

TALES OF THE DARK FOREST

The illustration is framed by a rough, stone-like border with green vines and leaves. At the top, a small brown furry animal hangs upside down from a vine. In the center, a large, grey-skinned troll with a red mohawk and a blue jacket points his right hand towards the viewer. To his left, a small girl with green skin and a purple top looks on. In the foreground, a boy with a head made of colorful grapes and a red vest holds a small brown object. To the right, a boy with a large nose and a green shirt peeks out from behind the frame.

TROLLOGY!

STEVE BARLOW & STEVE SKIDMORE



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TROLLOCY!

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STEVE BARLOW & STEVE SKIDMORE

ILLUSTRATED BY FIONA LAND



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The Legend of the Dark Forest

According to legend, the Dark Forest was not always dark. Long ago, the Kings of the Forest ruled a rich and fertile land from their high throne in the great City of Dun Indewood. Their prosperous and peaceful realm was defended by brave and honourable Knyghts, and you couldn't throw a rock without hitting a beautiful maiden, a sturdy forester or a rosy, apple-cheeked farmer. (Of course, none of the contented citizens of Dun Indewood would ever dream of throwing rocks about anyway; and if they did, one of the Knyghts, who were not only brave and honourable but just and kindly too, would ask them very politely not to do it again.)

It was a Golden Age.

But over the years, the Knyghts and Lords of the City grew greedy, idle and dishonest, and fell to quarrelling among themselves. The line of the Kings died out.

The power of Dun Indewood declined. Contact with the other cities and towns that lay in the vast wilderness of the Dark Forest became rare, and then was lost altogether when the Forest roads became too dangerous to travel.

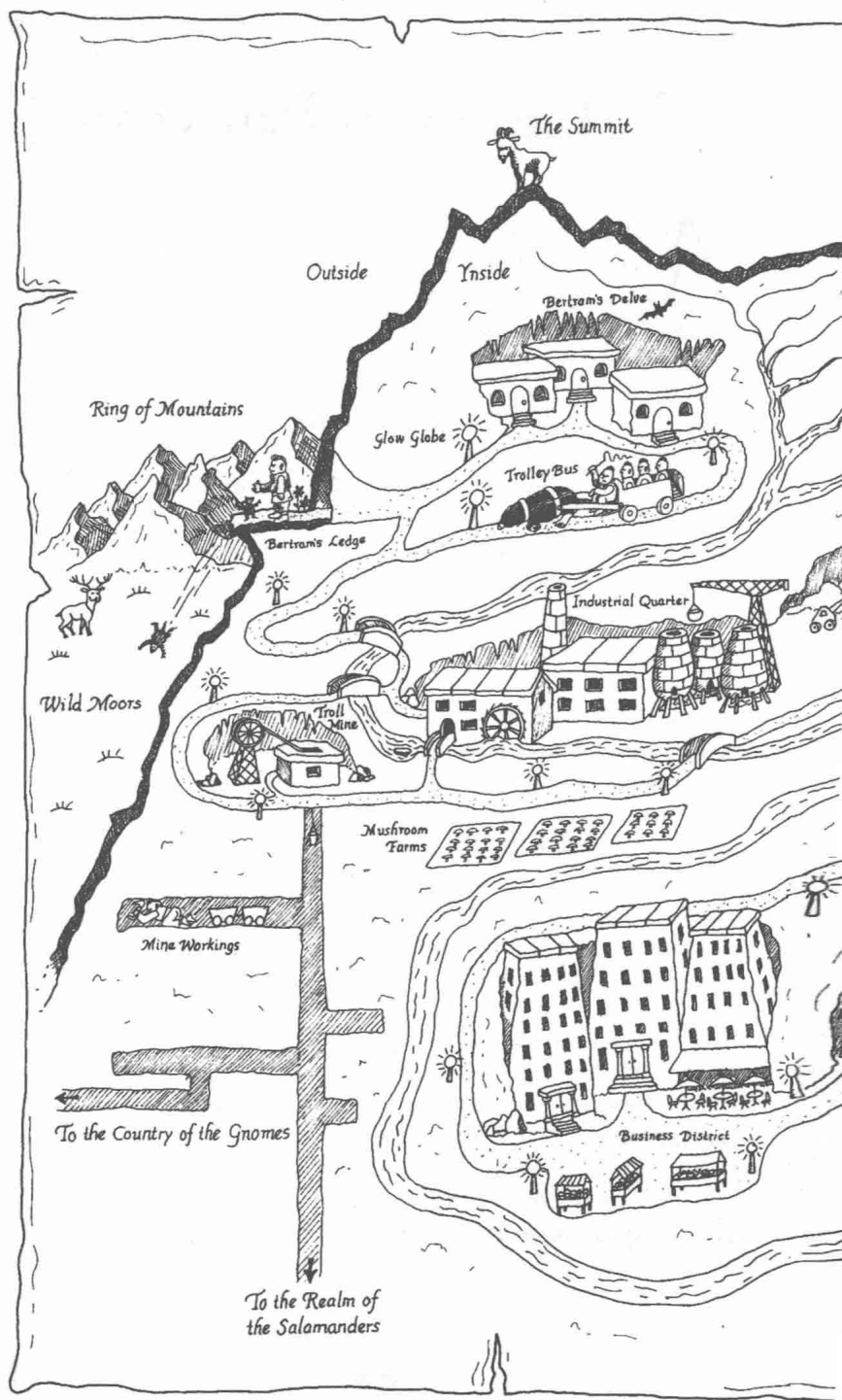
The creatures of the Forest became wild and dangerous until only a few hardy souls dared to brave its perils. The citizens of Dun Indewood continued to argue among themselves and cheat each other, turning their backs on everything that happened outside the City walls.

