

# PROBLEM?

## (A TROLL ADVENTURE)

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Short Gamebook Fiction

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# Problem? (A Troll Adventure)

"Troll? What fegging troll?"

Right now, you are not a happy adventurer.

One moment, there you were, sorting your riches from looting the city of Bane. Riches you'd had to fight to obtain. Well... riches you'd had to tag along into a besieged city to obtain. The next moment, you were surrounded by the tell-tale red fog which portends a Royal Teleportation. And then here you were, in the throne room of Queen Mary Sue herself.

*Sans* loot.

And *not amused*.

You should really act all respectful, what with how Queen Mary Sue has more hit points than anyone in the realm, a broom cupboard full of magic weapons, and the unique ability to teleport people to and from any point in her kingdom. But fegg it.

"Well", the Queen announces, "one was going about one's business, when up pops a troll with a giant magnet, huge grin on its face and schwoopy arms everywhere. It spins the magnet around, and all one's royal jewellery goes flying away! Then it asks one if one is a mad bro, whatever that means, and vanishes in a puff of smoke! Well, of course one got out one's magic orb, and one finds the thing is on the Isle of Trolls. Do be a good little player-character and go fetch it for me, won't you? *Pretty please.*"

You get the distinct feeling that this is a trick question. As in, one where "no" is not an answer. Or rather, not an answer compatible with keeping your head on your shoulders.

"Great! So here's what's missing." She begins reeling off a list of treasures taken by the troll.

"So you're going to teleport me right over there, then?"

The Queen looks a little sad. "Well, one *would*, of course, but the Isle of Trolls is outside my spell's teleport range."

"Well, that's fine. I'll just take a boat across the Bay of Sharks."

"Ah. Well, the trouble is, all the ships are grounded. The trade winds which carry the ships across the sea have mysteriously ceased. It's been like this for months. Wreaks havoc with trade, and the size of one's treasury. The royal astrologist says it's because Uranus is in Pisces."

Pies in Uranus, whatever. "So I'll just use oars."

"Oh, haven't you heard about the great oak plague?" You shake your head. "Well, a few years back, all the oaks in one's kingdom were infested with bark beetles. Some witchcraft I suspect. One beheaded a few necromancers and it stopped. Anyway – we've been short of oars ever since then."

*Well isn't that convenient. Or in your case, inconvenient. Almost like some malicious deity is making your fate as difficult as possible. God is trolling me, you think.*

*Do oars even have to be made of oak?*

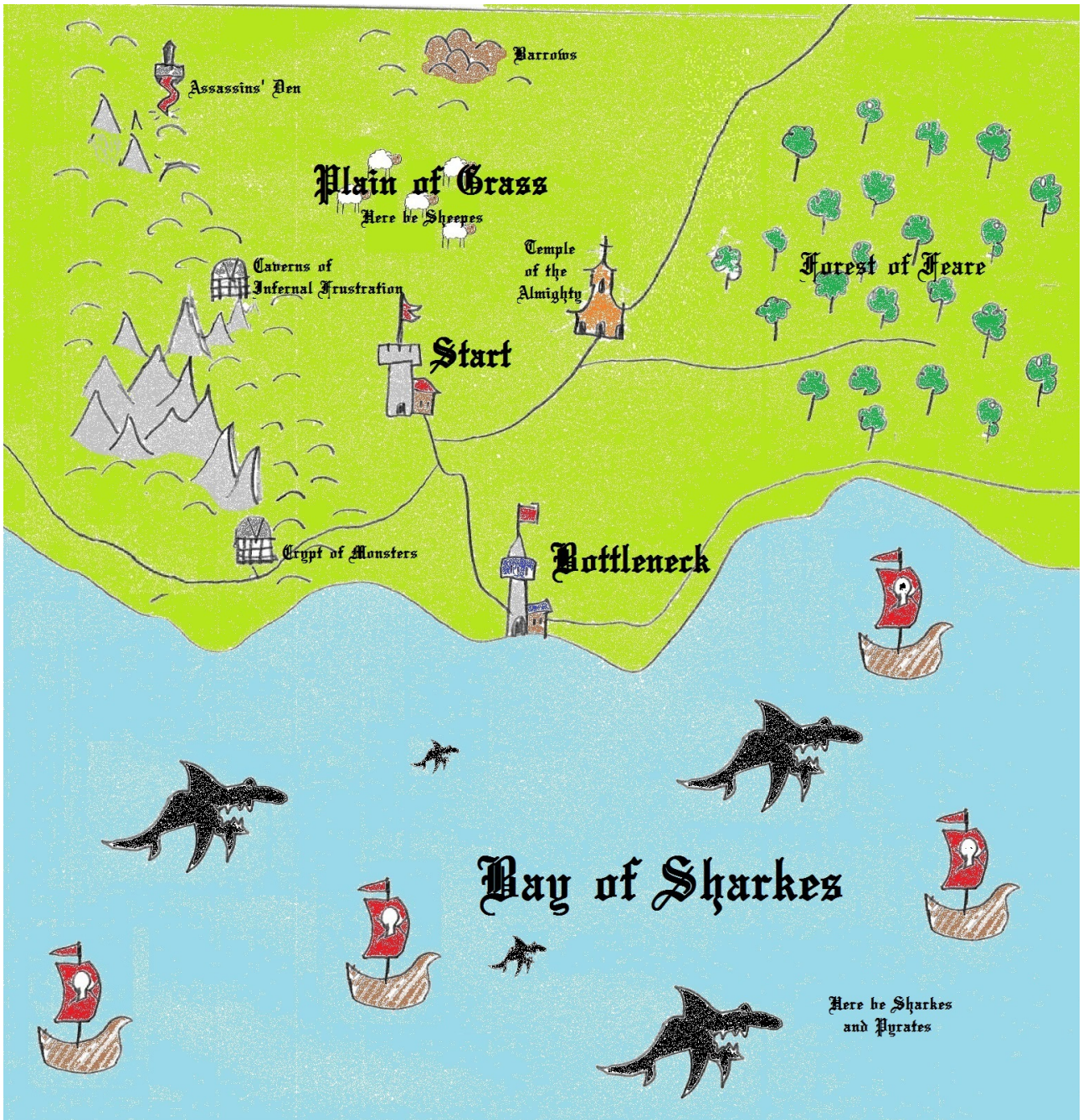
*"So of course, the only person who can reach the Bay of Trolls is a scheming adventurer like *you* – and I'm sure it'll take all your wits and strength."*

*You are scheming how to get out of this quest, when a thought occurs to you. Maybe the annoying troll has some other shiny things hanging around its cave. And if not – who's to say the Queen will notice a missing tiara or two?*

*"You're on", you say.*

*"Splendid!" announces the Queen, as the red smoke again surrounds you and your vision clears...*





Here be ye Mappe,  
being a true Likenessse of  
the Landes of the South of  
the Realm of Her Highness  
the Queen, Mary Sue, the  
Bay of Sharkes and the  
Island of Trolles





## Rules

In this gamebook, you play the role of an adventurer. All you'll need are two regular dice (D6), a pencil and a copy of the Action Sheet.

Since you've been teleported away without warning (and not at all for any sneaky metagamey reasons), you start the adventure with the minimum of equipment. You carry a sword, which has an attack rating of 1. You also carry a backpack, which can store **up to ten** items you find on your travels. Right now, it is empty. Except for money, weapons and armour, all items in this adventure are carried in the backpack, and take up space there.

You also have some money, kept in the pockets of your clothes. Roll both dice and add 10 (giving a number between 12 and 22)– this is how many Gold Pieces you carry.

You also need to calculate your **hit points**. This is the number of points of damage you can take before you kick the bucket, run down the curtain, and join the holy choir. Roll both dice and add 30 (giving a number between 32 and 42) – this is your original and maximum hit points. This is also your current hit points score at the start of the adventure. Your hit points can go up and down, but they may never exceed your maximum (though on rare occasions, the maximum itself might be raised).

## Combat

When you face an adversary, you and your opponent will have different attack ratings. Your attack rating is the rating of the **single weapon** you use in combat, plus any bonuses you pick up for armour, traits, etc. *You may only wield one weapon at a time* – this will normally be the weapon with the highest attack rating. However, you may wear *as many pieces of armour as you like, but only one on each part of your body* – you can wear a cloak and a helmet, but not two cloaks or two helmets. Spare armour or weapons (additional to those worn or wielded) each take up 1 place in your backpack unless otherwise stated.

When fighting in combat, subtract your opponent's attack rating from yours – this is your combat ratio, which can be positive or negative. If your attack rating is the same as the enemy's, the combat ratio is 0.

Roll a die for whoever attacks first (unless the text says otherwise, it's you). Then roll for the adversary. Take it in turns rolling a die each, until someone is dead or the conditions set in the text are met (some opponents will flee if you reduce their hit points to a certain level).

If you're attacking an opponent, you do the damage on the die, adding a positive or subtracting a negative combat ratio. So if you have a combat ratio of -2 (minus two), and you roll a 5, you do 3 damage. If you have a combat ratio of 1, and you roll a 5, you do 6 damage.

If your opponent is attacking you, you do the damage on the die, subtracting a positive or adding a negative combat ratio. So if you have a combat ratio of -2 (minus two), and you roll a 5, your opponent does 7 damage. If you have a combat ratio of 1, and you roll a 5, you take 4 damage.

Neither you nor your opponent can do less than 1 damage – so if the combat ratio deduction takes the damage down to zero or below, it counts as doing 1 damage. On the other side, damage can go as high as the scores allow.

If your hit points ever reach zero – in combat or at any other time – **you are dead** and should roll a new character and restart the adventure from section 1.

As you will probably have guessed from the introduction, this adventure is tongue-in-cheek. Some parts parody the structural style of classic gamebook writers, and even some of the instadeaths are not meant entirely seriously. The difficulty level for a beginning player is fairly high. Playtesting has confirmed that it is easy to complete on the perfect path, and also completable on less than optimal paths. However, it is unlikely that you will stumble across the right things to do on a first try. It is advisable to print out several copies of the Action Sheet to help with repeat playings. If you are short of time, frustrated with replaying or ready to ragequit, but you want to know how the gamebook is structured, what the optimal path is, or how the story ends, read the *hints and tips* provided at the end of the book.

However, the author would like to discourage you from going there straight away – please try the gamebook as it's meant to be played, a few times first. If you play through a few times and take note of what choices work well and which do not, the adventure will become cumulatively easier.

Wisdom of the flying spaghetti monster: this gamebook is designed so that any character, however weak their initial dice rolls, can successfully complete it with good choices. Unlike some other people who include statements of this kind, we actually mean it. Some of the places you can visit are essential to the adventure, whereas others are dead ends or traps. The order in which you visit locations may affect your experience there. During this adventure, you will have the opportunity to pick up or buy a range of different backpack items. Some items are vital to successful completion, some are only useful for ephemeral purposes, some are of no use at all, and a few are downright harmful, so be selective in what you pick up and keep.

Got it?

OK, so let's begin...

**ACTION SHEET****Attack rating:** 1*Include bonuses (and deductions) from 1 weapon, all armour, and traits***Hit points**

MAXIMUM:

Current:

*Hit points cannot exceed their maximum level. 0 = dead***Backpack***Maximum 10 items. If new items are bought or found, choose which item(s) to discard.**Spare weapons and spare armour also take up spaces here.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

**Money**

Gold Pieces:

**Main Weapon**

Sword, attack rating 1

*May be swapped at any time outside combat, if other weapons are available. Spare weapons must be kept in the Backpack. No dual wielding.***Armour****Traits****Notes and clues**

## 1

As the red haze clears, you look around to try to determine your location. Through the haze, you see cobbled streets and an indiscernible flurry of movement. The smell of untreated sewage and animal excrement is clear. This being a passable imitation of the high Middle Ages, you have never learnt to find such smells offensive. The noise of children, pigs, and the clatter of wheels on cobbles tells you that this is one of the kingdom's small towns. Your sudden appearance is surprising, but not *that* surprising – this is a fantasy world rich in magic, after all. People look up from their work or play for a few seconds, and then carry on with their business. A small dog barks at you until someone calls it away.

As you gather your senses, you recognise the distinct red-straw roofs and marbled stone walls of the town of Start. This small market town nestles in the foothills of the Override Mountains, and besides a few craftsmen, mainly serves as a place for the peasantry to sell their wares. The Queen has helpfully placed you within easy walking distance of the object of your quest. By no means the biggest or richest town in the kingdom, Start is less than a day's walk from the port of Bottleneck, where merchants and smugglers bring trade goods for sale in the kingdom. Or at least they would do, were it not for the conveniently inconvenient weather conditions.

With few clues about where to start, you consider the possible ways forward. The Isle of Trolls is located across the sea, but you will have to find a way to cross the sea without wind or oars.

If you want to visit the town market to purchase equipment, turn to **61**.

If you want to visit the Assassins' Den, turn to **36**.

If you want to walk to the Temple of the Almighty and ask for aid on your quest, turn to **82**.

If you would like to explore the Forest of Fear, turn to **89**.

If you would like to head directly for Bottleneck, turn to **88**.

If you would like to raid the Crypt of Monsters, turn to **90**.

If you would like to search for clues in the Caverns of Infernal Frustration, turn to **6**.

If you would like to cross the Plain of Grass and head for the Barrows, turn to **97**.

## 2

You hold your breath for as long as you dare, and strain your muscles to put as much distance as you can between yourself and the ship. Unfortunately, you are still within range of the pirate ship's underwater cannon. As you surface for air, you hear a shout go up on the pirate ship, as the crew run to man the weapons.

The pirates are able to fire three cannonballs at you before you get out of range. For each of the three balls, roll 1d6. The results are as follows:

1-3 the cannonball misses you by a large margin. The pirates' aim is clearly not helped by their eyepatches and hook hands – you have been lucky this time, and lose no hit points.

4-5 the cannonball passes narrowly by. You avoid a body blow, but the force of its passing knocks the wind out of you and burns your skin, as you are caught in the force of the shot. Roll another die and **deduct this many hit points**.

6 the cannonball strikes you directly. It passes straight through your chest, leaving a perfect circular hole which quickly cauterizes. You look down through the hole and see the sea floor beneath you, and



utter a redundant “fegg” as the life slips from you. You are dead. Problem?

