

Moria (Middle-earth)

“Mines of Moria” redirects here. For the video game expansion pack, see [The Lord of the Rings Online: Mines of Moria](#).

In the fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien, **Moria** (Sindarin for “Black Chasm”) was the name given by the **Eldar** to an enormous underground complex in north-western **Middle-earth**, comprising a vast network of tunnels, chambers, mines and huge halls or *mansions*, that ran under and ultimately through the **Misty Mountains**. There, for many thousands of years, lived the **Dwarf** clan known as the **Longbeards**. The name given to Moria by the Dwarves is **Khazad-dûm**, which means *Delving of the Dwarves*.

According to Tolkien’s fiction, the city and one-time centre of Dwarven industry was also called *Hadhodrond* (pronounced HATH-o-drond, with “th” as in *this*) by the **Sindar**, *Casarrondo* by the **Noldor** and *Phurunargian* in the **Common Speech**, all meaning *the Dwarrowdelf* (dwarrow being an archaic English word for dwarves). For over a thousand years of the **Third Age** it was widely known as **Moria**, “Black Chasm” or “Black Pit”, from Sindarin *mor*=“black” and *iâ*=“void, abyss, pit”.^[1]

It has been suggested that Tolkien—an ardent Catholic—may have used this name as a reference to the mountains of **Moriah**, where (according to the book of Genesis) Abraham was to sacrifice his son, Isaac. However, Tolkien categorically denied such derivations, saying that “As to *Moria*...it means...Black Chasm [in Sindarin]. ...As for the 'land of Morīah' (note stress): that has no connection (even 'externally') whatsoever.”^[2]

1 Literature

1.1 History

1.1.1 Years of the Trees

The Dwarrowdelf was founded by **Durin** 'the Deathless' in the far distant past, long before the creation of the **Sun and Moon**. Durin had awakened at **Mount Gundabad** not long after the **Elves** first awoke, and as eldest amongst the **Fathers of the Dwarves** was acknowledged as pre-eminent amongst them, a status subsequently inherited by his descendants, the kings of the Longbeards.

From Gundabad, Durin’s growing clan “spread southward down the vales of **Anduin**”, all the while “under attack

from the **orcs** of **Morgoth**”.^[3] According to legend, Durin ultimately found “a glen of shadows between two great arms of the mountains, above which three white peaks were shining”.^[4] Within this heavily wooded valley, a long series of short water falls led down to a long, oval lake, which appeared to have a magical quality: “There, like jewels sunk in the deep shone glinting stars, though sunlight was in the sky above”.^[4] Perceiving these stars as a crown glittering above his head, Durin took this as an auspicious sign, and named the lake **Kheled-zâram**, the '**Mirrormere**'.

The three peaks overshadowing the lake he named **Barazinbar** 'the **Redhorn**', **Zirakzigil** 'the **Silvertine**' and **Bundushathûr**, '**Cloudyhead**'. The icy cold springs feeding it he called '**Kibil-Nâla**', of unknown meaning, although to the valley itself he gave the name '**Azanulbizar**', The **Dimrill Dale**. Durin chose the caves above **Kheled-zâram**^[4] as the earliest beginnings of his stronghold: **Khazad-dûm**, 'the Dwarrowdelf'.

All of these places became revered amongst Durin’s people in later days. His descendants erected a rune-carved stone monolith at the site whereupon he had first looked into the **Mirrormere**, and although it had become indecipherably weatherworn by the end of the **Third Age** — broken, cracked and faded — the influence of Durin I, the founding king of **Khazad-dûm**, was never forgotten.

Khazad-dûm waxed continuously in size and population in Durin’s long lifetime, until it became the “greatest of all the mansions of the Dwarves”,^[5] even before the return of the **Noldor** to **Middle-earth**. By that time, **Khazad-dûm** was already “a name and a rumour from the words of the Dwarves of the **Blue Mountains**”^[5] to all the **Eldar** of **Beleriand**.

After his death, the reputation of Durin’s realm continued to grow, not merely due to his spiritual ascendancy over the other **Fathers of the Dwarves** as the eldest amongst them, or the Dwarrowdelf’s growing size, but to its great wealth, which was founded upon the uniquely precious metal ***mithril***, which was universally prized yet found nowhere else in **Middle-earth**.

1.1.2 First Age

Khazad-dûm played no part in the wars of **Beleriand**, and in fact gained a respite from orc attacks throughout the **First Age**, “when **Morgoth** needed all his strength” elsewhere.^[3] The Longbeards maintained contact with all the other six dwarf clans, and after early **Men** arrived

in **Rhovanion**, Khazad-dûm quickly began trading with them, exchanging the products of their growing metallurgical and masonry skills for food, to the great profit of both peoples.

