

IMPUDENT PEASANTS!

BY ANDREW WRIGHT



This Allansian map excerpt is the work of David A. Holt
(with some minor alterations by myself).

Impudent Peasant!

Two dice, a pencil and an eraser are all you need to embark on this exciting adventure, which comes complete with its own combat system and an adventure sheet to record your progress. It is up to YOU to decide which routes to follow, which dangers to risk, and which foes to fight!

Impudent Peasant! is dedicated to the playtest team from the fightingfantasygamebooks.com forum without whom it almost certainly would never have been finished:

- **Seldon Silverhair** (Getaway)
- **Donarth Quickblade** (Plibit4)
- **Gareth Bel** (astral12)
- **Jakon Frewind** (thief)
- **Darak Swiftfoot** (cosmo)

(And extra thanks to cosmo for creating the
Two Trolls Tavern.)

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INTRODUCTION

You are about to take the lead role in an adventure that will make you a quite generally respected person, at least in your neck of the woods. Before you take part in this quest, you must first determine your own strengths and weaknesses. You use dice to work out your initial scores. On page 11 is an *Adventure Sheet*, which you may use to record details of your adventure. On it, you will find boxes for recording your SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK scores, as well as other details. You are advised either to record your scores on the *Adventure Sheet* in pencil or to make photocopies of the sheet for use in future adventures. Take note that you begin this adventure as a fifteen-year old Human and your SKILL and STAMINA score are generated a little differently to other *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks.

Skill, Stamina and Luck

Roll one die. If you rolled a 1 or 2, your *Initial* SKILL score is 6. If you roll a 3 or 4, your *Initial* SKILL score is 7. If you roll a 5 or 6, your *Initial* SKILL score is 8. Enter your *Initial* SKILL score in the SKILL box on the *Adventure Sheet*.

Roll one die. Add 6 to the number rolled and enter this total in the STAMINA box.

Roll one die. Add 6 to the number and enter this total in the LUCK box.

For reasons that will be explained below, all your scores will change constantly during the adventure. You must keep an accurate record of these scores, and for this reason, you are advised to write small in the boxes or to keep an eraser handy. However, never rub out your *Initial* scores, except on those very rare occasions when the text specifically tells you so.

Although you may be rewarded with additional SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK points, these totals may never exceed your *Initial* scores, except on very rare occasions, when you will be instructed on a particular page.

Your SKILL reflects your general expertise in fighting and combat; the higher the better. Your STAMINA score reflects your general constitution, your overall will to survive, your determination and overall fitness; the higher your STAMINA score, the longer you will be able to survive. Your LUCK score indicates how naturally lucky a person you are. Luck – and magic – are facts of life in the fantasy world you are about to explore.

Battles

During your adventure, you will often come across pages in the book, which instruct you to fight a creature of some sort. An option to flee may be given, but if not – or if you choose to attack the creature anyway – you must resolve the battle as described below.

First, record the opponent's SKILL and STAMINA scores in the first empty Encounter box on your *Adventure Sheet*. The scores for each opponent or creature are given in the book each time you have an encounter. You should also make a note of any special abilities or instructions, which are unique to that particular opponent.

The sequence of combat is then:

1. Roll two dice for your opponent. Add its SKILL score. This total is the opponents Attack Strength.
2. Roll two dice for yourself. Add the number rolled to your current SKILL score. This total is your Attack Strength.
3. If your Attack Strength is higher than your opponent's is, you have wounded it. Proceed to step 4. If your opponent's Attack Strength is higher than yours is, it has wounded you. Proceed to step 5. If both Attack Strength totals are the same, you have avoided each other's blows – start the next Attack Round from steps 1 above.
4. You have wounded your opponent; so subtract 2 points from its STAMINA score. You may use LUCK here to do additional damage (see below). Proceed to step 7.
5. Your opponent has wounded you; so subtract 2 points from your STAMINA score. You may use LUCK to reduce the loss of STAMINA (see below). Proceed to step 7.
6. Make the appropriate adjustments to either your opponents or your own STAMINA scores (and your LUCK score if you used LUCK – see below).
7. Begin the next Attack Round, starting again at step 1 with your current SKILL score. This sequence continues until the STAMINA score of either you or your opponent reaches zero (death). If your opponent dies, you are free to continue with your adventure. If you die, your adventure ends and you must start all over again by creating a new character.

Escaping

On some pages you may be given the option of running away from a battle should things be going badly for you. However, if you do run away, your opponent automatically gets in one wound on you (subtract 2 STAMINA points) as you flee. Such is the price of cowardice! Note that you may use LUCK on this wound in the normal way (see below). You may only *Escape* if that option is specifically given to you on the page.

Fighting More Than One Opponent

In some situations, you may find yourself facing more than one person or creature in combat and will have to fight them all at the same time! When you find yourself fighting multiple opponents, each adversary will make a separate attack on you in the course of each Attack Round, but you can choose which one to fight. Attack your

chosen target as in a normal battle. Against any additional opponents you roll the dice for your Attack Strength in the normal way; if your Attack Strength is greater than your opponent's is, in this instance, you will not inflict any damage; you can regard it as if you have parried an incoming blow. If your Attack Strength is lower than your adversary's is, however, you will be wounded in the normal way.

Luck

At various times during your adventure, either in battles or when you come across other situations in which you could either be *Lucky* or *Unlucky* (details of these are given in the relevant pages themselves), you may use LUCK to make the outcome more favourable to you. However, beware! Using LUCK is a risky business and, if you are *Unlucky*, the results could be disastrous.

The procedure for *Testing your Luck* is as follows: roll two dice. If the number rolled is less than or equal to your current LUCK score, you have been *Lucky* and the outcome will be in your favour. If the number rolled is higher than your current LUCK score, you have been *Unlucky* and will be penalised.

This procedure is known as *Testing your Luck*. Each time you *Test your Luck*, you must subtract 1 point from your current LUCK score. Thus, you will soon realise that, the more you rely on your LUCK, the more risky this procedure will become.

Using Luck in Battles

On certain pages of the book, you will be told to *Test your Luck*, and will be told the consequences of your being *Lucky* or *Unlucky*. However, in battles you always have the option of using your LUCK either to inflict more serious damage on an opponent you have just wounded or to minimise the effects of a wound you have just received.

If you have just wounded an opponent, you may *Test your Luck* as described above. If you are *Lucky*, you have inflicted a severe wound; deduct an extra 2 points from your opponent's STAMINA score. However, if you are *Unlucky*, however, your blow only scratches your opponent, and you deduct only 1 point from your opponent's STAMINA (instead of scoring the normal 2 points of damage, you now only score 1).

Whenever you yourself are wounded in combat, you may *Test your Luck* to try to minimise the wound. If you are *Lucky*, your opponent's blow only grazes you; deduct only 1 point from your STAMINA. If you are *Unlucky*, your wound is a serious one and you must deduct 1 extra STAMINA point (i.e., a total of 3 points from your own STAMINA). Remember: you must subtract 1 point from your LUCK score each time you *Test your Luck*.

More about your Attributes

Skill

Your SKILL score will not change much during the course of your adventure. Occasionally a paragraph may give you instructions to increase or decrease your

SKILL score, but it may not exceed its *Initial* value unless you are specifically instructed to the contrary.

At various times during your adventure, you will be told to *Test your Skill*. The procedure for this is the same as that for *Testing your Luck*: roll two dice. If the number rolled is less than or equal to your current SKILL score, you have succeeded in your test and the result will go in your favour. If the number rolled is higher than your current SKILL score, you have failed the test and will have to suffer the consequences. However, unlike *Testing your Luck*, do not subtract 1 point from your SKILL each time you *Test your Skill*. Your SKILL score can never exceed its *Initial* value unless specifically instructed on a page.

Stamina

Your STAMINA score will change a lot during your adventure. It will drop because of wounds received through combat, or by falling foul of traps and pitfalls; and it will drop after you perform any particularly arduous task. If your STAMINA score ever falls to zero or below, you have been killed and should stop reading the book immediately. Brave adventurers who wish to pursue their quest must roll up a new character and start all over again.

You can restore lost STAMINA by eating meals, sleeping, and drinking a Healing Potion, assuming you find one. More details about eating and sleeping are given below.

Luck

Additions to your LUCK score may be awarded in the adventure when you have been particularly lucky or created your own luck by some other action. Details are given, where appropriate, in the paragraphs of the book. Remember that, as with SKILL and STAMINA, your LUCK score may never exceed its *Initial* value unless specifically instructed on a page.

Eating and Sleeping

This adventure follows guidelines similar to *The Shamutanti Hills* with regards to eating and sleeping. Each day (see below for more information on the Passing of Days), you must eat at least one meal, otherwise you will lose STAMINA points due to undernourishment. You may rest and eat only when allowed by instructions in the text, and you may only eat one meal at a time. When you eat a meal, add points to your STAMINA score as instructed by the text. When night comes, you will generally be able to get some sleep, but there may be events that restricts the availability of sleeping time. Likewise then, if you miss a night's sleep you may also lose STAMINA points as you will be tired the next day, although taking a night's rest will usually replenish your STAMINA. The text will instruct you on how many points to add to your STAMINA score following a night's sleep.

Equipment

You will start your adventure with a bare minimum of equipment, but you may find or buy other items during your adventure. As you can see from the *Adventure Sheet* on page **11** there is a large box for the recording of general Equipment, such as weapons, armour, treasure, potions and the like, as well as four smaller boxes for recording quantities of Gold, Food, Torches, and Arrows, that you may acquire. For now, note down that you have:

- A wooden club (note this in the Equipment box).
- 3 meals (note these in the Food box).
- 6 Gold Pieces (note these in the Gold box and leave some space as you may also have to note Silver Pieces as well). Bear in mind that 10 Silver Pieces = 1 Gold Piece.

You can also choose ONE, and only ONE, of the following item groups:

- Fishing gear (note this in the Equipment box). During the course of a day, you may choose to use the fishing gear to help replenish the number of meals you have, assuming you are successful and actually catch something. Details of how to do this will be given in the text.
- 3 torches (note these in the Torches box). Torches can obviously be used for exploring dark or underground areas.
- A bow, quiver, and 6 arrows (note the bow and quiver in the Equipment box, and note the 6 arrows in the Arrows box). Before the start of any battle, unless otherwise stated, you may fire an arrow at your opponent, using the bow. To do this, cross off one Arrow from your Arrow box and *Test your Skill*. If you succeed, you may subtract 2 points from your opponent's STAMINA score. You may use LUCK here to do additional damage (see above: *Using Luck in Battles*). Obviously, if you do not succeed, you have missed with your shot. In any case, assuming your opponent still lives, you must then fight the battle as per normal.

Hero Points

There is also a box on your *Adventure Sheet* for recording Hero Points. They are not so much a measure of how heroic you are but more about how well you are doing at working out the Big Picture. Yeah, I know it's a clumsy narrative device and inappropriately named at that. So sue me. You start the adventure with zero Hero Points.

The Passing of Days

Finally, there is a box at the top of your *Adventure Sheet* for recording which day of the Allansian week it is. You will be instructed by the text as to when and what you should be writing in the Day box. Next to the Day box is a Name box for entering the name of this poor sap/famous warrior to avoid that tedious nameless adventurer syndrome. Hint: Ragnar Runeweaver is almost always a better choice of name than Nigel, Errol, or Daniel (and no offense to those people either).

Hints on Play

This adventure is dangerous. You might well fail on your first attempt. Make notes and draw a map as you explore – this map will prove invaluable when making further forays in this adventure, and it will enable you to progress more rapidly to unexplored sections. Remember: when you are travelling through any environment, it is a good idea to make a note of where such encounters lie in the adventure, including useful objects and information to aid you on your dangerous quest.