If you survive the cannon barrage, but you have suffered at least 1 wound, you manage to escape the pirates but attract the attention of sharks. Roll 1 die and divide it by half, rounding fractions up (for a number between 1 and 3); this is how many sharks you must fight before you reach the Isle of Trolls. Each shark has the following abilities:

**Shark**            **Attack rating +2**            **Hit points 8**

If you survive the pirates and the sharks, you finally manage to reach the island.

Go to 50.

3

Still the boring railroad keeps going. You are getting closer to the heart of the mine. The piles of rock are more frequent now. Still the convenient torches line the walls. A group of scenic bats hang from the ceiling, without regard for how they could possibly get to the surface through miles of mineshaft and several doors.

Another tempting passage leads off to the left.

If you would like to explore the passage, turn to 34.

If you continue down the interminable mineshaft, turn to 20.

4

The substance has a strange, earthy taste, and the consistency of thick molten chocolate. It reminds you of chocolate mixed with coffee. As you gulp it down, you feel a strange sense of wellness come over you, and you realise that it is some kind of powerful healing potion created by the elves using their life force. **Restore your hit points to their maximum level.**

Thanking the elves for their blessing, you may now explore the hut (86) or continue into the forest (46).

5

Deciding there is no way across the ocean for now, you decide to search one of the other locations, and wearily trudge back up the road to the town of Start. The distance is not great, and the road takes you through the countryside, past fields of wheat and barley, rye and vegetables.

These are troubled times. On the way back to start, there is a chance you will meet an adversary of a wandering monster. Roll 1 die to see what, or who, you encounter:

1-3 no encounter.

You make the journey from Bottleneck to Start without encountering anything more dangerous than chickens, squirrels, and the occasional farm-hand.

4            **Highwayman**            **Attack rating +2**            **Hit points 15**

Trade routes are a magnet for the desperate and the greedy, and the route from Bottleneck is also the route taken by traders bringing items for sale from over the sea. Highwaymen hide along the road between Bottleneck and Start, attacking merchants and traders and levying a “toll” on their goods.

With trade disrupted by the lack of wind, they have fallen on hard times, and start to target random passers-by such as yourself. This is not a fight to the death; the Highwayman will run away if his Hitpoints fall to 5 or fewer.

**5      Cougar                      Attack rating +3      Hit points 8**

Wild cats are native to the surrounding hills, but farming and mining activities have forced them out of their old hunting grounds, onto the fertile plains. They usually target livestock and wild deer, but the braver and more desperate will attack lone travellers such as yourself. This wild cat is out for a quick meal. If you reduce its hitpoints to 2 or fewer, it will run away.

**6      Werewolf                      Attack rating +1      Hit points 20**

Once a human being, this creature has undergone a steady transformation. Infected with the curse of lycanthropy, at first it changed into its wolf form only on full moons. Over time, its infection has deepened, and now it wanders the land night and day, hunting for prey to eat – or infect with its deadly plague. This is a fight to the death. If you sustain 8 or more hit points of damage, roll 2 dice at the end of the combat. On a roll of 2 or 12, you have contracted Lycanthropy. If you do not find a healing potion within the next five sections, you will become a werewolf and your adventure is over.

If you survive the encounter, or roll for no encounter, you eventually arrive safely at Start.

Go to **78**.

**6**

The Caverns of Infernal Frustration are a maze of natural underground tunnels weaving their way beneath the Override Mountains. There are many rumours of strange treasures buried beneath, but nobody has returned with such treasures. Indeed, it is rare that those who venture into the caverns ever return at all.

Passing through the cavern entrance, you stand inside a deep shaft leading gently down into the ground, out of sight. Sunlight floods into this cavern from the cave entrance nearby, while luminous cave plants mark out the passages ahead. Continuing onwards and downwards, you come to a fork in the passage.

If you wish to go left, turn to **28**.

If you wish to go right, turn to **73**.

If you change your mind and go back to town, turn to **78**.

**7**

The craggy rock walls and slight upward slope of the side tunnel provide few clues as to its origin or purpose. Stray picks and heaps of rock suggest that it was used in the process of mining ore. The seam must be exhausted, for all you can see is rock. The side tunnel lacks the arch supports of the main passage, and as you crawl along it, you occasionally feel small stones or soil falling onto your back. You get the feeling that straying from the railroad is rather risky. Finally you come to a dead end, with no sign of treasure or clues. Dejectedly, you make your way back to the main route.

Return to the main route at **74**.

8

As the number clicks into place, the barrow door creaks open. Inside, you expect to find a sarcophagus and treasure, but the scene which greets you is much less pleasant.

At some time during the centuries, the barrow has already been looted. There are no signs of treasure, or the remains of the owner. Instead, wild animals have taken refuge here. Shards of rock and clutches of earth are scattered around the room. A clutch of giant grubs, each a foot or more in length, nestle in one corner. You are about to leave, when you see a slight movement from a corner of the room. You focus your eyes to make out the shape of a Giant Chameleon, six feet in length, intent on feasting on the grubs. Its colour-changing skin is almost invisible against the earthy wall of the barrow. You have disturbed its feast, and now it intends to make a meal of you. Hissing, the creature advances.

## BATTLE

**Giant Chameleon**      **Attack rating 0**      **Hit points 15**

If you win the battle, you may skin the creature with your sword, and take the **Chameleon Skin** if you wish – it takes up two spaces in your backpack.

If you wish to take this skin to the village tailor and enquire into making armour from it, turn to **35**. Otherwise, return to town at **78**.

9

After the final tap, you stop and wait for the chest to respond. But it does not open.

Instead, a silvery fanged mouth materialises in its surface. The mouth is clearly magical, with inch-long, pointed teeth protruding from a disembodied jaw with no eyes or nose, which is connected to the chest by the semblance of a wrist. It looks like a cross between a viper and a monstrous hand.

With the speed of a snake, it darts out and bites you on the hand, sinking its immense teeth into your wrist. You let out a shriek at the sudden pain. **Lose 4 hit points.**

It then retracts itself into the chest, which returns to its previous, inert state. You examine the surface for any signs of the monster, but the surface is perfectly smooth once more.

Certain you counted the words correctly, you are disappointed that the chest did not open, and decide that it was probably some kind of cruel joke or trap, left here to startle or harm intruders.

Go to **15** and choose another option.

10

After the final tap, the magical glow of the chest begins to dim, and a thin line forms about an inch from the top. Slowly, the outline of a lid forms. Initially taking the shape of a line of light, the outline gradually solidifies into a solid line through the wood, before the light fades away completely.

Its spell of opening dissipated, the chest is now nothing more than a simple wooden box. You lift the lid, and find inside the box a strange helmet. Shaped in the rounded style popular with crusading armies, and made of a strangely-coloured variety of iron, the helmet is light and easy to lift. From its top protrudes an unsightly spring, atop which hangs a small magnet. The helmet is a good fit for your

head, although you feel a little silly with the magnet bouncing to and fro as you walk.

If you wish to keep and wear the **Magnet Helmet**, mark it on your Action Chart as Armour (it does not modify your attack rating, but it may come in handy lately).

Pleased with your discovery, you turn your attention to other treasures. Turn to **15**.

**11**

WELL, replies the voice, IF THE ALMIGHTY DOES NOT EXIST, HOW CAN HE AID YOUR QUEST?

You have to admit, he has a point. Wandering around asking for aid from non-existent beings is not going to help your quest very much. And nor does holding conversations with the non-existent voices of such beings.

Gloomily, you leave the temple and return to town.

Turn to **78**.

**12**

The pot is plain, moulded from hardened clay, and has a tapering neck like a vase. It is too heavy to lift. Looking through the rim of the pot, you think you catch a glimpse of the gleam of metal in the bottom of the container.

You are wary of traps, and of small animals such as snakes lurking inside the pot. Instead, you exert your strength to push the heavy object onto its side. It lands with a dull thump; you were half-expecting it to shatter on the ground, making the extraction of treasure easier.

Picking up the large magnet you found earlier (it's either in your Backpack or still on the floor), you point it into the pot, and the metal object comes flying out and attaches itself to the magnet. Pulling it off, you find that it is a small **Mysterious Key**, inscribed with the number 7.

If you wish to keep this Key, mark it on your Action Chart as a Backpack item.

Your poking around reveals that there is nothing else inside the pot, so you explore elsewhere.

Now turn to **15**.

**13**

You freeze in awe, staring at the abomination before you. But it does not advance and attack. Instead, the creature flails around, reaching tentacles into different parts of the room. It turns and stares right at you – and apparently through you. And then it looks away. Again the tentacles lash out, probing one of the walls of the room.

Mystified at first, you soon realise what has happened. With only one eye, the creature is not able to see three-dimensionally; it depends entirely on the colour and shape of objects to discern them. As long as you are standing still, this monster cannot see you. Your Cloak of Invisibility does not simply make you harder to find – it makes you invisible to this vile creature.

You wait for the tentacled abomination to turn its one eye away from you, whereupon you slip behind the curtain and allow it to drop back into place. You make your way quietly along the corridor, heading for the troll's door.

Go to **52**.

#### 14

As the ship's prow bears down on you, the gigantic ram extending beneath its magnet-carrying figurehead, you reach out towards it. Your arms extend as they did before, reaching through the intervening space and catching hold of the ship's prow. You contract your arm muscles while holding on firmly, and fly through the air towards the ship.

But you have left yourself in a dangerous position. As you dangle from the ship's prow, pirates run towards you, waving their cutlasses and hooked hands. You have hauled your left leg over the side of the ship before they arrive, but there is no way you can fight so many pirates. A blow from a cutlass severs one of your hands, and blood and red bologna fly everywhere. A sharp kick loosens your remaining grip, and you tumble, cursing, into the sea.

The pirates are too busy looting your empty ship to follow up on you, but your bleeding stump slows your swimming, and attracts the attention of sharks. Two sharks grab you by the legs and pull you down towards the bottom. You use your remaining hand to unsheathe your weapon, and use it to cut open the gill of one of the sharks. It swims away, trailing blood. Unfortunately, you are not experienced in underwater combat, and you also manage to smash yourself in the face. Your lungs are ready to burst, when a giant moray eel, its mouth larger than your chest, emerges from the depths and snaps its jaws around the remaining shark – taking off your leg in the process.

You scramble to the surface and inhale a lung-full of much-needed air, but the blood loss is making you dizzy, and you soon lose consciousness. Seagulls fly down and peck off your head. After a few days, your body floats ashore on the Isle of Trolls, which is as close as you'll get to your destination. Your head sinks to the bottom of the sea and lodges itself inside a random treasure chest.

You are dead.

Problem?

#### 15

You are in the treasure room. It is still the way you left it, except for any items you have taken or opened already. An inactive portal, like a black mirror, in one corner. A narrow passage leads off to one side. Various chests and pots also attract your interest. There might still be treasure here to be found.

If you have not done so already, you may examine the large chest in the centre of the room (**65**), the small chest near the suits of armour (**37**), the earthenware pot (**12**), the narrow passage (**24**) or the inactive portal (**75**).

If you have already examined all the options, turn to **68**.



**16**

The passage continues onwards. It is getting warmer as you descend deeper into the earth. Mine activity was more intense in this area, and here and there, piles of rock suggest the places where ore seams have been exhausted. In one place, you have to skirt around the remains of an overturned ore cart, which lies on its side, rusting. Mould has gathered on the inside, and is now a breeding-ground for small insects. An albino rat disappears into a crack in the wall at the sound of your approach.

This fegging mineshaft is getting boring.

There's another side tunnel here.

If you want to explore the side tunnel, go to **71**.

If you want to continue along the railroad, go to **3**.

**17**

You are bathed in luxuriant light. Your surroundings disappear as you are transported into a plane of pure golden energy. You feel a deep sense of inner peace. **Restore your hit points to the maximum.**

BEHOLD, says the voice, YOU HAVE PASSED THE TEST AND EARNED OUR AID. YOU MAY NOW WIELD THE SKILL OF A TRUE TROLLSLAYER.

The golden energy surrounds and holds you. It enters through your mouth, nose and skin, coursing through your veins.

After what seems so long, yet not long enough, the light fades and you find yourself once more inside the temple.

You reach out to explore your surroundings, and realise that your arms are now able to extend to three times their usual length. Further, the bones have become supple as reeds, allowing you to bend your arms into fabulous shapes. You move them backwards and they retract to their usual appearance. By planning your movements in advance, you can maintain the appearance of a normal human, yet use the extending arms talent when it is useful – such as in combat.

Mark the trait *Schwoopy Arms*, +1 attack rating on your Action Sheet.

This trait raises your attack rating above that provided by your current weapon. In addition, there are special circumstances where you will be given the opportunity to use the trait.

You have achieved all you can achieve at the temple.

After this healing experience, you can forego sleep and set out onto the Plain of Grass right away. If you wish to do this, go to **97**.

If you want to forego sleep and head for the Forest of Fear instead, go to **89**.

Otherwise, head back to town at **78**.

**18**

The wharf is packed with all kinds of ships and boats, from coracles and triremes to merchant craft many metres in length. Most are sailing ships, and your hopes of finding oars to steal or buy is quickly

shattered. The state of the ships tells you that few of them are currently in active use. Instead, they have been deposited here until the winds improve. The sails are tied tightly in bundles to the masts, and the ropes and chains bearing anchors are covered with seaweed and limpets; some of the ropes are clearly beginning to fray.

The wharf is almost abandoned, save for the ever-present gulls which squawk and fly off at your approach. You are contemplating whether you could steal or buy a ship when a morose merchant emerges from one of the larger vessels. He attempts to strike up a conversation.

“Nice day for a trip out to sea, what? Shame the winds won't take us far. I have ten tons of copper to shift over to Patami, and I'd loan my ship to anyone who could find a way to get us there.”

Loan his ship, hmmm?

This is starting to sound like your kind of deal. A shame you don't have any wind magic or oars.

If you possess a Large Magnet, go to **54**.

Otherwise, you have no way to get across the sea.

If you wish to check out the town market, go to **41**.

If you are stuck, and wish to go somewhere else, you'll have to walk back to Start – go to **5**.

