

# Joe the Balrog

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Rosemary Mansfield

1st Meadow '02 - 24<sup>th</sup> Heat

## Player Characters

Isil Eth	Mind	Elf	Female	Leader
Gerard	Illusionist	Human	Male	
Tom	Air	Human	Male	Mil Sci
Ithilmor	Star	Elf	Female	
Vychan Adam-Jones	Earth	Giant	Male	
Fayan	Earth	Human	Male	
Basalic	Earth	Human	Male	Scribe

**Plane** - Alusia

## Places visited

Dwarven city of Highcastle

TorHold - nearby dwarven outpost

**Employer** - Kali the Nameless

## Major NPCs encountered

Joe the Balrog

'The Scarlet Edelweiss' - an elf

Tinker - dwarven guide

Garak - head of the exiled dwarven council

Dolgrin - dwarven war leader.

Kundrun - charismatic head of the goblin revolution

Pebble - young dwarf

**Mission** - Do something about the Balrog inside Highcastle

# Joe the Balrog

## Adventure Summary

### 1<sup>st</sup> Meadow

Found out what kali knew about Highcastle. We were to go there and visit the Naga in the nearby lake.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Meadow

Arrived at Lake Evendile. The Naga lived in the swamps on one side but that area had been churned up with swathes of mud.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Meadow.

Entered swamp. Discovered some remains of Naga settlement. Chased into the air by a large waterspout. Went looking for the Naga on the other side of the lake. Found by young dwarf guide, Pebble.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Taken to Tor Hold. Found out about the situation in Highcastle by the exiled dwarven council. The goblins living there had revolted and taken over. They had also managed to release a balrog into the city. The council wanted it dealt to as it seemed to be allied with the goblins.

### 7<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Left for Highcastle with dwarven guide, Tinker.

### 8<sup>th</sup> Meadow.

Entered Highcastle, which is located mostly in a mountain. Have combat with three devils. Find area where balrog had been rampaging. Fought a group of goblins, captured and questioned one. Went to more populated market area. Tinker obtained more information from dwarves still in residence.

### 9<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Tom and Adam had close encounter with balrog during the night. Adam had a short conversation with it before it left. Enforcer goblin guards out searching and we fight a patrol before hurriedly departing. Encounter 'Scarlet Edelweiss' who leads us out of the mountain.

### 10<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Edelweiss goes back in the city for more information while we rest up.

### 12<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Edelweiss had discovered that a lot of dwarves were being held captive so he wanted to rescue them while we provided a distraction by taking on the balrog. However he still needed more information. So we went into the city again to investigate the mines. We started at the ancient dwarven halls then worked our way down.

After a while of making our way through passages, we discovered an area cut through a very hard black rock. Inside we found a magical metal structure that was used for 'metal finding'. We kept going and found a place where the balrog had been.

### 13<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Made our way back to the dwarven halls.

### 15<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Arrived back at Tor Hold and reported to the Council what we had learnt.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Meadow

The day of Edelweiss's mass breakout. We assembled in the dwarven halls and waited for the balrog to investigate us. When it arrived we hit it with everything we had. After a while, the balrog collapsed into a blob of mithral which rapidly sank into the rocky floor. We left before the goblins showed up.

Got outside and descended to dwarven command post. The dwarves were having battles with the goblins. Relieved siege on dwarven patrol then headed back to Tor Hold. That evening we learnt more about the balrog from Adam's elemental.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> Meadow

Arrived at Tor Hold and reported. Stayed with the dwarves until 24<sup>th</sup> Heat for training.

## **Joe the Balrog**

### **Basalic**

Kali The Nameless, the current leader of the Guild Council, required a party to investigate the current situation with the dwarven city of Highcastle, located on the western border to Alfheim. She had heard from the nearby Naga community that a balrog had been let loose, that had been under the city, and they wanted something done about it.

Those that gathered were:

Gerard, the illusionist, Human male from an alternate plane. Dirt I think he called it. Distinguished feature, a blue glowing foot (Wonder what he stepped in).

Adam Vychan Jones. Male hill giant and druidic earth mage. 16'4" tall, in plate armour and a chartreuse tabard and wearing a pair of black spectacles. He's also a ranger and healer.

Ithilmor. Elven female, a dark celestial mage, and very strong in her faith of Elbereth. So strong that not even her spells can affect me. This may be useful in combat.

Fayan. An earth mage I had not met in a long time, since the affair with the giant rats in the giant castle. Owned a black winged mare and a set of ambulatory luggage. Also druidic.

Tom - Air mage from the same plane as Gerard.

Isil Eth - Elven mind mage.

Kali told us that Highcastle is a dwarvish city, built into the mountain range. It basically consists of two parts, the Vale which are the buildings on top or at least have a surface entrance, and the UnderCity, the sprawling complex of tunnels beneath the earth. Many of these tunnels were old mine workings dating back hundreds of years.

HighCastle used to be a prosperous place. The dwarves mined mithral which was sold to the nearby elves. However those mines ran out long ago. Other minerals such as copper, iron and tin are still mined and exported. Mithral smiths still exist but their skills are not in high demand any more. Also the fact that Alfheim has been at peace for the last few hundred years means that the weapon market has fallen through the floor.

The civilisation in the city is mostly dwarves but a quarter of the population are goblins who are treated as second class citizens. A Guild party had been in HighCastle in Winter '798 (cf scribe notes *Kali and the Five Dwarves*) but had to leave because of the increased rioting - and they weren't responsible. Since there had been hardly any money coming in and the city had to import most of the basic necessities, the society there was breaking down with rampant poverty, mostly in the UnderCity. People were scavenging for what work they could and several areas were in disrepair. Some of them had to be abandoned. Currently what work was done was based on the person's ability to pay for it.

Kali had no idea what the current situation was but the message from the Naga had implied that the goblins had revolted. Somehow they had also released a balrog that had been imprisoned under the city and the Naga wanted something done about it.

