobolds. That was the signal for my friends to charge the encampment. I don't know what they did, but I knew they were wreaking havoc judging from the commotion.

Meanwhile I was facing the kobold who was carrying a shield and mace. This one was a fine adversary. He didn't fall for my feints and managed to dodge most of my thrusts. Fortunately he was focussed more on the defensive and his blows missed me as well. It turned out that he wasn't alone in the tent. A sorcerer blasted me with magic missiles while another warrior exchanged places with the leader. This one was better fun. He bought my feints and I placed a few good solid thrusts in his entrails. The sorcerer however kept on hitting me with his magic missiles until Kendalan put his bow to good use and planted two arrows in the kobold guts disrupting his spells and buying me some time.

The fight with my new opponent was evolving in my favour, but the sorcerer and the kobold wielding the shield and mace were slowly wearing me down. Someone used a magic spell on us and we were covered in fiercely bright dancing lights. Although it almost blinded me, I was able to close my eyes in time. The warrior outside was not so lucky and was blinded by the magic effects. This allowed me to drive my rapier into the narrow gap in armour covering his armpit and dive to take down the sorcerer inside the tent.

The sorcerer tried to hit me with the same fire spell Reed uses all the time and I was barely able to dodge the glowing hand. In hand to hand combat no magic user is a match to my prowess, he fell for my next feint and I was able to drive Blade's rapier straight through his heart. One down and two to go. Then Cuura and Kendalan's wolf came to the rescue and downed the blinded warrior with a few blows. We teamed up on the last leader who turned out to be a priest and swiftly ended his life as well.

Outside the battle was fast turning in to a rout when Reed managed to persuade the kobolds to drop their weapons and flee Nashkell mine. Again her reasons for such a display of mercy are above me and I feel that more than one of my companions have doubt as well. Still we decide it will be best if let them go. We'd found the prisoners from the farm house and killed the kobolds leaders. The threat is gone and in the process I was able to deliver a good fight again.