1.1.3 Second Age

Following the defeat of Morgoth and the dawn of a new Age, the Broadbeam dwarf clan now found themselves living amidst the ruins of their ancient home, which had been rent asunder and had collapsed, along with the destruction of much of Beleriand in the cataclysmic final battle against Morgoth. After forty further years of struggle, many of them made the difficult decision to leave behind what remained of **Belegost** and cross Eriador, to the now great and ancient Dwarrowdelf, which increased its power still further. Whether these remained a separate clan or group within their new home, or became merged with the Longbeards is not known.

At the same time, Orcs once again became “well-armed and very numerous, cruel, savage, and reckless in assault. In the battles that followed the Dwarves were outnumbered, and though they were the most redoubtable warriors of all the Speaking Peoples they were glad to make alliance with Men.”^[3] The Orcs were all the more easily defeated by the new combination of Khazad-dûm’s heavy infantry and the horsed archers provided by Men, and the Longbeards consequently came to dominate the northern and central **Hithaeglin** and the lands east of there, although Khazad-dûm had always “regarded the **Iron Hills**, The **Ered Mithrin**, and the east dales of the Misty Mountains as their own land”.^[3] Ultimately, these Men then assisted the dwarves of Khazad-dûm “in the ordering of the lands that they had secured”.^[3]

With the foundation of the **Noldorin** realm **Eregion** to the west of Khazad-dûm around the year 700,^[6] friendly relations between the Longbeards and the Elves became firmly established. Many of the Elves then became involved in the development of Khazad-dûm’s mansions as a consequence, and it “became far more beautiful”^[6] during this period. This friendship also resulted in a massive subterranean extension westwards: the Dwarrowdelf’s habitable parts remained in the eastward side, but passages were delved through miles of rock that terminated at a gigantic stone portal outside this elven realm — The West Gate — “which opened out into their country and was chiefly used by them.”^[3] **Celebrimbor**, the Lord of Eregion, used *mithril* lettering on the dwarf **Narvi**’s behalf when the latter built these, to create an inscription that read *Im Narvi hain echant. Celebrimbor o Eregion teithant i thiw hin*: “I, Narvi, made them. Celebrimbor of Eregion drew these signs.”

The West Gate allowed the Elf lady **Galadriel** to pass eastwards through Khazad-dûm and establish **Lothlórien** beneath **Azanulbizar**, and the **Nandorin** elves that had earlier evacuated the area to escape Khazad-dûm’s growing

power, returned to settle there.

All of the Dwarrowdelf was originally illuminated by many “shining lamps of crystal”,^[4] although the halls of the highest level were also lit with windows and shafts carved through the mountain sides. These levels lay between flights of fifty or more stone steps, with seven hollowed out of the mountains above ground level, and many more subterranean levels — or ‘Deeps’ — beneath the Great Gates at the head of the **Dimrill Dale**. Every level comprised a multitude of arched passages, chambers and many pillared halls, often with “black walls, polished and smooth as glass”.^[4] Below the level of the Gates lay mines, treasures and even dungeons,^[4] although far below the lowest Deep of Khazad-dûm, lay primordial tunnels in perpetual darkness, gnawed by ‘nameless things’ that had lived there since the earliest beginnings of **Arda**. Few if any actually ever glimpsed these creatures, and no description of them is extant.

One important feature of the Dwarrowdelf was the defensive structure known as **Durin’s Bridge**, “a slender bridge of stone, without kerb or rail”,^[4] that spanned a fifty foot wide chasm of indeterminate depth, allowing enemy soldiers to cross it only in single file (one after another), not side by side. Another, steeped in legend, was The **Endless Stair**, which ascended “from the lowest dungeon to the highest peak”,^[4] where it terminated within **Durin’s Tower**, carved from the solid rock at the tip of **Zirakzigil**.

The West Gate and the Great Gates remained the only two known exits from Khazad-dûm, which proved fortunate during the **War of the Elves and Sauron** in the middle of the Second Age: the Dark Lord’s victorious host in Eregion was unexpectedly distracted by a powerful assault of dwarves from Khazad-dûm, who subsequently retreated behind **Narvi**’s impregnable doors after their purpose was achieved. Afterwards, **Sauron** harboured deep hatred for Khazad-dûm and ordered his Orcs to trouble **Durin**’s folk at every turn, even though “the halls of Khazad-dûm were too deep and strong and filled with a people too numerous and valiant for Sauron to conquer from without”.^[4] Despite this, “its people began to dwindle” from this time,^[4] possibly due to the loss of foodstuffs that had been provided by Men in the vales of **Anduin**.