## 19

The cliff face is steep, although a narrow trail runs up it to the top. You can see banana trees at the top of the cliff, standing out clearly from the palms on the ground, and you wonder why they have grown in such a place. Is it superior climate conditions, or just artistic license? You will never know, and right now, you're more interested in whether there's treasure to be found.

The cliff wall is formidable, and you see nothing to induce you to attempt to climb it. Seabirds nest in niches in the cliff face, and some of them squawk warnings not to approach their eggs. But you have more luck in exploring the ground level. In an inlet in the cliffside made by tidal corrosion, you see a small cave.

You want to explore it, right?

Inside the cave, next to a small rock-pool, you find the remains of an traveller, his rusty sword lying at his side, his leather clothes now rotting away. He was probably here adventuring like you, and fell foul of some unseen danger in this cave. Your worries about possible traps do not deter you from searching his body. Like any good adventurer, you loot the remains of his backpack and pockets, finding nothing of use except a **Mysterious Key** bearing the number 30. You may add this as a backpack item if you wish.

You can see nothing else of interest in the cave, but the wall opposite you looks somehow unnatural, and you wonder if it is a false front concealing treasures.

If you wish to investigate the stone wall, go to **57**.

Otherwise, you may swim out to sea (**95**), climb the cliff using the cliff-side path (**43**), or explore the forest (**76**).

20

Finally – *at fegging last* – you have reached the end of the mineshaft. The rails end in a solid metal block, against which several rusted wagons are queued. Each is loaded with some kind of stone. Several skeletons suggest that the process of loading was still underway when disaster caught the miners unawares. Deep purple glints in the walls provide clues as to the magical ore being extracted here.

Besides the mineshaft from which you came, the only exit to this cavern is a wide, clearly manmade passage leading off to the left. Following the passage, you feel elation at the prospect of finding the hidden treasure, maybe undisturbed after all this time. Your good mood is shattered, however, when a skittering noise sets your spine on edge. Something is advancing towards you, along the tunnel.

The monster that dwells in this abandoned world is the product of the vile experiments of the necromancers who once worked here, and it is advancing on you now, following the scent of raw flesh. Creeping rapidly towards you is a horrific creature like nothing you have ever seen. At the front it is almost human-like, with the head, torso and forearms of a man, though in place of its mouth it has gigantic clacking mandibles, and its body is covered with a scaly hide. It wields a strange red sword in each hand. From the waste onwards, stretching back down the tunnel, the creature has the segmented red-gold plates and body-sections of a vast centipede. Each segment was once a dwarf, and the legs protruding from the sides of each segment are still visibly humanoid, some even ending in booted feet. The thing must be at least thirty feet in length, though luckily only its front end can engage you in combat.

When it catches sight of you, it advances, letting out an unearthly shriek.

#### BATTLE

**Human Centipede**    **Attack rating 1**    **Hit points 40**

If you manage to defeat this monstrosity, its humanoid forefront lets out an eerie sigh, as if released from an eternity of suffering – a sigh which echoes along the line, almost as if the living beings which made up this evil creation were breathing their last. The spell which bound it together has finally been broken, and its parts clatter lifelessly to the floor, with some segments rupturing and snapping.

You squeeze past the remains of the creature and continue to the end of the passage, where you come upon its lair. This room was once the observatory and library of the evil necromancers themselves, but it has long since been converted into a charnel-house filled with the mortal remains of the centipede's victims. None of the spellbooks or potions remain; only the shattered frames of magical contraptions reveal the chamber's original purpose. The creature has perversely collected the bones of its victims, sorting them by type and piling them in various corners of the room. There is no sign of treasure here.

You begin to wonder how the creature survived alone down here, when adventurers from the surface only occasionally managed to progress so far. A creature of its size must surely eat regularly, yet you have seen no signs of large animals in the mine. Then you remember: *a wizard did it*.

At the far side of the lair, there are three doors leading deeper into the mineworks. Gingerly you open the three doors, none of which are locked.

The first door opens onto a room. The room contains a sign bearing the inscription: *Sigilgile, eneng*

*sigeyin, kotok bash.* You can make out an exit at the far side of the room.

If you have a dictionary and wish to translate the sign, turn to **48**.

If you do not have a dictionary, and wish to enter the room anyway, turn to **81**.

The second door opens onto a narrow passageway. Swords and spikes protrude from the walls and ceiling. You intuit that this passage is some kind of gauntlet – meant only for the bravest. You can see light at the end of the tunnel. If you wish to enter this passage, turn to **29**.

The third door opens onto a boring, nondescript passage. If you wish to enter this passage, turn to **49**.

**21**

OK, you asked for it.

The moment you step through the gate, you snag a tripwire which draws it shut behind you. You hear a heavy bolt fall into place.

Dark figures appear, moving among the boulders and peeping out of caves. An arrow flies past your left shoulder. You turn to run, but there is no escape. An arrow impales itself in your shoulder, fired from an unseen spot on the hillside above. It is followed by a poison dart which cuts through your clothing and lodges itself in your hamstring. You fall to the ground in pain. Moments later, a large custard pie hits you in the face.

As you wipe away the mess from your face, you see that a rapier-wielding ninja has run forward into melee combat range. He intends to engage you in single combat, but your eyes are blurring from the effects of the poison. You reach for your weapon, but your arm muscles refuse to move. You fall to the ground, gasping for breath. Shortly afterwards, your head falls off and rolls down the hillside, and your body explodes into tiny pieces.

You are absolutely, definitely, well and truly DEAD.

Problem?

**22**

As he finishes his call, you reply loudly in the Common Tongue. You say simply and clearly that you are an adventurer seeking treasure. You are no threat to the patrol, their village, or their grasslands. You say that you are going to the cave ahead, after which you will return to the South.

Unfortunately, Ovids' grasp of the Common Tongue is rudimentary at best, and they are notoriously distrustful of strangers.

Roll a die.

If you roll 1-3, they attack you; turn to **77**.

If you roll 4-6, they believe you and leave you alone; turn to **62**.

**23**

The shadow surfaces, revealing the serrated teeth of a massive shark. You are about to thumb your nose at it, realising that it cannot reach you up here, when it leaps out the water and clamps its jaws to

the side of the ship. As it hauls itself on deck, you see that the six-foot-long monstrosity has reptilian hands and legs. You have never seen a monster of its kind, and it looks almost ridiculous, flopping its fishy body towards you on its hind legs. *It's like someone is trolling me*, you think. But its teeth and claws are deadly serious, and it intends to make a meal of you.

You draw your weapon and prepare to fight the advancing horror.

**Legged Shark Attack rating +2      Hit points 10**

If you defeat the shark, go to **60**.

**24**

This passage is the narrowest you have encountered so far in this dungeon. At its entrance, it is easily traversed; but can otherwise walk forward with no difficulty. However, as you continue along the passage, you realise that a few sections are so tight as to be barely passable. Reluctantly, you decide to leave your backpack, armour, and some of your clothes in the entrance area, so as to be able continue. Even then, you can barely squeeze through the narrowest sections of the passage, at the cost of superficial scrapes and grazes to your back.

The route descends into the bowels of the earth, and is marked by a sharp change in conditions. Down here, the air is humid and heavy with water vapour, and the heat is greater than at any point so far in your journey. The passage is also dripping with water, which runs down the walls, falls from stalactites and gathers in tiny pools wherever the floor is uneven. There are patches of moss on some of the walls, and a quick examination reveals whitish, translucent shrimp, less than half an inch in length, in some of the larger pools. More worryingly, the air feels a little intoxicating, and you start to become rather dizzy. You wonder if this is an effect of the heat and moisture, or too much excitement and too little sleep.

If you wish to continue along the strange passage, turn to **55**.

If you wish to return to the treasure room, turn to **15**.

**25**

You try to run from the creature, but two lashing tentacles catch your leg, bringing you crashing to the floor. The horrific events which transpire next will not be recounted here, but finally, slashing and hacking with your weapon, crawling ever closer to the passageway, you manage to drag yourself out of the creature's reach. As you enter the tunnel, your hand closes on what you think to be your belt, until you realise that your own belt is still in place – what you have grabbed is the remains of one of the creature's previous victims. Attached to the belt is a pouch of coins – add **20 gold pieces** to your total.

Exhausted and traumatised by your ordeal (**deduct 5 hit points**), you drag yourself onwards and eventually summon the courage to examine the troll's door.

Go to **52**.

**26**

You step through the door into a wide, square cavern carved from the rock. At once, your heart lifts at the sight of the chests, coins, statues, runic books, and weapons which take up much of the room. At last, after many perils, you have found the treasure room at the heart of this ancient mine.



You hardly know which treasures to investigate first. There is more here than you could ever hope to carry or drag to the surface, even by magical means. Quickly, you dismiss some of the items as useless or immovable. Suits of armour, of dwarven size and too heavy to carry, line one of the walls. These are clearly designed for the mine guards, and worthless to you. You also dismiss the heavier statues, which you are unable to lift. After a quick skim through, you give up on the idea of taking any of the books, as you have no way of knowing which are valuable spellbooks, and which are some dwarf's diary.

Of more interest are the coins. Unfortunately for you, these are not modern gold coins, but their pre-inflation forerunners, the ancient iron farthings. Still, you cram as many as you can into your pockets, filling them to the brim. These coins amount to **10 gold pieces**, which you may add to your Action Sheet.

Among the loose treasures, you find three other items which draw your attention: a **Heavy Golden Statuette**, a **Jewelled Mirror**, and a **Large Magnet**. If you wish to take any or all of these items, mark them on your Action Sheet as Backpack Items.

You now turn your attention to the chests and urns, and also notice a side passage at the back of the room. Is there more treasure in this direction?

Do you wish to examine:

A large metal chest in the centre of the room? Go to **65**.

A smaller chest, standing beside the suits of armour? Ho to **37**.

An earthenware pot? Go to **12**.

A narrow passageway leading off to the left? Go to **24**.

An inactive portal in the corner of the room? Go to **75**.

**27**

Room empty. Walk in room. Sudden noise. Pain in thigh. **Lose 2 hit points.**

Cry in pain. Thing is advancing. Must fight.

BATTLE

**Cave Ghoul**                      **Attack rating 1**                      **Hit points 10**

If win, thing is dead. Spit on corpse. Two coins in pocket (**2 gold pieces**). Take if want. Go through door.

Go to **83**.

**28**

The dark winding passage continues downwards, past grottos carved into the rock by flows of water long since dried up, rows of stalactites and stalagmites, and the lairs of pale-skinned beasts which eke out an existence in this underground wasteland.

You follow the tunnel in the half-light, but in the darkness, fail to see a tree root protruding through the rock. You trip and sprain your ankle. **Lose 3 hit points.**

After uttering a few obscenities, you dust yourself off and continue. You soon come to another fork.

If you wish to go left, turn to **73**.

If you wish to go right, turn to **67**.

## 29

You were expecting some difficulty here, right?

As you walk along the passage, magically powered axes and swords – still sharp after years of inertia – fly from the walls in front of you, swinging backwards and forwards at regular intervals, powered by some kind of invisible clockwork. Metal spikes rhythmically thrust themselves from the ceiling and floor. Watching the obstacles, you notice that there are gaps in the pattern, long enough to allow a runner to get through, at intervals of a few minutes. You will have to time your run right to get past each set of implements and reach the end of the corridor.

You will have to dodge **six** separate sets of blades. For each set, roll both dice and note the result:

- 2        You miscalculate badly and a swinging blade lops off your head. You are dead. Problem?
- 3-4     You miscalculate badly and a swinging blade severs a muscle in one of your limbs. Add the trait *Injured: -1 attack rating* to your Action Sheet – this deduction applies to all future combats. Deductions for multiple rolls are cumulative (if you're hit twice, it becomes a -2 deduction, etc).
- 5-6     You miscalculate and suffer a slight injury. Deduct **2 hit points**.
- 7        You dodge the blades, but trip and fall at the end of your run, as the fear and exertion get the better of you. Deduct **1 hit point**.
- 8-10    You make the run safely, barely ducking beneath the last blade in time.
- 11-12   You make the run easily, and get such an adrenaline rush that you may restore **1 hit point**.

If you successfully pass all six sets of blades, congratulations – you are seriously fegging badass. Add 4 to your *Maximum/Original* hit points (but do not restore any!). This is an increase to your constitution as a result of being badass.

If you made the entire run without picking up the trait *Injured*, then also add the trait *Badass +1 attack rating* to your Action Sheet. This bonus applies to future combats in addition to other weapon, armour and trait bonuses.

After jumping aside from the final set of swinging weapons, you find yourself in an alcove inside a plain black, circular door. With trepidation, you open the door and continue.

Go to **26**.

## 30

You pull your cloak close around you. When the lead Ovid catches sight of your cloak, he lets out a startled bleat. The patrol stops in fear, and several let out cries in their language before beginning to back away. Like sheep, Ovids are terrified of wolves, and from this distance, they cannot tell your cloak from the real thing. They back away some distance, their eyes fixed on you, before they turn and flee towards the horizon.

Turn to **62**.

**31**

The Start town marketplace is a cobbled square in the centre of town. The square has space for dozens of stalls, but today is not a market day, and the place looks almost deserted. Only a handful of the most persistent merchants – mostly traders in items of everyday use – are still attempting half-heartedly to peddle their wares.

The only items which interest you are:

**Dagger** (backup weapon, attack rating 1)      2 gp  
**Woolen Shawl** (worn – does not take up a backpack space) 1gp  
**Iron Troll Statue**      3 gp  
**Red Herring**      2 gp

If you wish to purchase any of these items, make the changes to your Action Sheet, and then turn back to **78** and make another choice (you don't have to pay for a room this time).

**32**

As you continue through the wood, the shadows darken and you begin to stumble across half-buried gravestones and stray bones which look almost human. Finally, the path peters out in a large, dark clearing. The trees close in tightly around the clearing, but the evening sun shines through a gap in the forest canopy. Among various tombstones too old and corroded to read, you see that a large stone sarcophagus has been unearthed by unknown forest predators, or perhaps its own occupant. It stands at the centre of the clearing, its lid slightly ajar. The tomb is showing signs of wear, but is still largely intact. You believe you could remove the lid with an effort of strength.

If you wish to open the sarcophagus, turn to **92**.