Be wary about *Testing your Luck*, unless a paragraph instructs you to do this! When it comes to fights, you should *Test your Luck* only to keep yourself alive if an opponent's blow would otherwise kill you. However, be warned! If you decide to use LUCK in this way, be certain your adversary is worth it – LUCK points are precious!

You start this mission with very few possessions, but will be given opportunities to collect food, weapons, and items. However, choose your equipment carefully – although many are precious or magical, others are red herrings and of no real value at all.

You will soon realise that paragraphs make no sense if read in numerical order. It is essential that you read only the paragraphs you are instructed to go to. Reading other sections lessens the excitement and surprise during play. The only true way to succeed in this adventure involves minimal risk; even if your character scores are low, you should be able to find magical artefacts and weapons that may increase your chances of victory in battle.

"'Impudent peasant!' he growls, 'Do you think you are any match for Balthus Dire?' With these words he snaps his fingers and you hear a grunting from behind. You swing round to see a grotesque creature shambling towards you. Its hairy body has four arms, each ending in vicious-looking hooks. As it approaches, it slashes the air in front of it. 'Why, I'll wager you are not even a match for a CLAWBEAST!' laughs Dire."

Reference **374**, *Citadel of Chaos* (with thanks to Edward T. Jolley)

"Commoners were obliged to provide ritual gifts of grain and cattle and to render labour services when summoned by the chiefs or the king. If they knew what was good for them, they were prompt and courteous in their response to requests from their head-hunting overlords."

p. 184, *Cannibals and Kings*, Marvin Harris (1977)

Big thanks to the Oiseau for his Advelh software – use it to write YOUR next interactive gamebook adventure!

The MIRE-MAN from reference **49** is by Simon Hall and first appeared in the Out of the Pit section of issue 13 of *Warlock – The Fighting Fantasy Magazine* (although I don't believe the MIRE-MAN was supposed to have 4 Attacks, as is wrongly printed in the article).

Thanks to Simon Osborne for providing details of the RAZORFISH from reference **25**, which originally comes from Ian Livingstone's *Return to Firetop Mountain* (FF50). Thanks also to Vastariner for the unused pun based on said fish.

Lastly, big thanks to Guillermo Paredes for providing details about the price of Yaztromo's Nose Filters from Ian Livingstone's *Forest of Doom* (FF3).

[N.B. For reasons of rules continuity, certain parts of this adventure have been copied near verbatim from *Sorcery! Book 1: The Shamutanti Hills*, by Steve Jackson (1983).]

NAME		DAY	MONSTER ENCOUNTER BOXES		
SKILL <i>Initial=</i> <i>Current=</i>	STAMINA <i>Initial=</i> <i>Current=</i>	LUCK <i>Initial=</i> <i>Current=</i>			
EQUIPMENT	HERO POINTS		<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>
	GOLD		<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>
	FOOD		<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>
	TORCHES		<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>
	ARROWS		<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>	<i>Skill=</i> <i>Stamina=</i>

BACKGROUND

“The town of Bitterford lies in the valley of the Red River, on the southern edge of the Pagan Plains. Built on the ruins of an older settlement that dates from before the War of the Wizards, Bitterford is connected by road to the much larger settlements of Kaad, Mirewater and Port Blacksand (via Riverglade). As a result, much trade passes through the town, whether it be ore-barges from the Dwarfish mines upriver or merchant caravans carrying exotic wares to the Allansian interior. In addition to wealth from trade, the farmland surrounding Bitterford is rich and fertile, supporting a prosperous community of farmers and freeholders. Not surprisingly then, the town has been often raided by marauding tribes of nonhumans and bandits from the windswept Pagan Plains to the north.¹”

Raljak Lying-Jackal, *A Shorter History of Allansia*, 284 AC, the Year of the Fox, Salamonis: Scrolls from the Halls of Learning.

After Bitterford was razed for the third time since its founding, merchants from both Kaad and Mirewater banded together to create the Bitterford Guard, a small but efficient unit led by a Human or Dwarf warrior appointed from either town. Since then, although the raids haven't stopped, they have been limited instead to stealing the odd herd animal under cover of darkness, as opposed to wanton bloody destruction of the entire town. The current Marshal of the Bitterford Guard is Urad Blackaxe from Mirewater, a grizzled Dwarf skilled with either axe or crossbow and rumoured to have one time been a Trialmaster in Baron Sukumvit's legendary Trial of Champions. As well as directing the operations of the Bitterford Guard, Urad is the face of law and order in Bitterford though he usually leaves the more mundane judgements and trials to a Bitterford Council made up of the more wealthy merchants and land-owners living in the town.

For the past week however, both Urad and the Council have been sorely troubled by rumours and portents emanating out of the trackless wastes that are the Pagan Plains. Thick intertwining columns of smoke have been spotted rising from the Plains, always an excellent indicator of a predatory warband on the move. A small family clan of Centaurs was found slaughtered on the northern road to Kaad by a merchant convoy from that town. Such was the scene of carnage they encountered that the convoy's Strongarms were still grey-faced and shaking even as they crossed the Red River and left for Mirewater the next day. Then, Lael Whitebeard, a hermit and hedge-wizard who lived in a small stone hut about a day's ride into the Plains, was found wandering towards Bitterford by a Guard rider out scouting. Most of his skin had been flayed and removed, apparently by a particularly blunt sword. He said just one thing before expiring, whispering slowly whilst clutching the Guard rider with his now-skinless fingers: *“Gore! Gore will come!”*

¹ The name Bitterford actually dates from a recorded incident when a merchant caravan travelling from Kaad to Mirewater was attacked and almost destroyed whilst crossing the Red River, by a mongrel rabble of Orcs, Goblins, and the odd Centaur and Rhinoman exile.

YOU however, still possess all your skin and have never strayed further than a day from Bitterford in the first fifteen years of your life. You were orphaned five years ago when a rogue band of Hill Trolls, raiding further west than is usual, got as far as the Bitterford outer reaches, slaying your parents and several other townsfolk in the process, before being wiped out by Urad Blackaxe and his Guard. The only reason you survived was that you were with the Guard at the time, pestering the younger ones for combat lessons. Since then, you have lived in the simple wooden hovel your father built, employed by the people of the town to do odd jobs and general labour about the town and its surrounding farmlands. Partly due to the fact you are significantly larger than a typical fifteen year-old Human, and partly due to the odd spot of combat practice with the Bitterford Guard, a large number of your jobs involve disposing of various weird Allansian creatures that wander into town in search of food. And there are a few. Darkwood Forest is not that far to the east, the Dawn Mounds and the woods around the Tower of Zanbar Bone to the south have long been a baneful area of ill repute, and then of course there are the Pagan Plains...

You are, in short, self-appointed peasant pest-destroyer of Bitterford, but also open to other forms of employment. Could an adventuring career be among them? Turn to **1** to find out...

NOW TURN OVER

1

Stormsday

Write 'Stormsday' in the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet*. True to its name, the day begins under a slate-coloured sky, although the persistent drizzle of rain from above fails to develop into anything more spectacular, and gradually gives way to occasional bursts of bright sunlight.

You rise early and in a foul temper, mainly due to several new leaks in the thatch roof above your straw pallet. If you wish, you could eat a meal at this time, though you will not gain any STAMINA points for it, as you have not yet lost any! However, by eating a meal now, you will avoid the consequences of losing STAMINA the following day due to hunger, and you do not yet know when your next chance to eat might be. Regardless, if you choose to eat a meal now, do not forget to deduct 1 meal from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

Afterwards, you stomp through the mud and puddles of the backroads, towards the main square of Bitterford, past both prosperous stone houses and the occasional crumbling ruin of a time long past, now almost submerged in overgrown vegetation. Presenting yourself at the chambers for the Bitterford Council, you are told by Gilfas the Scribe that there is little work today. Indeed, the Council chambers appear to be full of nervous merchants and farmers, all gossiping about the death of Lael Whitebeard and the possibility of a warband raid from the Pagan Plains.

Just as you are contemplating the prospect of a day of unpaid idle however, Farmer Corran appears, wearing his traditional sheepskin jerkin. Corran is not a particularly wealthy farmer, due in part to rambling and extensive woods on his land from which all manner of horrors have crawled. This time apparently, his best herding dog was carried off by some spindly robe-clad humanoid and presumably eaten – he wants you to enter the wood and dispose of the creature. Technically, you don't deal with nonhumans – that being the Bitterford Guard's job – but they are busy with the Pagan Plains nonsense and Corran is clearly a desperate man.

'Please,' he begs you. 'I can't afford to lose another dog! I'll pay you 5 Gold Pieces, plus you can keep whatever you find!' That sounds tempting. To accept Farmer Corran's offer, turn to **34**.

Alternatively, if you possess some fishing gear (i.e. you have 'fishing gear' written down in the Equipment box on your *Adventure Sheet*) you may instead prefer to cite the irrevocable 'no humanoids' clause of your contract to Farmer Corran, and spend the day fishing in the Red River, in which case turn to **25**. Note that if you do NOT possess fishing gear then you MUST choose the option to help Farmer Corran.

2

Once again you head out towards the riverside property of Farmer Corran. This time however, instead of investigating the mysterious tangled woodland, Corran directs you to a far corner of his modest land, where a tall rocky shape can be seen rising up above the knee-high pastoral grass.

Farmer Corran and his two remaining dogs wait for you at the entrance to the field, and so you stride forward alone through the grass, towards the distant and peculiar rock outcrop. Up close, you see the reason for both its strange shape and ever-increasing size – the 'outcrop' is in fact the growing nest of a horde of large FIRE ANTS, each as long as your finger!

Before you can pay too much attention to the ants however, a hideous shadowy figure clammers out of a dark hole at the base of the ant mound and hurls itself at you. It is human-like and about your size but its body is completely covered

in ants and it mewls wordlessly as it attempts to strangle you with hands whose ant-adorned surfaces shift and move in skin-crawling fashion. This is a fight to the finish!

ANT SYMBIOTE

SKILL 6

STAMINA 10

You can fire an arrow at the ANT SYMBIOTE if you wish (and don't forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If the ANT SYMBIOTE wins an Attack Round then you must suffer an additional STAMINA point of damage as FIRE ANTS jump from the Ant Symbiote to you and inflict many painfully poisonous bites.

If you defeat the ANT SYMBIOTE in battle, roll two dice and *Test your Skill* to see if you can avoid the massed hordes of FIRE ANTS that have been encroaching upon you whilst you have been fighting. If you are successful, turn to **35**. If you are unsuccessful, turn to **14**.

3

The skiff floats gently down a reed-lined waterway into a large pool completely surrounded by scrawny trees trailing great shrouds of pale green droop-moss. The machete-carrying labourer is squatting nervously at the front of the boat, and you can see sweat beading rapidly on the back of his neck, despite the overcast grey weather. The only sound is the ragged, nervous breathing of the puntman behind you, pushing the skiff forward through the muddy brown waters.

In an instant however, the waters of the pool bubble and roil as a large head, adorned with vicious hooks and fangs, rises suddenly out of the slime, attached to a long, segmented body. With muck dripping off its glistening hide, the beast's gaping maw arcs unerringly towards you. You must fight the BLOOD WORM!

BLOOD WORM

SKILL 4

STAMINA 6

You can fire an arrow at the BLOOD WORM if you wish (and don't forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If the BLOOD WORM wins an Attack Round, it has fastened itself to you and proceeds to suck your blood. You automatically lose 2 STAMINA points every Attack Round (including the first round it wins) regardless of whether you win or not. You cannot use LUCK to reduce this damage either.