1.1.4 Third Age

With the defeat of Sauron, Khazad-dûm was able to recover somewhat, and it was not until 1300 years later that the Longbeards came under renewed attacks by Orcs.^[4] By that time, the more easily accessible veins of *mithril* had become exhausted, and eventually, in the year 1980, the miners of Khazad-dûm delved so deep that they disturbed or released a Balrog, an ancient Maia loyal to Morgoth, forgotten, and dreadfully powerful. This balrog of Morgoth killed King **Durin VI** in that year, and in the following year **Náin**, his son. The Dwarves were unable to defeat **Durin’s Bane**, or even drive it away, for steel

and stone had no effect on the ancient being, and so were forced to flee their ancient home, relocating to **Erebor**. Khazad-dûm was deserted, and the elves renamed it Moria. Thereafter, Orcs of the Misty Mountains made Moria their home.

Many centuries later, in 2790, driven from Erebor by the dragon **Smaug**, **Thrór**, heir of Durin, attempted to re-enter his ancestral home despite warnings not to. He was slain by the Orc chieftain **Azog**, a murder that precipitated The **War of the Dwarves and Orcs** culminating in a bloody battle called the **Battle of Azanulbizar** outside Moria's eastern gates nine years later. The Dwarves were victorious and Azog himself was beheaded by **Dáin II Ironfoot** before the great orc could reach the safety of the gates, but the Dwarves had suffered great losses and remained unwilling to face Durin's Bane. Casualties were so high that the dwarves were unable to craft sufficient **crypts** for the slain, as was their wont, and were forced instead to burn their dead. The felling of trees to accomplish this was so great that the Valley of Azanulbizar (the "**Dimrill Dale**") was forever deforested. Those slain were honoured in future years with the appellation "Burned Dwarf". After this **Pyrrhic victory**, **Thrór's** son **Thráin II** attempted to re-enter the Mines, but **Dáin** stopped him and prophesied that some power other than the Dwarves must come before Durin's folk could return to Moria.

Towards the close of the **Third Age** a few generations later, the dwarf **Balin** led a company to reopen the city, including **Flói**, **Óin**, **Ori**, **Frár**, **Lóni**, and **Náli**, although Balin's mission was against **King Dáin's** wishes. At first all went well, but after five years the colony was destroyed by Orcs. King **Dáin** was then visited twice by a messenger from **Mordor**, offering to return the remaining three of the **Seven dwarf rings** and the realm of Moria, if **Dáin** would cooperate in finding the **One Ring**. The offer was refused, but it is not known whether Sauron "the base master of treachery",^[4] had any power over Durin's Bane.

The **Fellowship** reluctantly passed through Moria in 3019, and although the Great Gates lay shattered by this date, they passed beyond Narvi's doors in the west only with difficulty and in great peril. Many of the long deserted lower Deeps had become flooded and inaccessible, and the Fellowship were gambling that most of its Orcs had been killed in the **Battle of Five Armies** a few decades earlier. After reaching the **Chamber of Mazarbul** towards the end of their journey, the Fellowship were attacked there by many Orcs, before being approached by Durin's Bane itself. **Gandalf** confronted the Balrog on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm, near the remains of the Eastern Gates, where the two duelled briefly before plunging together into the abyss beneath it, allowing the rest of the Fellowship to escape. Though Gandalf and the Balrog survived the fall, both perished in the subsequent epic duel from the primordial depths below Moria to the tip of **Zirakzigil**, which ultimately demolished both the tower and the top of the Stair. Gandalf was afterwards resurrected as **Gandalf the White**.

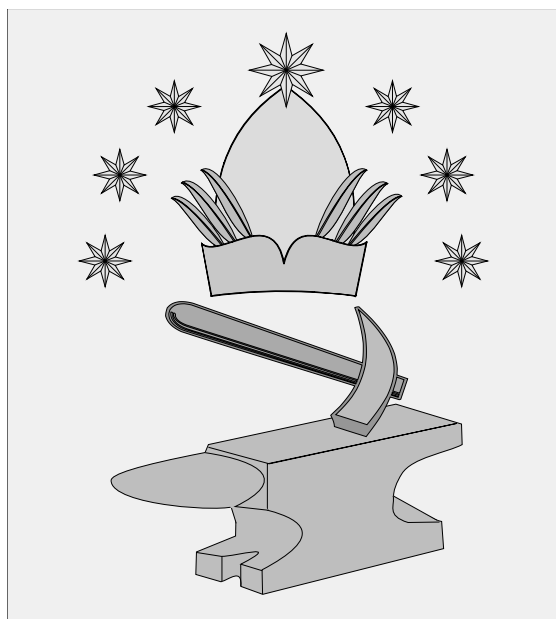
1.1.5 Fourth Age

Following their exile from Khazad-dûm, the Longbeard dwarves always yearned for their homeland, even after more than a thousand years had passed; **Azanulbizar** became "the deep-shadowed valley which we cannot forget",^[4] just as they felt compelled to continue incorporating "the image of those mountains into many works of metal and stone, and into many songs and tales. They stand tall in our dreams..^[4]"