With no one to tame it, the Forest became home to truly dreadful things. Beasts with the understanding of men, and men with the ferocity of beasts, roamed the dark paths. The trees themselves became malevolent and watchful. And the Forest grew...

Well, that's the legend, anyway.

Of course, these days, nobody believes a word of it...





The Summit

Outside

Inside

Ring of Mountains

Bertram's Delve

Glow Globe

Trolley Bus

Bertram's Ledge

Wild Moors

Industrial Quarter

Troll Mine

Mushroom Farms

Mine Workings

To the Country of the Gnomes

To the Realm of the Salamanders

Business District

The City of
Caer Borundum
beneath
Mount Ynside

Up





BOOK THE FIRST

The Book of the Trolls

(The Fellowship of the Lemming)

CHAPTER ONE



How Bertram met a Lemming who Looked
before he Leapt.



High on the slopes of Mount Ynside, Bertram Hornblende clasped his callused hands behind his head and lay back, enjoying the warmth of the sun on his face.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a brownish blur as something small and furry raced past him and leapt off the ledge where he lay, launching itself into empty space.

“Yyyyiiiiiiiippppppppppeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

Bertram ignored the intrusion. It was good to be alive, he thought. Above him, wispy clouds flowed across skies patrolled by eagles and hawks, while sable-winged ravens



croaked threats and insults at each other as they swooped and squabbled. Hearing the *kwok-kok-kok* call of a wild bird from far below, Bertram looked down from his high ledge to where fleecier clouds drifted softly across the distant landscape of moors that surrounded the mountain.

Another furry streak shot past him.

“Here goes **nnnnnnnoooooottthhhhhhiinnnnngggggggg!**”

Behind Bertram, the gigantic flanks of Mount Ynside reached up, scarred by snowfields and glaciers. Its jagged, white-capped peaks seemed to clutch at the sky. From its lower slopes, the barking challenge of a stag echoed across the wild moors. Further down still, the wild grasses and heathers gave way to alpine meadows where goats roamed. The reedy, plaintive notes of their distant bleating trembled in the still air.

A third intruder raced across the ledge and hurled itself into the void.

“Going **dddddddoooooowwwwwwnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn!**”

Beyond the meadows lay a forest. The ancient legends of Bertram’s people called it the Dark Forest and said that its trees stretched further than the eye could see, an endless world of green. But Bertram did not know whether this was true. He didn’t even have a very clear idea of what a tree looked like close to: there were no trees this high up, only stunted bushes and the springy heather that in summer transformed the sombre brown landscape of the high moors into fields of glowing purple.

“Heads **bbbeeeeeee|||||||||||looooooowwwwwwwww!**”

The sun was already dipping towards the western



horizon. Soon it would be time to go home. Bertram closed his eyes – and frowned. His contented mood faded.

Nobody understood him. What was wrong with his friends and neighbours? When Bertram so much as mentioned the outside world they shuddered and looked at him strangely, and made excuses to get away as quickly as they could. Why? It was wonderful out here! Bertram loved the sound of birdsong, and the wind as it rustled through the grass. He loved the sun on his back.

None of this would have been unusual if Bertram had been human. It would have been normal. It would have been expected. But Bertram wasn't human.

Bertram was a troll.

