

## 49: Hide and Seek

We were contemplating our next moves at the bottom of the central stairway. The majority wanted to start the search from the top level down, so up the stairs we went...

First floor were 4 closed doors. Second floor three passage ways protruding in opposite directions toward the outer walls of the tower. Felina was scouting the stairway to the third and last floor when she suddenly vanished in the dark. We all hurried up the stairs to find a vast single room filled with thin brick dividing walls. According to Grimwald, Durlag's tribe had probably build temporary housing accommodations inside the towers top floor. Temporary in dwarven culture of course is just about anything that isn't supposed to last for eons. These dividing walls were about the only structural parts of the tower time had any effect on and were slowly crumbling to dust, creating a maze with small vaulted chambers with irregular gaping holes in the walls.

We couldn't find any trace of Felina but we heard something moving to the right of the party. Off we went of a wild goose chase. It didn't take us long to be lost completely, faint sounds lured us deeper and deeper in the maze. To prevent getting lost even more I started to drop copper coins on the ground to allow us to find our way back.

That too proved useless, when we traced our steps back we noticed that someone or something was removing the coins and was somehow reshaping the entire structure of the maze. Our foe was able to manipulate stone and probably burrowed through solid rock as well.

It didn't take us long to notice that Reed was missing as well. Two down and still no way of finding our companions, or even finding our way back to the central stairway.

At the moment we were sitting ducks for the creature that could move around, single us out one by one and bring us down unnoticed. I figured the creature would use the space between the vaulted ceiling and the inner ceiling of the mace. This theory became more plausible when we encountered a room were part of the ceiling had come down. The space was cramped, but I figured I could crawl through at reasonable speed. I volunteered to help the party by scouting from above.

I would follow a route above the ceiling, while the party would follow in the rooms below. Within a dozen of yards I spotted a movement in the distance. Our enemy was a small ugly earth like creature that bolted the moment it encountered armed resistance from me above and from Zhae pounding it from below.

After regrouping with the party I had an idea to find Reed and Felina. If I would use the powers from my heritage to protect myself from Goodness, I could use that field as a close proximity meter that would surely react on the aura's of Felina and especially Reed. The search began with invoking the protective shield and just started criss-crossing the ceiling, hoping to feel the slight tremor in the shield warning me that I was closing in on my target. The gamble paid off and I found them. Yelling for the party to assist me, I also alarmed the monster to my presence.

The earth elemental had beaten Reed and Felina unconscious and hid them in an cramped place between three walls. Zhae was pounding the walls to break them down in order to reach our friends. Just in time he opened a hole we could use to follow the elemental. Grimwald and Kendalan ran to block of the elementals exit routes.

Faced with overwhelming odds and near defeat the elemental fled into the ground never to return. Reed and Felina had taken beating, but nothing too serious. The next problem was

finding our way through the maze. Scouting from above the ceiling allowed me to see that there were just two thin walls blocking our path to the stairs.

Zhae put his muscles to good work and within a few blows he opened up a hole into a closed room with a stone table inside. It looked like we had found one of the three magic keys to gain exit to the doorway towards the lower levels.

One key found, two floors left unsearched.

Second floor had three passageways leading into the tower. Grimwald found encriptions on the wall in dwarvish saying "Choose the right way" While a statement like that is pretty obvious, the practical use was non-existent.

First passageway led to two doors. First one led into a room filled with fire, second one was filled with a chalice made of ever-ice. Because we were so smart to open up two doors at the same time, the fire front collided with the cold leading to a violent explosion of steam. Quickly closing the fire door prevented us from being cooked. A quick search of the ice room discovered nothing of real value.

Clearly we didn't choose the "right" path. Next one brought us into a large room with two strange apparatus. A large circular table with a sliding handle and a pedestal with strange symbols on it. We were able to slide the handle a few inches to the left, but the tower shuddered and protested, encouraging us to leave the handle alone. The pedestal had strange mathematical symbols in a straight line over it. Curious what they would do I pushed the first symbol. The tower reacted with a thundering sound followed by the rumble of a building coming down. No damage was done to the tower itself, but slowly we understood the purpose of the room. This room was the control room of a huge weapon on top of the tower. The circular table provided direction to the weapon, while the pedestal controlled the distance. The strange symbols were actually symbols of actual buildings. First a symbol for the gatehouse and bridge, then a symbol for the second gatehouse etc. This tower housed a huge and powerful weapon and I had just used it to blow up our only exit!