Otherwise, you've had enough of this spooky forest, and do not wish to be caught here after nightfall. Return to town at **78**.

**33**

Terrified of the advancing horror, you fumble in your backpack for the three keys. You pull out the first, and try it in the locks. Too big for one, too small for another, it finally slots into place, and you turn it with a satisfying click. The creature begins to slaver with a vile sound, sensing its prey may be escaping.

Fumbling through your pack once more, you pull out a second key. It is just the right size for the largest keyhole, and you are rewarded with another click. The creature is now emitting a frustrated whining. Excited at your success, you feel like turning round and blowing the monster a raspberry.

More confident now, you draw out the third key, and ram it into the final keyhole. It turns... and then sticks. *What?* You realise now that only two of the keys are correct. The third key is now jammed firmly in the final keyhole.

*I'm an idiot, you think. I come all this way, and I've brought the wrong fegging keys.*

Go to **91**.

34

A short passage leads to the ruins of a miners' dormitory. A few wooden bedframes and the remains of what might have been sacks or blankets have nearly rotted away. You are despairing of finding anything interesting here when a glint of metal catches your eye. Protruding from the remains of a felt pouch is a **Mysterious Key**, marked with the number 16.

If you wish to keep this key, mark it on your Action Chart as a backpack item.

There is nothing else to find here, so return to the mineshaft at 20.

35

The tailor looks over the chameleon hide and ponders for awhile. Finally, she agrees to sew it into a Cloak of Invisibility, in return for **5 gold pieces**.

Such a cloak will raise your attack rating by 1, in addition to the rating of your weapon (it counts as Armour). It will not actually make you invisible to most opponents, though it will make you harder to see, and more difficult to hit in combat. However, it might make you invisible completely to an opponent with limited eyesight, especially if you stand still.

If you purchase the cloak, delete the Chameleon Skin from your backpack, and record the **Cloak of Invisibility +1** as armour.

Then turn to 78.

36

As you tread the road towards the Assassins' Den, the sky begins to darken and the rain starts to fall. A strange sense of foreboding comes over you, and you wonder what possible good could come of going to such an evil and desolate place.

You remember everything you have heard about the Assassins. An independent guild, they train in martial arts and sell their services to the highest bidder. Most members wear the black robes and poisoned weapons of the ninja tradition, though some prefer face-to-face throat-cutting. They are notoriously unfriendly to visitors lacking the means to purchase their services.

You arrive at the Assassins' Den as dusk begins to fall. The outer ramparts of the Den are built onto the side of a mountain. A ramshackle fence topped with sharp spines surrounds an earthen training ground strewn with boulders. The perimeter looks intimidating, and yet the black iron gate swings open on its hinges, almost beckoning you in. Myriad tunnel entrances in the hillside, and shadows behind boulders warn of possible places of ambush. There is not a soul in sight.

A sign, with runic characters painted in what might well be blood, bears the message:  
*Assassins' Den. Trespassers will be assassinated.*

That doesn't sound like an invitation inside.

Are you *really sure* you want to go into the Assassins' Den?

If so, turn to 21.

If not, turn to 78.

**37**

This chest is rather small, only large enough to contain a single medium-sized item. It is made of a reddish wood inlaid with silver, and it gleams with a faint magical light. It does not seem to have either lid or lock. You soon reach the conclusion that the chest is a classic wizard's device, designed to open by magic rather than by key or force. Attempts to open it by other means are doubtless subject to spells of protection.

On the chest's side, you find a strange riddle:

*The key to the chest is the key to the riddle  
so tell me the answer and tap on  
the lid how many times you read in the  
the riddle before you, the word "the".*

If you think you know the answer, turn to the section which corresponds to the answer. If the entry starts "After the final tap", keep reading. Otherwise, return here.

If you cannot open the chest, you abandon it and turn your attention to other treasures. Go to **15**.

**38**

Your descent has taken you deep beneath the surface, forced down by the weight of your items. You become tangled in some unpleasant underwater seaweed, and curse your bad luck. You try to cut yourself free and swim for the surface, but your heavy backpack is dragging you to the bottom. You reach to unfasten it, but the seaweed has become tangled with it and tied it to your body. While you hack at it with your sword, you fall inexorably towards the bottom of the sea, where a giant moray eel suddenly emerges and snaps you in half. You are just wondering why you can't feel your legs, when a shark attracted by your blood sinks its teeth in your neck. Your head floats to the surface and bobs there like a grotesque buoy.

You are dead.

Problem?

**39**

You swig down some of the green liquid. It tastes strangely pleasant, with a thick texture and a sweet, sugary aftertaste. At first, you don't notice any changes, and wonder if the potions have lost their potency with time. Then suddenly, you see something which makes your blood run cold.

Turn to **51**.

**40**

You draw the wand and point it at the troll. A burst of flame, inches thick, flies from its handle and hits the creature in the chest. Instead of howling with pain, the troll absorbs the bolt and laughs. A second later, a similar bolt comes flying from its hand, and collides with your forehead.

You struggle to fight back, but the troll assails you with flame after flame, scorching your hair, burning your clothes from your body, pushing you back when you get too close. All the time, its face is distorted in a wide grin, and it lets out a deep, throaty laugh. You feel the pain of a dozen wounds where your flesh is burnt away.



Finally, the creature unleashes a sheet of flame which severs your head from your body. Then, it opens the door, throws the body to its pet, and hangs your head with the others on its wall.

You should know better than to get in a flame war with a troll!

You are dead.

Problem?

#### 41

The town market is easy to find. The town is mostly built along the promenade, and the market nestles in a yard between two large buildings, on one of the few roads which run back from the coast. This market is smaller than the one in Start, and has seen better days, judging by the paucity of merchants and their limited wares. Most of the handful of stalls are run by fisherfolk. Rows of herring, whiting, haddock and crabs hang from hooks or poles, or are laid out on the surface of stalls. Women and men, some still in their sea clothes, shout prices at passers-by.

Inamongst the fisherfolk, you manage to find a single knick-knack stall, run by an elderly trader with a long beard. You imagine that he might be a retired mage, and his stall carries a wide variety of items, from colourful stones and glass beads, to bottles of potion and crystal balls. Most of the items seem to be cheap imitations or fairground junk, but a few of them look like they might be useful for your adventure.

Decide if you wish to **buy** any of the following:

<b>Magnifying Glass</b>	5 gp
<b>Homeopathic Medicine</b>	2gp per dose; restores 5 hit points when consumed
<b>Magic Sword</b>	10 gp (attack rating 1, properties unknown)
<b>Brick</b>	1gp
<b>Spade</b>	2gp

You may also **sell** the following items to the stallholder at the prices marked:

<b>Mysterious Keys</b>	1gp each
<b>Red Herring</b>	1gp
<b>Dictionary</b>	1gp
<b>Halberd</b>	1gp
<b>Pirate Map</b>	1gp
<b>Magnet Helmet</b>	3gp
<b>Cloak of Invisibility</b>	5gp
<b>Jewelled Mirror</b>	5gp

Once you are done buying and selling, head over to the wharf at **18**, or leave town at **5**.

#### 42

The passage descends sharply downwards before plateauing out. You feel that you are drawing closer to the mine itself. This part of the caverns is less firmly built, although stone arches continue to hold the tons of earth above you in place. Trickles of water run down some of the stone fittings, creating puddles in the floor which swarm with transparent larvae and tiny fish.

After some time, the passage abruptly ends at a half-collapsed doorway. You clamber over the earth and rotten wood, to find yourself in a large chamber, constructed of stone. Cautiously you search the room for traps or treasure; it is completely empty. At the far side there are two doorways, one inlaid with purple gems, the other hewn of plain beige stone. You consider removing the gems, but they are too tightly embedded for your meagre thieving skills.

There are two doors on the far wall, one purple, one beige.

If you wish to go through the purple door, turn to **59**.

If you wish to go through the beige door, turn to **27**.

#### 43

There is a steep path running up the side of the cliff, and you carefully pick your way around rocks and shrubbery and ascend to the top of the cliff. Here, there are many tall banana trees, the green and yellow fruit hanging out of reach. Monkeys cavort in the branches of the trees, pull faces at you, and occasionally drop a banana peel to the ground. From here, you can see most of Troll Island, and you see a cave in the rockface, past the forest. You see the forest stretching back into the distance, widely-spaced palms at first, later giving way to subtropical rain forest.

Unfortunately, cliffs can be dangerous places. As you walk back towards the beach, you slip on a random banana peel, and tumble over the edge of the cliff. You plummet down the rockface, crashing back-first into a seagull's nest. With broken bones, you continue to fall down the cliff, landing in a hammock which some local hunter has strung between two palm trees. The force of your fall snaps the trunk of one of the trees, and the other tree swings back and then unleashes you like a slingshot, face-first back into the cliff. Your head is impaled on a piece of spiked rock jutting out of the cliff face.

You are dead.

Problem?

#### 44

Swallowing your fear and tensing your nerves, you continue along the passage. You do not have far to go until you reach its terminus: a small cavern opening onto a vast underground lake. The rich vegetation continues up to the lake's edge, and on and under the water. Around the lake's edge grow a number of luminous lime-coloured plants, and you realise that it is these plants which are the cause of your feelings of dizziness. They are giving off huge amounts of oxygen, as they process the lakeside carbon with a preternatural efficiency.

There is nothing else of interest here. The lake itself stretches into the distance, but the roof descends to meet it. You see nothing in the lake itself except plant life, and a few subterranean fish and shrimp. You are unequipped for under- or over-water travel, and getting a little nervous about leaving your backpack unattended for so long.

It occurs to you that the oxygenating plants might have uses in your adventure, should you ever need an air supply. If you wish to take a **Plant**, mark it on your Action Chart as a backpack item.

Afterwards, you walk and squeeze your way back along the tunnel, retrieving your equipment and returning to the treasure room.

Turn to **15**.

45

"If evil exists", you reason, "the Almighty cannot be truly omnipotent. There must be two powers in the world, each limited by the other. There is not a single creator of the universe, but contending forces of Good and Evil, locked in an endless battle".

As you finish your reply, you feel the building darken and hear the doors slam shut. A pentagram of magenta light appears on the floor, giving off an eerie radiance. Immaterially at first, and then with increasing solidity, a ten-foot demon comes into existence. Its red flesh pulsates with muscle and sinew as it raises its obsidian sword.

BATTLE:

**Greater Demon**      **Attack rating 4**      **Hit points 20**

If you win the battle, turn to 17.

46

You continue through the jungle, making a beeline for the hills where you would expect a troll's lair to be. Carefully avoiding the webs of jungle spiders and the openings of giant carnivorous plants, you pick your way between the trees. A multicoloured bird alights on a tree nearby, cawing, and you could swear that it is telling you to fegg off. It becomes hotter as you continue inland, and beads of sweat begin to fall from your forehead. Cursing, you wipe them away with your hand.

As you continue, the jungle foliage gives way to lush grass as the ground begins to rise. Emerging suddenly and unexpectedly from the treeline, you see before you the object of your quest: a troll's lair. It is a cavern in the cliffside, the rock which sometimes blocks its entrance rolled aside far enough for you to pass. Footprints – unmistakably those of a troll – lead to and from the entrance. The notorious troll's face insignia is scrawled in runic paint at the side of the door, settling any doubts you had that this was the right cave.

You are at once elated and nervous as your quest nears its conclusion. You squeeze through the opening into the enclosed space of a dripping cavern, eerily reminiscent of your earlier experiences in the Crypt. Sunlight filters in through the doorway, torches hang in sockets, and a passage leads back into the earth. Chewed bones and scraps of clothing are scattered about the floor, clearly the handiwork of the troll or one of its pets. Broken casks of ale and the remains of evil herbs give clues as to the creature's other habits.

In the back of the cave, behind a ragged cloth curtain, you find a passage leading to the troll's sleeping chamber. The passage ends in a door, in which you can see multiple keyholes.

Before you can advance further, you hear a crash behind you. Something terrible has descended from an unseen alcove in the ceiling. It resembles nothing more than a gigantic ball of wool. Except that the ball of wool is ten feet wide, and composed of a lashing web of green tentacles which can touch the walls of the cave. Each tentacle drips with slime from its many suckers, claws, and mouths. At the centre of the thing, a single red eye glares at you.

If you have a Cloak of Invisibility, go to 13.

Otherwise, if you wish to fight the creature, go to 64.

If you would prefer to flee down the passage, hoping it cannot follow you, go to 25.

47

As the horror crawls up the passageway, filling you once more with an unnatural dread, you marshal all your focus and courage to root through your backpack. To your relief, the keys are still there, gathered in a clump at the bottom of the bag. You pull them out all at once, and test them against the locks. The largest key fits easily into the largest keyhole. It turns slowly, and for a second you think it is stuck. But a stronger turn delivers a rewarding *click!* as the lock turns into place.

You can smell the creature's vile ichor, like acidic rotten blood, as you try the second key. It turns softly in the hole and you hear a second click. But the third key is completely the wrong size and shape for the remaining hole. Try as you might, there is no way you can force the oversize key into the tiny opening. As you fumble about, trying to make the lock work, you feel like you are trying to breed a pug with a Rottweiler. There is no way the key is going to work.

Go to 91

48

You look up the phrase in your dictionary, and spend awhile conjugating and associating words. *Sigil...* to do, to experience... ahh, special scientific usage... *Kotor*, to enter... is *kotok* a conjugation? You shuffle through the grammatical notes... *Eneng sigeyin*, wet sand? Why are you being warned about wet sand?

After a few minutes of referencing and cross-referencing, you decide that the sign most likely says: "Do not enter. Quicksand experiments."

If you want to enter anyway, go to 81. Otherwise, go through the gauntlet door (29) or the plain passage (49).

49

This long, winding tunnel wends out to the right of the entrance, and then turns back to the left. It is unremarkable, and very similar to the mineshaft you just descended, aside from the lack of rails and the sparsity of rock piles. The same magical torches adorn the walls, at the same intervals. There is even less wildlife down here than in the passages above, although there are still a few rock ferns and the occasional insect.

The fifteen minute walk through this passage is boring you to absolute tedium. Unless you went up at least one of the side passages from the mineshaft, add the trait *Bored Stiff*, -1 *attack rating* to your Action Sheet.

