

KALI AND THE FIVE DWARFS

Being the mostly complete and occasionally accurate record of the mission to return Councillor Kali to the Guild, from the 1st of Frost 798WK to 4th Ice 798WK.

The brave, handsome, virtuous adventurers:

Hoo: Paragon of subtlety, sneak extraordinaire, master of modesty, sometime leprachaun, and scribe.

Pinefella: A human warrior of legendary skill, he's a lumberjack and he's OK, master animal controller, party leader.

Grif: Isn't it funny, how a bear likes honey? In charge of preventing food surplus. Usually disguised as a human.

Strontium: An unusually mobile elm that thinks it is sentient. Primary responsibility: feeding the bear.

Sir Donatalon Falouge: A dashing cavillier who would have won the hearts of all the ladies had his charm not faded into insignificance like a candle beside the summer sun when compared to the leprachaun, and had there been any ladies to charm. Military scientist.

1 Frost: We are aroused at an ungodly early hour that leaves totally insufficient time to recover from Samhain revelries, so as to be able to attend the Guild Meeting early in the afternoon. It is quickly apparent that the explosions, flames, smoke and stampeding pink elephants of last night were not purely alcohol-induced visions, as the guild has been attacked and severely damaged. The only guild councillor left is a necromancer, which is clearly an untenable situation, so we are to search for Mistress Kali, councillor and head of the Namer's college, who has been on leave for 3 years.

We are briefed by Mistress Claudia Singer. Kali left a message that she could be contacted via the dwarven Clan Salt at Highcastle. We are to travel by dwarf-portal to Granite's Peak and make our own way from there to Highcastle. Due to a shortage of guides through the portals, we will be unable to leave immediately. Seeing as how they are not in a hurry after all, they could have told us tomorrow and let us sleep in today.

2 Frost - 5 Frost: We hang around the guild avoiding librarians and doing training. On the afternoon of the 5th, our guide Kyle returns from guiding another party through the portals.

6 Frost: Kyle draws a door on a rock wall which then opens up. We travel through tunnels of fitted stone walls. Every few hours, we reach a cross-roads with a small chamber. Eventually we spend the night in one.

7 Frost: In the morning, very shortly after leaving our camp, we find a pot of gold in a tunnel. The party boldly prepares for a fight to the death, but it cravenly doesn't fight back - indeed, it is illusory. Some of the party is greatly amused. Late that afternoon, we come out into courtyard in Granite's

Peak stronghold. We stay the night in an inn.

8 Frost: Kyle brings us instructions from the merchants on how to get to Highcastle. These instructions are transcribed here:

Granite Peak to High Castle. You have two weeks to travel ahead, through moor and forest. Go on the northern track to the village of Blue Dale. Follow the sheep trail up the eastern scarp and go across the north side of High Top. Continue along moor keeping Black River Vale on your right. When the ground rises to the square top hill, go up between the rock spines to the crest (don't camp on the crest). Go down the eastern ridge and across the plateau until you reach three pines. Drop down into Karis village. Take the north road from Karis and cross Deer Run Ford. Turn right and follow the river until the third stream (white Hawthorn) Follow this stream up onto the moor. Cross the moor, keeping in line with the rock spine. Once past the third peak, look for the shepherds' bothy. Follow the sheep trail to Five Oaks Village. Then take the forest road to Green Lake. Watch for bears near the lake. Go left around the lake and then upstream to the bridge. Cross over and climb the ridge until the conifers start. Pass over and around the valley to the next ridge. When you see Lake Evendile drop to the ashes for easy travel. Circle the lake (watch for swamp) going easterly, until the fifth valley. Go up Dovak Vale until Dovak Gate.

We buy some stuff. Pinefella is a leather fetishist. Master Toric of the second hand horse sales yard tells us that he has seen bears as big as horses along our route, there are frequent fogs on the moors, and there can be boggy bits, but it is not bad in winter. We leave town at midday. At the three way fork we take the way with a picture of a blue flower.

9 Frost: Walk all day through hills.

10 Frost: We reach Blue Dale late morning. It is a human village. We follow the sheep trail to plateau. Continuing uphill following a sheep track, we can see High Top by evening. There is heather but very little wood up here.

11 Frost: Foggy and cold. The far side of the ridge is noticeably colder. We go parallel to a distant river valley containing farms.

12 Frost: Cold day, even colder night. Undergrowth much lower. We can see Square Top Hill by evening.

13 Frost: We climb a steep bank where it is easy to fall and get minor injuries. The ridge in instructions is not much of a ridge. Early camp because of fog.