Kali was also able to tell us that the tunnels ranged in size from 4 foot to 7 foot and it is well advised to hire a guide. All the dwarves knew Common. We were warned that speaking dwarven was a grave offense unless invited to do so by the dwarves. It was possible for dwarves and goblins to interbreed but any half-breeds born to dwarves, when detected, quickly meet with 'accidents'. Rumour had it that there were a community of half-breeds deep in the tunnels. There was a dwarven militia, known as the Force, which mainly patrol the Vale, and nearly all the dwarven youngsters serve in it at one time or another. Some of the inhabitants are addicted to a substance they called 'tea', distilled firewater with an additive herb. Fayan was able to recognise it as a mountain variety of hemp.

The Naga lived in the swamps to the west of the nearby lake, Lake Evendile. They are very powerful mages and despise deceit. They also read minds as a matter of course. Kali had visited them once and needed a guide to find their loose community. Later, from the scribe notes, we discovered that the trail is marked with small thorn bushes.

Kali told us that she would pay us 2000sp each to go and talk to the Naga. That was about when a messenger came into the meeting room with a copy of the scribe notes we were looking for. The library was in the process of being moved to the new building so it had taken some time to get them. Upon perusal we also noted two major hazards: an insane kraken in the lake (Don't use telepathy at it otherwise you will be driven insane) and a large rock worm in the lower parts of the old mine workings that had very tough skin and an acid interior. The worm eats rock and when bits are removed they crystallise. It may also have two minds, requiring a spell each to control it.

I became the scribe with Isil-Eth being the party leader and Tom the military scientist.

Those of us who needed Lessers got them off Adam and we made what arrangements we required. I purchased a dozen of the old D10 healing potions for 1200sp as well as a few more standard 10pts, just in case.

Also Adam had the ability to ask questions of the Earth. What was asked was:

Has there been a Balrog within 50 miles of Highcastle in the last month: YES

Are the artifacts used to imprison the Balrog within 10 miles of Highcastle: YES

Are there any demonic entities (excluding balrogs within 10 miles of Highcastle: YES

Was it the act of a goblin that caused the Balrog to be released: YES

Is a Balrog in charge of the city of Highcastle: YES

Can the Balrog be banished: NO

Are the Calimar involved in any of this: NO

Is the balrog being commanded by another entity: NO

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Meadow

Took the public portal to Elfinberg then went through the link to MMHS, arriving near an inn around lunchtime. The rest of the day we spent flying over the mountains until we found an alpine meadow to land in. Even though it was summer, it was still rather cold up here. Of course the inevitable argument started between Adam and myself over Earth College philosophies, especially when I refused to summon dinner. It's much more sporting to go out and hunt it.

Watches were set and the night passed without incident.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Meadow

We flew west along the southern mountain range alongside Alfheim until we reached the northern spur. A bit more flying and we were able to see our destination. There still seemed signs of life as there were wisps of smoke coming from various buildings in the area but we couldn't see any movement in the Vale itself.

What caught our attention was the lake. There were swathes of mud among the western marsh area as if something large had been crawling along. The paths were straight but not systematic. Fayen concluded there were five separate incursions. Could it have been the worm?

There wasn't much we could learn from the air so we found a flat place to land.

.2.

Camp was made by an old campsite and the night passed without incident.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Meadow

After we had breakfast and purified, we went down to the swamp. Fayen was able to find the thornbushes and we proceeded along the sunken causeway. The thornbushes were spaced between 2 to 20 elvish yards apart.

After half an hour the path had been cut by one of those swathes. Inside it, the swamp material had been churned and mixed in a 15' wide, 2 foot deep trench. Five foot to either side, the material had been stirred up. I had originally thought that the area had been flattened by the passage of a large entity but this was not obviously the case. Instead, it looked like a team of horses had been through here, at speed, with plows.

Fayen flew over, on his horse and was able to find the next thornbush. Tom had a small globe which made the user weightless so we used that in turn to be ferried across.

Twenty minutes more and we reached an area that had been completely churned up by multiple passes. We could see a stone pillar in the mix which led to the conclusion that at least part of the naga village had been wiped out. But were the naga still about? Adam decided to find out by calling out to them, but there was no response - at least the kind we anticipated.

Within minutes we could hear a roaring sound that was getting louder. Then there was a voice in a Western Marches accent that yelled "Run! Run for your lives!" That was when we saw the huge waterspout coming towards us at speed.

We all took to the air. Fayen on the horse. Ithilmor and I carried aloft by Adam, Gerard towed by Tom and IsilEth carried by her bodyguard, Leonard. I couldn't see our unknown benefactor but I hoped he had reached safety.

The waterspout charged towards us at a speed that was faster than any of us so we scattered in a way it could only get one group. The one it chose to get was Tom and Gerard who were swiftly enveloped by the maelstrom and whirled around inside. Occasionally they were battered by the other objects it had picked up, such as bits of wood and the odd fish.

It then turned and headed back towards the lake. From what Ithilmor and I could tell, it was not

an entity but a spell effect. That implied the lake kraken was responsible.

Isil Eth was able to transform Tom into a merperson before it got out of her range. The rest of us were now flying a stern chase and Fayan was the only one who had a chance of catching it.

After a few minutes Gerard, who was weightless, was able to reach the outside and was flung out. We would see a flashing blue light marking his position. Fayan went to intercept. Meanwhile I was preparing a rope and clipping one end to my belt. If I had the opportunity I was going fishing.

Once it reached the middle of the lake, the waterspout started to collapse. As it did, a block of ice appeared on the lake. Tom fell upon it, but after a short interval he was able to fly off again. Meanwhile Fayan was able to catch Gerard on the second attempt. Ithilmor reported she could see a black, cigar shaped, object beneath the surface of the water.

We regrouped by the lake shore. As we did so, something odd happened to Isil Eth and her behaviour changed. I Daed her for duration of current curse in effect but got no answer. However, the effect soon passed.

Tom, still in merform, splashed down in the swampy water near us and swam in. Isil Eth returned him to his original form and I hauled him out. Much of the lower half of his armour and anything else he was wearing there was ruined so, after drying him off I gave him some of my spare clothing. Fortunately we were about the same height.

.3.

The furrows only went halfway up the swamp from the lake so we decided to go up to the other end in case the naga retreated up there. So we followed a track that went along the tree covered hill parallelling the swamp. On the way we noticed that there seemed to be an unusual number of ruins about. Once past the last furrow we headed back down to the swamp again.