With the death of the **Balrog**, the way was at last clear for the Longbeards to reclaim the Dwarrowdelf however, and it is told that a few centuries into the **Fourth Age**, **Durin VII** – a descendant (some sources say the son) of **Thorin III Stonehelm** – at last led his people back to their longed-for ancient homeland, retrieving what they could of Khazad-dûm's once-mighty riches.

1.2 Geographic features

1.2.1 West-door



Durin's emblem as described on the Doors of Durin

The **Doors of Durin**, also called the **West-door** or the **West-gate** of Moria, were created in the **Second Age** by the Dwarf **Narvi**, as the western entrance to Khazad-dûm. In these times, they stood open and were guarded by a doorwarden, allowing free and friendly trade between the Elves and the Dwarves.

The doors bore a design engraved in *ithildin*, which mirrored only starlight and moonlight. When the moon was out in full and ancient words long-forgotten were spoken, fine silver lines would appear, outlining the secret door. The designs on the arch, which were made by the Elf **Celebrimbor**, included a hammer and an anvil (the em-

blems of Durin); a crown and seven stars; two trees surmounted by crescent moons; and a single star (the Star of the House of **Fëanor**). The inscription at the top of the arch read: “Ennyn Durin aran Moria. Pedo mellon a minno” – “The Doors of Durin, Lord of Moria. Speak, friend, and enter.”

In the original novel *The Fellowship of the Ring*, a comment by Merry led Gandalf to think that the message was actually intended literally: “Say ‘friend’ and enter.” He then spoke the Elvish word for “friend” (*mellon*) and the doors opened. In the 2001 film, though, **Frodo** had the inspiration to ask for that word and saw it as a riddle.

Shortly after Gandalf opened the doors, the **Watcher in the Water** attacked the Fellowship as they entered the Mines, ripping down the holly trees that flanked the doors and barricading the gate; the Watcher also shut the doors leaving the Fellowship trapped in Moria. In the film, the Watcher caused a cave-in instead, apparently destroying the gate.

1.2.2 East-gate

The East-gate of Moria was known as the Dimrill Gate.

The Dimrill Gate had two great doors that hung from tall doorposts. Gandalf entered Moria through the Dimrill Gate while searching for Thráin II who disappeared in 2845. **Aragorn** also passed through the Dimrill Gate during his journeys in Middle-earth.^[4]

Gollum entered the Dimrill Gate in August 3018 and made his way through Moria to the West-gate. The Fellowship entered Moria through the West-gate on January 13, 3019, and journeyed eastward followed by Gollum. Gandalf confronted the Balrog on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm and fell into the abyss. Aragorn led the others out of Moria through the Dimrill Gate.

1.2.3 Chamber of Mazarbul

See also: **Book of Mazarbul**

The **Chamber of Mazarbul**, the chamber of records, was a room in Moria containing the Tomb of **Balin**. It was located to the right of a pathway that branched off the north end of the Twenty-first hall. When the Fellowship found the chamber as they passed through Moria, Balin’s tomb was located inside it, and a bright shaft of sunlight streamed in from outside the mountain to land directly on the tomb. There were two stone doors leading into the chamber. Many deep recesses were cut into the chamber rock containing chests that had been recently looted by the orcs inhabiting Moria. In one of these was found the **Book of Mazarbul**. The book told of Balin’s expedition to Moria. The last words in the book were written by Ori and he wrote: “We have barred the gates, but can not hold them for long. We cannot get out. They have

taken the Bridge and the Second Hall. **Frár** and **Lóni** and **Náli** fell there. The pool is up to the wall at the West-gate. The **Watcher in the Water** took **Óin**. We cannot get out. The end comes. Drums, drums in the deep. They are coming.” It was in the Chamber of Mazarbul that the Fellowship engaged in a brief fight with a band of Moria orcs and where **Gandalf** made his first stand against the Balrog.^[4]

The Chamber’s depiction in **Peter Jackson’s** *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* film is loosely based on the description in the books; however the walls are covered with inscriptions in **Khuzdul** and the **Common Speech** not found in Tolkien’s work,^[7] and the doors to the chamber are made of wood rather than stone.