14 Frost: 100' visibility in fog. After 3 or 4 hours, reach a row of pine trees. After interrogating a tree, we head north and find the sheep trail and three pines set off from the others. We follow sheep trail to small (10 households) stockaded human village. We stay at Ma Bessie's place. From here we can either cross the moor (takes 2 1/2 to 3 days in summer) or follow round the river (6 or 7 days) to Five Oaks.

15 Frost: We talk to sheep farmers about the route. We go to ford and then up to moor where there is a very big hawthorn tree. We find the shepherd's bothy by crystal of vision, but it is out of locate range (60 miles.) Hike on moor for rest of day.

16 Frost: Weather deteriorates to high winds, sleet and hail during course of day. We camp in early afternoon.

17 Frost: Warmer, heavy rain. Sir Donatalon falls face first in mud and hurts his ankle and rides a mule for the rest of the day.

18 Frost: Sunny day. We reach the bothy early, and stop for rest of day to rest the mules.

19 Frost: Clear day. Follow sheep path down from moors to oak trees in valley.

20, 21 Frost: tramping along trail. Good weather, nothing interesting.

22 Frost: Reach Greenlake in morning. Hike around to old bridge by early afternoon. Climb up ridge to conifers to camp, snows overnight.

23 Frost: Lightly snowing. We cross the ridge, go around a hollow, over next ridge to view of mountains and lake. Path down is tricky and could be dangerous in mid winter. We cross a valley and creek, round next ridge. Next valley branches a little way up and has a stone ruin. After more ridges, reach 3rd valley. On far side of valley, 6 knolls fail to take us by surprise. We kill 3, one escapes, two prisoner. They have some weapons/armour of good quality, but mostly little of value and were after the mules as food. They speak common poorly. They have a village further up the valley. Past next valley, which has ruins and old dwarven tunnel entrances. On to a ruined road, which takes us to 5th valley, which is cultivated. There is an unfortified surface village of dwarves and a big tunnel into the hill. We stay at guesthouse/inn (which has accommodation for humans.) Gnolls are turned over to authorities. Dwarves generally speak common well.

Aside: Geography and Politics of Highcastle.

The city is mostly underground, with food coming from the surface dwarven villages. The city has seen much better days - portions are uninhabited, many people are unemployed or underemployed. Labour is very cheap. About 1/3 of the population are goblins, who are citizens but almost always very poor and work at menial tasks.

Each dwarven family appoints a "senior" as boss/spokesman. The seniors appoint the clan lord. There are 5 clans, and the 5 clan lords control the city. They are reappointed every 10 years.

The city has been around for 4000-5000 years, and was based on iron and mithral mining, but the mithral ran out centuries ago.

Different districts have different rates and levels of wealth according to how good the air and water

supplies are.

Record keeping is preferably carved into stone, although clay and metal are also used. Paper is seldom or never used for writing.

There are two trade routes into the city - the one we followed from human lands, and one to Elfhien.

There is a militia known as "the force" that keep the peace. They are more like town guards than like an army.

Although fights with weapons are rare, dwarves are frequently armed.

Trade with humans is relatively recent. They trade many weapons to the elves. Exports are salt, iron, weapons, diamonds, copper, tin. Imports from Humans are wool, firs, leather, food, animals. From elves, import silk.

Currency is copper and gold - silver seldom used.

24 Frost: We get a guide to take us to the Clan Salt recordkeepers. It takes about an hour to cross town. The recordkeeper's district is wealthy. We are introduced to Krodat, an old dwarf who is porter of the Mages Hall. He takes us to the Salt Clan Mages Hall, which has room-sized pentacles and curse removal triangles. Kali comes to see us, and we give her a letter explaining the situation at the guild. We have lunch with Kali.

Kali has important commitments to the dwarves - a debt payable by service, with 7 years yet to go. She is just finishing training 5 dwarves as Namers as part of this service. She is uncertain if the Council will give her leave to leave.

We return to the inn at the surface.

25 Frost: Shopping in the morning. We sell some of the stuff from the gnolls, including a well made battleaxe which is sold back to the family that originally made it. In the afternoon we look at some spectacular old halls.

26 Frost: We are summoned to appear before the Assembly of the 5 lords. We go to a room the size of a small law court. Kali makes her petition to the lords to be allowed to leave to see to her "masterwork" (i.e. the guild) which is in trouble. She wishes to take her apprentices with her, to finish their training in Seagate. Pinefella tells the lords about the current state of the guild.