Ithilmor called out to the naga again and we waited. While we did so I did a small campfire then boiled the billy for tea. While I did this we were treated to the pleasant sound of Ithilmor singing although Adam didn't seem to appreciate it for some reason. Just then we noticed someone moving in the trees and rocks above us.

He was a young, beardless, dwarf and the way he was acting, indicated he was trying to hide. I managed to coax him out with a mug of tea and he told us his name was Pebble and he was sent to find 'the ones from Kali' and guide them to the Naga. Fortunately he knew Common so he wouldn't have to put up with my bad dwarven accent. We were supposed to go along something called the 'infolaid'. I guess it's an elvish word. However he refused to tell us who sent him as that was part of his instructions. He did tell us who he was hiding from though. A goblin called 'Terror' who was in charge of recapturing escapees from the city.

So we followed Pebble along ridges, down valleys etc until we reached a small side valley off a larger one through which an aquaduct had been built. Pebble told us to wait here. It was a rather tranquil spot with brightly coloured flowers, rich green grass, and some rather interesting rock structures in the cliff. Definitely elvish influence at work here.

Ithilmor encountered a young naga in the aquaduct who told us that the kraken had got as strong as it was because someone had been feeding dwarves to it. There had basically been a revolution in the city because of rising taxes and lessening resources to go around. The goblins had obtained a leader, called Kundrun, who had somehow managed to convince many of the poorer dwarves to bypass their clan loyalty and help in the revolt against the rich dwarves. Now they were killing anyone who was rich or attempting to hoard wealth as well as those that supported the old way. The release of the balrog may have been an accident and she wasn't sure just where it had come from. Maybe the goblins had been hunting for mithral to bolster their flagging economy and ran into it. The war leader of the exiled dwarves, Dolgrin, had been collecting information on the balrog.

Finally Pebble returned. As it was getting late, it had been decided that we would camp in a rocky valley not far from here and continue on in the morning, otherwise we would be attempting to climb a mountain in the dark, not a desirable thing to do. So that's what we did. The night passed without incident.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Meadow

After morning purifications, and a quick breakfast, Pebble arrived and we headed off again. We climbed up the valley by the aquaduct then followed Pebble's instructions as he took us along the oddest route I had ever seen. However, the idea was to keep us hidden. We couldn't see much ahead but we could always see our backtrail, presumably so we could know if anyone was following us. I was taking mental notes of Pebble's techniques. May come in useful one day.

As the going got steeper someone had thoughtfully planted ropes and pitons to help. Of course I was testing all the handholds etc - just in case. Fayan had to get his horse to fly carefully just above the ground. Any higher and it was very likely to be shot down. For someone his size, Adam was as nimble as a mountain goat. Probably also explains his appetite.

Finally we reached one side of a deep gully. Pebble told us to wait there. Shortly there was the sound of an arrow shooting across the gully from the other side, trailing a rope. An older dwarf had been waiting on this side and soon, a twin rope bridge was constructed which we used to cross, one at a time. After that it was more climbing then, after squeezing through a crack, we encountered a tunnel with stairs at the far end. The stairs led to a terraced courtyard. We had finally reached TorHold, where the dwarves had fled to.

We thanked Pebble just as another dwarf arrived to take us to lodgings where we could dump our gear and freshen up. A bit later on, we were taken up the courtyard to a larger building and led into a dining hall where two other dwarves were waiting. This was Garak, the head of the Council, and Dolgrin. They told us that each of the five clans was donating an item as our fee and the Naga were making a sixth. Naturally we were curious about what they were but decided to see if we could earn them first.

Basically they wanted us to kill the Balrog and retake the city. The balrog was basically a fire creature but it also had a second element, mithral or iron. It was about 15 to 20 feet tall and crashes through places with utter disregard for the stability of the surrounding area. It also had a whip of glowing fire and a very hot breath weapon that melted all it touched. Fortunately it was rather noisy, like being in a foundry, so we would know when it was coming. It could be controlling the goblins or their could be some sort of alliance between it and them. The goblins were now feeding the dwarves to it, instead of the kraken. Also the Naga had known that the

balrog had been trapped there when the dwarves had first arrived but had, for some reason, decided not to tell them about it.

We also discussed re-trapping it but discovered that a bunch of items and an ancient ritual was required. Three of them were presumably in the old treasury in the city, but it was unknown whether they were still there. and two others had not yet been found. Plus the details of the ritual had been lost. It was clear that possibility was not an option.

Then there was the 4 to 5 thousand goblins and the 8 to nine thousand dwarves still in the city. Some of them are mages: fire, earth, water and possibly rune. Probably not air though. Kundrun may have magics himself but might not be a mage, however he is very charismatic and persuasive. The goblins had been allowed to be water mages but the fire and earth colleges had been closed to them. It was highly likely that they had been learning it illegally but the dwarven supervisors had been turning a blind eye as it was useful and saved them the trouble, and expense, of getting a dwarf mage. Currently Kundrun was rewriting the city laws, presumably in favour of the goblins.

Another problem was the state of the city. The main admin area had been looted and burnt. The air circulating system had fallen into disrepair and, coupled with the damage caused by the balrog, many areas of the city were now dead air zones. Only an air mage had a chance of finding their way around. Water rationing was also in force. So it was decided to send for one of their air mages (there were none in residence at the moment) so Tom could learn how they find their way around.

The other thing they told us that was curious were that there were goblins hiding in the hillsides. Were they refugees too?

So we discussed ways of killing the balrog. I was keen to have a go at it, as it seemed to be a creature of evil but I had to remind myself that I was a Pasifistic Earth Mage and only supposed to act defensively unless provoked. Anything else was to walk down the Dark Path. Mind you, I have come very close and have been sorely tempted to do so of late.

.4.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Meadow

We were finally ready to go and reconnoitre the old city. Tom had spent all yesterday learning from the dwarven airmage how to navigate and identify air flows. Also the dwarves were able to find us four invested fire armours (can handle 30 points each). I knew I should have got Flamis to make some before I left. Should also learn fire counterspells as well.

So, along with our guide, Tinker, we headed back down the way we had come. It took nearly all day to make our way down then along to an abandoned village near Highcastle. Here, we camped the night.

During the night howling could be heard. After abandoning the usual theories, we concluded it was humanoids chasing other humanoids.