Assuming you manage to defeat the BLOOD WORM, the labourers help you tie its bloated and mottled carcass to the rear of the skiff. When you return to Mistress Jhaleph and the fringe of the swamp, many of the other labourers cheer and clap upon seeing the body of the creature you have slain. Mistress Jhaleph rewards you by handing over 3 Gold Pieces as promised. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*. Turn to **21**.

4

Try as you may, it proves impossible to keep your eyelids open, and you nod off into a fitful sleep. As a result, you are out like a snuffed candle when several small shadowy figures, each clutching a large sack, climb over the back wall of the compound and begin sneaking towards the warehouse.

As you lay asleep and senseless at your post the thieves cosh you across the head, just to be sure, and tie you up. Deduct 1 STAMINA for the wound – if you are still alive, read on. The thieves then proceed to loot the warehouse of Venquis Glint, as well as also relieving you of your valuables. Be sure to cross off all the Gold Pieces

and Silver Pieces currently recorded in the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

When Venquis Glint arrives at dawn, it is with several members of the Bitterford Guard, who are clad in mail armour and black surcoats featuring the insignia of a grey stone bridge silhouetted against a red sun. Venquis is outraged to find you tied up helplessly and most of his merchandise stolen. He absolutely refuses to pay you any of the 3 Gold Pieces he initially promised, and all but accuses you outright of being in league with the thieves and thus in line for a cut of the proceeds from selling the stolen gear. You feel that it is only the presence of the Guards that prevents Venquis from beating you with his bare fists.

‘You’d be better off dealing with pests, youngster,’ one of the Guards advises you whilst untying your bonds. ‘Leave sentinel duty to professionals such as ourselves.’

Dejectedly, you stomp off home. Turn to **11**.

5

“And so it came to pass that Bitterford was completely obliterated by the marauding warband of the mysterious Chaos warlord known only as Gore the Grim. None could stand against him for he had retrieved a powerful magical artefact from deep within a ruined crypt, somewhere out in the vastness of the Pagan Plains. The artefact took the form of a silver circlet that, when worn, allowed Gore to psychically impose his will on others. Those who tried to fight him found themselves drained of determination and unable to best the warlord, thus, more and more scavengers, bandits, non-humans, and outcasts joined his growing warband and acquiesced to the resoluteness of Gore the Grim to rend the lands of Allansia asunder in a savage trial of blood and flame.

The people of Bitterford were but the first victims. There were many, many others...”

The Grey Mage, *This Ravaged Land: Notes from After the Allansian Apocalypse*, 305 AC, the Year of the Crocodile, Oyster Bay Refugee Camp: Scrolls from the New Dark Ages

Something went wrong. Perhaps you did not acquire enough Hero Points. Perhaps you were slain in combat, on that final fateful Highday of Bitterford. Perhaps it was a bit of both. Regardless, the people of Bitterford have perished and this current little adventurous jaunt of yours is now well and truly over...

6

Unfortunately for you, one of your legs gets trapped in some sort of animal burrow whilst you are patrolling the Bitterford edge of the firebreak. Desperately you try to free yourself, even as the burrow’s inhabitants – two dog-sized BRISTLE BEASTS – erupt angrily out of another entrance.

Before the Guardsmen can spy your fate and help you get free, the spiny reptilian creatures have given you an extensive goring and then fled out into the Pagan Plains. Deduct 4 points from your STAMINA score for the injuries suffered whilst at the mercy of the BRISTLE BEASTS. Assuming you still live, the Guardsmen are not totally uncaring about your bad luck however, and despite the odd stifled snicker from his underlings, Captain Vortnik still sees fit to pay you 2 Gold Pieces for your endeavours. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet* and turn to **21**.

7

The left-hand trail is relatively short, and the buzzing noise becomes a little louder as you wander down it. Before long, you enter a small clearing, across which lies a fallen tree trunk long since colonised by great swathes of moss and battlements of vivid red, bright yellow and pale green fungi. Accounting for the noise are a number of large golden-furred bees that drone about the clearing. They appear to have established a small hive within the dead tree trunk.

With a shock however, you recognise them as a colony of KILLER BEES from Darkwood Forest. Both their honey and wax are highly valued by Allansian merchants and whilst there are not enough here to present a serious threat to you, their stings are still very painful.

What will you do now?

Investigate the beehive turn to **43**

Or, if you have not already done so,

Retreat back down the trail and take the central path turn to **28**

Retreat back down the trail and take the right-hand path turn to **15**

8

On seeing your aggressive intentions, the bird flaps its short black wings in a desperate attempt to get airborne.

‘Squawk! Mistake! Squawk!’ it trills, but you are in no mood for pleasantries.

You lunge forward to attack. Your foe is a JABBERWING – a large, crow-like bird capable of speech due to the surprising amount of intelligence they possess.

JABBERWING

SKILL 4

STAMINA 3

You may fire an arrow at the JABBERWING if you wish (don’t forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you choose to do so however, you must add one to the dice roll when *Testing your Skill* as the flying JABBERWING is a difficult target to hit.

If you slay the JABBERWING, Khazgar the Herder finally approaches the stinking, rotting carcass, now that all the carrion birds have gone. He confirms it is indeed his bull, from the tattered harness strapped to the bloody mess of once was what its neck. The mission is thus successful – in finding Khazgar’s bull – even if the outcome is disappointing, and Khazgar pays you 2 Gold Pieces for helping him. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

Now that your work here is done, you head for home. Turn to **41**.

9

To your mind, there is little better feeling than to return to your simple hovel to prepare a warm meal after a hard day’s graft. If you decide to eat, cross 1 meal off the total in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. For eating this meal, you may restore 3 STAMINA points if it is your first meal today, or 2 STAMINA points if you have already eaten. Your STAMINA score may not increase to more than your *Initial* score however.

Regardless of whether you eat or not, one thing that is inescapable after such a day is sleep. After shaking your pallet free from sundry minor pests and repositioning a series of pots and buckets to catch any leaks from the roof in the event of more rain, you sink into a deep slumber, for which you may restore a further 3 STAMINA. Again though, your STAMINA score may not go over your *Initial* score.

Moonsday

Erase 'Stormsday' from the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet* and replace it with 'Moonsday'. Did you eat at all yesterday? If you did not, then you must deduct 3 STAMINA points for going without food for the day.

Like yesterday, Moonsday is gloomy and overcast, with only the odd beam of sunlight piercing through the clouds to illuminate a lone tree, ivy-clad fence post, or crumbling mossy wall; all glistening with dew amidst the grey murk.

If you wish, you may eat a meal now, gaining a further 2 STAMINA points if you choose to do so (don't forget to cross 1 meal from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*). By eating now, you will avoid the consequences of losing STAMINA the following day due to hunger, as you do not know when the next chance to eat may come. Alternatively, you may just hope for the best and wait until later.

Unlike yesterday, you have barely finished pottering about your hovel, still just entertaining the idea of walking into town to see what work Gilfas the Scribe may have for you, when you are accosted at home by folk seeking help.

First comes the trail merchant Venquis Glint, complaining about thieves in the night, stealing from his warehouse out near the High Road to Kaad. 'Packs, rope, harnesses, provisions – where will it end?' he moans. 'I suspect Strongarms from rival merchant convoys myself! Stealing equipment for future trading expeditions deeper into the Allansian hinterlands! Either that or a small army!' Despite the fact Venquis' face is mottled with rage and spittle flies from his mouth as he rants, he will only pay you 3 Gold Pieces to guard his warehouse. What's worse, it will be an all-day, all-night job, until he can arrange a regular Bitterford Guard from the Council, meaning you will be dead tired tomorrow.

Barely has Venquis finished his tirade though, before Hieron Horsefriend, a rancher with property neighbouring Farmer Corran, wanders up to your front gate. Hieron's property encompasses low cliffs looking out over the Red River valley floor, and apparently the recent wet weather has caused a minor rockslide. This has in turn revealed a small cave at the base of the cliff, from which something has emerged to slay one of Hieron's prize foals. He is almost beside himself with grief, and between wracking sobs, reveals he will pay you 4 Gold Pieces to enter the cave and dispose of whatever lies within. He will allow you to claim whatever treasure you find inside the cave, if any, but you must supply your own torch for the exploration.

If neither of these missions appeal to you, you may of course go fishing in the Red River, but only if you possess fishing gear written down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*.

What will you do?

Help Venquis Glint by guarding his warehouse turn to **47**

Aid Hieron Horsefriend by entering the cave (you must have at least 1 Torch in the Torch box on your *Adventure Sheet* to choose this option) turn to **23**

Go fishing in the Red River, assuming you have fishing gear turn to **25**

10

You wander amidst the myriad stalls of the Bitterford Market, hunting for bargains. Below is a list of all the items available to be bought or sold at the market. If an item does not have a 'To buy' price it cannot be bought, and if it does not have a 'To sell' price it cannot be sold. Note also that some prices are given in Silver Pieces, and that 10 Silver Pieces equals 1 Gold Piece.

Beeswax - *To sell: 6 Gold Pieces*

If you have acquired some beeswax during the course of your adventure you can sell it at the market for 6 Gold Pieces.

Dagger - *To sell: 5 Silver Pieces*

If you have acquired a dagger during the course of your adventure you can sell it at the market for 5 Silver Pieces.

Giant Dragonfly skin - *To sell: 40 Gold Pieces*

If you have acquired some Giant Dragonfly skin during the course of your adventure you can sell it at the market for 40 Gold Pieces.

3 meals - *To buy: 6 Gold Pieces, To sell: 3 Gold Pieces*

You can buy or sell meals in lots of 3 only. Don't forget to update the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet* if you do so.

Club - *To buy: 5 Silver Pieces, To sell: 2 Silver Pieces*

See below for notes on combat penalties if you sell all your weapons at the market and do not buy a replacement.

Bow - *To buy: 10 Gold Pieces, To sell: 5 Gold Pieces*

To use the bow you will also need to buy a quiver and 6 arrows (for a total cost of 12 Gold Pieces and 7 Silver Pieces). Rules for using a bow and arrow are given in the Equipment section of the rules.

Quiver - *To buy: 12 Silver Pieces, To sell: 8 Silver Pieces*

To buy the quiver you will also need to buy a bow and 6 arrows (for a total cost of 12 Gold Pieces and 7 Silver Pieces). Rules for using a bow and arrow are given in the Equipment section of the rules.

6 arrows - *To buy: 15 Silver Pieces, To sell: 1 Gold Piece for 6 arrows or 1 Silver Piece per arrow*

To use the arrows you will also need to buy a bow and a quiver (for a total cost of 12 Gold Pieces and 7 Silver Pieces). Rules for using a bow and arrow are given in the Equipment section of the rules. You can sell individual arrows for 1 Silver Piece per arrow.

Fishing gear - *To buy: 5 Gold Pieces, To sell: 2 Gold Pieces*

If you buy fishing gear you can make use of the 'go fishing in the Red River' option that is offered each day as a way to replenish the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

3 torches - *To buy: 3 Gold Pieces, To sell: 2 Gold Pieces*

You can buy or sell torches in lots of 3 only. Don't forget to update the Torches box on your *Adventure Sheet* if you do so.

Small shield - *To buy: 6 Gold Pieces*

If you buy the small shield then note the following on your *Adventure Sheet*: "If you are wounded in combat during an Attack Round, roll one die. On a roll of 1, the small

shield completely blocks the blow and you suffer no wound.”