There is an investigation Kali is involved in that must be completed by the end of the year. We are offered as alternatives to take over her role in this investigation so that she may leave.

After the lords consider: Kali may go if we stay to help fulfill a prophesy relating to the millennium.

Kali feels this is generous of them.

Over lunch at Kali's home, we get told more. The dwarves have several millennium prophecies (7 in total?) The first part is complete - Kali has found a Holy Grail for them. This led her to the second prophecy: there are 6 things (people?) that need to be brought together to preserve Highcastle through the millennium:

When the dark comes rising, six shall turn it back
Three from the circle, three from the track
Wood, bronze, iron, water, fire, stone
five will return, and one go alone.

Iron for the birthday, bronze carried long.
Wood from the burning, stone out of song.
Fire in the candle ring, water from the thaw
six sign the circle and the grail gone before.

(Aside; The prophecy that led to the finding of the grail was:

I am the womb of every holt (refers to building of Highcastle)
I am the blaze on every hill (refers to dragons)
I am the queen of every hive (refers to civil war in Highcastle some time ago)
I am the shield for every head
I am the tomb of every hope
I am Eirias.
)

In our prophecy, "dark" refers to evil.

We notice that the 6 things in our prophecy fall into two sections: elemental (fire, wood, stone) and craftable (wood, iron, bronze). In each verse, craftable items mentioned first, then elemental. Craftable could refer to the ages of the world: Age of silver (elves, represented by wood), age of bronze, age of iron. These may be the three from the track.

We spend the rest of the day arranging lodgings in the city. The council provide us with a house to live in while we work on this problem. Servants etc. are very cheap to hire. Root vegetables are cheap but grain is expensive. Our household (cook/housekeeper, guide, runner, 2 door guards) costs 15 gold per month to maintain. (Council pays rent, rates for us.)

While this is arrange, Strontium talks to sages/historians and Gaians.

Kali arranges that we will either return to Seagate or send a message before the Spring meeting.

28 Frost: We learn from the Gaians that there is an old sacred Gaian grove now in the hands of gnolls. There is a mountain called Thunder Mountain that gets struck by lightning far more often than seems normal.

29 Frost - 5 Snow: Investigations with sages etc.

There may be over 50 gnolls living near the Gaian grove. It is unknown if the grove is sacred to the gnolls. The grove is to the north.

Thunder mountain is about 2 1/2 days trip away to WNW of city.

There is a waterfall called "Thaw's fall" in the mountains to the west, about 1 1/2 days journey in summer.

There are many naga at the west end of the lake. They are fluent in Dwarven. Naga are partially reptilian, live in marsh, have good manners and are formal and cultured, although their appearance and buildings look simple.

The founder of the city (because he found the mithral) was called Dow and his birthday is associated with the founding of the city. It is full moon day, seed time.

6 Frost: We start a journey. We have 10 dwarf guards to accompany us to the Gaian grove. It is overcast and cold, and we come across tracks of occasional Gnoll hunting parties. We sneak to where we get a good view of the valley. There are old tunnel entrances where the gnolls probably live, ruined buildings, and smoke coming from the grove area, although it is some distance from the habitations. Path between grove and tunnels area is well trodden. There could be 40 to 80 gnolls living here, half of whom would be capable of bearing arms.

By crystal, we find out there are 25 to 30 in the grove, mostly bitches and puppies, preparing food and smoking meat. We see a hidden defensible position about 800 yards from the grove, and sneak around to it to await nightfall. By 11pm, most of the gnolls have left the grove.

Strontium and Griff Sneak Unseen to the grove. There are 3 gnolls, who run away when they smell the bear nearby.

The grove is unexpectedly snow free, and the trees are very healthy. They are awoken via a ritual.

The bear and the birch have a snowfight. Maybe this is traditional behaviour for bears. Strontium talks to the trees. They talk back. The willow and oak used to talk to the Gaian priests, and are lonely without people to tend to them. (The gnolls are better than nothing but not as good as the dwarves used to be.) There used to be a pond in what is now the firepit.

I have snuck down and I bless the trees and make the clearing look like it should, with grass, flowers and a pond.

The others dig in the old pond and find a strange lump of wood. Trees say it is the Hand of Gaia - we think it is the "Wood from the Burning" and take it with us. It is a relief carving of a tree with birds and animals. We leave about 5am and have 6 hour trip back to city.

7 Snow: We sleep, and awake about 6pm completely refreshed. It must be a side effect of the

wooden thing, which we give to Krodat to get divinated. Strontium - "I genuinely believe that the council doesn't want to be bothered whenever we find what may or may not be an artifact" (and bring it into their city.) This is strong evidence that trees don't think.