#### 8<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Dawn arrived with drizzle. Gerard disguised us as goblins, basically 're-allocation specialists'

as Tinker called them. We then meandered through the vales, some of which showed signs of recent cultivation, then into a stock entrance. We then descended into a looted area of the city where we holed up in an old building and had a late breakfast. During this, Isil Eth detected the mind of someone doing a repair.

Carried on, bypassing any inhabitants. Some of the tunnels had rune markers on them, presumably marking the name of the district. We also passed a trough in the middle of a square that was full of water. Tinker explained this, and others like it, was the city's water supply. The citizens would come to fill up their buckets. Pipes ran under the surface, carrying water and sewage.

We carried on through more tunnels towards another residential area. Suddenly we were motioned to a halt as we could detect the sounds of combat. After the ruckus stopped and the victors had left, we investigated. There were definite signs of a combat with scuff marks and fresh blood on the ground. Three bodies of large red humanoids with wings lay on the ground. Two of them abruptly vanished but we were able to ascertain that they were devils. The one that was left was an E&E with 24WP with the rank of highest spell being 10. It too vanished a short time later. Nearly all the blood on the ground was from devils but there was a small amount of goblin as well. From what we could tell, the goblins had quickly surrounded the devils and vanquished them easily and efficiently. But where had they come from? Were they native or had the balrog, or some other entity, summoned them. Someone bringing evil into the world surely seemed to be sufficient provocation to me, and surely it was our moral duty to defeat evil, but Ithilmor didn't think so.

We wanted to investigate an area where the balrog had been so Tinker led us there, through a maze of alleys and byways. On the way, Tom detected an area where the air flow just felt all wrong.

Finally we reached the area. Four or five entire layers had collapsed, presumably caused by the balrog taking out the supporting structures. There had been a lot of small rooms here but there was now a large cavern full of rubble and dust. There were even some old dwarf bodies. There were burnt and melted patches but none of them had any residual aura. There was also no sign of any material scraped off the balrog that could be analysed but there were signs that a dwarf had got caught between the granite wall and the balrog and was crushed to paste.

.5.

During our investigations we were pounced on by five goblins who wanted us to hand over our box (Fayan's mobile luggage). However, after one phantasm, a volley of DTJs, and Adam, those who were still standing and conscious decided to flee. Their armour was well made and of dwarven manufacture but didn't fit them very well. The only commonality between them was a brass button with the symbol of a box carved on it. The buttons were not magical. In their haste, they left a bag containing brass fittings etc. Were they a scavenging party?

One had been captured so we questioned them. They were a 'relocation' party and the stuff that they acquire gets taken to the local district office where it gets redistributed equally around the populace. The entire city had been subdivided into districts and a portion of the split is passed up to the council office. He had only heard of the balrog as from a year ago but had never seen it, so he considered it to be an 'urban legend'.

There are also enforcers, who have the symbol of the axe, and are charged with keeping the peace. They're usually recruited from the toughest goblins. There are also the 'educators' who wear big red tabards and are usually accompanied by a squad of enforcers. I guess they're the local judges.

Once we had finished with him, we let him go. From what he said, everyone was treated equally and any wealth was shared out to benefit everyone.

Finally we worked our way to a more populated market area. There seemed to be an equal mix of goblin and dwarf although, later examination showed that all the goblins had dwarven blood. Only the dwarves were pure. Also, only the dwarves were doing the tasks that required heavy lifting. There were some Enforcers lounging about, armed with short sword, battleaxe and wearing decent looking armour. None of them had any magic in effect. The goblin and dwarven children weren't interacting with each other so there may still be some segregation but that was only a supposition.

.6.

We were waiting in a small room while Tinker went to check out some contacts. He was only planning to be gone for a couple of hours but many more went by and we were starting to be rather concerned. So Fayan did a special spell and ascertained he was a level below us and still moving. At least he hadn't been confined. He also suspected that he detected the balrog, about a quarter of a mile away, still in the same place it had been, in the level above.

A short while later there was a coded knock on the door and Tinker slipped in, very quickly. He explained that he had been visiting some cousins of his, and hadn't realised that there was a curfew on. He had to be very careful getting back to us.

He told us that there are patrols wandering around the place, probably enforcing the curfew, which had only started a couple of weeks ago. There was a new member on the council. One of the old ones had been accused of sedition and had been fed to the balrog. A goblin crime lord had taken his place. As a consequence there were more enforcers on patrol and they were more regular. Also bunches of inhabitants had been rounded up at random for no apparent reason although one common denominator was that they hadn't lived in their current region for more than six months or so. At least they hadn't started hassling any of the guides yet.

He had determined the location where reallocated objects go and had discovered that the enforcers had taken over one of the larger guild halls as barracks. The educators were recruited from smart enforcers, a few of them being dwarves, and many of them being mages. Informants and spies usually report to an educator. Also an educator who had lived in one area always serves in another. Hence there are no local loyalties.

It had been a goblin, Sydoc, that had been deposed. He had been a smuggler and was fed to the balrog for 'evil ideology'. Tinker was getting the impression that events were getting a little arbitrary. The only dwarf on the council was the one who had run water and sewage systems for three districts. The goblins still supported him. There were five members on the council with Kundrun being the leader.

It was rumoured that the balrog was old mates with Kundrun and friends although another one had it that the balrog had charmed all the miners. One story was that throwing ice over ones

shoulder was enough to keep the balrog at bay. When the council member was fed to the balrog, there was a big public display. This took place in the old council buildings which had been given to the balrog to live in. There seemed to be some co-operation between the balrog and the council.

A year and a half ago there was an attempt to open the old mines. Rumour had it that the balrog came out of one of them. The mines were still running except the old salt mines. However, those miners were still employed. However Tinker had no contacts in the mining districts so he had no way of ascertaining the exact situation. The mining districts were tough goblin places. Even the guides are goblins. The miners had been wholeheartedly behind the revolution and still totally support the new council.

The balrog has been seen in various places and there were stories of it going on rampages or just walking down the corridor. However there were no reports of it doing anything like that recently.

The school of calligraphy had been closed down for teaching 'evil ideology'.

Before we settled down to rest we were disguised as Enforcers.