1.2.4 Durin’s Bridge

The *Bridge of Khazad-dûm* is a narrow stone bridge crossing a chasm within the eastern gates of Moria. It lends its name to Chapter 5 in Book II of *The Lord of the Rings*, in which Gandalf referred to it as **Durin’s Bridge**.^[8]

The bridge was built to guard the East Gate of Khazad-dûm. It narrowly spanned a deep chasm built under the high arches common in Khazad-dûm. This gave the bridge powerful defensive value, for if an enemy were to breach the East Gate of Khazad-dûm, he would be forced to cross the span of the Bridge (some fifty feet) in single file line, exposing the crossing enemy to the arrows of the Dwarven defenders.^[8]

The Eastern end of the bridge connected to the First Hall and through that toward the East Gate of Khazad-dûm. The Western end of the bridge connected to the superstructure of the main city itself.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, the eponymous Fellowship were forced to seek a path through Moria, long since abandoned by Durin’s Folk. Through the course of this journey, the Fellowship encountered **Durin’s Bane**, a balrog that had survived the destruction of **Thangorodrim**.^[8]

Seeing that the Fellowship was over matched, **Gandalf** challenged the Balrog on the span of the Bridge of Khazad-dûm. In the course of this fight, Gandalf shattered the Bridge (and with it, his staff), allowing the rest of the Fellowship to flee out of Moria by the Eastern Gate as he was dragged into the depths.^[8]

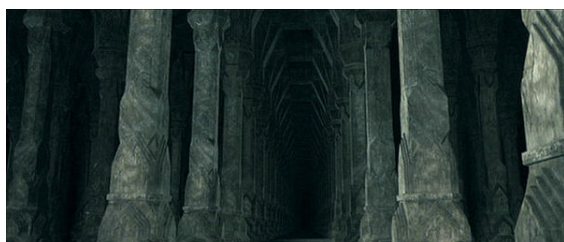
1.2.5 Endless Stair

The Endless Stair rose from the lowest dungeon of Moria to **Durin’s Tower** at the summit of **Celebdil**. The Endless Stair was of such legendary status among Dwarves that some considered that it had never existed, but **Gandalf** confirmed its existence to **Gimli** when he recounted his battle with **Durin’s Bane** (a balrog). **Durin’s Tower** and the top of the Stair were destroyed in that struggle. The

height of the Stair is not known, but Gandalf said that it climbed many thousands of steps in an unbroken spiral.^[9] The Stair would have to be of truly mythical proportions indeed, as it allowed Gandalf and the Balrog to travel from a subterranean lake underneath a chasm several thousand feet up to the top of one of the tallest mountains in Middle-earth.

2 Adaptations

2.1 Film



The 21st Hall, now abandoned, as seen in Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

Peter Jackson's portrayal of Moria in his *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* movie was mostly inspired by Alan Lee's illustrations. Apart from the bridge spanning the chasm, its architecture consists entirely of polygons and contains no curves.

2.2 Computer games

The roguelike computer game *Moria* was modelled on *The Lord of the Rings* events. The goal in the game is to reach the bottom of a maze-like simulation of the Mines of Moria and kill a Balrog. Moria has also been featured in board games such as the *Lord of the Rings* (board game) created by Reiner Knizia.

Several other roguelikes and MUDs feature Moria as a dungeon similar to the one described in the book, usually containing a creature akin to a Balrog.

The first expansion pack of the MMORPG *The Lord of the Rings Online* named *Mines of Moria* takes place almost entirely in Moria, which has several levels. The uppermost is the path of Durin's Way, which pierces the mountain to reach the cliffs of Zirak-Zigil. The main levels of Moria span from the Doors of Durin to Dolven-View, Zelem-Melek, Nud-Melek and the East doors, known as the First Hall. Further down in the subterranean realm are the Silvertine Lodes and the Redhorn Lodes, and the furthest depths contain the submerged Water-Works, the fiery Flaming Deep, and the Foundations of Stone, where Gandalf and the Balrog fought before ascending the Endless Stair.

3 Further reading

- Dickerson, Matthew (2006). "Moria". In Drout, Michael D. C.. *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. Routledge. pp. 438–439. ISBN 0-415-96942-5.

4 See also

- Dwarf (Middle-earth)
- Durin's folk
- Eregion

5 References

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- [3] Tolkien, J. R. R. (1996), Christopher Tolkien, ed., *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 0-395-82760-4
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- [9] *The Two Towers*, "The White Rider".

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