8 Snow: We leave, taking one mule with us. We have a dwarf guide called Don. Don says there is a monster in the lake, imaginatively called the Evendale Lake Monster, but he only knows childhood tales of it. It snows all night.

9 Snow: We travel all day through snow.

10 Snow: Not snowing. We reach Nagum ("Nagum" = plural of "Naga". Obviously somebody is ignorant of Elvish pluralification rules.) swamp early in the day. Don leads us over a disguised causeway. (The way is marked by small thorn bushes.) We arrive at a hall.

The hall has stone pillars with wattle and daub between, reed roof. Inside there is a mosaic floor. We talk to a naga with wispy grey hair and beard. He is half human, half snake. He speaks common with a Western Marches accent. We discuss the problem briefly. The naga suggests we investigate the waterfall and then return, when his cousin will be here to consider the problem. We leave after a short visit.

We follow a stream into very rocky glacial valley. We camp. Don gives us the saga of the building of the naga hall. It is 2 hours long. (In the words of the Immortal Bard: "Sing. Thing. That thing can sing! Song. Long. A long, long song! Goodbye thing, you sing too long.") The stone pillars go very deep. there is protective magic in the hall.

11 Snow: Early in morning we reach a 200' cliff face crossing the valley, with a waterfall. A glacier face is beyond the cliff. The dwarf says an earthquake caused the cliff. If it did this here, I wonder what it did to the dwarf city?

We search behind waterfall, in pool at bottom, but find nothing interesting. I get TKed up to top of cliff and send down a rope. Pinefella comes up. We find nothing at top. It is too dangerous to go near the glacier. We collect a keg of water from the fall, then leave. Sir Don has a backfire that leaves him as an unfeeling brute. He keeps stubbing toes and not noticing. A crystal ball vision, asking to see the Water from the Thaw, shows us the waterfall but with much more water - maybe we have to wait til spring for this one? We camp at standard dwarf camping place next to the Naga swamp.

12 Snow: We go back to Naga hall. The sage naga is called Thereen, and has black hair and grey scales. He suggests the elements are elements/virtues of dwarven society:

Bronze = warriors, war

Iron = wealth (Dwarven economies are usually based on iron)

Fire = craftsmanship

Wood = health

Stone = steadfastness

Water = ? Possibly purity. (It would be in Naga society.)

He knows very little about Thunder Mountain. The lake monster is real.

The Evendale Lake Monster:

Information about the monster is gathered together here for convenience, although not all was found at this time.

The monster is like a very large squid or very small kraken, being over 10 yards in length. It is known to have been in the lake since a 200-300 years after Penjarie (i.e. 1700-1800 years ago.) There has been a sequence of these monsters - this is just the latest.

It is not clear if it is sentient, but it seems to be insane, and broadcasts that insanity to nearby minds. **DO NOT USE TELEPATHY WITHIN RANGE OF THE LAKE'S EDGE.** The Naga are particularly susceptible to this, going insane if within a mile of the monster unprotected. They regard it as the embodiment of evil.

The insanity field has no permanent effect. Dwarves need to be closer to be effected and are less strongly effected. It is unclear whether mind cloak would help.

The Naga have a magical item called the Nagum Shield, made for them by the dwarves when the monster first turned up. It protects them from the insanity field of the monster, and keeps it away from their swamp. It looks like a glass sculpture of a waterfall, it sits on a white marble dais surrounded by a moat of clean water. There is a chance this is the "Water from the Thaw."

Bronze is probably a weapon, possibly armour or shield - we should try the oldest such objects.

Iron for the birthday is perhaps the earliest iron from Highcastle - maybe related to the founding of Highcastle?

The waterfall seemed like a good idea - the sage would investigate further.

Perhaps 6 people are needed to wield the 6 objects found?

Thereen will give further thought, and talk more when we come back from Thunder Mountain.

We return to camp for lunch, and back to Naga for curse removal in afternoon (done by a female naga.)

13 Snow: Hiking into mountains.

14 Snow: Soon reach treeline. From here we need to climb scree slopes, rock faces - it is quite dangerous, not recommended for poor climbers. The top of the mountain is flat with no ice or snow. There is a broken up largish rock, which seems warmish. We disassemble it (moving the summit of

the mountain about 20 feet in the process) and find a dark rod. We get back to last night's camp by dusk.

15 Snow: The rod is a 20lb sculpture of a fire, made of stone and metal. There is a warm field about it, about 10' radius. It has dwarven runes: "The fire for shaping, the lightning for breaking." We return to the camp near the Naga.