#### 9<sup>th</sup> Meadow

When I woke up, some of the others had a story to tell. Apparently the balrog had come into our room through the wall. However, the wall was not marked and there was no residual magical aura. All it could see was Adam and had thought Adam was some sort of elemental. During the encounter, Tom was staying very still in the shadows. From what he could tell, the balrog was very curious and pleasant.

According to Adam the aura of the balrog showed it was a long lived sentient. The GTN was 'a sentient entity of fire and earth with overtones of extreme age and/or power'. It also belonged to this plane. It came through the wall and, even though it had difficulty in fitting in the room, the impression was gained of a heavy looking humanoid figure covered in charcoal and other bits with a bright glowing interior emanating from between the cracks. I suspected some sort of intelligent magma creature.

The walls had been warm but had cooled by the time I got to examine them. All the evidence I could find was piles of black cinder powder which reminded me of the slag residual left after ores are smelted. There was no aura there either so I obtained a sample for later alchemical analysis. I actually had to get a second sample after Adam sneezed on the first. Tom also reported the room had smelt of sulphur at the time but he freshened it after the balrog left.

Adam to Isil'Eth - "My social graces, compared to yours, are like a snail".

The others went out to seek breakfast while Fayan and I stayed behind. Fayan, because his luggage would attract too much attention, and myself because I didn't want to leave him alone for his own protection.

We rested the rest of the morning as we planned to head off in the afternoon. Adam wanted to return the balrog's visit. (I shall continue to refer to the entity as a balrog until we are able to ascertain exactly what it is.)

We were thinking that maybe visiting the balrog was not a good idea when, suddenly there was the sound of metal banging against metal. At first, we thought it was a battle but, more listening revealed it to be a house to house search. It definitely sounded like the jig was up. Somehow, they knew we were about.

So we prepared to leave. Just as we were doing so, a squad of enforcers came around the corner. Since we were currently disguised as enforcers, we were going to bluff our way past until someone called out "That's them!". Two more groups appeared from side corridors.

Basically it went downhill from there. I met an advancing goblin who proved to be tougher and more skilful than I had initially assessed. After Ithilmor blasted them with twinkling blackfire I noticed my opponent starting to foam at the mouth and was more determined to get past me. About then, their leader collapsed. Probably Isil Eth's very effective phantasm.

Isil Eth's body guard stepped in to help protect Ithilmor as the goblins resumed their advance. I wasn't having much luck (as usual) and ended up being overborne by two goblins.

Meanwhile Adam created a tunnel behind us so that we could retreat. The use of more blackfires, phantasms etc turned the tide of battle and many of the enforcers were defeated. A few got away and the last one surrendered. He was rendered unconscious before being bound and bagged. During the fight, Ithilmor received a nasty arm wound and Isil Eth had a thumping headache.

We quickly examined the debris. One of them, their military leader, was wearing rather nice bronze armour and also had a magical weapon. Others also had magical weapons and armour. Probably had been temporary enchanted but there wasn't time to check that now. So we gathered up the spoils of battle then followed Tinker out of the area, avoiding search parties. On the way, Isil Eth 'liberated' a fresh pot of tea and three cups.

Just then a hand, attached to an arm, came out of a supposedly solid wall and beckoned us to follow it. So we did. Turned out the wall was an illusion and the hand belonged to an elderly looking hunchback goblin who had a GTN of elf and was an illusionist. Figures. The 'goblin' introduced himself as the 'Scarlet Edelweiss'. He led us through a rather back route and, at one point we passed an elderly goblin woman with kids. There, Isil Eth left the tea before we descended a trapdoor into a workroom.

Edelweiss suggested we should change our disguises and become coal haulers. So we did. During the process we introduced ourselves and he expressed surprise when Ithilmor did so. Apparently the word was out that there was a reward out for anyone who found an 'Ithilmor' and they had assumed they were referring to objects. Some red creatures had been popping up and ambushing groups demanding to know where an Ithilmor was. Now the appearance of those devils made sense. Those five demons was still looking for Ithilmor. So Ithilmor told us to address her as Eleniel until further notice.

Suitably disguised, Edelweiss led us out into the marketplace. Some Enforcers were scattered about but they paid us no heed. Finally, we went up a spiral staircase circling something hot, and emerged in a hut, located high on the mountain near an air exhaust vent. It was late afternoon and Edelweiss told us to stay put until after dark.

I was keeping watch while the others questioned our goblin prisoner. All they could get out of

him was that it was a member of the 'enlightened revolutionary army' and he didn't want us to steal any ithilmors. So Adam decided to force the goblin to look into his eyes. What the goblin saw must have terrified it as it screamed loudly and went catatonic.

Fayan and Edelweiss immediately sneaked out to see if that scream had attracted any unwelcome attention. Sure enough, they returned to tell us that there was a patrol heading this way. So, after clearing away all signs of our presence, we hid behind a nearby rock outcropping with the assistance of blending magic. Soon a troupe of goblins arrived and searched the area. Fortunately for us, they found nothing suspicious. They then bivouacked down to spend the night, lighting a fire and setting up tents.

After dark, we carefully snuck off and managed to elude them on the way down. Finally we were off the mountain and were guided to a tumbled down house in one of the valleys where we spent the remainder of the night.

### 10<sup>th</sup> Meadow.

Edelweiss told us that he had been concerned about the 'good dwarves of this town' and had been helping to get some of them out. He thinks that Kundrun had managed to develop a good working relationship with the balrog and suspected that each one of the two believed they were in control of the other. He had seen the balrog in the execution hall. There it had been 50 foot tall. He had also heard that the balrog referred to the city as 'my house'.

Isil Eth used a hypnotism to try and find out more about the balrog's visit. Basically the conversation went:

Mr B: "Hello."

Adam: "Hello."

Mr B: "Who is your master."

Adam: "I don't have one."

Mr B: "You are not quite what I was expecting. Who are you? What are you?"

Adam: "Well I was born a fire giant, got turned into a stone giant and I am part goat. But I'm mostly earth."

Mr B: "Ah!." and he left with Adam saying "But I do like fire..." but at that point he had gone.

Smoke and other vapours had issued from the creature and Adam had got the impression of something larger than he could see.