Finally, you come to a sealed black door bearing an icon for treasure. At fegging last, you think. A swift kick breaks the rusty lock, and the door opens inwards.

Go to 26.

50

Waterlogged and bedraggled, you pull yourself from the sea, and collapse onto the beach of Troll Island. Seabirds circle overhead, their caws sounding like malicious laughter to your ears. You drop to your hands and knees on the beach, panting. Your eyes sting from the salt water, and you finally begin to feel the pain of the wounds and muscle strain you have suffered since leaving the port of Bottleneck. For awhile, you just lie there, wet sand between your fingers, water still dripping from your hair,

backpack, and clothes. You have made it this far, but you feel you can barely continue. You are overcome with tiredness, and, almost against your will, you drift off to sleep on the beach.

You awaken refreshed (**restore 5 hit points**), and look around your new surroundings. You are on a forlorn beach. The sea stretches away before you in one direction, apparently still, and in the other direction, the beach is ringed with palm trees. Cliffs rise above you to the east, and inland, beyond the forest, you can see a range of hills. You wonder if there are caves in the cliff face, though from what you know of trolls, you expect your adversary to have its lair in the interior of the island, past the subtropical forest.

If you have a Pirate Map **and** a Spade, and wish to follow the instructions on the map, add the number of steps to the current entry and turn to the section with this number.

Otherwise, if you wish to swim back out to sea, go to **95**.

If you wish to climb the cliff, go to **43**.

If you wish to explore the foot of the cliff, go to **19**.

If you wish to walk into the forest, go to **76**.

## 51

You have just drunk a transmutation potion, and its effects are beginning to show. Green scales are starting to appear on your chest, arms and legs. Within ten minutes, your skin resembles the scaly hide of a crocodile or lizard. Slapping yourself on the arm, you barely register the pain of the blow. It is as if you are wearing a thick coat of chainmail over your skin. You realise that this reptilian effect will greatly increase your resilience in combat. And as a reptile, your blood quite literally runs cold.

At first you worry about the dangers of ostracism and persecution, should you wander around looking like a lizard-man. But these potions were designed for the use of the wizards themselves, and their effects, though permanent, are under the control of the user. You soon realise that you can change the scales back to regular skin, or summon them back to your body, through an act of will. You will be able to activate the trait during combat, and deactivate it when you wish to explore a town or sneak somewhere.

Add the trait *Lizard Skin*, *+1 attack rating* on your Action Sheet. This combat bonus is in addition to any others you receive from weapons, armour, or other traits.

If you have not done so already, you may now try some of the watery liquid – turn to **84**.

If you don't want to try the other potion, go to **15**.

## 52

The passage is barely a foot higher than your head, and culminates after a few yards in a locked iron door. Through a grille in the door, you can see into the final room of your quest – the troll's bedroom. The creature itself sleeps fitfully beneath a patchy, worn blanket on the floor of the room to the left of the door, a wide grin etched on its face like a death mask. A torch is hung in an alcove near its bed, serving as a nightlight. Strewn on the floor are more half-chewed bones, dirt-encrusted socks, and empty potion bottles. Against the opposite wall, you notice some strange contraption resembling a flat mirror or painting, black in colour, connected by strange ropes to a gnomish typewriter. The skulls and half-rotten heads of the creature's conquests line the wall over the device, each impaled on a sharp

spike. There are at least a dozen of these macabre trophies.

This chamber is a terrible sight to behold. But it is the patch of floor to the right of the strange device which makes your heart skip a beat. There, in the light of a torch, you see what you have been seeking: the troll's treasure hoard. The items described by the Queen are all there, along with other valuable items – golden goblets, silver charms and tiaras, heaps of coins, treasure chests, urns, gemstones cut and uncut, tapestries, rich clothes, and the other grabbings of the malicious, larcenous creature. Like any such negative being, it cannot enjoy the treasure itself, but only the glee it derives from taking it from others. It hoards the treasure it cannot use, which is piled randomly on the floor. Not only can you complete your quest, but there is enough extra loot here to live richly for many years.

As you stare awestruck at the treasure hoard, dreaming of what you could do with such wealth, a slurping noise suddenly brings you back to the present. The tentacled monstrosity, formerly too big to pursue you, has somehow remade its shapeless mass into an alternative form, more flattened and elongated. It must have enough vestigial intelligence to have determined that you must have left by this passage, and it is now hunting you. It barely fits in the passage, but it is now squeezing itself, an inch at a time, into the entranceway, its eye searching the darkness for you. You realise the enormity of the danger you are in, for unless you can get past the door, you are trapped between it and the advancing abomination.

Trying to swallow the rising panic, you examine the lock. It consists of three separate keyholes, and luckily no bolts.

Do you have any Mysterious Keys?

If you have three Mysterious Keys, then add together the numbers they bear, and turn to the entry equal to the total of the three numbers.

If you do not have any Mysterious Keys, or fewer than three, or if you add up the numbers wrong, go to **91**.

**53**

As the creature's gaze once more cuts through you, you are awestruck with terror. Frozen for a few vital seconds, you finally summon the guts to pull off your backpack and empty it on the floor. Among the items, you see the three shiny keys, still exactly as they were when you found them.

You try to thrust the smallest key into the smallest keyhole, but it slips from your hand and falls to the floor. You are sure you can hear demonic laughter from the approaching aberration as it relishes your doom. Annoyed enough to recover your wits, you snatch up the key and try it once more. This time, it clicks in the lock.

You grab the second key and try it in first one keyhole, then the other. On the second attempt, it clicks once more. The monster is staring at you now, afraid that you will escape your fate at its hands (or tentacles).

Finally, you try the third key. But the key is far too small for the keyhole. You twist it around, try to jam it deeper, but nothing works. Finally, the shaft of the key snaps, leaving its head embedded in a hole into which it could barely be crammed.

What an idiot you are, bringing the wrong fegging keys!

The creature is still advancing, and you can barely suppress a scream.

Go to **91**.

#### 54

The merchant's ship is of modern build, with the wooden hull held together by steel beams. It is anchored to the sea bottom, but it takes short work to pull up the heavy chain. Still, with no wind, the ship simply floats in the harbour, unmoving.

But you have a cunning plan. Using a rope from the hold, you attach the magnet to the ship's figurehead, being careful to face it backwards towards the beams. (Remove the magnet from your action sheet). You hope that the pull of the magnet on the ship's metal hull will haul it out to sea.

You are in luck. Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the ship begins to creep forward. The magnet is exerting its irresistible force on the metal of the beams, pulling them forward, and dragging the entire ship along with them. The heavy anchor slides across the deck, and you quickly loop the chain around the mast, before it flies overboard and strikes the magnet.

The merchant is astounded, and runs along the dock, waving his hat in his hand. But the ship is now creeping away too quickly for him to jump aboard, and he is left waving excitedly from the end of the wharf, shouting: "Bring her back! Bring her back in one piece!"

Your elation continues for some time, as the ship makes steady progress across the Bay of Sharks, a white trail of foam appearing in its wake. The sails flap uselessly in the wind generated by the ship's own motion, and the anchor continues to hover where you have chained it to the mast. Behind and above, seagulls flock, seeking fish stirred-up by the ship's miraculous passing. You grip firmly to the helm, wondering how you will alter the ship's course if you are off-target for your destination. Still, you have achieved something incredible: this ship would normally need a crew of at least a dozen, and you have launched it alone.

As you continue your progress, you notice a shadowy shape beneath the waves. Something large is marking your passing.

Roll 1 die. If your character has red hair, add 1. If your character has at least one sibling, subtract 1. If your character has been to the Temple of the Almighty, add 2. If your character has met the Queen, add 1. If you have the Reptile Skin trait, subtract 1. If your character used to pee his bed as a child, subtract 1. If your character is really a horse in disguise, subtract 2. If your character thinks troll humour is funny, subtract 1. If your character likes strawberries, add 2.

If the result is now 4 or more, turn to **63**.

If it is 3 or less, turn to **23**.

#### 55

As you continue along the passage, you become warmer and dizzier. The floor is now running with water an inch deep, which splashes around you as your boots impact on the floor. The vegetation is

even more profuse as you continue, with many kinds of plants – moss, ferns, unidentified herbs, even some bushy plants with colourless flowers. In most places, the passage is not so narrow, but the ever-present water and vegetation create new hazards, as you struggle not to slip on the wet, mossy surface. Your body rubs against the walls, leaving green residues on your clothes where they make contact with plant life. Occasionally, however, you continue to encounter places where the walls and roof barely allow space for you to cross. At one stage you barely squeeze your body through a six-metre stretch, wriggling forward like a snake or mole, and you dread to think what would happen if you encounter an adversary in such a situation, or if you become stuck, or have to wriggle out backwards. The dizziness is starting to worry you, as thoughts of poisonous spores and noxious gases come into your mind.

If you still wish to continue further, turn to **44**.

If you would rather return to the treasure room, turn to **15**.

## 56

The thing is still advancing as you reach into your backpack and pull out the first key. It is too large for the first hole you try, but fits perfectly into the second. The creature is reaching forward, grasping rocks on the cavern wall to pull its bulk into the passage. As the lock opens with a reassuring click, you pull out a second key. This one is smaller than the first, and exactly the right size for the smallest hole. There is another reassuring click.

The abominable monster stops in its tracks and lets out a deep moan. Is it aware that you are about to escape its clutches? You pull out the third key. It is just the right size for the final keyhole, and the lock clicks open with another satisfying click. You throw your shoulder and back against the door, pushing with all your weight, and it crashes open into the chamber. The monstrosity is still advancing, so you slam the door behind you, locking your pursuer outside in the passage.

But you are not out of danger yet. The ruckus of the creature's advance and your fumblings with the door has awakened the sleeping troll. It screams at you in its strange dialect. "Y U HERE? Y U NO RUN? U JELLY? U MAD?"

Pulling a thin rapier from under its pillow, it advances on you, schwoopy arms outstretched, a maniacal grin on its twisted face.

If you have a Flame Wand and wish to use it, go to **40**.

Otherwise, continue reading.

The troll stands a foot taller than you, and wields a light sword made of magnets and silicon. Grinning, it swings its weapon at your head. With your escape route blocked and the treasure within your grasp, you must fight this final adversary.

**Troll**                      **Attack rating +5**                      **Hit points 20**

If you win the battle, go to **100**.



57

You stare at the wall. It is eerily smooth, lacking the irregularities of a natural surface or even an artificial one. You wonder if it is an illusion or a false front of some kind. As you pore over the surface, looking for a keyhole and wondering whether to try striking it with your weapon, you hear a voice echoing in your mind.

*Who dares to awaken Ian the Living Stone? My combat statistics are the nastiest you have ever seen!*

You turn to see that a magic forcefield now blocks your exit, and the wall is now beginning to come to life. Hands extend from its sides as it pushes itself out from the sides of the chamber. You must fight it to the death.

**Ian the Living Stone**                      **Attack rating +12**                      **Hit points 24**

If you manage to defeat this adversary (fat chance), the rock monster falls slowly to the floor, and the forcefield dissolves into the air. Also, add the trait *Compulsive Cheater: + whatever I feel like* to your Action Sheet.

You may now go into the forest (76), climb the cliff (43) or swim out to sea (95).

58

As you slide the letters into place, you hear a *click* as the chest unlocks. Gingerly you lift the lid. Expecting gold or jewels, you are surprised to find that this is actually the wizards' apothecary chest – perhaps readied for transport before the disaster. Neatly arrayed in multiple rows are bottles of potion of various colours. On closer inspection, you realise that both the contents and the labels are of only two types. The tightly sealed decanters have been stored in such a way that the two types of potion form a chessboard pattern, each second potion different from the one before it.

You are unable to read the labels. However, you get some indication of the contents from the colouring of the liquids. One set of potions are bright, bilious green. The others look like bottles of water. In fact, you suspect they probably *are* bottles of water.

If you want to try drinking one of the water bottles, go to 84.

If you want to try drinking one of the green bottles, go to 39.

If you don't want to drink either of the bottles, go to 15.

59

As you transverse the indigo-encrusted aperture, the opulent magnificence of the successive chamber overwhelms the rods and cones of your retina. You have fortuitously discovered the chambers of entertainment of the sovereigns of this domain in ancestral epochs. Proceeding selfconsciously across this stupendous intersection, you marvel at the intricacy of the bygone construction of the tapestries and portraits that line this interior. The angles bespeak of an almost prehistorical antiquity, while the images visualise in minute precision the confrontations of mighty paladins and centurions with the tenebrous denizens of Gehenna.

Foregoing the possibility of potential acquisition in anxiety at the potentiality of trespassing upon maleficent sorcery, you observe in awestruck immobility the opulence of these decorations, which vaguely postfigure the magnanimity of long-forgotten forebears, even while their present condition is

rendered imperfect by the deterioration inevitable in materials of such ancestral vintage.

After recovering your fortitude, you ambivalently resume your explorations by proceeding by means of an unadorned oaken door.

Go to **83**.

## 60

After this first encounter, you continue to travel without incidents. For many minutes, the ship makes good speed across the Bay of Sharks, and you begin to make out the outline of land on the horizon. You are aimed a little too far southwards, and you are just considering how to adjust the magnet when another outline on the horizon fills you with awe.

Bearing down on you from the eastern horizon is a massive vessel, flying the stereotypical Jolly Rodger to indicate its piratical mission. Its sails, like yours, are limp, and you see that there are *two* giant magnets affixed to a pole at the front of the ship – along with what you take to be a giant battering ram, and a crudely pornographic figurehead.

Its crew, seemingly dragged out of a bad movie, is made of bandanna-wearing pirates, each befitted with an eyepatch, hook hand, or wooden leg. The exception is the captain, who has earned his position by means of having *all three* prostheses. The ship is followed, not by seagulls, but by an entire flock of parrots. You swear you can hear them shrieking “pieces of eight!”

You are considering how to outrun or outmanoeuvre the ship, when a cannonball smashes into the hull beneath the waterline. The ship lists to starboard, clearly leaking water into the empty hull. It will take some time to sink, but there is no way it is fit for pursuit.