Iron amulet - *To buy: 5 Gold Pieces*

The merchant selling the iron amulet claims it is magical but cannot demonstrate any notable powers that it may possess. If you do buy it, note it down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*.

Nose filters - *To buy: 3 Gold Pieces*

The merchant selling this set of nose filters assures you that they have been crafted by the great wizard Yaztromo himself, and are highly effective when dealing with poisonous gases, foul odours, and the like. If you buy them, note them down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*.

Fine sword - *To buy: 40 Gold Pieces*

If you buy the fine sword then note the following on your *Adventure Sheet*: “The fine sword adds 1 to your Attack Strength and 1 to the total damage caused during any combat. If you *Test your Luck* during combat and are *Lucky*, the fine sword will inflict 5 STAMINA points worth of damage instead of the normal 4. If you are *Unlucky*, it will inflict 2 STAMINA points damage.”

Potion of Skill - *To buy: 6 Gold Pieces*

The Potion of Skill has one use only. If you drink it, cross it off your *Adventure Sheet* and restore your SKILL to its *Initial* score. The Potion has no effect if your SKILL is already at its *Initial* level.

Healing Potion - *To buy: 6 Gold Pieces*

The Healing Potion has one use only. You can drink it at any time except during combat. If you drink it, cross it off your *Adventure Sheet* and restore your STAMINA to its *Initial* score. The Potion has no effect if your STAMINA is already at its *Initial* level.

Lucky Charm - *To buy: 10 Gold Pieces*

If you buy the Lucky Charm, you do not have to deduct a LUCK point for every time you *Test your Luck* and are *Lucky*.

Finally, note that if you leave the market without a weapon (such as a club, dagger, or fine sword) you will have to deduct 4 from your Attack Strength during combat for the rest of the adventure, at least until you manage to acquire another weapon.

After you have finished here and made all the necessary alterations to your *Adventure Sheet*, you have a choice of two options:

- Visit the Two Trolls Tavern (if you have not already done so) turn to **33**
- Return to your hut turn to **31**

11

Once again you return to your hovel in search of rest and recuperation. If you decide to eat, cross 1 meal off the total in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. For eating this meal you may restore 3 STAMINA points if it is your first meal today, or 2 STAMINA points if you have already eaten. Your STAMINA score may not increase to more than your *Initial* score however.

Despite the ongoing saga of where best to place buckets to combat the leaky

roof of your hovel, sleep is easy to achieve. You may restore 3 STAMINA points for the rest, but your STAMINA score may not go over your *Initial* score.

However, if you chose to help Venquis Glint guard his warehouse (regardless of whether you were successful or not), you get no rest and may not restore 3 STAMINA points as a result. Instead, you must deduct 2 STAMINA points for the lack of decent rest last night.

Fireday

Erase ‘Moonsday’ from the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet* and replace it with ‘Fireday’. Did you eat at all yesterday? If you did not, then you must deduct 3 STAMINA points for going without food for the day.

Despite its name, Fireday is just as gloomy as those that have preceded it recently. Tendrils of grey mist stretch between tree-lined lanes, slowly dissipating into nothingness as the warming rays of Glantanka strike Bitterford and the Red River valley.

If you wish, you may eat a meal now, gaining a further 2 STAMINA points if you choose to do so (don’t forget to cross 1 meal from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*). By eating now, you will avoid the consequences of losing STAMINA the following day due to hunger, as you do not know when the next chance to eat may come. Alternatively, you may just hope for the best and wait for another opportunity.

Somewhat later in the day, you arrive at the Bitterford Council chambers to see if there are any labours required of you. Ignoring the small groups of townsfolk clustered about and exchanging rumours, Gilfas the Scribe consults a thick Borrinskin-bound ledger, furtively scratching notes in the margin with an indigo-feathered quill.

‘Ah, yes,’ he says ruminatively, peering up at you over the edge of bottle-thick half-moon seeing lenses. ‘Mistress Jhaleph has need of you to help clear a swamp on her lands on the far bank of the Red River. I believe she has offered a stipend of 3 Gold Pieces for services rendered.’

Three Gold Pieces for wading about a swamp hunting mud beasts does not sound appealing, particularly in this weather. As if sensing your apprehension, Gilfas indicates a commotion in the Council chambers where a party of six Guardsmen are readying their equipment, which includes numerous tar-blackened torches.

‘Alternatively,’ he says, pointing towards the Guardsmen, ‘these warriors are preparing for burning off a fire-break, on the northern edge of Bitterford that faces the Pagan Plains. Your job would be to help them dispose of whatever troublesome creatures may flee the fire, back towards town, but we can only offer 2 Gold Pieces for such work.’

Again, if neither of these assignments take your fancy, you may choose instead to go fishing in the Red River, but only if you have fishing gear written down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*.

What will you do?

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| Aid Mistress Jhaleph in clearing swampland | turn to 36 |
| Help the Bitterford Guardsmen burn off a firebreak | turn to 27 |
| Go fishing in the Red River, assuming you have fishing gear | turn to 25 |

Quickly, you hurry towards the centre of town. Most of the Bitterford Guard appear to be holding a line north of the Market Square, behind reinforced barricades facing

outwards at the Pagan Plains. From behind these lines you can occasionally see a small party of heavily-armoured Bitterford Guard swordsmen sally forth under the leadership of the bearded human Captain Vortnik to deal with isolated parts of the warband. These sorties are invariably backed up by a withering hail of crossbow fire courtesy of Marshal Urad Blackaxe himself, and his contingent of Dwarfish Guard troops.

As a result, the majority of the warband – Orcs, Goblins, a few Trolls, and the odd Centaur bandit, from what you can see – are bogged down directly opposite the Bitterford Guard, sheltering amongst the blackened ruins of several recently destroyed cottages. Further back, in the lee of a still standing wall, are a group of yet more Trolls that would appear to form a bodyguard for the warband leader. You cannot actually see the leader amongst them from this distance, but one Troll clearly holds the warband's standard – a grisly, skull-adorned wooden pole to which have been nailed the skins of what are, or rather, were, men. With a shudder of disgust you note that several of the human skins appear bloody and recently flayed...

Away from this horror, the fringes to the left and right of the main battle lines are a seething hotbed of attempted breaches by warband shock troops, followed quickly by bruising Guard-led counterattacks. Unfortunately, you are caught out by one such breach of the defensive lines when a scrawny humanoid in tattered black robes jumps out suddenly from behind a wall. Before you can react, the creature hurls a small silvery globe in your direction but it explodes harmlessly in a glittering mess of springs, cogs, spikes and nails, halfway through completing its thrown trajectory.

'Bugger!' says the creature with some degree of feeling. 'Cost me twenty gold that Murder Sphere did!'

It screams an Orcish battlecry and runs towards you, brandishing a jagged steel scimitar. You must fight the MAN-ORC ASSASSIN!

MAN-ORC ASSASSIN

SKILL 8

STAMINA 6

You have enough time to fire an arrow at the MAN-ORC ASSASSIN, should you wish to do so (and don't forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you defeat the MAN-ORC ASSASSIN, turn to **29**. If however the MAN-ORC ASSASSIN reduces your STAMINA to zero, turn instead to **5**.

13

As you sit down at the table of the outland barbarian, his fingers instantly stop drumming the tabletop and he stares at you incredulously.

'This is not the tavern wench I ordered!' he splutters indignantly, his vocal tone shifting rapidly from surprise to anger. 'What mockery is this? I, Krom the Mighty, demand blood-vengeance for this gross slight upon my honour, and that of my ancestors!'

Having said that, the barbarian grabs his battle-axe and brings it down in a whistling arc that cleaves the table completely in two. He then swings the axe up and out in your direction, its razor-edged blade glinting fearsomely as it scythes towards you. You must fight!

KROM THE MIGHTY

SKILL 10

STAMINA 10

You cannot use a bow and arrow before this combat. If you survive two Attack Rounds, then the rest of the tavern, led by Dagrath of Drystone, separate you both

before there is a fatality. Krom the Mighty, after an epic struggle against what seems like the entire population of Bitterford, is separated from his battle-axe and thrown into a cell at the Guard Barracks to cool down. You are ordered to return to your hut and cease disturbing the customers of the Two Trolls Tavern. Turn to **31**.

14

Whilst you have been battling with the Ant Symbiote, the giant FIRE ANTS have been swarming about your feet. It will take some effort on your part to extract yourself without suffering from their poisonous bites. Throw one die. If you throw a 1-4, then this is the number of STAMINA points you lose as the FIRE ANTS bite your flesh. If you roll a 5 or 6, you are lucky, and avoid being bitten. Regardless, assuming you survive, you retreat hastily from the vicinity of their nest.

Farmer Corran has been watching the proceedings with interest. As you have now slain the Ant Symbiote that was guarding the nest, he feels more than capable of completing the job of eradicating the Fire Ants using some flaming brands and the odd cauldron of boiling water.

‘That should do the trick nicely,’ he says. ‘Thanks again for all your help.’

He pays you 4 Gold Pieces for your efforts today. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*. Turn to **41**.

15

The right-hand path is muddy and seems to run alongside the edge of the wood - from time to time you get glimpses, through breaks in the undergrowth, of green fields and the Red River sliding slowly past. There are few sounds, but further along the trail you notice the smell of woodsmoke and burning meat. Before long the path leads to a clearing that contains a crude mud and timber hut. Immediately in front of the hut is a warty-skinned humanoid clad in tattered robes tending to a small rock-rimmed firepit, above which cooks what appears to be the remains of Farmer Corran’s dog on a skewer.

The humanoid starts in surprise as you enter the clearing but that quickly turns into a ferocious scowl. ‘Yooman!’ it rants. ‘Come to steal my food, by Hashak!’ Its scrawny hand grabs a nail-studded cudgel, which it brandishes menacingly as it stalks towards you. You must fight

HOBGOBLIN POACHER

SKILL 6

STAMINA 6

You have enough time to fire an arrow at the HOBGOBLIN, should you wish to do so (and don’t forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you reduce the HOBGOBLIN’s STAMINA to zero, turn to **37**.

16

Mistress Jhaleph’s property lies on the far bank of the Red River, further down the road to Mirewater, which means a short trip over the grey, Dwarf-constructed edifice that is the Bitterford Bridge. This has long since replaced the old pebble-strewn ford that gave the town its name.

The swamp is a reed and vine-choked mire that lies adjacent to the river, down an old and rutted side-road. Labourers, some of whom are toiling nearby, have cleared parts of the swamp, sinking wooden posts into the mud to support a rickety wooden walkway that you follow along behind Mistress Jhaleph, teetering precariously on the narrow planks.

Presently, the reedy undergrowth opens up into a small clearing containing a brooding stone monument streaked with green slime and creepers and surrounded by black mud and oily water. The walkway connects to a set of stone steps that rise up from the water, ending at a small stone platform on the outside of the monument where lies a darkened entrance. You follow Mistress Jhaleph up the steps and peer into the impenetrable gloom of the interior of the building. A foul stench immediately assails your nostrils.

‘How do you know it’s a crypt?’ you ask, trying valiantly to suppress a gagging reflex caused by the rank odour.

‘Well, the workers have found a lot of bones in the vicinity,’ says Jhaleph, holding a scented kerchief to her nose. ‘That in itself says nothing, but, assuming this area was once an ancient graveyard, it would then mean this building must logically be some sort of mausoleum. The friezes are another clue.’

She points to some of the stone panels on the exterior. They have been cleared of debris and appear to depict the life and times of a priest or nobleman of sorts.