Edelweiss told us he had his own agenda. He wanted to rescue the dwarves and goblins that had been imprisoned with no charge. As far as he could tell they were being questioned and there was some sort of classification going on about everyone's origins.

All he knew of the items that the previous party had found was that the fire item had been given to the balrog and that the 'Heart of the Dwarves' had been taken out of the city with the old council.

Edelweiss was going back into the city to gain more information. We were welcome to use this

place as long as we didn't attract undue attention and we left some sort of warning if we had to leave in a hurry. So we spent the next two days healing up Ithilmor and doing a curse removal on Isil Eth.

.8.

### 12<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Edelweiss had finally arrived back. He had discovered that the captives were kept in large pens that were next to the old abattoirs. The quickest route to the surface was half a mile through the stock tunnel. More pens were being cleared that implied that the collecting had not been completed and the prisoners were being reasonably looked after. There was a possible maximum capacity of 500. Edelweiss's plan was to get them all out while we provided the diversion by taking out the balrog. He was wondering if they were going to be sold as slaves.

He needed to spend another couple of days making arrangements for the mass breakout so we decided to investigate the mines, looking for clues. Edelweiss told us we could leave messages with him here, or with Sally, who works in a house near the Salt clan mages hall. He gave us a button with a picture of a scarlet edelweiss as proof of identity.

We had been told that a lot of the salt miners had been relocated to other mines and lots of new mines had been opened.

So, after a big dinner, and spell preparations, we all set off back to the mountain. The entrance was near another deserted village and was one of the lowest.

We were disguised as miners. Goblin miners were basically skinny but muscular who only wore loincloths and their skin was more grey than usual because of rock powder impregnated into the skin. After a while we reached the ancient halls. These were the oldest part of the city and consisted of ornate carved hallways. The carvings were both decorative and informative. Tinker told us the story of the founding of the city by the great dwarf Dar, 5000 years ago. He told it as a children's story, using several of the carvings as illustrations. I thought it was fascinating but some of the others looked bored. Before the revolution, Tinker had brought school parties down here, but currently there was no sign of anyone else.

Tinker pointed out the main routes down. The mines follow the seams but there is a definite structure. Tinker will also check the nearby guild hall at each meal time to see if we had returned. That was located through the side passage and third door on the left.

The first part of the mine was wide and not sloped. Stone slabs provided supporting. Half an hour later, we reached an open area, 10 ft high (double height), 40ft long and 12-15 ft wide. A square shaft, 10' wide was in the centre and descended into unknown depths. Bits of metal were fastened to the roof over the shaft, quite likely the remains of the elevator system. A narrow staircase with wellworn steps led downwards on the other side.

After vapour breathings and feather falls were cast on everyone, we descended down the shaft. The air got dustier at the 300ft mark and occasionally we could see small windows, beyond which we could see the staircase behind. Probably the emergency exit. Also a ladder had been cut into one wall of the shaft.

We passed two lateral holes on the way down. The third was at the 350' mark and a glimmer of light could be seen down it so we decided to investigate. This hole was a chamber and three

other corridors led off it. One was a set of stairs going up, the second curved downwards while the third went off horizontally before ascending. The light source was revealed to be in a ledge near the ceiling, at the bottom of the staircase, and was a slow burning wick surrounded by a tarry substance. Tracks went up the stairs, in both directions, but I wasn't able to tell which of the other passages that they had taken. We did explore the level route for 70 odd feet and discovered that the wall changed. The rock now contained poorish iron ore, probably the edge of the original seam. Adam believed he could see the signs of recent movement, about 3 to 20 people. A bit further on we could hear the sound of dripping water.

The dwarven rune for the numeral 6 was carved into corridor wall by the shaft entrance and the runes for 23A were carved on the shaft wall by the ladder. We dropped another 150 feet down the shaft and there were two more entrances between that and the bottom. At the bottom we discovered packed and shattered gravel. One side of the shaft extended about 5 feet further out and there there was a doorway (no door) opening onto a staircase which went up and down with no landing.

Of those two entrances immediately above, the first one was a straight tunnel out but the one immediately above was large with three other tunnels coming off it. All the shaft walls were missing. So we ascended the narrow staircase to that level and found a six rune carved here as well. The entrance area had a well on one side where we were able to recover some drinkable water. It looked like this place had been a major junction point for ore carts. Some ore was lying about, mostly iron ore but there was also some magnesium ore as well. The whole place smelt old and dusty. One of the corridors also smelt damp. There were two large corridors and a smaller one. One of the large corridors had a breeze blowing down it while the other two had air flowing into this area. I had a look around while we had lunch and could see there had been movement down all three shafts.

I was sure that, if there was another descending shaft, it would be down the tunnel with the air blowing into it. Sure enough, 250 ft further on, we found the top of another one in another large room. However, on the way, by a T junction, we discovered a small room with an old fireplace in it. The room hadn't been used in ages and we wondered if this was a supervisor's office.

The ceiling over the shaft was domed and most of the air flow was going down there. Another staircase followed the shaft down. We were able to ascertain that there was water down the bottom. There was also an eight rune nearby.

So we drifted down again. The first offshoot was 20' down and was similar to the first one we checked. There was one doorway off and the room had the rune for cerise on one wall. A stairway led down and there were signs of movement on it.

The next opening was another 40ft further down. When we checked it out we discovered that the 20' by 20' room intruded onto the shaft. One large corridors came off the room and a smaller mineshaft also exited. A staircase went up and another descended on the opposite wall. Nearby was a rune indicating the number 11. Most of the air was flowing out of the shaft and down the wide corridor but there was some continuing downwards. Again there were recent footprints about except near the descending staircase.

So we headed down the wide corridor following the air flow. After a while it began to slope down unevenly then changed to a flat rectangular shaft on a 20 degree sideways tilt as well as going down. It then split in two with even airflow both ways, one up and one down. We took the down one. A bit later on we passed under a vertical shaft which wiggled away out of sight.

Without warning the passage went steep with 3' ledges making up steps at regular intervals. We had to carefully work our way down. Finally - after some serpentine wiggling, we reached a small (5' high, 5' deep) alcove with smoke stains on the roof. Twenty feet later on was a small 3' wide side hole which led up. Our tunnel snaked around while still going down then narrowed.