Realising you cannot outrun them, the pirates are now steering their vessel directly at your ship, on a collision course. They mean to ram your vessel, before looting it for treasure. You do not fancy your survival chances when they realise the ship is empty.

You grab your equipment and prepare to act, in the seconds remaining before the collision.

If you have a Magic Sword, you must go immediately to **96**.

If you do not have this item, but you have the *Schwoopy Arms* trait, and wish to use it to swing onto the pirate ship, go to **14**.

If you wish to stand and fight, go to **87**.

If you wish to jump overboard into the sea, go to **85**.

## 61

You're in luck, as you have arrived here on market day. The peasants from miles around travel to Start to sell their surplus and buy supplies from the urban guildsmen. Dozens of wooden stalls, some draped with linen or blankets, are arranged in approximate rows across the village square. Hawkers loudly advertise their wares – apples from Northeim, loaves of bread, barley seed of seven varieties, fresh fish, woollen shawls, carven woodcuts and simple ornaments. Notably missing are the brightly coloured fruits and expensive silk garments brought by merchants across the seas. Villagers, craftsmen and the occasional noble peruse the stalls and make the occasional purchase. Amidst the apples, loaves of bread and homemade clothes, you discern a number of items which may be of use:

## WEAPONS AND ARMOUR:

**Flame Wand:** shoots gout of flame at adversaries; attack rating 2 6 gp  
**Fine-carved Sword:** attack rating 2 5 gp  
**Wolf Cloak** 3 gp  
**Woollen Shawl** 1 gp

## BACKPACK ITEMS:

**Potion of Speed** (one use only) 3gp each  
**Healing Potion**, restores 1 die of damage (per potion) 3gp each  
**Common Speech to Ancient Tongue Dictionary** 4 gp  
**Mysterious Key**, labelled with the number 10 2 gp  
**Empty Transparent Sack**, 3 feet wide 1 gp  
**Iron Troll Statue** 2 gp  
**Red Herring** 2 gp

You may buy as many potions as you wish and can afford, but each potion or other item takes up 1 backpack space. The Cloak and Shawl count as Armour, but if you buy both, you'll need to put one in your Backpack as you can't wear them both at once. Similarly, if you buy one or both Weapons, and you wish to keep your Sword (or keep both new weapons), all but one have to go in the Backpack.

When you are finished making purchases, or if you choose not to buy anything, return to 1 and make another choice.

## 62

As the Ovids' sheepish silhouettes disappear over the horizon, you turn your attention back to the cave ahead of you. You have reached the Barrows, and the area around here is scattered with similar mounds. But the entire area is crawling with Ovid patrols, so you only dare explore the nearest barrow.

As you draw close, you realise that the elevation is not a hill at all, but a manmade barrow or tomb. The door is locked with a combination lock, and a strange riddle is inscribed on the door:

*By infinity, no number can divide,  
 But what of infinity, turned on its side?*

If you can answer the riddle, turn to the section indicated in the answer; it will begin: "As the number clicks into place".

Otherwise, you fiddle with the lock but get nowhere, and you return to town, dejected. Turn to 78.

## 63

The shadow breaks the surface, and you sight the smiling face of a dolphin. With a smirk, it leaps in the air, startling the circling birds into darting higher into the sky. It splashes into the water, spraying the deck of the ship, and then splashes back beneath the waves.

It returns moments later, balancing a ball on its nose. Tossing the ball in the air, it does another somersault before returning underwater for the last time.

If you wish to keep the **Ball**, mark it as a Backpack Item.

Turn to 60.

64

As the creature fixes its eye upon you, you can barely move, frozen with fear which seems born of foul sorcery. You feel like the creature is looking into your soul, seeing something inside you similar to itself, or contaminating you with its psychic energy. It takes every ounce of willpower you have to reach for your weapon. As it sees you preparing for combat, it attacks with speed, extending first one tentacle and then another from its bodily mass. You dodge the first extending tendril, only to be slapped by the second, then leap to the side to avoid the teeth of a third. This creature is going to be a formidable opponent.

In this combat, the opponent rolls first.

**Tentacled Thing      Attack rating 4      Hit points 20**

If you reduce the creature to zero or fewer hit points, the floor is now coated in a terrible mess. Tentacles, ichor and blood spatter the walls, and ceiling. The remains of the creature fester in a heap at the centre of the room, its severed limbs still flailing. Bleeding from a hundred openings, it seems as though it is at death's door. You breathe a sigh of relief and prepare to continue, but as you turn your back on the creature, you feel a sickly squelch as another tentacle slaps you on the arm. You turn and see that the creature is beginning to regenerate, with its wounds sealing over and new tentacles emerging from its amorphous central mass, as if it is eating its own severed limbs and generating new ones. You have no idea how to kill this creature, so you hurry along the passage.

Go to 52.

65

The steel chest is still in perfect condition, a strong suggestion of its magical nature. You suspect that something valuable is contained inside. You examine the lock, and find that it has four empty slots, into which can be placed any of the twenty-six letters of the Common Tongue. The letters themselves are arranged in a sliding puzzle box beneath the slots, allowing you to move them into what you take to be the answer slots. Each letter must have a different key or clockwork part on its invisible reverse side, so that choosing the correct letters, in the correct order, will activate the mechanism to open the lock.

Beneath the lock is inscribed a plaque, a clue to provide entry to the chest:

*I am a King, in times more crude,  
whose name, some say, is somewhat rude.  
My royal command did not stop the sea  
My name will open chests for thee.*

If you know the answer to the riddle, then convert each letter of the name into a number (A=1, B=2, C=3, etc.), and turn to the entry corresponding to your answer. If the passage begins, "As you slide the letters into place", then you have the right section.

If you cannot answer the riddle, turn to the wrong section, or do not want to open the chest, then the chest will not open. You cannot try again, as one of the pieces you used has locked in place – presumably a measure designed to frustrate random guessing.

You may now explore the other treasures at 15.

66

“Evil exists because the Almighty allows free will”, you reply. “The universe would be a worse place if everything was determined, than it is today with the existence of evil.”

IF YOU HAVE FREE WILL, replies the voice, THEN TELL ME THIS.

IN ALL, MY SERVANTS ARE FEWER THAN THIRTY, OF THREE TYPES. OF LESSER ANGELS, I HAVE TWICE AS MANY AS GREATER ANGELS. OF GREATER ANGELS, I HAVE TWICE AS MANY PLUS ONE AS I HAVE KYRIES. BUT TO EVERY KYRIE, THERE ARE FIVE LESSER ANGELS. HOW MANY SERVANTS DO I HAVE?

If you know the answer, turn to the matching section. If you guessed/calculated right, the section should begin, “You are bathed in luxuriant light”.

Otherwise, you have guessed wrong and the voice will speak no more. Go back to town at 78.

67

The passages twist and turn, following the routes of ancient underground rivers. Sometimes you think you have found a route upwards, only to find it peters out in a dead end, or twists downward a few metres further along. You are growing tired, yet you dare not rest in such a dangerous place. Your exhaustion costs you, however, as you unwisely stumble around a bend in the tunnel and find yourself standing in the lair of one of the caverns' monstrous denizens.

Roll a die and fight the following battle (it is possible to fight the same kind of adversary several times):

BATTLE

**1. Giant Cave Rat    Attack rating -3    Hit points 15**

In this ancient maze of tunnels, rats feeding on other scavengers have grown to an immense size, unknown on the surface. Almost blind, and covered with matted grey-white fur, giant cave rats will prey on any intruder.

**2. Tunnel Grub    Attack rating 0    Hit points 30**

Resembling giant maggots with ovoid toothed jaws, Tunnel Grubs have the ability to bore through light rock such as sandstone, and use this ability to ambush prey in the maze of tunnels. Nobody knows, and you dread to think, what the adult form of these creatures might be.

**3. Tentacled Moss Monster    Attack rating -2    Hit points 20**

In a watery cavern filled with slime and moss, you encounter a chaotic thing out of an explorer's worst nightmares. It seems like a mass of wriggling tentacles, each covered with barbed spikes. If you defeat this creature, roll a die. On a roll of 5, you find a **Helmet** (armour, +1 attack rating); on a roll of 6, you find a **Broadsword** (weapon, +3 attack rating).

**4. Vampire Bat    Attack rating 5    Hit points 3**

Vampire bats inhabit many of the caverns near the surface, raiding flocks of sheep and cattle by night, and returning to the caves to rest by day. Fiercely territorial, they attack any intruder.

**5. Degenerate Ape-Thing    Attack rating 1    Hit points 10**

It is rumoured that groups of humans trapped in the caverns eventually degenerate, or evolve, into foul primates adapted to this subterranean hell. Resembling hairless gorillas, these ghoulish apes feed on animal or human flesh, and wield crude weapons such as bone clubs.

**6. Cave Goblin      Attack rating 0      Hit points 12**

Small groups of goblins live in the caverns, farming edible moss and eyeless fish. You have stumbled upon such a goblin in the middle of some vicious pursuit, and it turns on you, flailing its pick. If you win this combat, you may take the goblin's **Pick** (Weapon, attack rating 1).

If you survive the battle, then you retrace your steps, arriving at another fork.

If you wish to go left, turn to **73**.

If you wish to go right, turn to **28**.

**68**

Approaching the inactive portal, you pull the lever, dragging it into the “up” position. There is a weird humming, and the black depths of the mirror imperceptibly shift to indigo, and then violet, retaining at every point an off-colour shadow of yourself. Suddenly, a violet light shoots out from the portal, wrapping itself around you. You are pulled inexorably into the portal, and feel yourself surrounded by swirls of purple energy. The ground seems to disappear from beneath your feet, but you have no sensation of falling. Instead, a sensation of floating in a cloud overcomes you, but it lasts only a few moments before you feel solid ground once more beneath your feet.

The first sense to return is touch, and you feel a wind on your face some seconds before you begin to hear the cries of sea-birds, or smell the distinct seaweedy scent of a coastal town. Finally, the violet mist also fades, and you recognise at once that the portal has teleported you onto the surface, somewhere south of its location underground. You are on a country road, which follows the route of the ancient highway along the coast. You also realise that you are less than a mile from Bottleneck, the trading port which opens onto the Bay of Sharks.

Continue your quest by turning to **88**.

**69**

Suddenly, an inspiration comes you you. Pulling out the sack, you reach up to fill it with air, and throw it over your head. Sweet air fills your lungs. Next, you reach into your backpack and pull out the plant. You stuff it inside the sack, and tie the drawstrings around your neck. The oxygen-producing plant provides you with a constant source of underwater oxygen, and you can now stay underwater for as long as you like.

You swim away from the pirates, being sure to put good distance between yourself and the ship before you surface. The sharks and other marine predators keep their distance from what they take to be a strange-looking creature, swimming freely in their own domain. You pass easily through the still water, aiming for the coastline on the horizon, which from beneath the surface, resembles a mountain rising from the depths.

Go to **50**.

70

You examine the trousers. There is some kind of lump under the surface, which could be a staff or other weapon. Wondering if you have uncovered the magician's wand, you put your hand inside to pull it out, but instead feel a sharp bite to your finger (**lose 2 hit points**).

You are in a fight with one of the jungle's serpentine denizens, which has been charmed by the elves and placed here to protect their home from thieves.

**Trouser Snake          Attack rating 1          Hit points 6**

Thankfully, this snake is not poisonous to humans. If you defeat the snake, you continue on your journey.

Go to 46.

71

Okay, you asked for it.

The tunnel is narrow but smooth. There is nothing up here besides rusted tools and piles of rock. As you squeeze through the narrow passage, you occasionally dislodge loose earth and rock. As you come to yet another dead end, marked by a collapsed ceiling, the walls begin to shake. You attempt to turn, but the tunnel is narrow and you are forced to delay long enough that a rockslide blocks your passage, massive boulders crashing from the ceiling.

You dodge two large boulders which seem aimed at your head, before another smashes successfully into your skull, knocking you to the ground. You fall onto a stalagmite, which impales your body from front to back. Attracted by the smell of your blood, poisonous cave snakes crawl out of the walls and bite you all over. Then your head falls off and rolls back down the tunnel, settling amongst the wall of rocks.

You are now as dead as a doornail.

Problem?

72

"Evil is a perception", you reply. "From the human point of view, many things which exist seem evil. But the divine perspective is not a human perspective. From a divine perspective, all that exists must seem good."

SO YOU KNOW HOW IT IS TO BE JUDGED FROM AN ALIEN POINT OF VIEW?

You are wondering how to respond to this question, when your vision changes. The pews and altar fade away, and you are now in an alien courtroom, its furniture composed of spiked benches made of seashells and glass. You feel the light dim and spectral shapes come into being around you. They soon take the form of immense crabs, dressed in the red robes and wigs of high-court judges. They snap their claws and clatter their forelegs on the desks at which they sit.

The largest crab, which wields a judge's gavel in its foreclaw, announces: "You are charged with

aggravated fourth-degree crustacicide. How do you plead?"

You try to reply, but no sound escapes your lips.

"Hurry up! Or you will be held in contempt!"

Still you are unable to speak.

"Very well. I find you guilty as charged. The sentence is death by hammering!"

The giant crab advances on you, swinging its gavel. This is a fight to the death.

**BATTLE:**

**Giant Crab    Attack Rating 3    Hit points 12**

If you win the battle, turn to **17**.

**73**

You walk onwards through the passages, feeling ever more like you are trapped in some massive rock tomb. The tunnel twists and turns, and you no longer know in which direction the entrance lies. Each grotto, each shimmering underground pool, and each tangle of scraggly vegetation seems much the same as the rest. The twisting passages seem so similar in the darkness, and you soon lose any sense of direction in the enclosing gloom.

If you wish to go left, turn to **67**.

If you wish to go right, turn to **28**.

**74**

The further you venture into the mineshaft, the more similar everything seems. The tracks continue in a straight line, only occasionally bending slightly to bypass a particularly stubborn piece of rock. The torches continue to line the walls at regular intervals, but plant and animal life become more scarce. After another ten minutes, you come to another side passage.

If you wish to explore this passage, go to **93**.

If you wish to remain on the railroad, go to **16**.

**75**

The portal is like an immense mirror, taller than a man, and surrounded with gold filigree embossed with magical runes and symbols. The mirror itself is dark as the night, though you still seem to cast a shadow when you look into it, as if there are shades of black. A lever is embedded in the side of the portal, currently pointing down, in the off position.

