

# Recovering Durin's Axe

## Contents

<a href="#">Preface</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Background</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Course of the action</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Obstacles</a> .....	2
<a href="#">Aids</a> .....	2
<a href="#">A possible solution</a> .....	3
<a href="#">Additions to the maps in the Moria module</a> .....	4

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## Preface

The adventure is suitable for 3-5 Rolemaster oder MERP characters of level 10-15. At least one of these should be a dwarf.

The plot is located in Moria at some time after TA 1981, i.e. after the Balrog drove the dwarves from the city. In order to use this adventure, you have to have access to ICE's Campaign Book „Moria“. The ICE book #2001 is referenced in the chapters below, but the older Moria module should also work. Many creatures, items and maps mentioned in the following chapters can be found in these books.

If you have additions for or comments on the adventure, please sent them to [epost@joergjahnke.de](mailto:epost@joergjahnke.de).

Have fun with the adventure!

Jörg

## Background

When the Balrog slew Nain I, king of Moria, and drove the dwarves out of the city, the dwarves had to leave behind many of the heirlooms of Durin's line. Among these heirlooms is Durin's Axe, a powerful and enchanted weapon. Years after the fall of the city, a group of dwarves – this might be a powerful order, the dwarven king or members of the king's family – decides that there must be a way to retrieve at least some of the heirlooms, most importantly the magic axe. They decide that rather a small and stealthy group than a dwarven war-host should be able to undertake this task.

## Course of the action

Therefore a member of this group, a dwarf named Fundin, contacts a trusted dwarf, one of the PCs, to convince him and take the risk of entering Moria, together with companions he may choose. They might offer this group of adventurers gold for retrieving the axe, or simply lure them with the wealth indeed still lying in the treasuries and armories of Moria.

After preparing themselves for the adventure, the PCs should head for the old dwarven city. Should they enter the West Gate (Moria, section 10.1) they will need to use the secret word of passage that they were given by Fundin. The East Gate (also described in section 10.1) should be left open and it should be possible to move the large doors and enter the city.

Even in the first rooms the adventurers enter, they should get some hints (light Perception/

Observation rolls) that orcs now inhabit the city. Ideally they should now move stealthily and try to quickly reach the lower deeps by means of a stairway. The central stairway, Durin's Chimney, does lead directly to the seventh deep, but the stairs are more closely guarded than other stairways. So the adventurers would risk being detected by orcs or other monsters lurking in Moria.

Some hours or even days later the PCs might indeed reach the seventh deep of Moria and the King's Chambers. There they will probably be disappointed – the heirlooms of the king are no longer here. At this point it might happen that the players have no clue where to go next.

Should they be accompanied by Tili (see Aids below), the old dwarf will suggest to visit the Balrog's lair that he heard is in the sixth deep. Although the old dwarf is only seeking a battle with the Balrog for a glorious way to die, he strikes near the truth as the king's heirlooms are indeed in the sixth deep, but in the Black Hold (Moria, page 93, (e)). Another possibility to gain knowledge of Durin's heirlooms might be to capture a high ranking officer of the Balrog's guards, e.g. an orc captain or even a troll. Interrogation of this victim might prove difficult though.

Afterwards the really difficult part only begins as the Balrog's Lair (Moria, page 93, #50) is closely guarded. Not only is there a high chance that the Balrog is in the central throne room (Moria, Page 111, section 14.2), but additionally members of his elite troll guard are stationed in several places inside the Balrog's Lair. A possible way to enter the Black Hold, which is one of the adjacent chambers, could be to stalk in during the hours when the Balrog is meditating. Invisibility and Long Door spells could also come in handy.

Many are the ways the adventure might end: Should the adventurers indeed get hold of some of Durin's heirlooms, then this theft might be detected at some time and the PCs might be pursued by orcs, trolls or even by the Balrog himself. Perhaps the PCs also gave up at some point and retreated from the throne room. Should they have raised an alarm beforehand, then the outcome might be similar as had they been successful. Otherwise they might try to leave Moria undetected, perhaps trying to make some booty in one of the armories or treasuries of the other deeps or levels.

Should the adventurers really get out of Moria with Durin's Axe and return this axe to Fundin or to the king directly, they will be praised as great heroes of the dwarves. The king will certainly generously reward the PCs.

## **Obstacles**

- Unless the adventure is played shortly after the fall of Moria, detailed maps of the city should not be available.
- The greatest obstacle are of course the various evil inhabitants of Moria. See ICE's Moria module for details. An encounter with the Balrog should be avoided at any costs. Even for a group of characters higher than 10<sup>th</sup> level this creature should be much too powerful to overcome.
- Many passages and rooms, especially the treasuries, are armed with traps. Most of these are still active after all the years...