Half an hour of heavy going later, we came to an alcove where we rested and Ithilmor insisted on herbal tea. So Gerard attempted to create wood but only produced a rotten branch which was flung down the tunnel - clatter, clatter, clatter, splash. Upon checking it out we discovered a pool of water accumulating on one ledge with water trickling down. I investigated further and discovered that the tunnel bottomed out with a foot of water over a layer of loose rock. It then turned a corner and ascended again before splitting. One leg went up as a tunnel while the other was a staircase. I collected a few rock samples and a sample of the water before returning to tell the others.

Ithilmor to Adam - "You're a goat. You'll be fine"

With the help of ropes and a piton (I must put more in the hole when we get back) we negotiated our way through that bit then headed up the stairs.

Adam - "We don't need a cushion. We've got an illusionist"

Gerard - "I'm not that soft"

The stairs led to a horizontal corridor which took us to an intersection of three staircases. Little runes were located off the stairs which read as #11, #23 & #27. We had emerged from #23. #11 curved to the left and spiralled up while #17 went right, sloped down then doubled back. No tracks were detected in either passage. So we took #17 which we soon discovered took the oddest path we had ever encountered. It spiralled down then switched backward and forward alternating all over the place.

After twenty minutes we finally reached a 20' cubical chamber. The top third consisted of buttressing with a carved archway over each doorway. There were 4, in the centre of each wall. There were no signs of any travel here either. Couldn't hear anything either. All of the tunnels went out straight then curved 45 degrees to the right.

After marking the one we came in, we went through the one to the left. After a while it sloped down then we discovered that it descended into water. None of us fancied a swim through unknown depths so we went back. Ithilmor marked that exit with an 'S'.

We then took the one directly opposite where we came in. We proceeded down a wide spiral ramp before reaching another 20' cubical room, complete with buttressing. Somehow it didn't seem to be of dwarven make or if it was, the usual dwarven style of carving. This room was marked as '18'.

Ithilmor insisted we be systematic so we went left which became another spiral down. Partway

down a small, ornate, corridor went right. Soon we reached a third chamber. This one was identical to the other two except it had a coloured mosaic floor. According to Tom, the major airflow was going out back the way we came and all the other entrances had air blowing in. This became '19'

Going left again, the corridor remained level then zig-zagged. After a while it was apparent that there were a number of intersections and the path was looping in on itself. Finally we reached chamber '20' and went left again. This time there was a staircase with a handrail which then switched back on itself. There had to be some crazy purpose to this whole design because I was sure they weren't following ore.

We reached a 'T' junction ('21') and turned left, then along 20ft before the passage terminated. The only way on was a square hole going straight down for 75ft with a stone ladder cut in the sides. Ithilmor dropped a coin down the shaft. When we were sure nothing dangerous had been attracted, we carefully made a descent again using piton and safety ropes.

The floor was a different rock than what we had been travelling through. We had been making our way through standard granite, now we were walking on a layer of black granite, which was harder. No auras were detected. The corridor terminated in a stone wall with the dwarven luck rune on it. After some experimentation we determined that the slab slid sideways. There was a waft of dank air as Adam slid it sideways.

Inside was a square chamber of polished black walls, roof and floor. The ceiling was a hollow pyramid and there was a plinth in the middle of the floor which supported a metal sculpture covered with several 3-D dwarvish runes. We could make out another sliding slab as the opposite wall.

The area was magical with no discernable purpose although it had an echo of reflection. It wasn't consecrated either. So Ithilmor stepped in and felt a tickle across her skin. The object itself was made out of three sorts of highly polished metal and its nature of magic was 'Finding'. What it found was 'Metal'. The plinth and sculpture was magically trapped, warded or cursed and required a key to be safely moved.

I was making notes of the runes in case they provided a clue but all we could figure out that it was dwarven poetry, bad dwarven poetry at best. There were several references to the founder of the city and the deeds of him and his ancestors.

Adam got the opposite door open and we carried on. The tunnels beyond were through black granite. Stairs went down to a T intersection so we went down and left. 15 foot further on there was a stairwell going down off the right but we kept going. Eventually we found ourselves back at the T. So we took the stairwell. Down below was the same setup and was basically a series of connected squares. We went through five of them before reaching a half finished chamber. There were no chippings on the floor and the guidelines were still in place. No plinth and no other exits. However, the walls were warm to the touch and Tom smelt the same acrid smell he had detected when the balrog had arrived. Clearly the balrog had been here. A search revealed no secret entrances and no runes. However I could tell that the crystalline structure on the floor was subtly different. Gerard used a crystal of vision and saw an image of a group of elves and dwarves. It looked like the carving on the hall depicting the signing of the treaty.

So we headed back up the stairs to find a place to rest. On the way, Tom Isil Eth, Adam and I collapsed owing to poisoned air which also affected our mental faculties. Fayan neutralised the poison but there was residual lung damage. The suspected cause were the fumes that issued from the balrog.

We finally camped in one of the carved chambers above the room with the plinth.

.10.

### 13<sup>th</sup> Meadow

We made our way back, following our markers until we reached the big shaft that had water in the bottom. There, we took the stairway. All in all, it took six hours total until we were back in the old halls. Finally, room to stretch. All of us were suffering from backaches. While Ithilmor went looking for Tinker, Adam and I checked out the mural. It was of the signing of the treaty between the dwarven and elven kingdoms and marked when the real wealth started coming into the city. Isil Eth was able to identify many of the names. At this stage, the dwarves were making mithral stuff and a set of mithral armour was gifted to the elven queen's champion.

The centre piece of the mural showed a dwarf and elf holding a large lump of rock. When Tinker turned up, he identified it as the Oath Stone, also known as the Heart of the Dwarves. Last he knew, the dwarven council still had it. However, he knew nothing of the object we had found below.

### 15<sup>th</sup> Meadow

Left the city the next morning and made our way to the dwarven outpost where we reported everything to the Council. They believed that the object we had discovered was one of the things Kali's original party had been looking for. They were also interested in Edelweiss and planned to put more scouts out to find refugees. Also the Dar clan is the senior mining clan.

Edelweiss's attack was scheduled for the 21<sup>st</sup> so we made plans to deal with the balrog.

.11.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Meadow

We had made our way back to the ancient hall where we planned to attract the balrog and deal to it. Basically, when it appeared, we were going to hit it with everything we had from range.