Trying to avoid breathing any more of the air than is necessary, you light your torch (cross it off your *Adventure Sheet*) and advance through the entrance portal with your weapon in your other hand. You find yourself in a cramped passageway dripping with moisture that slopes downwards into the depths of the crypt. Turn to **49**.

17

Is there no respite from this avian carnage? Even as your last opponent noisily expires on the forest floor, yet another has already burst asunder from a nearby seed pod, and now swoops down upon you, its short blunt bill glinting unpleasantly in the sunlight.

TREE GOOSE

SKILL 6

STAMINA 5

You cannot use a bow and arrow before this combat. This particular Tree Goose has had some time to get used to its wings and you must deduct two from your Attack Strength during this fight as you attempt to hit the flying bird. If the Tree Goose reduces your STAMINA to zero, then you have failed miserably in this endeavour and die unmourned. If however you reduce the Tree Goose’s STAMINA to zero, you can turn to **40**

18

The skiff floats gently down a reed-lined waterway into a large pool completely surrounded by scrawny trees trailing great shrouds of pale green droop-moss. The machete-carrying labourer is squatting nervously at the front of the boat, and you can see sweat beading rapidly on the back of his neck, despite the overcast grey weather. The only sound is the ragged nervous breathing of the puntman behind you, pushing the skiff forward through the muddy brown waters.

Suddenly, the near-silence is broken by a hideous droning racket, and an enormous insect, almost as big as you, rises up from behind the reeds. It hovers above the skiff on four long incandescent wings and its body is a metallic green in colour. Its rainbow-sheen compound eyes regard you impassively, before it darts to the attack, curved mandibles agape. You must fight the GIANT DRAGONFLY!

GIANT DRAGONFLY

SKILL 8

STAMINA 4

You may fire an arrow at the GIANT DRAGONFLY if you wish (don’t forget to

cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you choose to do so however, you must add one to the dice roll when *Testing your Skill* as the hovering GIANT DRAGONFLY is a difficult target to hit.

Assuming you manage to defeat the GIANT DRAGONFLY, the labourers help you tie its gleaming carcass to the rear of the skiff. You spent a short time with a borrowed machete removing as much of the beast's hide as possible, for you know it to be quite valuable. Add 'Giant Dragonfly skin' to the Equipment box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

When you return to Mistress Jhaleph and the fringe of the swamp, many of the other labourers cheer and clap upon seeing the body of the creature you have slain. Mistress Jhaleph rewards you by handing over 3 Gold Pieces as promised. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*. Turn to **21**.

19

Somehow, you manage to keep your eyelids open, and stay up all night guarding the warehouse compound of Venquis Glint. As a result, you are awake and alert when several small shadowy figures, each clutching a large sack, climb over the back wall of the compound and begin sneaking towards the warehouse. Screaming a battlecry, you run towards them brandishing your club, which causes most of them to scatter, many clambering frantically back over the wall and off into the darkness, squealing in fear as they go. Only one remains, and it pulls a dagger from its boot and advances towards you. By the flickering lamplight you recognise its scowling warty face as that of a GOBLIN. You must fight!

GOBLIN THIEF

SKILL 5

STAMINA 5

You have enough time to fire an arrow at the GOBLIN, should you wish to do so (and don't forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you reduce the GOBLIN's STAMINA to two points or less, read on below.

Your last blow knocks the Goblin senseless, and you stand silently for a moment, waiting to see if any of the other thieves are still there. It appears though that they have all fled into the night. Searching the Goblin reveals 2 Silver Pieces as well as his dagger and you may take both if you wish (don't forget to add them to your *Adventure Sheet*). After that, you tie the Goblin up and wait for Venquis to arrive.

When he does arrive at dawn, it is with several members of the Bitterford Guard, who are clad in mail armour and black surcoats featuring the insignia of a grey stone bridge silhouetted against a red sun. Venquis is overjoyed to see you have successfully protected his warehouse against thieves and rewards you with 3 Gold Pieces as promised (don't forget to add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*), whilst the unfortunate Goblin is handed over to the Guardsmen for questioning.

Later, it transpires that the Goblin and his fellow thieves in the night are advance scouts for a Pagan Plains warband, and were stealing gear for a raid on Bitterford. As your actions have helped shed much light on this potential threat, you may add 1 Hero Point for your troubles, and also add 1 LUCK point for your good fortune. Update your *Adventure Sheet* and turn to **11**.

20

You try to dodge aside but are too slow and instead take a spray of foul-smelling liquid to the face and eyes. It stings horribly so – after a couple of blinks you are

completely blinded – and in your twitching agony, you fall from the wooden plank and tumble screaming down the well. It is only a short drop but you crack your head on a rock, knocking you unconscious, while at the same time your flaming torch extinguishes itself in a pool of black water with a sharp *pfffft* sound and a plume of smoke. This means neither you or Norbet – now squinting down at the darkness of the well in utter terror – will ever see the pale, slimy, wart-covered hand that reaches up and pulls your limp body slowly beneath the surface...

Your adventure is over.

21

Another day ends with you trekking back through the muddy byways of Bitterford towards your ramshackle hut. If you decide to eat, cross 1 meal off the total in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. For eating this meal you may restore 3 STAMINA points if it is your first meal today, or 2 STAMINA points if you have already eaten. Your STAMINA score may not increase to more than your *Initial* score however.

Again, after strategically scattering receptacles about the hut to catch the constant drip of rain through the leaks in the roof, you sink instantly into slumber. You may restore 3 STAMINA points for the rest, but your STAMINA score may not go over your *Initial* score.

Earthday

Erase 'Fireday' from the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet* and replace it with 'Earthday'. Did you eat at all yesterday? If you did not, then you must deduct 3 STAMINA points for going without food for the day.

Earthday may well be the middle of the week but it does not signal any change in the weather. Bitterford remains wreathed in grey fog and accompanied by an occasional drizzle of rain, as if Sukh the Storm God was shaking his mane of hair free of moisture.

If you wish, you may eat a meal now, gaining a further 2 STAMINA points if you choose to do so (don't forget to cross 1 meal from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*). By eating now, you will avoid the consequences of losing STAMINA the following day due to hunger, as you do not know when your next chance to eat may come. It remains entirely your choice however.

Despite the weather, there is some excitement about the town of Bitterford today as Earthday is market day, meaning hordes of people descending on the town from all points of the compass – hawking, bargaining and trading all manner of goods and services. The market is held in the main square of Bitterford, which is bordered on one side by the extensive stone building that houses the chambers of the Bitterford Council and the fortified barracks of the Bitterford Guard. In the middle of the square lies the partially buried spire of a black stone obelisk – a monument from ancient times whose meaning is long since lost. Around the obelisk are arranged several small shrines to deities such as Avana, goddess of luck; Galana the Gardner; Varantar, patron of shepherds; the Ploughman, a minor agricultural demigod; Aqualis, god of rivers; Fulkra, patron of travellers; and many more besides. Offerings are made at these shrines before the official opening of the market, and throughout the rest of the day, by pilgrims seeking both fortune and favour.

The goods for sale are numerous and varied, ranging from local produce to intricate metalwork from the Dwarfs upriver, as well as goods from much further afield such as herbal potions from Arantis, spices from the city-states of the

Glimmering Sea, and even preserved Silver Sea Bass all the way from the Dark Continent of Khul.

In addition, the local tavern, known as the Two Trolls, is doing a roaring trade keeping thirsts quenched and bellies full. Strangers and locals alike throng its high-columned galleries, exchanging views on many things but principally current news on the carrion-loving warband said to stalk this corner of the Pagan Plains.

If you find the bustle and vigour of market day off-putting however, you may always decide to go fishing, but only if you have fishing gear written down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*.

What will you do?

Browse amongst the market stalls turn to **10**

Visit the Two Trolls Tavern turn to **33**

Go fishing in the Red River, assuming you have fishing gear turn to **25**

22

Desperately you attempt to dodge the sweeping blade of the halberd, but are too slow and suffer a nasty wound. Deduct 2 STAMINA points (You may use LUCK to try to reduce this damage if you wish). If your STAMINA is now 0 or less, turn immediately to **5**. If not, read on below.

Recovering quickly, you move to attack, but your first few blows are parried defensively by GORE THE GRIM. His disinterest in pressing an advantage is all too apparent and it is almost like he is expecting something of you, such as the sudden clumsiness that appeared to afflict so many of your fellow townsfolk when fighting.

GORE THE GRIM frowns heavily in concentration, even going so far as to touch the silver circlet upon his brow with one broad, callused hand. Still nothing happens. His eyes then drop to the iron amulet that dangles from a cord tied around your neck. It is as if a shock has gone through the both of you at the exact same time causing simultaneous enlightenment:

The iron amulet of yours must repel the foul and crippling sorceries of the silver circlet!

Inspired by this knowledge you bound forward with weapon raised – here is your chance to avenge Bitterford and succeed where so many have failed! It is a fight to the finish!

GORE THE GRIM

SKILL 8

STAMINA 9

You cannot use a bow and arrow before this combat. If you manage to defeat GORE THE GRIM, turn immediately to **50**. If you are instead defeated by GORE THE GRIM, turn to **5**.

23

You agree to help Hieron Horsefriend dispose of whatever is lurking in the cave at the base of the cliff on his property, and follow him through the muddy backstreets of Bitterford, heading eastwards. His land lies just beyond that of Farmer Corran – fertile grazing land bounded by the Red River to the south, and gently sloping cliffs to the north, past which lie the high steppes of the Pagan Plains. From the top of the cliffs can be seen the far bank of the Red River, comprising yet more farmland and small stone hovels, not to mention the ochre slash across the landscape, running from east to

west, which is the road to Mirewater.

Presently, you arrive at the base of a cliff, where Hieron gestures at a large amount of red clay and rubble that has slid down off the cliff face and into the pastures where several of his horses are grazing nervously, their tails constantly flicking the air. The landslide has revealed a low, dark cleft between the rocks, with the mud at the entrance to the cave appearing to have been churned up in a rather peculiar fashion.

‘Whatever it is in there, I think it has more than four legs,’ says Hieron by way of explanation, indicating the curious spoor at the cavemouth.

‘It sure ain’t friendly either,’ he adds, pointing to the dew-covered skeleton of the dead foal, glinting in the grass off to one side. The bones have been picked clean and now only a few brownish scavenger beetles – each the size of your thumb – wander hopefully amidst the carnage.

Taking a deep breath, you light your torch (cross one torch off the Torch box on your *Adventure Sheet*), and with it in one hand and your sturdy club in the other, you duck down and into the damp confines of the cave. Roll one die to determine what horror you find within.

If you roll a 1, 2, or 3

turn to **30**

If you roll a 4, 5, or 6

turn to **44**

24

You meet with Khazgar the Herder at his rundown shack amongst Bitterford’s northern outskirts. A dour fellow with a wispy black beard, Khazgar explains that finding the missing bull, or rather what is left of it – he doesn’t hold out much hope for its survival – should be quite easy. The hard part is dealing with whatever else may be in the immediate vicinity of the bull.

Leaving Bitterford behind, the two of you trek slowly through the damp pampas grass and clumps of yellow spinifex that make up the Pagan Plains. Soon enough, Khazgar spots a circling cluster of carrion birds – visible as distant black spots – wheeling slowly against the vast pale grey cloudscape that looms over both your heads.

By following the birds, the two of you arrive at what looks like a carcass of sorts but it is covered with a number of carrion-loving birds, both large and small. Khazgar refuses to approach any closer, and asks instead that you go and check that it is indeed the remains of his bull (apparently there should be some sort of collar tied around whatever is left of its neck).

