

But the only sounds they heard were the echos of falling water-droplets and the shuffling of their own feet.

The minutes ticked on without incident, and the company soon left the cavernous room behind, moving into another tunnel-like passageway to the right. Every few minutes thereafter, they came to a side tunnel or division in the main passage, whereupon Grey Wolf would call a brief halt while he and Crow Foot inspected the walls or floor before continuing one way or the other.

On and on they went, farther and farther into the inky depths of Thunder Cave, carefully making their way through the maze of tunnels with their meager light. As they moved single file behind their guides, the heavy silence was broken only by their footfalls and the occasional whispers of Grey Wolf and Crow Foot as they determined the proper direction. The sound of dripping water had ceased and, though the air was still moist and cool, the ground at least was dry.

Curiously, now and then the ceiling directly above them would disappear entirely in a round, gaping hole that appeared to tunnel straight up into the mountain — to what distance it was impossible to tell by lantern light.

Gradually the air began to feel less chilled and stale, as if someone had momentarily opened a window hidden somewhere in the blackness — though the effect might have been caused by the warmth of the travelers' own exertion. The tunnels, too, had begun to change, no longer rough and rocky, but worn, rounded, and uniform — as if made by the passing of a huge stone ball. Even the floor was curved, so that the six friends were forced to walk directly in the middle of the passageway, which was just high enough for Wigwah's head.

And still the slope continued downward.

Though they seemed to be the only living creatures in Thunder Cave, Wigwah began to have the uneasy feeling that they were being observed. This he kept to himself, however, not wishing to alarm the others. All the same, he resolved to keep as alert as possible.

After considerable time, the floor of the cave began to level out and the tunnel emptied into a large hall, its walls and ceiling covered by elaborate, but dry, rock formations. No other passageways could be seen leading from the spacious room.

They had reached a dead-end.

Then, in the center of the far wall, they perceived the dim outline of what appeared to be a huge door.

"*There. See? Big-door-to-Basement-of-Mountain!*" proclaimed Grey Wolf triumphantly.