## **Aids**

- Fundin will offer some sketchy maps and a rough description of the first level and first deep of Moria. Additionally he will outline the general layout of Moria with its seven levels and deeps, the city part and the mine, and also tell them that the heirlooms of the king were located in the King's Chambers in the seventh deep.
- Should the adventurers (probably) travel to the West Gate of Moria, he will also tell them the secret word „Mellon“ to speak to open the West Gate.
- He will also point out that the adventurers should take heed of the various kinds of traps

which might still be active in the dungeon.

- If the party is missing a member Fundin will offer that the old dwarf named Tili, who is accompanying him, might join them. Tili, who is described in ICE's Moria #2011 in the „Exploration Expedition“ adventure suggestion in section 17.3, is a 5<sup>th</sup> level Fighter. While not powerful in combat in comparison to a group of 10<sup>th</sup> level adventurers, he might be helpful due to his studies of Moria. The GM may have Tili give hints on possible secret passages etc. if he sees need. On the other hand Tili is also a danger as he is looking for a suitable way to die and thinks that through the hands of the Balrog would be quite suitable...

## A possible solution

I was in fact mildly surprised to see that the group I threw the above adventure at, was actually able to retrieve the axe and get it back to the dwarf king. They immediately discarded any solution involving brute force and relied heavily on stealth. With a Ranger, a master of stealth by himself, and a Magician, who could cast Invisibility on any character requiring a bit aid when stalking, it was not too difficult to pass at least the various orcs in Moria unnoticed. So the adventurers relatively easily reached the 7<sup>th</sup> deep and the King's Chambers.

After they realized that Durin's heirlooms were no longer there, then came the task of finding out their new location. They were able to capture an orc and trick him into revealing the location of the dwarven heirlooms. The orc boasted with the axe being in the hoard of the balrog on the sixth floor and that they would never get it into their hands.

Getting to the sixth floor and near the balrogs lair was also possible. But they quickly realized that getting into the balrogs domain unnoticed was not so easy as the gates were guarded by trolls. They searched for quite some time for a second entrance or secret passage but found none (from the maps I thought at that time that there simply were non such entrances, but later a second look revealed that there might in fact be two more passages that lead to the balrog's abode, perhaps closed up after he used the old dwarven smithies as his new lair. So intense searching might have revealed a closed up way and the adventurers might have opened it up again somehow).

The party then searched the old libraries of the dwarves in the upper levels for old maps which might describe other entrances to the old dwarven smithies on the sixth floor, now the balrogs domain. While they did not find a normal passage, they found out that a chimney led from the smithy to the level above into a region called The Domes. They then moved to this area of the fifth floor to find that the chimney still existed.

The problem was now to get down into the balrog's throne room unnoticed. What the party wanted to avoid was moved into the room while the balrog was inside. They had trust in their ability to stalk past any troll guards the room, but they were not so sure whether they could trick the demon. Fortunately the Paladin in the group had his spell „Detect Enemy“ at hand which allowed to located the balrog. Casting this spell several times over the next few days revealed that the demon was moving into a nearby smaller room every day for 3 hours and was not moving during that time (in fact the demon is meditating for three hours every day).

After a good time for a trip to the throne room was now found, the spells of the Magician and the Ranger allowed the latter character to fly unharmed through the flames coming up the chimney and into the throne room. There he searched the throne room and the one or two nearby rooms whose doors were open and seemingly unguarded but did not find Durin's Axe. Finally he decided to silently open one of those doors where he (faintly) heard trolls speak/move behind. Just by chance he chose the door to the passage leading to the balrog's treasure lair where the axe was located. Due to his superior stalking ability he got into the room, found out that the axe was there and was able to leave unnoticed, but leaving the axe behind for this time, seeing that it was nearly impossible to steal it without the troll guards noticing this.

For a second trip directly afterwards the Magician joined him. His only task was to use some Stone Wall spells to delay the trolls who might possibly chase the Ranger after his theft. And in fact the Ranger was able to steal the weapon. Followed by three large trolls he sped past the mage who had prepared his wall spells. These gave them the necessary time to flee through the chimney into the domes. Although an alarm was sounded and the balrog himself was after them, they were able to escape from Moria with the weapon.

As you see stealth and magic were essential for this group. But other parties, with other strengths, might come to a different solution...

## **Additions to the maps in the Moria module**

ICE's Moria module does not contain a complete floor plan of a the levels and deeps of Moria. Instead it contains a rough floor plan and some guidelines on how to determine the countless small rooms and roads. Below you can find some additional aids on using the maps.