“Goodbye, cruel **WWOOOorrrrrrrrrlllllll d d d d d d d d d d d d d d d d!**”

Trolls lived in the mountains, in deep, dark, hidden places where currents of air murmured and underground streams thundered. Trolls shrank from the light, but Bertram was scared of the dark. In fact, sunlight was supposed to be deadly to trolls. Any troll caught by the rays of the sun would be instantly turned into stone. All troll children learned this at their mother's knee, but when Bertram had stumbled upon a way to the surface many years ago, he found that the light of the sun merely warmed him. It made him feel alive. Just as it was doing now.

“**Ggggaaaannnggggwwwwwwaaaaaaaayyyyyyy!**”

Usually, Bertram enjoyed complete solitude when he ventured above ground from the troll city of Caer Borundum to his ledge on the face of the mountain. It was as close as he ever came to being happy, lying out here with the sun on



his face, the coarse grass tickling his back and the world spread out before him. But today, for some reason, the place was teeming with small, furry creatures who, from time to time, insisted on scampering across the ledge where Bertram was sitting (and occasionally across Bertram himself) and flinging themselves to their doom with piercing cries.

“Oh, dearie, dearie me.”

Bertram opened his eyes – and blinked.

There in front of him, peering over the edge at the sheer drop below, was one of those small, furry creatures. But this creature didn’t look at all happy at the prospect of hurling itself off the ledge. It was muttering to itself in a worried sort of way.

“Right then – one, two, three, and away we go... Or should it be three, two, one? Oh, well, I don’t suppose it matters... Then I shout ‘Geranium’... no, that’s not right. ‘Geology’... no, it wasn’t that. Oh, well, I daresay I’ll remember when the time comes. So it’s one, two, three, ‘Geometry’ or whatever, *and*... plummet! Yes, that seems about right—”

“Excuse me,” said Bertram.

The creature gave a startled squeak and spun round to face him. It teetered on the edge of the drop, desperately windmilling its stubby arms to regain its balance. Then it clutched at its chest with one quivering forepaw and bunched the other into a tiny fist, which it shook at Bertram.

“What do you mean, you great clodhopper, sneaking up on me and bellowing like that? You nearly had me over.”

“I’m sorry I startled you,” said Bertram. “But I didn’t sneak up on you, I was here all the time.”



"I thought you were a pile of rocks." The creature stared at Bertram with its small, black, near-sighted eyes. "Hang on – you're a troll, aren't you?"

"How did you guess?" asked Bertram wearily.

"Well, what are you doing out here in the day? You're supposed to turn to stone in sunlight, aren't you?"

Bertram shrugged. "That's what they say, but it doesn't seem to happen to me. I don't know why."

The small, furry creature whistled. "*Weird.*"

Bertram felt a wave of misery wash over him. He was used to other trolls avoiding him and giving him strange looks – but even this odd creature, which he'd never met before, had spotted straight away that he was different from other trolls. He *must* be weird.

His misery gave way to annoyance. This was *his* ledge. What gave this interloper the right to make personal comments? "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

The creature drew itself up to its full height, and completely failed to look impressive. "If you must know, Mister Weird Troll," it said defiantly, "I'm jumping. Don't try and stop me!"

"Oh," said Bertram. "Do you think that's wise?"

The creature blinked. "Wise?"

"Yes – I mean, it's a sheer drop several hundred feet on to solid rock." Bertram stood up and wandered to the edge of the cliff. "Solid, *jagged* rock. I should think you'd go splat in a pretty final sort of way."

The creature shuddered. "Thank you so much for reminding me. I was trying to put it out of my mind."



Bertram's brow creased. "Then why do you want to jump?"

"Well, I wouldn't say I *want* to," said the creature unhappily. "Not *want* to as such. It's more a case of *having* to." It gave Bertram a look of miserable defiance. "I'm a lemming."

"I see," said Bertram politely, not seeing at all.

"So there you are."

Bertram was nonplussed. "Where am I?"

"I mean, there you have it."

Bertram gave an apologetic shrug. "I'm sorry, I don't understand. What's a lemming?" He looked back at the cleft in the rock behind him that led back to his own world. "I'm afraid I don't get out much."

"Well, that's why I have to jump – because I'm a lemming. Jumping off mountains is what lemmings do." The lemming looked down and gave a little shudder. "I think. I'm pretty sure. Not all the time of course..."

"Only once, I should think."

"I mean, it doesn't happen every year. But every now and again we lemmings get an urge, you see..."

"An urge to find somewhere high up and jump off it?"

"Exactly! And then it's one, two, three, off we go, shout 'Gingerbread' or something on the way down, and..."

"Splat."

"Don't say that!" objected the lemming.

"Why?"

"Because I'm trying not to think about it!"

"No, I mean, why jump?"

The lemming blinked. "Well, I don't know. It's sort of built