You easily recognise this object as a Sorcerer's Portal, an ancient type of teleportation device used by wizards in olden times. Similar to the Queen's teleportation spell, such portals are much less flexible, being fixed in place themselves and able to displace their user only to certain fixed locations, generally within a mile or two of their location. You will be able to use the portal as a short-cut back to the surface, when you are finished in the treasure room – saving you the long march back, and the dangers of the mine.



The portal is clearly inactive, but raising the lever will most likely send you to the portal's location.

If you wish to activate the portal, turn to **68**.

Otherwise, go to **15**. You can come back here later when you are ready to leave.

## 76

You walk from the beach into the forest of palms and tropical vegetation. For the first few yards, the soil remains sandy, and the surrounding trees are identical to those on the seafront. As you continue deeper into the forest, the palm trees give way to the tall trees, leafy ferns and littered floor of a subtropical rain forest. The power of life is all around you. The forest is alive with frogs, insects and small mammals which dart away at the sound of your approach. Colourful birds trill unfamiliar songs, which you are sure are mocking you. You are soon lost in the unfamiliar jungle, when you stumble upon a strange clearing.

The wide, grassy clearing, out of sorts with its surroundings, stretches between two groups of palm trees which seem to have been artificially planted in neat rows. On the far side of the clearing stands a small, one-room hut, carved of wood from the surrounding forest, its roof thatched with seaweed. Beyond the hut, the forest stretches onwards towards the hills.

In the clearing are seated two elf maidens, completely naked. One has dark skin, and the other is fair-skinned with reddish-blond hair. They are giggling while eating a brown substance from a translucent goblet. Suddenly, one of them notices you, calls something in elvish, and they run into the woods, faster than you can follow.

If you wish to eat from the goblet, go to **4**.

If you wish to explore the hut, go to **86**.

If you ignore the clearing and continue into the forest, go to **46**.

## 77

The Ovid leader looks down at your weapon. His expression, already fierce, becomes more hostile, and he charges towards you, levelling his halberd at your chest.

### BATTLE

**Ovid Leader**    **Attack rating 3**            **Hit points 12**

If you win the combat, the death of their leader saps the courage from the patrol, and they turn tail and flee towards their village. If you wish, you may keep the leader's **Halberd** (weapon rating 1). It takes up 2 backpack spaces if you keep it as a spare.

Turn to **62**.

## 78

You return to Start as dusk begins to fall. The town gate is still open and unguarded, but stray glances tell you that strangers are not welcome so late in the day. The town's streets are now almost empty, with only a few drunkards and the occasional guard still outside. A lone cow wanders down the street, and gives a dejected moo.

You are tired, and must spend **1 Gold Piece** on a room for the night. You stay at the town inn, a basic

but functional affair designed to house visiting peasants and traders. If you don't have a gold piece, **lose 2 hit points** for sleeping rough.

In the morning, you must decide where you will explore next. *Choose somewhere you have not yet been (or tried to go).*

If you want to visit the town market to purchase equipment, turn to **31**.

If you want to visit the Assassins' Den, turn to **36**.

If you want to walk to the Temple of the Almighty and ask for aid on your quest, turn to **82**.

If you would like to explore the Forest of Fear, turn to **89**.

If you would like to head directly for Bottleneck, turn to **88**.

If you would like to raid the Crypt of Monsters, turn to **90**.

If you would like to search for clues in the Caverns of Infernal Frustration, turn to **6**.

If you would like to search the Plain of Grass, turn to **97**.

**79**

You walk for some time along the right passage, only to find that it culminates in a dead-end – a wall of solid rock. Cursing your luck, you turn around and go back in the opposite direction.

Go to **42**.

**80**

You examine the pine trees at the edge of the beach, and finally locate one which has the telltale skull and crossbones motif carved into it. Assuming this to be the marked palm, you follow the instructions on the map, and when you dig into the sand, your spade collides with something underneath, with a dull clang. With a bit more digging, you manage to unearth an oak chest.

To your delight, the chest is not locked, and you lift back the lid to see...

...the rotten remains of a pirate's butt, the flesh decaying in the heat, and the tailbone visible through a tear in the skin.

You find its sight and stench nauseating, and vomit onto the sand. **Deduct 2 hit points.**

You look back at the map, and realise you'd misunderstood. The chest does, indeed, contain a pirate's booty – but not the type you'd expected. *Even the dead are trolling me*, you think.

Now, do you wish to swim out to sea (**95**), climb the cliff (**43**), explore the foot of the cliff (**19**), or go into the forest (**76**)?

**81**

OK, you asked for it.

You walk briskly into the room, ignoring the allusive sign. This chamber is spacious, with a domed ceiling formed naturally as a cave, though the walls look manmade. Peculiarly, much of the floor is free from the dirt and rock-dust which is ever-present in the neighbouring caverns.

As you walk across the room, just past the sign, you step onto a patch of open ground and your foot

disappears several inches into the ground. Something is sucking on your limb, pulling it into the ground. You try to pull it out and it sinks further. Quicksand!

You grab onto the sign and try to pull yourself out, but your legs keep being sucked deeper into the morass. The sign snaps, flies off and falls on your head, smashing your face into the floor. Letting go, you realise that it has a skull motif – the sign for danger – on the reverse side. You open your mouth to scream, and a scorpion runs from nowhere and crawls down your throat, stinging you from inside. As your shoulders disappear under the quicksand, the scorpion poison explodes in your neck and your head flies like a cannonball across the room. Rolling into the centipede's lair, it knocks over the stack of skulls like a bowling ball, and comes to rest against the far wall.

You are dead.

Problem?

**82**

The Temple of the Almighty is the biggest, boldest building for miles around. While town houses rarely rise above a storey, the temple is the size of seven houses atop one another. It is almost as if the builders were saying, we're bigger than you, and don't you forget it.

You enter the temple through its main doors, which are twice the height of a human, and bask in the light coming through the stained-glass windows. The interior of the building is typical of the temples of the kingdom. A paved aisle runs down the middle, between rows of wooden pews. It culminates in a set of steps leading to a raised altar and pulpit. The doors are open, but no clergy or worshippers are in sight.

As you approach the altar, you hear a booming voice cry out:

DO YOU SEEK THE AID OF THE ALMIGHTY IN YOUR QUEST?

If you choose not to answer, or answer “no”, you return to town – go to **78**.

If you answer “yes”, the voice continues:

FIRST YOU MUST SHOW KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURE OF THE ALMIGHTY. TELL ME, MORTAL: IF THE ALMIGHTY IS ALL-POWERFUL, ALL-KNOWING AND GOOD, HOW CAN EVIL EXIST?

If you wish to reply that the Almighty does not exist, turn to **11**.

If you wish to reply that evil does not exist, turn to **94**.

If you wish to reply that the Almighty does not have absolute power, turn to **45**.

If you wish to reply that the Almighty allows humans free will, turn to **66**.

If you wish to reply that evil only appears as evil from a human perspective, turn to **72**.

**83**

Beyond the door, you find another stone room much like that through which you entered. This room, also, is devoid of both life and treasure. But your fear of possible traps is heightened when you notice the figure of a skeleton with a rusty sword, lying against the far wall.

Warily, you cross to the single door in the far side of the room. You find that it is locked, and too strong to force. You closely examine the lock, and find that it is a combination lock, labelled with numbers from 1 to 100. Beside the lock is inscribed a puzzle:

*A bandit lord, my Problems have mounted,  
But never a Female Dog, among them can be counted.  
Nor yet a Wench. So now deduce,  
From what number of Problems I may be set loose?*

If you can figure out how many problems the bandit lord has, turn to the section bearing that number. If you answered right, the section will begin, "The door opens inwards".

If you give the wrong answer, there is a sharp *click* as the secondary locking mechanisms come into place. Try as you might, there is no way onwards. Return to town at **78**.

**84**

You were an adventurer,  
You aren't anymore,  
'Cause what you thought was H<sub>2</sub>O  
Was H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>.

You are dead.

Problem?

**85**

As you leap from the ship, the pirate captain barks at his men, gesturing in your general direction. While some of his crew leap onto your ship, others run to the sides of the two vessels and aim their crossbows and arquebuses in your general direction.

If you are wearing a Magnet Helmet, the steel projectiles veer off in mid-air, as they are attracted to the magnet on top of your helmet. They collide with the magnet, fixing in place, and sparing you from injury. What an ingenious contraption, you think. They should use these helmets in all the world's armies, to make them immune from metal projectiles.

If you do not possess a Magnet Helmet, some of the projectiles hit you. Roll a die and subtract this number from your hit points.

If you are still alive, you land in the sea with a terrific splash, and immediately break out into an underwater swim towards the island on the horizon. Unfortunately, you are still within range of the pirates' weapons, and they are likely to target you if you surface.

If you possess an Iron Troll Statue, a Heavy Golden Statuette, and/or a Brick, go to **38**.

If you do not possess these items, but you possess **both** a Transparent Sack **and** a Plant, go to **69**.

If you do not possess any of these items (or only one of the two items), go to **2**.

86

You enter the hut. A cauldron and altar mark it as the dwelling of a forest witch, probably one of the elves you just saw. It is filled with magical items and scrolls, most of which you have no idea how to use. You are wary of stealing from magic users, as their items are very likely to be protected or cursed.

The only item you recognise is a Dispel Magic scroll, its familiar characters inscribed in the ancient language of magic. It will remove all magical effects from you – good and evil. The hut contains a large stack of these scrolls, so the elves probably would not worry about losing one, or bother to put it under magical protection.

If you wish to read the Dispel Magic scroll, it will cancel out the magic of the Troll Sword if you have it, turning it into a normal Sword (attack rating 1) and allowing you to use other weapons if you wish. However, it will also eliminate the powers of the Flame Wand (which becomes a normal Stick, attack rating 0), the Cloak of Invisibility, the *Schwoopy Arms* and *Lizard Skin* traits, and any other magical items or traits you possess. Decide if it is worth the loss to read the scroll.

There are also a pair of weatherbeaten leather trousers (*pants* if you're American) hanging on the back of the door. This seems strange to you: why do nudist forest elves have a pair of trousers?

If you wish to search the trousers, go to **70**.  
Otherwise, continue into the forest at **46**.

87

The battering ram collides with your ship, smashing into the wooden parts of its hull and tangling the two ships together. You are thrown to the floor, but thankfully suffer no injury. Pirates throw across grappling hooks and begin to climb across onto your ship. A second line of adversaries line up behind them, and take aim at you with crossbows and arquebuses.

If you are wearing a Magnet Helmet, you now realise its purpose, as the incoming projectiles veer from their course, drawn in by the magnet. If you are wearing no such item, **roll 1 die and deduct this many hit points** for wounds from the projectiles.

By this time, the boarders have rappelled across onto your ship. Several of them quickly descend to the hull, but one vicious-looking pirate leers at you with a mouthful of gold teeth and unsheathes his cutlass. He is less interested in treasure, than in adding you to his list of kills. This will be a fight to the death.

**Pirate**                      **Attack rating +1**                      **Hit points 12**

If you defeat the pirate, his lifeless form falls to the deck just as his comrades return. They have discovered that the ship is empty, and plan to take their frustration out on you. You will have to jump in the sea after all.

Go to **85**.

88

The seaside town of Bottleneck nestles between two cliffs overlooking the Bay of Sharks. The small town runs almost down to the beach, into which have been built buoys and a long wharf to facilitate

trade and fishing. Despite the adverse conditions, the fisherfolk are managing to continue their trade, and the smell of fish soon joins the seaweed tang on the slight sea breeze. Seabirds circle overhead, occasionally diving into the ocean or alighting on a roof or wall.

As you walk along the town's main promenade, overlooking the almost flat sea, you search for a possible means across the ocean. In better times, this port town is alive with merchants arriving and leaving to sell their wares, but the lack of trade winds has slowed the town's activity to a trickle. You see a collection of merchants' boats, fishing boats and assorted other craft moored at the wharf, awaiting an opportunity to set sail.

If you wish to approach the wharf and ask about crossing the sea, go to **18**.

If you wish to seek out the town market, go to **41**.

If you're fed up of this town already, and wish to take the road back to Start, go to **5**.

## 89

The Forest of Fear is fearsomely frightening. You have heard terrible stories of the monstrous creatures and walking corpses which inhabit its darkest recesses. You are no ranger, and expect rapid death should you stray from the path. It is possible that you will find treasure or aid in your quest along this forest's shadowed trails, but at what cost?

Cautiously, you advance along the beaten track which wends its way out of the populated fields and into the depths of the cursed wood. The overgrown path wends between evil-seeming grey trunks which seem to look at you with malice. Overhead, a dense canopy blots out the light. The lack of birdsong feels more a presence than an absence. Sometimes a cracking noise breaks the silence – a bird or rabbit, you hope.

The path soon comes to a fork.

If you go left, turn to **98**.

If you go right, turn to **32**.

If you wish to return to town, turn to **78**.

## 90

The Crypt of Monsters has been explored by many an adventurer, yet its supply of treasure seems improbably endless. It helps, of course, that most explorers either return to tell of an empty cavern with impassable doors – or else, do not return at all.

The Crypt is actually misnamed, for it was never intended as a burial place. In time immemorial, it was used as a mine, to extract some unknown alloy used in the preparation of magical weapons. The dwarven miners were rarely seen on the surface, and it was rumoured that mages and necromancers had taken up residence in the mine, using its bounty to weave terrible spells and break the laws of life and death. One day, a great explosion rocked the mine and parts of the structure caved in. None of the dwarven miners ever returned. From that day forward, the Crypt has been a feared and cursed place – exactly the kind of place which treasure-hunters love to explore. Of the many who have entered, few have bested its puzzles, and survived its dangers.

Warily you trace the path through its yawning cavernous entrance and descend into its torchlit interior. This close to the surface, the flora and fauna of the Crypt are similar to those of caverns across the

kingdom. Foot-long rats and insects scurry for cover as your footfalls echo through the caverns, and patches of moss and ferns grow in cracks in the walls.

After descending for fifteen minutes, you reach a fork in the passage. The left passage descends steeply downwards, while the right passage seems to loop back upwards towards the surface.