Sighing at the vagaries of your job, you inch forward, confirming that the over-sized corpse is indeed that of some beast of burden, slain by a nameless horror of the plains. At your approach, many of the birds – including several vultures and the odd Death Hawk – depart in a chorus of furious squawks, leaving behind only a murder of large, aggressive ravens. The biggest one launches itself at you, with thorny claws and dagger-like beak aimed straight at your face. Defend yourself!

RAVEN

SKILL 4

STAMINA 3

You may fire an arrow at the RAVEN if you wish (don’t forget to cross it off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you choose to do so however, you must add one to the dice roll when *Testing your Skill* as the flying RAVEN is a difficult target to hit.

If you slay the RAVEN, then most of the other ravens scatter and flee. Only

one remains, a large and somewhat plump bird that appears to find it difficult to get airborne. Much to your amazement, it starts talking!

‘Stop! Squawk! Don’t kill me!’ it caws. ‘Have information...Squawk!’

What will you do?

Listen to what the bird has to say

turn to **46**

Fight it anyway

turn to **8**

25

You have chosen to spend the day fishing in the Red River. You must have ‘fishing gear’ written in the Equipment box of your *Adventure Sheet* in order to choose this option (if you do not, return immediately to the reference you have just come from).

Usually there are quite a few types of fish to be caught here in the Red River – Spotted Pike, Mud Carp, Moonling Perch, and the ubiquitous bronzish-crimson Freshwater Herring. In order to catch any of these fish, you must *Test your Skill*. Roll two dice. If you roll over your current SKILL score, you are unsuccessful in your attempts at fishing and catch nothing. If you roll equal to or under your current SKILL score, you are successful at fishing and may roll one die. This represents the number of fish you have caught and you can add this number to the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

Regardless of whether you were successful or not, there is always the possibility of attracting the attentions of something nefarious whilst fishing. Roll one die and consult the table below to see whether you encounter any river creatures.

<i>Roll</i>	<i>Creature</i>	SKILL	STAMINA
1	RAZORFISH	7	8
2	RIPPER SHARK	7	6
3	GIANT FROG	5	7
4	SNAPPERFISH	6	2
	Each time the SNAPPERFISH wins an Attack Round, you must deduct 3 STAMINA points and 1 SKILL point, owing to its sharp teeth and powerful jaws. A successful <i>Test your Luck</i> will reduce the damage to 2 STAMINA points and 1 SKILL point. An unsuccessful <i>Test your Luck</i> will increase the damage to 4 STAMINA points and 1 SKILL point.		
5	BLOOD EEL	5	4
6	No encounter		

You must fight any creatures you encounter. If you possess a bow and at least 1 arrow, you may shoot the river creature as per normal, but you must add 1 to the dice roll when *Testing your Skill* to represent the difficulty of shooting at something underwater (and don’t forget to cross the arrow from the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). Likewise, whilst fighting the river creature you must deduct 1 from your Attack Strength each Attack Round to represent the same difficulty in fighting something that is underwater.

Most of the river creatures are themselves edible, so if you encounter one you may convert it into meals for later consumption. Simple roll one die and divide the result by 2, rounding all fractions up. This will give you a figure between 1 to 3, which you may add to the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*, in addition to any fish you may have caught previously.

Finally, assuming you survive your encounter, you may choose to eat a meal here. If you do so, deduct 1 from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. Then, if you have already eaten today, add 1 STAMINA point to your current STAMINA total. If this is your first meal today, add 2 STAMINA points to your

current STAMINA total. Remember, you cannot exceed your *Initial* STAMINA score.

Now it is time to return to your hut. Consult the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

If it reads 'Stormsday'	turn to 9
If it reads 'Moonsday'	turn to 11
If it reads 'Fireday'	turn to 21
If it reads 'Earthday'	turn to 31
If it reads 'Windsday'	turn to 41
If it reads 'Seaday'	turn to 45

26

Under grey, overcast skies, you trek to where the abandoned well lies in a distant corner of one of Norbet's fields, surrounded by a quiet glade of black-barked cypress trees. Mounds of dirt and undergrowth have been cleared away to reveal a circle of lichen-stained brown stonework – the well itself.

'I was lowering my best storm lantern down there, I was, using that,' says Norbet, indicating a recent wooden construction at the top of the well, to which is attached a rope that leads downwards into dark depths.

'The lantern got to the bottom, where there was all this black water, like,' he says, shivering at the memory. 'When this *thing*, this *white hand*, came up out of the water an' grabbed the lantern, an' pulled it under!'

Norbet proposes lowering you down the well, on the rope (the end of which, you note, has been cut clean off) with a torch and your weapon, to deal with whatever lurks therein. Not having much of a choice, you light the torch (cross it off your *Adventure Sheet*) whilst Norbet attaches a wooden plank to the rope creating a swing-like platform for you to sit on.

You are then lowered down the well, though craning your head to look below you reveals nothing but blackness. The torchlight illuminates the surrounding stone and earth as you descend however, which is dank, oppressive, and crawling with small, many-legged horrors. Above you is an ever-receding circle of daylight where Norbet's face is visible as a dark blob peering over the edge of the well.

Suddenly, there is a horrible retching sound from the bottom of the well – like something clearing its throat – and, looking down, you have the terrifying sensation of something flying up through the air towards you, on your flimsy wooden swing. Roll two dice and *Test your Skill*. If you are successful, turn to **32**. If you are unsuccessful, turn to **20**.

27

You decide to help the Guardsmen burn off a firebreak between the town's northern edge and the Pagan Plains. The six of them wear studded leather armour and black surcoats featuring the Bitterford insignia of a grey stone bridge silhouetted against a red sun. Four are humans, armed with bows and swords, whilst two are Dwarfs wielding crossbows. The leader is one of the humans, known as Captain Vortnik, a mercenary from Kaad with an iron helm and a stubby beard. You ask the Captain why a firebreak is necessary, as the current dismal weather surely negates any risk of a grassland fire sweeping in off the Pagan Plains.

'By orders of Marshal Urad Blackaxe!' says Captain Vortnik in clipped military tones. 'A reasonable-sized firebreak will reduce the cover available for any warband that may be planning to attack or infiltrate Bitterford. Also, by doing so in such weather lessens the risk of us setting all this corner of Allansia aflame.'

Whilst the Guardsmen busy themselves torching the surrounding countryside, you set about your task, which consists of using your wooden club to persuade any wildlife fleeing the fires not to head towards Bitterford. From previous experience you know all manner of creatures lurk out there in the high plains. Aardwolves, Rattlesnakes, swarms of poisonous Fire Ants, snaggle-tusked Wild Boar, and even a Giant Centipede that once scuttled up from some dank crevasse, have all fled from the fires the Guards periodically set.

Test your Luck now, to see what you encounter. If you wish, you may use any torches you possess to create a small protective firebreak of your own. So, for every torch you are prepared to cross from the Torch box on your *Adventure Sheet*, you may deduct 1 from the dice roll as you *Test your Luck*. Lastly, do not forget to deduct 1 from your LUCK score after you have *Tested your Luck*, regardless of whether you are successful or not.

If you are *Lucky*

turn to **39**

If you are *Unlucky*

turn to **6**

28

As you follow the narrow middle trail through the undergrowth, the strange honking noises become louder. Suddenly, the trail opens up into a small clearing. In the centre of the clearing is a twisted and somewhat stunted tree, with wrinkled black bark and pale green leaves. Large bulging seed pods, some of which appear to be squirming mysteriously, hang from its branches.

Flying in fast circles around the tree and making the honking noises you have been hearing since entering the woods, is a large goose-like bird with a black bill and covered in grey feathers. Incredibly, as you watch it circle the clearing, you see another identical bird start struggling out of one of the seed pods! It is then you realise you have stumbled upon a TREE GOOSE TREE – a hideous symbiotic combination of bird and plant. With a final warning honk, the flying TREE GOOSE arrows down towards you, bill agape. You must fight!

TREE GOOSE

SKILL 6

STAMINA 5

Note that if you have a bow and arrows, you cannot use them before the fight as the Tree Goose is flying too fast. During the fight you must deduct two from your Attack Strength as it is difficult to hit the fast-flying bird. If the Tree Goose reduces your STAMINA to zero, then you die here in this clearing and your remains will provide food for the Tree Goose Tree. If however you reduce the Tree Goose's STAMINA to zero, you can turn to **40**.

Alternatively, given the number of seed pods that are now wriggling ominously, you may wish to *Escape*. If you choose to do this, deduct two from your STAMINA and turn to **7** if you wish to return to the left-hand path, or turn to **15** if you wish to return to the right-hand path but remember that you must choose an option you have not already taken.

29

Whilst you have been fighting, the axe-armed Troll bodyguards have pushed forwards, with the horrific standard held high, and have joined the main warband in a sustained assault on the Bitterford Guard barricades. At first, the Guards appear to have the upper hand but then worrying things begin to happen. Near the centre of the line, where the warband standard flies, Guard troopers begin to clumsily drop

weapons, stumble into one another, and commit other ill-judged actions for which the only reward is a swift end on the blade of a gore-encrusted Trollish axe. Some sort of foul sorcery is evidently at work!

Attempting to halt the tide of destruction that has seen numerous Guards already fall, Captain Vortnik leaps forward at the warband line, sword raised. The line parts to finally reveal the warband leader: a massive RHINOMAN armed with halberd. Vortnik screams a battlecry and charges at the brute, only to slip, drop his weapon, and fall to his knees in one long continuously tragic sequence. His last action is to lift his head upwards and stare in dread, even as the RHINOMAN has already begun to bring the halberd down in a two-handed over-arm stroke...

You look away from the slaying of Captain Vortnik for an instant but when your gaze returns there is no sign of the corpse, as it has been already stamped underfoot by another the warband's sudden advances. To your horror, even the troopers under the command of Marshal Urad now appear clumsy, uncoordinated, and incapable of firing their crossbows, not to mention staying upright. The axe-wielding Trolls pour forwards at the helpless Dwarfs, tusked mouths slavering with drool.

You become uncomfortably aware that you are the only remaining citizen of Bitterford in the immediate vicinity who is still on their feet.

With a few long strides, the RHINOMAN warlord Gore the Grim stands before you brandishing his blood-soaked halberd. His leathery hide is tattooed in abstract swirls and whorls of indigo-coloured ink, and augmented by a chainmail hauberk and black iron gauntlets. Tiny maddened red eyes glare at you in fury from behind a steel-tipped nasal horn, and, atop his head, a silver circlet gleams in the sickly overcast light.

'Now you die, human!' he intones in a voice of leaden gravity, before spinning the halberd around in a one-handed arc set at a perfect level for your potentially instant evisceration.

If you have an iron amulet (written down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*), turn to **22**. If you do not, turn instead to **42**.

30

The cave is damp, narrow, and strewn with boulders of various sizes. There are also several galleries and tunnels leading away from the main chamber, but most are too small for you to investigate, other than using your flaming torch to see how far back the darkness extends. It is whilst you are checking one of the larger tunnels that you turn, seeking to return to the main chamber, and instead trip over a large boulder *that you are sure was not there before!*

You consider this enigma whilst rubbing your bruised shin and are horrified to see a second boulder shuffle surreptitiously up behind the one you just fell over. Too stunned to move, you watch in horror as the first boulder then sprouts many spindly legs, a pair of glinting eyes, and a wide toothy maw, and rushes forwards to bite you painfully on the foot. Deduct 1 STAMINA point from your total.

