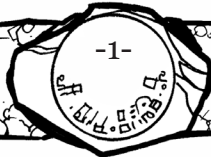


LOST CITY OF THE DWARVES: DISCOVERY



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## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

It's a beautiful autumn day in Mountain View, but then every day is beautiful when sitting in your favourite tavern with a good drink in front of you, no rowdies to spoil the mood, and a table all to yourself. Unfortunately, these moments never last long. A commotion outside disturbs your inner peace and that's when Tangent walks in. 'Tangent' isn't the spellcaster's real name of course, but everything he does ends up taking off in a completely different direction than planned. You wince as he heads right for your table with a huge grin on his face and you instantly regret having survived his last mishap. An incident from a recent adventure left the entire party running for their lives in nothing but their skivvies since his invisibility spell made everybody's gear completely disappear instead. Being the only one who didn't try to string him up by his thumbs you are now his best, and probably only, friend. Before speaking he straightens his spectacles as if that will somehow validate whatever it is he is about to say.

"You are quite probably the luckiest person in the world!" He proclaims. Right away you know that this won't end well. Putting your head back and closing your eyes you search for the patience to make it through this conversation. The commotion outside is getting louder. "I've heard reports from a very reliable source that there was a MASSIVE earth tremor just last week in the mountains!" You still can't open your eyes. "And the centre was right HERE!" And with that he slaps a map down in front of you, almost spilling your drink by the sound of it. "The Lost City of the Dwarves!" The commotion outside won't let up, the Dwarven mountains are leagues from here, and nobody in their right mind starts an excursion of this magnitude for a place that's never been found with winter on the doorstep. Then the screaming starts. You open your eyes.

An angry griffon surrounded by guards is the last thing you expected to see out in the street. Jumping to your feet and reaching for your sword makes Tangent take notice of the activities for the first time. "Oh no!" Is all he can say as he rushes ahead of you through the door.

"BE-US CALM-US!"



Why does wizard-speak have to sound so stupid? But it does the trick. He walks right up to the thing and puts his hand on it like it's his noble steed. The beast settles down, the guards settle down, and you suddenly have a bad feeling about how Tangent wants to get to the mountains. He looks back and sees the doubt on your face before the words can even get out. "It's alright," he assures you, "I have complete control! It's just all the excitement, that's all." The beast does seem to be fine now. Nobody has ever tamed a griffon, let alone ridden one. The idea has its appeal. "We'll be back before dusk. The drinks will be on me!" His last words sound like a desperate plea. "I just want to see if it's there." The rational person inside you screams to turn him down, but the adventurer in you screams even louder...

Legend has it that we lost touch with the Dwarves over a century ago. No one had ever gotten there without a Dwarven guide and to be invited to their city at all was rare, even for nobility. Dwarves themselves were regular visitors to the surface world, they just had a way of keeping to themselves. Nobody knew why they stopped showing up, and there isn't a human alive who has ever seen one, at least, not in these parts. The Dwarves just drifted from memory to legend. Every few years somebody puts a team together and sets off for the mountains to find their fabled city but they always come back empty handed with barely a story to tell. Nobody has even found a hint that it ever existed. Then again, nobody has ever ridden a griffon either.

The take-off was a little bumpy, and the modified horse saddles leave room for improvement, but the sensation of soaring over the mountains on the back of such a fearsome and magnificent beast cannot be beat. Towering storm clouds flicker in the distance and you can only watch in amazement as lightning lights up the column like fireflies in a wintery bush. The ride alone makes this venture worth it, whether you actually find anything or not. It's already a story that you could tell for years without anyone at the tavern getting tired of it. Tangent has finally pulled through, maybe even earning a new nickname.