If you wish to turn left, go to **42**.

If you wish to turn right, go to **79**.

## 91

You try everything you can to get past the door. You fumble with the locks, trying to pick them, but your fear makes your fingers clumsy. You try to smash the lock with the butt of your weapon, but it holds up to your pounding. You bang on the door, try to smash it down with your weight, but it holds firm. Every moment that passes, the creature advances a little further. It knows you are here now, and this time, there is no escape.

As you fumble once more with the lock, trying to break it with your weapon, you feel the terrifying slurp of a tentacle gripping your leg. With superhuman strength, the advancing creature slams you to the floor and drags you towards it. Your senses overwhelmed with fear, you barely register the dozens of tentacles gripping and exploring your face, limbs, and extremities. You are already unconscious before the creature inserts one of its feelers into your ear, through your brain, and out of your mouth. The troll will be out later to reward his pet, and add your mangled head to the collection on his wall.

You are dead.

Problem?

## 92

You exert all your strength to remove the lid of the heavy stone coffin. Roll a die. On a roll of 5-6, you lose **2 hit points** from the exertion.

After a few seconds, it falls away, taking with it a layer of earth. Spiders, woodlice and other invertebrates run for cover as their sanctuary is disturbed.

Your nerves are taut and your heartbeat pounding, as you half-expect a mummy or ghoul to jump out of the coffin and attack. But when the lid falls away, you realise that the tomb is empty. Whoever, or whatever, was buried here is no longer inside. Either it is food for the forest animals – or it is half-alive, and wandering the forest nearby.

You are about to give up your search when you notice a sheet of parchment wrapped in a fragment of cloth, mostly covered with dirt. You fish it out and dust it down, and find a map. You instantly recognise the location – it is the Isle of Trolls. An X is marked on the beach, clearly marked with the inscription *Pirate Booty*. In the margin is an inscription: *Thirty steps due east from the palm bearing the mark, and dig straight down*.

If you wish to keep the **Pirate Map**, mark it as a Backpack Item.

The path is at a dead end, and you have no wish to dig through the underbrush in this evil forest or to be caught here after dark, so you return to town. Go to **78**.

93

After a couple of minutes of crawling along the tight passage, you come to an abandoned guard room. The remains of metal furniture and weapons make clear the room's purpose, and two dwarf skeletons still sit in place. Rusted weapons litter the floor. The remains of what was once a bed are scattered in a corner. As you search through the ruined equipment for anything useful, rocks begin to fall from the ceiling, striking you on the head and arm. **Lose 5 hit points.**

Quickly you retrace your steps and continue along the main passage.

Go to 16.

94

"Evil does not exist", you reply. "All of the world is part of Creation. No part is inherently evil. In the end, everything is one".

As you realise the bliss that comes with this revelation, you feel yourself slipping into a state of consciousness where nothing is real but the oneness of being. The walls, pews, windows, and altar transform into patches of bright light, part of a continuum of light drawn from a spot at the centre of your belly. You feel the weight on your heart lift, the pain in your back recede. All is well with the world, and all is well inside you.

Congratulations, you have reached Nirvana.

Unfortunately, reaching Nirvana also makes you apathetic about illusory worldly affairs. While your soul experiences ecstasy, your body starves away on the steps of the temple. Until, that is, a hungry wolf walks through the door and starts eating your body. A passing monk sees the wolf, and throws his mace at the beast, but it dodges aside and the mace slams into your forehead, smashing it backwards against the altar. The monk rushes forward and grabs you by the legs, but the wolf sinks its teeth into your scalp and pulls. Your head rips out of its socket and the wolf runs away, proudly carrying your head.

You are dead.

Problem?

95

I really, really, really, really hate you right now.

You are trying to derail this quest, right?

Take **10 hit points damage**, you nasty person. We'll call it a shark attack or something.

Now go back to 50 and choose again. No you may not get the healing bonus this time.

96

This is probably the first opportunity you have had to test your new sword. If not, congratulations – you managed to avoid getting screwed-over earlier, because of a design glitch. Or rather, because of something random a wizard did.



It is only when you draw your sword to fight the pirates that you realise that it is actually cursed. It is heavier than a normal weapon, and harder to wield, but it exerts a compulsive pull on your will, requiring you to select it over your other weapons. Made for the lulz by an apprentice magician, this Troll Sword is designed to make combat more difficult. It flops all over the place, changes direction mid-swing, and periodically backfires towards you.

Mark your main weapon as **Troll Sword, -2 combat rating**. This negative rating also cancels out any rating bonus you could receive for other weapons. You are forced to hold onto this weapon and not replace it, unless you find a way to cancel its magic.

If you wish to stand and fight, despite your combat disadvantage, go to **87**.

If you have *Schwoopy Arms*, and wish to swing onto the pirate ship, go to **14**.

If you would rather jump in the sea, go to **85**.

## 97

The vast meadowlands of the Plain of Grass lie north of the farmsteads surrounding the town of Start. The plains were once the location for the vast sheep herds of the kingdom, but fifty years ago, they were attacked and forced out by the Ovids – a strange race of sheep-centaurs with the bodies of large sheep and the arms, torsos, and heads of humans. Centuries of rumours about the farmers' unnatural closeness to their flocks provide a possible explanation for the appearance of the Ovids. Like true centaurs, the Ovids run in packs on the plains, scouting the perimeters of their ever-moving, nomadic villages as they graze different areas of the rough grasslands.

The plains themselves are an unlikely site for treasure, but they are the only route to the barrows of the ancestors, lying in the hills to the north. Not wishing to tarry too long and risk an encounter with the Ovids, you hurry across the plains. For hours, there is no sign of anything larger than a rabbit, let alone any treasure. After some time, you catch sight of an opening in the side of a small hill which seems to rise alone from the plain.

At this point, your luck turns sour, for the Ovids have clearly made camp within a mile of the cave, and their patrols are scouting the area. If you wish to return to town before they find you, go to **78**.

If you continue, it is not long before you hear a sharp whistle. You turn to see six of the strange creatures galloping towards you on their small sheep-like legs. Each is wielding a pole-arm.

If you are wearing a Wolf Cloak, turn to **30**.

Otherwise, the lead Ovid, a large ram with curled horns protruding from his shaggy red hair, approaches you alone. He gives a sign to his band to hold back; they do not want to risk losing the entire patrol. He shouts a challenge in their strange, bleating language.

if you draw your weapon and prepare to fight the Ovids, turn to **77**.

If you wish to try to speak to the Ovids, turn to **22**.

## 98

As you continue onwards, the trail becomes harder, with bracken and nettles intruding on the trail. It takes you longer and longer to cover short distances, and the trees seem to become more mocking and evil.

You are walking beneath the trunk of a particularly large, dead tree when something drops from the branches of the overgrowth above. You try to dive out of the way and reach for your weapon, but it impacts onto your back, knocking you to the floor.

Roll 1 die and **deduct this many hit-points** for the drop attack.

If you are still alive, your main weapon has been knocked from your hand. You may retrieve the weapon after this combat, but otherwise, you will have to fight with your second weapon. If you only possess a single weapon, fight barehanded at -2 to your attack rating (bonuses from traits and armour may still be added to this score).

Rolling aside, you stand and face the enemy. It is a ferocious creature resembling a koala, but twice the size, with pointed fangs and bloodied claws. Its grey-black fur is matted with the blood of its victims. You have heard terrible tales of these dreadful creatures, and now you must face one in mortal combat.

*In this battle, the enemy goes first.*

#### BATTLE

**Drop Bear      Attack rating -1      Hit points 8**

If you win the combat, turn to **32**.

#### 99

The door opens inwards, its ages-old hinges creaking with the strain. You pass through the door, into what you realise is the main part of the former mines.

The tunnel in which you stand resembles an ancient mineshaft. This room is the collection-point to which ore would be ferried to be raised to the surface on cables. The shafts to the surface have since been filled in, but the remains of the miners' work are still visible. Broken carts and rusted picks litter the floor. Several small skeletons, clutching picks and shovels, suggest that some of the dwarves were caught in this room during the disaster which destroyed the mine. Parts of the ceiling have fallen in, but the passage ahead seems stable enough to use.

The passage turns out to be a gently descending mineshaft, dug almost straight into the earth. A rusted railtrack runs down the middle of the tunnel, with handrails along its sides; it is almost like somebody has built a railroad for you to follow. As with earlier areas, the use of stone arches to hold up the ceiling has ensured that the tunnel is still intact after all these years. Torches set into brackets on the wall also continue to glow, long after they should have expired. Powerful magicks, or artistic license, is clearly at still at work here.

You follow the passage forward, staying close to the ancient rails. Your footfalls echo in the passage. Nothing disturbs your progress. There is less life this far down, and the creatures of the depths are stranger to your eyes. Once in awhile, an eyeless white spider or centipede darts into a crack in the walls.

After ten minutes, you come to a side tunnel, wending away from the main tunnel.

If you wish to investigate the side tunnel, turn to **7**.

If you would prefer to continue along the railroad, turn to **74**.

100

You exchange blow after blow with the troll, feeling your life sapping beneath its persistent attacks. But it is the creature which gives way first. A blow from your blade severs one of its arms when it is at its schwoopiest, reaching around behind you. For the first time, you see doubt in its eyes. Then you hit it a body blow, leaving a tiny red stain on its slender chest. This is enough to wipe the malicious grin from its face. Within a few more blows, you have severed its tiny neck, and its head lies at your feet. As the head rolls along the floor, you could swear you hear it utter its last words: "you..... mad..... bro?"

You contemplate hanging the head on a spike with its victims, but then you remember: you're here to loot, not to troll.

You are filling your backpack with treasure, when the thought occurs to you: *I'm stuck here*. The tentacled thing has made no progress in bashing down the door, and is reduced to watching you balefully through the grille, its one red eye full of frustration and hatred. But there is no way out besides the passage through which you have entered. You rap at the walls with your blade, but you find no signs of a secret passage, no point soft enough to allow you to tunnel out. You examine the strange device, but its symbols are in a language you can't read.

You let out a moan as the feeling of despair overwhelms you. After a few minutes, you recover your senses and begin to formulate an escape plan. Perhaps you can lure the creature into the chamber, back it into a wall, and escape along the tunnel. Or maybe you can fight the thing, and sever enough of its tentacles to allow you to clamber over it. You are preparing for another desperate battle, when suddenly, a red haze engulfs the room.

What is this? You think. Some last trick of the troll's? Some special attack by the tentacled horror?

Then the mist begins to clear, and you see Queen Mary Sue standing before you.

"But... butbut..." You are so amazed you can hardly talk.

"Come now", the Queen chides you. "You don't imagine that one would be foolish enough to leave a mercenary like you with all of one's treasure, do you?"

You can barely contain your anger. "You told me you couldn't teleport out here!"

The Queen gives you a telling look, like you have just told her the moon is made of cheese. "We all tell little fibbies now and then, darling. If one had simply whisked you all the way out here, then what kind of adventure would that have been?"

*About three sections long, you think.*

"So all of this... the unnatural winds, the oar shortage, the hidden keys, the ancient crypt... this was all so you could have a little laugh?" You are seriously considering attacking the Queen right now. Superpowers and chance of escape notwithstanding.

"Oh, no", she replies, almost laughing. "Haven't you realised yet? *This is all about you!*"

"Me?" You really have no idea what she is on about.

"Of course!" she is laughing now. "You see, there are some of us who just love to be trolled! People who adore the skill of solving puzzles, the thrill of high adventure, the rewarding feeling of finally meeting the challenge of a fiendish plot! I *know* you are this type of person, otherwise you could never have got this far!"

Your mouth falls open, flabbergasted. She thinks that you... are only here... because you enjoy it?

"After all", she adds, "you have come this far, over many lives no doubt, in the face of perpetual trolling. Through unfair instadeaths, convoluted problems, utterly random choices, impossible science, and all the worst tricks of the dungeon designer's trade. Surely you don't expect one to believe that you did it all for the imaginary treasure you will never see?"

Before you can reply, a red mist surrounds you and you realise that you are being teleported away once more. The cavern, the Queen, the strange device, the tentacled beast, fade from your vision as you are engulfed in red mist. As your senses (and the fourth wall) begin to recover, you find yourself in a strange land far away.

With nothing but a sword in your hand, and an empty backpack.

An empty... backpack...

FFFFFFUUUUUUUUUUUUUU

*That fegging witch! That's the second time she's cost me my fegging treasure!*

You are overcome with fury, and you curse Queen Mary Sue to the four corners of the globe.

But soon, you see the lights on the horizon, and start off once more, towards a new city, new adventures... and new opportunities to be trolled.

THE

FEGGING

END.

## HINTS AND TIPS

*Written backwards to avoid casual perusal*

Lufesu osla era smeti rehto lareves dna, ereh yek eht pu kcip ot deen uoy. Emag eht ni retal ot kcab emoc tonnac uoy hcihw, ecalptekram eht si og dluohs uoy ecalp tsrif eht, erutnevda eht gnitrats no.

Tniop siht erofeb elbaliava stsoob gnitar kcatta eerht era ereht. Ereht gniog erofeb gnitar kcatta owt sulp tsael ta evah ot erus ekam, thgif ysae na siht ekam ot. Sretsnom fo tpyrc eht ni si eseht fo tsrif eht. Erutnevda elohw eht ni stabmoc yrassedecen owt ylno era ereht.

Thgif lanif eht erofeb yltrohs ytinutroppo gnilaeh lluf a si ereht. Egats siht yb xis sulp sa hcum sa evah ot kcul htiw elbissop si ti. Gnitar kcatta ruof sulp tsael ta tuohtiw elbataebnu ylraen si dna evif sulp si ssob lanif eht. Dne eht ta thgif ssob eht si rehto eht.

Smelborp enin ytenin gnos eht ot ecenerrefer a si rood melbrop eht. Elzzup syek eerht eht dna, tpyrc eht ni rood smelbrop fo rebmun eht era sseccus rof evlos ot deen uoy selzzup ylno eht.

**gnorw si hcihw eno eht si top eht ni eno eht. dnalsi eht no evac eht ni dna top eht ni, lennut edis, tsal eht pu, ecalptekram eht ta, syek rouf era ereht.**