### ***Connections downwards into the Deeps***

The Route Maps of the Moria module are not always easy to read. Especially the connections between the different levels of Moria might remain a mystery. Some connections as I have interpreted the map:

From the First Level & First Deep downwards:

- Durin's Chimney (to 7<sup>th</sup> Deep and beyond), from #5 to #40, #43, #45, #48, #52, #57
- Central stairs, from the central „s“ note in the city part of the map, just 3 cm right to the #5 on the map. Leads to the „s“ in the center of the maps on all lower levels.
- Stairs down, from the „sd“ note on the map, just 2 cm left of the #9 that denotes the East Doors. Leads to the northernmost „su“ on the map of the Second Deep.
- Stairs down, from the „s“ note on the map, just 1 cm left of the #9 that denotes the East Doors. I think it leads to the easternmost „su“ on the map of the Second Deep.
- Accessway to the Lower Mines, from #11 to „the southeastern Smith Halls on the Second Deep“. The latter might be the southeasternmost room on the map of the Second Deep.
- Stairs near the Inn Chambers, probably should lead down the westernmost „s“ note of the city part in the Second Deep.
- Stairs in the mines. Lead from the westernmost „s“ on the map to the westernmost „s“ on the map of the Second Deep.
- Traverse in the mines. Leads from the westernmost „t“ on the map to the westernmost „t“ on the map of the Second Deep.

From the Second Deep downwards:

- Durin's Chimney (to 7<sup>th</sup> Deep and beyond), from #40 to #43, #45, #48, #52, #57
- Central stairs, from the central „s“ note in the city part of the map, just 2 cm right of the #40. Leads to the central „s“ note in the city part of the map in the Third Deep, right of #43.
- Stairs down, from the „sd“ note in the southern part of the city near the middle of the map. Leads down to the „su“ note in the Third Deep.
- Traversal down, leads from the „t“ note near a central room in the city to the „t“ note near the triangle room in the Third Deep.
- Traversal down, leading from the „td“ note in the mines to the „tu“ note in the mines of the Third Deep.
- Cable lift in the Whispering Hall. Not sure if it actually can be used by a person to move from Deep to Deep, but the description (Moria, section 10.7 and #56 on page 98) indicates that it might be the case for Hwanin's Well and at least parcels can be transported.

From the Second Deep upwards:

- The southernmost traversal „t“ on the map seems to lead to the southernmost traversal „t“ on the Second Level.

From the Third Deep downwards:

- Durin's Chimney (to 7<sup>th</sup> Deep and beyond), from #43 to #45, #48, #52, #57
- Central stairs, from the central „s“ note in the city part of the map, just 2 cm right of the #43. Leads to the central „s“ note in the city part of the map in the Fourth Deep, right of #45.
- Cable lift in the Whispering Hall. See notes for the hall on the Second Deep. On all lower Deeps the Whispering Halls are marked with a „t“ for a traversal. Only on this floor there is only a traversal to the west of the hall. This might lead to the Whispering Hall in the Fourth Deep, but I suggest to instead have it mark a connection from this Whispering Hall to the Whispering Hall on the Deep below.

From the Fourth Deep downwards:

- Durin's Chimney (to 7<sup>th</sup> Deep and beyond), from #45 to #48, #52, #57
- Central stairs, from the central „s“ note in the city part of the map, just 2 cm right of the #45. Leads to the central „s“ note in the city part of the map in the Fourth Deep, near the #47.
- Cable lift in the Whispering Hall. See notes for the hall on the Second Deep. The „t“ seems to indicate a possible traversal to the Whispering Hall on the Deep below.
- Stairs down, from the „sd“ note in the south of the city to the southernmost „s“ note in the Fifth Deep.
- Traversal in the mines. Leads from the „td“ in the north of the map to the „tu“ in the north of the map in the Fifth Deep.

From the Fifth Deep downwards:

- Durin's Chimney (to 7<sup>th</sup> Deep and beyond), from #48 to #52, #57
- Central stairs, from the central „s“ note in the city part of the map, just 2 cm right of the #48. Leads to the central „s“ note in the city part of the map in the Sixth Deep, quite near to the balrog's domain.
- Stairs in the mines, the southernmost „s“ on the map, leads to the „s“ near #51 in the Sixth Deep.
- Chimney from the balrog's throneroom. In the area called The Domes lies the exit of the chimney of the former dwarven smithy on the Sixth Deep, now the balrog's lair.

From the Sixth Deep downwards:

- Durin's Chimney (to 7<sup>th</sup> Deep and beyond), from #52 to #57
- Central stairs, from the central „s“ note in the city part of the map, just below #50. Leads to the central „s“ note in the city part of the map in the Seventh Deep, below #54.
- Stairs in the mines, the southernmost „s“ on the map, near #51, leads to the southernmost „su“ on the map of the Seventh Deep.
- Eastern stairs, the easternmost „s“ on the map, leading to the easternmost „su“ on the map of the Seventh Deep.