Assuming you still survive, you realise now that you face a pair of GRANNITS – fiendish little cave monsters that use their rock-like armour as camouflage in order to surprise their victims, in much the way that they have surprised you! In the narrow confines of the tunnel however, you are able to fight the GRANNITS one at a time:

First GRANNIT

SKILL 4

STAMINA 3

Second GRANNIT

SKILL 4

STAMINA 3

Note that if you have a bow and an arrow, you may not use them at the start of this fight as one of your hands is too busy holding onto the flaming torch that illuminates the cave.

If you defeat both the GRANNITS, you search the rest of the cave but to your disappointment find nothing else of interest or value, other than an old dagger, which you may take if you wish. Still, when you drag the carcasses of the dead horrors outside to where Hieron Horsefriend is waiting, he shows he is not ungrateful by handing over 4 Gold Pieces for a job well done. Add 4 Gold Pieces to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet* and don't forget to cross off the torch you used to explore the cave, if you have not crossed it off already. Now, turn to **11**.

31

After all the excitement of market day, you return to your hut in search of solitude. If you decide to eat, cross 1 meal off the total in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. For eating this meal you may restore 3 STAMINA points if it is your first meal today, or 2 STAMINA points if you have already eaten. Your STAMINA score may not increase to more than your *Initial* score however.

Sleep proves easy to come by, despite the increased amount of rain pelting down on the thatched roof of the hut. You may restore 3 STAMINA points for the rest, but your STAMINA score may not go over your *Initial* score.

Windsday

Erase 'Earthday' from the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet* and replace it with 'Windsday'. Did you eat at all yesterday? If you did not, then you must deduct 3 STAMINA points for going without food for the day.

Windsday marks a change in the weather about Bitterford and surrounds – it gets worse. A light but steady drizzle of rain descends on the town, turning the roads to ochre mud, whilst neighbouring houses and trees become dim shapes lurking in the gloom.

If you wish, you may eat a meal now, gaining a further 2 STAMINA points if you choose to do so (don't forget to cross 1 meal from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*). By eating now, you will avoid the consequences of losing STAMINA the following day due to hunger, as you do not know when your next chance to eat may come.

The short trek to the Bitterford Council chambers is a grim one. Your boots become caked solid with mud, whilst your clothes become drenched from the rain. Worse, there is also the sight of rats, dogs, and even the odd half-feral Gremlin, scavenging through the debris from yesterday's market that clutters the main square.

Inside the chambers there is a more convivial air. Gilfas the Scribe is working near a large hospitable fire though he must make frequent pauses to polish his steamed-up glasses on the sleeve of his robe. During one such break he informs you that there are two possible jobs for you on this day. One involves tracking down a missing bull for Khazgar the Herder, a loner whose cattle are usually found grazing the marginal lands on the outskirts of the Pagan Plains. This job will pay 2 Gold Pieces.

The other job is for your old friend Farmer Corran, he of the missing dog. Apparently, according to Gilfas, a strange rocky outcrop has been growing on Corran's property, accompanied by a shadowy figure, and Corran is wary of losing another dog. Gilfas finds the whole idea ridiculous – who ever heard of rocks growing

suddenly in size, much less accompanied by some sort of sidekick – but there is no denying Corran’s desperation as he is offering 4 Gold Pieces for the job.

Alternatively, you could always go fishing, but only if you have fishing gear written down in the Equipment section of your Adventure Sheet.

What will you do?

Help Khazgar the Herder track down his missing bull turn to **24**

Investigate Farmer Corran’s mysterious ‘rock outcrop
that grows in size’ turn to **2**

Go fishing in the Red River, assuming you have fishing gear turn to **25**

32

At the last instant you dodge aside as a spray of foul-smelling liquid sails past your face. Add 1 LUCK point for your good fortune, though you may not exceed your *Initial* score. You don’t have time to think about what it was however, as you have reached the bottom of the well. By the light of your torch, you can see there is stagnant black water everywhere, its surface broken occasionally by a slime-covered rock. Gently, you ease off your makeshift platform and into the stinking ooze – it is only knee-deep – torch and weapon held out in front of you.

Suddenly there is an eruption in the water and an immense pale slimey toad with staring golden eyes launches itself at you, attempting to cram you into its great, tooth-lined mouth with its white, hand-like paws. You must fight the mutant SPIT TOAD!

SPIT TOAD

SKILL 5

STAMINA 6

Note that if you have a bow and arrow, you may not use them at the start of this fight as one of your hands is too busy holding onto the flaming torch that illuminates the bottom of the well.

If you slay the vile SPIT TOAD, you search but find little down here other than an inordinate number of bones, all picked clean of flesh, and Norbet’s now-broken storm lantern, which you take. Signalling to the farmer above by pulling several times on the rope, you are raised slowly back to the surface and out of this nightmarish pit. Norbet thanks you profusely – particularly since you gave him his lantern back to repair – and gives you 3 Gold Pieces. Add 3 Gold Pieces to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet* and don’t forget to cross off the torch you used to explore the well, if you have not crossed it off already. You return to your hut. Turn to **45**.

33

The Two Trolls Tavern is absolutely packed with people, not surprising given that it is market day. There are rich human merchants in fur-lined robes from cities such as Port Blacksand and Kaad, Dwarf miners with war-picks and horned helms, tattooed barbarians from the more sociable tribes of the Pagan Plains, and even the odd Wood Elf from Caeranos township in Darkwood Forest, standing quietly at the bar and observing the drunken rabble with a jaded eye.

The landlord is Dagrath of Drystone, an immense bald slab of a man who is rumoured to count a green-skinned Common Troll as one of his distant ancestors. Upon seeing you, he starts bellowing:

‘Out! Out! By Holdgut’s Special Blue, if I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a hundred times or more – you’re too young to be drinking here!’ he says, pointing a

large claw-nailed finger in your direction. ‘Come back in a year or two when you’re a mite older, child!’

Some of the newcomers look startled at this confrontation, but most customers are regulars and used to the verbal sparring between yourself and Dagrát.

‘Where’s your gratitude, Dagrát!’ you reply indignantly, in time-honoured fashion. ‘After all, was it not I who ended the Gripworm infestation of your lower cellars? And who slew the Giant Rat that dismembered two of your serving-staff? Not to mention the time I slaughtered the foul Sewer Snake that had taken up residence in the ladies’ latrines.’

‘Yes, yes, you’ve made your point,’ says Dagrát hurriedly. ‘If you’re staying, then it’ll be 1 Gold Piece for one pint, and only one pint, mark my words, of watered Cloud Ale.’

If you do not wish to spend 1 Gold Piece (or do not have any to spend) then you must leave the Two Trolls Tavern. You can go browse the market stalls if you have not already done so – turn to **10**, or you can return to your hut – turn to **31**.

If you wish to stay in the Two Trolls Tavern, cross 1 Gold Piece off the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet* and read on.

After collecting your pint of Cloud Ale, you cast about for a spare place to sit, never an easy task on market day. You spot two empty chairs. Firstly, there is an untaken stool at a table in the corner at which sit two human adventurers, male and female. The man is tall and bearded, wearing scraps of plate armour, whilst the woman has brown skin and hair braided into numerous strands held together by bone coloured-beads. She wears battered-looking leather armour, and both have conspicuously placed their scabbarded swords on the tabletop, alongside their drinks.

There is also a spare chair at a table near the entrance. This table has but one occupant, a broad-shouldered and immensely muscular human barbarian with a ragged mane of dark hair. His skin has been weathered a deep bronze colour from ten thousand outland suns and resting lightly against his chair is a razor-sharp battle-axe that is almost as big as yourself. He watches the rest of the tavern with deep hooded eyes and his fingers drum a relentless rhythm on the tabletop.

Where will you sit?

With the two adventurers

turn to **48**

With the outland barbarian

turn to **13**

34

The tangled wood lies on a small piece of land to the east of Bitterford, near the Red River. Farmer Corran accompanies you most of the way, but stops some distance from the wood and refuses to walk any closer. His two remaining dogs shiver and whimper alongside him, their tails tightly curled downwards in abject fear.

‘There,’ he says, pointing to a break in the undergrowth that looks like a path. ‘It vanished down there, it did.’

You enter the wood, following what appears to be some sort of game trail. The surrounding trees are not especially tall or large, but the foliage on either side of the trail is thick and choked with thorny bushes and spiny thickets of bamboo. After a short while, the only sounds being the buzz of insects and the occasional strange birdcall, the trail splits into three. From the trail to your left, you seem to detect an increase in the volume of insect noise in the form of a distant buzzing drone. Directly ahead of you, another trail winds deeper into the wood, and from here you think to pick out a weird honking sound, like that of largish bird. To your right there are no sounds, though you spot what looks like a human-like footprint in the muddy path that

forms this trail. Which direction will you go now?

Turn left

turn to **7**

Go straight ahead

turn to **28**

Turn right

turn to **15**

35

During the battle you have managed to keep the Ant Symbiote between you and the nest and thus have avoided the attentions of the poisonous Fire Ants. Add 1 LUCK point for your good fortune, though you may not exceed your *Initial* score. Regardless, you retreat hastily from the vicinity of the nest.

Farmer Corran has been watching the proceedings with interest. As you have now slain the Ant Symbiote that was guarding the nest, he feels more than capable of completing the job of eradicating the Fire Ants using some flaming brands and the odd cauldron of boiling water.

‘That should do the trick nicely,’ he says. ‘Thanks again for your help.’

He pays you 4 Gold Pieces for your efforts today. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*. Turn to **41**.

36

Mistress Jhaleph’s property lies on the far bank of the Red River, further down the road to Mirewater, which means a short trip over the grey, Dwarf-constructed edifice that is the Bitterford Bridge. This has long since replaced the pebble-strewn ford that gave the town its name.

Gilfas the Scribe had evidently sent a messenger along to tell her you were coming, for the Mistress is waiting for you at a junction where a old and rutted side-road joins the main highway to Mirewater. Tall and regal-looking, she is clad in sensible hooded robes of dark brown hue, and there are always several heavily-armed warriors guarding her at all times. You know her late husband, Lord Jhaleph, was the previous Bitterford Marshal until slain by a pack of Moon Dogs operating at the behest of the Night Prince Zanbar Bone.

Nodding briefly in your direction, she indicates for you to follow and leads you down the side-road to the swamp – a reed and vine-choked mire that lies adjacent to the river. A large gang of labourers is hard at work, busily hacking away at the vegetation with machetes, digging drainage canals, filling pools with wagon-loads of dirt and sand, and sinking wooden posts into the mud to support the construction of a rickety wooden walkway.

You are led to a spot where several labourers crowd around a youth not much older than yourself, who is lying on the ground unconscious and swathed in heavily blood-soaked bandages.

Mistress Jhaleph speaks: ‘He was clearing brush near the middle of the swamp when we heard him screaming in hideous agony and he staggered out in not much better shape than you see him now. We want you to go in there and destroy whatever it is that attacked him!’

You take a spot on a small skiff with a pole-wielding puntman behind you and a machete-brandishing undergrowth-clearer to the front. Slowly, the skiff drifts forward into murky green hell.

Roll one die to determine what monstrosity is lurking in the depths of the swamp.

If you roll a 1, 2, or 3

turn to **3**

If you roll a 4, 5, or 6

turn to **18**

37

The Hobgoblin collapses at your feet, gurgling blood. You quickly scan the hut in case there are others, but it appears that the creature was a lone hermit. A search of the hut turns up the following, which you may add to your *Adventure Sheet* if you wish:

- 3 Silver Pieces (10 Silver Pieces equals 1 Gold Piece)
- 1 Torch
- 2 dead Tree Geese (these count as 2 meals and can be added to the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*)

You disdain to take the Hobgoblin's cudgel however, as it is far inferior to your own weapon.