16 Snow: We visit the Naga sage again, but get no useful information. We get to see the Nagum shield. Quoth Strontium to the Naga: "Let's do the twig thing." We return to the dwarven city.

17-27 Snow: Detailed records of this period were lost in the rockfall. What follows is an approximate reconstruction.

We reported our findings to the Dwarven Council. Investigations among the Dwarven bards lead us to find what we think is the Stone out of Song: "The Heart of the Dwarves" is a carved stone that the dwarves have used since time immemorial for making oaths on. It is already in the possession of the Dwarves. Divination shows that it gives the power of Geas to oaths taken on it.

Investigations into old bronze weapons or armour starts, but will take a long time.

We hire two guides to show us to where the first iron was mined at Highcastle. The location is at the intersection of what were veins of iron ore and mithral. It takes about 2 days underground, mostly in low tunnels, to get there. We arrive midway through the 26th. Searches during the rest of the 26th are uneventful, but we avoid the most unstable, dangerous looking parts of the mine.

27 Snow: We are looking for anything interesting when there is a sudden commotion behind us. We see the tail of a giant worm heading away into an unstable area of the mine, and one of our guides is missing, presumed eaten. The worm is about one yard in diameter.

Hoo and Pinefella give chase, Hoo going first because as a leprachaun he is able to run in the tunnels without stooping, and so is the fastest. Hoo catches up to the worm and attacks it vigorously with two main-gauches. The worm has very tough skin - a good, normal, blow with a main-gauches appears to barely penetrate. After Hoo finds a chink in the foul creature's armour, plunging his best main-gauche deep into its acidic interior, the creature strikes him with its tail, leaving him stunned and bleeding. The valiant leprachaun would surely have become worm food, had not Pinefella arrived on the scene and masterfully cast Control Animal on the wicked worm's posterior.

Meanwhile, behind the courageous pair, Strontium has passed into the unstable section followed by Sir Donatalon, who has dislodged the ceiling and been mostly buried in a rockfall.

The tail of the worm is kept under control as we release Sir Don. This takes some hours. We use tools to prop up the slab Sir Don is under to prevent further collapse as we work. Eventually he is freed.

Pinefella hacks at the tail of worm for a while, making a big hole in it. It has large, semi-metallic scales, about 12"x6" in size. The front end (not under control) eventually gets going, and after a time the worm escapes into a narrow crack.

We camp for the "night".

28 Snow: We use a locate spell to find the worm, and a crystal ball divination to find the relationship between the worm and the Iron for the Birthday - the vision shows the worm getting ever larger. (The dwarves are familiar with such worms, but very much smaller - about arm sized at maximum. They eat ore, and so are considered a pest by the dwarves.) We follow the locate to the crack where the worm was last seen and find just its tail. (The locator had never seen the front.) It is the weight and consistency of soft rock. We get 29 intact scales off it, and 4 more in usable sized bits - about 40lb total. It has enough iron to prevent use of magic. We find a sausage-like translucent bit of intestine which is slowly crystallizing - it will take days to finish, but may be valuable when it is.

We spend the rest of the day looking for the worm, without luck. We leave protection around the crystallizing thing to prevent damage, and start for home.

29 Snow: Hiking out.

30 Snow (12th night): Arrive back at city. We get the scales checked out. There is riotous partying, and partying riots, and a good time is had by all.

1-2 Ice: The scales are mostly iron alloy, not reproducible by artificial means, and more flexible than iron. The goblins have horror stories about that part of the mines.

3 Ice: We hire dwarves to go into the mine and retrieve the crystal for us. We spend time investigating Bronze Carried Long, but it will take months to make much progress. We give the Dwarven Council an update. They are distracted - 3 districts are still in riot after 12th night.

4 Ice: We arrange for the rockworm scales to be made into dwarf armour and sold. We send a message back to Kali via wind speech:

"Good morning Mistress Kali from Highcastle. We won't leave til the spring equinox. We have got three artifacts - wood, fire, stone. Send replacement party. Send our backpay. Send women - cute ones. Hideous menaces requiring quelling - 50 foot armoured rock worm and insane lake kraken. Byeee."

The crystals come back from the mine. They are non magical, pink semi-precious stone. 12 stones are worth 1000-4000 each.

Summary of loot:

Worm scales: 2000

Worm crystals: 20000 (profit, after collection fee and taxes.)

Loot from Gnolls: 500

Pay:

From Kali: 1700 each

From Guild: 800 each in guild script