The ride suddenly gets a little rough, making you panic, but Tangent calls back yelling something about 'ter-bu-lance',



whatever that is. The ride does even out, and not long after Tangent starts to point excitedly to the ground. At first you think he's just admiring the mountain river crashing beneath you, but then you see it too. It's hard to make out in the late, afternoon light, but it looks like a large piece of the mountain slid down recently, probably from the tremor, and has exposed a formation that could be a doorway! A huge doorway, but whatever it is it doesn't look like a natural rock formation. Turning your ride around and dropping down for a better look things get bumpy again. Tightening your grip you wait for the ride to smooth out again, but instead it only gets worse. This time Tangent yells something about 'spell duration'. That you understand.

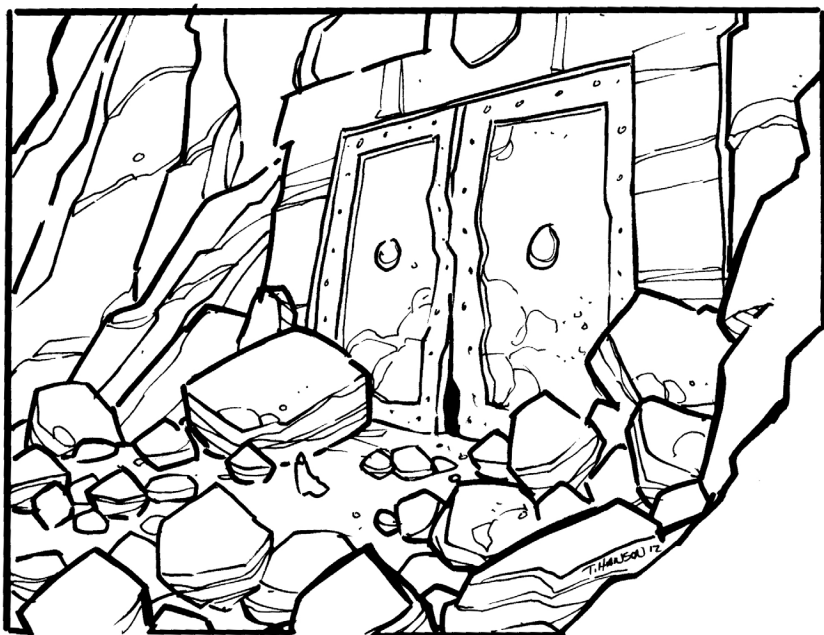
"I don't get it," he screams over the wind, "this spell lasted for days on my test rat!"

Suddenly everything is moving in slow motion. You are strapped to the back of a flying monster that is not happy at all about being a magician's slave. The back legs start raking at the straps holding you in place, and if you fall you have the choice of landing in a raging mountain river or on jagged mountain rocks. If your sword weren't out of reach with the rest of your gear you'd probably do the griffon a favour and kill Tangent yourself. Despite your best efforts to hang on you are soon air born, free-falling towards a certain death. Your last memory of the hapless wizard is him waving his arms frantically then gesturing towards you to the best of his ability. To your amazement, the ground isn't rushing up towards you quite as fast as it was before, and while your descent isn't brought to a complete halt you only lose consciousness when landing instead of losing your life.

You come to at the edge of the river, soaking wet and cold. The sun is just setting, so you haven't been out of it for long, and you are literally in the middle of nowhere. There is no sign of Tangent anywhere, meaning that he is probably still strapped to the back of a mad griffon, probably never to be seen again. Looking around you see the rock slide that you had spotted from the air, only a short distance up the mountain. Jogging uphill and scrambling over boulders helps to keep your teeth from chattering, then you reach your destination and forget all about the cold. Looming before you is a colossal archway carved into the



mountainside with two huge ironbound doors fitted perfectly in place. Walking closer to inspect this marvel you notice that the doors have shifted slightly from the quake, a small space visible where they meet at the bottom just large enough to crawl through. The thunderhead is closer now and the wind is picking up, almost hinting that you don't want to be outside much longer. Your only possible shelter lies between the giant gates that might lead to a mythical city that has been shrouded in mystery for over a hundred years. As the rain starts to pour down and the lightning flashes, the adventurer in you walks toward an uncertain fate, and for the first time the rational person in you agrees...



## YOUR ADVENTURE BEGINS