We had Mind Speech up, Vapour Breathings & Fire Armours on, and a Dark Sphere was floating near Ithilmor. I had borrowed some investments as well. Plus we were standing on floating rugs so we wouldn't be in contact with the ground - except for Adam and his earth elemental. Plus everyone was Quickened, except for Adam.

After a short wait, the rock in the far wall liquified and a 15 to 20ft tall, charcoaly looking figure came through. It was enveloped in smoke and carried a fiery whip. The Dark Sphere immediately rushed at the balrog and there was an almighty bang, causing the balrog to fall back, hitting the wall. Rocks fell from the ceiling. I shot invested DTJ's at it while Tom let loose a thunderclap, which echoed around the room, and Isil Eth fired ice, adding steam to the smoke. Adam ordered the elemental to attack but the elemental hesitated.

"Are you sure you want me to hit Joe?" - Adam's elemental.

The balrog charged into Adam who thumped it, sending charcoal blocks flying. Another loud bang as the Dark Sphere impacted and knocked the balrog on to Adam. The elemental hit the balrog and whimpered from the damage caused by the immolation. More cinders flew out and a wave of heat swept over us as the balrog's molten interior was exposed. The elemental cried out in pain.

Several of Fayan's DTJ's burnt up as they got close to the balrog but a few got through which chipped off more cinders. By now the whole room was brightly lit in an orange/red glow and there was smoke everywhere.

Adam rolled away from underfoot causing Gerard to refer to him as a "Wuss!" Gerard then fired off a lightning bolt but it bounced. I took the ricochet. Tom blasted it with a lightning ball.

Suddenly the balrog collapsed into an amorphous lump of molten metal. Now I know what mithral looks like. The floor was starting to melt under it as Gerard charged in.

"Bye Joe. See you later" - Adam's elemental as it withdrew.

While Ithilmor fired a Star Bolt at the mithral blob, Gerard went in with the intention of collecting as much as possible, irregardless of the fact that he was starting to sink into the floor as well. I started moving to a position in order to pull Gerard out if required while Tom let loose another thunderclap. Ithilmor saw that her previous spell had no effect so she slammed the Dark Sphere into the blob splattering molten mithral in all directions. Quite a bit ended up on Gerard.

The blob of mithral shrank as it oozed into the ground, blending with the rock below. From what we could tell, it was: not unholy, not undead but a creature of mana. Also it wasn't evil. Not a balrog as we knew them but in this case, a sentient mithral creature?

Isil Eth could hear footsteps beyond the walls so Fayan blocked all the other entrances, except the one behind us with Walls of Stone...

.12.

... and we decided to leave as the goblins were hammering away at the walls. Illusions of Enforcers were cast on all of us. Isil Eth reported that the goblin's minds were rather worried and as we emerged, we could see a room search going on.

We made our way along the corridors, into the market place ... and promptly got lost. So we ducked into a tailor's shop. The elderly dwarf there was making leather gear so we told him we were supposed to be meeting our guide here. After half an hours wait, and a cup of tea, we told him to find us another guide as our one was obviously not showing. He dashed off and returned with a middle aged dwarf who had a limp.

We followed this guide up a major road, that spiralled up, as we ascended we could smell fresher air and an animal tang. Finally, once we knew where we were going, we ditched the guide and continued on, looking for potential road blocks. All we encountered was a lone goblin guarding the exit near the stables. It didn't take us long to brazen our way through.

Outside was a bright sunny cloudless day and we had to wait several minutes for our eyes to adjust. We could hear what sounded like a battle nearby so we went to check it out. A short

while later, we found a small bunch of dwarves and goblins fighting. The sounds indicated there were at least six other groups further on. When the dwarves saw us they beat a hasty retreat, probably thinking we were reinforcements.

Gerard changed Isil Eth's disguise to be a dwarf and we headed after them. Finally we caught up and Isil Eth explained the situation. We healed them and headed down the mountain.

At the bottom, we encountered a dwarven command post. The sergeant told us there was a dwarven patrol pinned down so we went to rescue them. They were caught in a cul-de-sac with a bunch of goblins at the entrance. Two goblins were on top of each side of the cleft, firing at the dwarves. Unfortunately, my attempt to take one out with the boomerang, missed.

Isil Eth let loose a TK rage at the goblins, sending many of them flying through the air to impact really heavily into the side of the cliff. It was really messy. Unfortunately the dwarves were also flung back but, fortunately for them, they didn't have as far to go before they too hit the cliff. A ball of lightning also added to the mix.

It wasn't long until the goblins were vanquished. A couple of prisoners were taken and the dwarves, many of them injured, were helped back to camp. We discovered that Edelweiss's mass breakout had gone as planned and half of the prisoners were already free and clear. They were expecting new instructions later that afternoon. At the moment they were attempting to bottle the goblins up the mountain.

Later on we headed to Torhold, while escorting a courier which turned into an overnight trip. We camped in a sheltered valley and, two hours after dusk, Adam's elemental caught up to us.

It told us that he knew Joe as a really amazing visitor to the elemental plane but doesn't know where he comes from. They first met a very long time ago and now he's treated as a distant cousin. Mostly he's not all there - like water. The elemental went on to say the Joe 'went away' like he does when he is called. Joe is a balrog, but is friendlier than most. He only has heard of one other. Also fire elementals worship him.

The elemental went on to describe the mountain as 'lucky' as it has lots and lots of different earths. No mithral though, but there is a bit of gold and some really nice kaoline clay. The black stuff isn't granite but some sort of mithral rock. Only that one bit and it's mostly hollow now. It's also rather uncommon. It cannot be tunnelled by elementals and cannot be bound.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> Meadow

It took most of the next day to get to Torhold. When we arrived, we noticed it was really crowded and bustling with refugees. So we went to talk to the council. It turned out that the city council were rounding up farmers as the city was going to run out of food in a few months.

Anyway we got paid with our choice of one of the items that the dwarves had made or the cash equivalent. I decided to take the cash. I suspect I'm going to need it.

We ended up staying with the dwarves for a while to take advantage of their specialised training etc. As a consequence, we weren't back at the Guild until the 24<sup>th</sup> of Heat.