Leaving the woods by retracing the game trail, you meet up with Farmer Corran and relate to him all that has happened. You even manage to convince him to enter the woods with you, to see with his own eyes that the dog-stealing Hobgoblin has been dealt with.

'Arakor's in a better world now,' he sniffs, reaching down to scratch the necks of his two remaining dogs. 'At least I've still got Ty and Gereth for company. Thank you, youngster. You helped me when the Bitterford Guard couldn't.'

With that, he hands over 5 Gold Pieces as payment for your services. Note them on your *Adventure Sheet* and turn to **9**.

38

Your last blow causes the MIRE-MAN to collapse in a heap, now little more than a shattered skull, harmless old bones, and a rapidly dissipating stench. Add 1 LUCK point for defeating the guardian of the mausoleum, though you may not exceed your *Initial* score. Turning your attention to the sarcophagus, you manage to lever off the lid and peer cautiously inside. However, there is no further undead monstrosity to deal with, merely burial treasure in the form of an untarnished iron sword and a small, stoppered crystal decanter containing a maroon-coloured liquid. If you wish to take either or both of these items, note the following on your *Adventure Sheet*:

- Enchanted Sword (confers a +2 bonus to your Attack Strength when used in combat.)
- Healing Potion (One use only. You can drink it at any time, except during combat. If you drink it, cross it off your *Adventure Sheet* and restore your STAMINA to its *Initial* level. The Potion has no effect if your STAMINA is already at its *Initial* level.)

There is nothing further for you here so you retrace your steps back up the corridor. Squinting in the outside light, you recount your tale to Mistress Jhaleph and some of the labourers, who have gathered anxiously at the mausoleum entrance upon hearing sounds of combat within. You are paid 3 Gold Pieces by Mistress Jhaleph for services rendered. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*, and don't forget to cross off the torch you used to explore the mausoleum if you have not already done so. You return to your hut. Turn to **45**.

39

As the Guardsmen busy themselves with burning off strips of turf, you stalk along the margins of the firebreak, through billowing clouds of blueish smoke. For the most part however, nothing bothers you, whilst the Guardsmen are more than capable of dealing with the Pagan Plains' smaller horrors themselves.

Later on, several of the Bitterford Guard are taking a break when a small, fire-blackened figure erupts from a burning thicket near to you, takes a few steps and collapses in a heap at your feet. You signal to the Guard, who are instantly up and alert, whilst gingerly prodding the prone figure with your toe. It appears to be a GOBLIN, masked and dressed like some sort of sneak-thief.

Captain Vortnik and his men promptly finish the firebreak, pay you 2 Gold Pieces for a job well done (don't forget to add them to the Gold Box on your *Adventure Sheet*), and take the GOBLIN in for questioning at the Guard barracks at the back of the Bitterford Council Chambers.

It turns out that the Goblin is some sort of advance scout for a massing Pagan Plains warband, employed to both spy on Bitterford and steal supplies from various warehouses. As your presence was instrumental in capturing the Goblin and obtaining this valuable information, you may add 1 Hero Point and also 1 LUCK point for your good fortune. Update your *Adventure Sheet* and turn to **21**.

40

Whilst you have been struggling to defeat the Tree Goose, another has shrugged itself free of its seed pod and now dives towards you, honking defiance and trailing grey feathers through the air.

TREE GOOSE

SKILL 5

STAMINA 4

You cannot use a bow and arrow before this combat. As this Tree Goose has just been birthed it is not a particularly strong flier and you must only deduct 1 from your Attack Strength during the fight as you attempt to hit the flying creature. If the Tree Goose reduces your STAMINA to zero, you expire in this clearing, another victim of the devious Tree Goose Tree. If however you defeat the Tree Goose, turn to **17**.

41

Following yet another day of honest toil, you follow the backroads of Bitterford that lead the way to your hut. If you decide to eat, cross 1 meal off the total in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. For eating this meal you may restore 3 STAMINA points if it is your first meal today, or 2 STAMINA points if you have eaten already. Your STAMINA score may not increase to more than your *Initial* score however.

Once again, sleep is a welcome visitor to your hut, despite, or perhaps because of, the worsening rain outside. You may restore 3 STAMINA points for the rest, but your STAMINA score may not go over your *Initial* score.

Seaday

Erase 'Windsday' from the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet* and replace it with 'Seaday'. Did you eat at all yesterday? If you did not, then you must deduct 3 STAMINA points for going without food for the day.

The weather is similar to yesterday – more light drizzle beading everything with drops of moisture, and tendrils of white mist trailing through town like slow-moving phantoms. If anything, the roads are in even worse condition, and you do not

fancy the muddy slog to the Council chambers to see what work may await.

If you wish, you may eat a meal now, gaining a further 2 STAMINA points if you chose to do so (don't forget to cross 1 meal from the number of meals in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*). By eating now, you will avoid the consequences of losing STAMINA the following day due to hunger, as you do not know when your chance to eat may come.

Later, you hurry through the mud-slick streets into town to the Bitterford Council chambers, to see what labours need completing on this rather inauspicious day. Although Gilfas the Scribe peers disapprovingly at you over the top of his glasses when he sees how much mud you have tracked in with you, he still runs a finger down the page of his book to see what tasks lie therein.

'Aha!' he barks. 'Two things today! Mistress Jhaleph has discovered a ruin of sorts – she thinks it is a crypt or mausoleum – lurking in the depths of the swamp on her lands, and she requires someone to help clear it of potential danger. She will pay 3 Gold Pieces for a successful job, but you will have to provide your own torch.'

'And the other...' you ask hopefully, for wading through a partially submerged tomb for three Gold Pieces and having to supply your own torch sounds like a bad idea. Unless of course there is burial treasure present...

'Hmm...' says Gilfas, peering at the scratchy writing on the page of his book. 'My understudy Par-Quan wrote this, and his handwriting borders on the barbarian. Apparently, the farmer Norbet has found a long-abandoned well – I think that is what it says – on his land.'

Gilfas pauses, attempting to decipher the rest of the message.

'If what Par-Quan writes is true, Norbet believes there is, hmm, *something*, at the bottom of the well and will pay 3 Gold Pieces for you to dispose of it for him. Again, though, you will have to supply your own torch.'

Alternatively, you could always go fishing, but only if you have fishing gear written down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*.

Finally, if you have neither torches nor fishing gear (or if you do not care for any of the other options), you may choose to spend the entire day back at your hut.

What will you do now?

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| Explore the sunken crypt, if you have a torch | turn to 16 |
| Investigate the abandoned well, if you have a torch | turn to 26 |
| Go fishing in the Red River, if you have fishing gear | turn to 25 |
| Spend the entire Seaday at your hut | turn to 45 |

42

Desperately you attempt to dodge the sweeping blade of the halberd, succeeding only because one of your knees suddenly and mysteriously buckles beneath you, sending you tumbling backwards. Even as this happens, you almost lose your grip on your weapon, and also inexplicably develop the urge to violently sneeze! You have been afflicted with some clumsy, befuddling enchanterly, from which there is no protection! Somehow, despite this crippling sorcery, you must try and defeat the warband leader.

GORE THE GRIM

SKILL 8

STAMINA 9

You cannot use a bow and arrow before this combat. During the fight, you must deduct 4 from your Attack Strength each and every Attack Round, as you are forever dropping your weapon, stumbling uncontrollably, and generally acting in a highly suicidal but unpreventable manner. If you manage to defeat GORE THE GRIM

despite this immense handicap, turn immediately to **50**. If you are instead defeated by GORE THE GRIM, turn to **5**.

43

The KILLER BEES swarm around you but you are powerless to defend yourself as you must use both your hands to strip bark off the dead tree in order to locate the beehive. Throw one die. If you throw a 1-4, then this is the number of STAMINA points you lose as the KILLER BEES sting you. If you roll a 5 or 6, you are lucky and avoid being stung. Finally you locate the hive and loot its contents. You may take some beeswax (add it to the Equipment box on your *Adventure Sheet*) and some honey (add 1 meal to the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*).

Then, if you have not done so already, you may:

Go back down the trail and take the central path turn to **28**

Go back down the trail and take the right-hand path turn to **15**

44

The cave is damp, narrow, and strewn with boulders of various sizes. There are also several galleries and tunnels leading away from the main chamber, but most are too small for you to investigate, other than using your flaming torch to see how far back the darkness extends. It is whilst you are checking one of the larger tunnels that you turn, seeking to return to the main chamber, and instead trip over a large boulder *that you are sure was not there before!*

Pondering this enigma whilst rubbing your bruised shin, you are horrified to see the boulder suddenly rear up on six spindly insectoid legs and scuttle towards you! What you thought was rock is actually a black armoured carapace, from which protrudes a hideous skull-like head bearing razor-sharp mandibles. Chittering horribly, the CARRION BUG lunges towards you. You must fight!

CARRION BUG

SKILL 7

STAMINA 6

Note that if you have a bow and an arrow, you may not use them at the start of this fight as one of your hands is too busy holding onto the flaming torch that illuminates the cave.

If you defeat the CARRION BUG, you search the rest of the cave but to your disappointment find nothing else of interest or value, other than an old dagger, which you may take if you wish. Still, when you drag the carcass of the dead horror outside to where Hieron Horsefriend is waiting, he shows he is not ungrateful by handing over 4 Gold Pieces for a job well done. Add 4 Gold Pieces to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*, and don't forget to cross off the torch you used to explore the cave, if you have not crossed it off already. Now, turn to **11**.

45

Given the current run of wet and gloomy weather, your hut proves a desirable alternative to toiling outside in the elements. If you decide to eat, cross 1 meal off the total in the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. For eating this meal you may restore 3 STAMINA points if it is your first meal today, or 2 STAMINA points if you have eaten already. Your STAMINA score may not increase to more than your *Initial* score however. Regardless of whether you worked today or not, you find sleep easy to come by. You may restore 3 STAMINA points for the rest, but your STAMINA may not go over your *Initial* score.

Highday

Erase 'Seaday' from the Day box on your *Adventure Sheet* and replace it with 'Highday'. Did you eat at all yesterday? If you did not, then you must deduct 3 STAMINA points for going without food for the day.

Sticking your head outside you notice the weather has completely changed. The clouds have been swept from the sky by a hot, harsh wind, blowing in from the Pagan Plains. Before you can eat however, you notice other more disturbing things: great plumes of smoke, rising walls of flame, the screams of townsfolk, and the clash of steel on steel.

Bitterford is under attack from a Pagan Plains warband! Quickly, consult the Hero Points box on your *Adventure Sheet*:

If you have 0 Hero Points, turn immediately to **5**.

If you have 4 Hero Points, turn immediately to **12**.

If you have between 1 to 3 Hero Points, read on below.

You grab your gear and head out, determined to help the Bitterford Guard defend the town, but immediately encounter advance skirmishers from the warband that have successfully infiltrated already.

If you have 3 Hero Points, you just face a lone ROGUE WHEELIE, large yellow eyes glaring at you balefully from the centre of a circular body adorned with a bandolier of viciously serrated throwing knives.

If you have 2 Hero Points, you face both the ROGUE WHEELIE and a RATMAN SCOUT, with brindled grey fur, studded black leather armour, and a bloodstained shortsword.

If you have 1 Hero Point, you must fight the ROGUE WHEELIE, the RATMAN SCOUT, and a GREMLIN SCAVENGER, who waves a flint-tipped hand-axe and whose wrinkly hide is painted in spirals of blue woad.

If you face two or three enemies, you must fight them at the same time.

ROGUE WHEELIE	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6
RATMAN SCOUT	SKILL 5	STAMINA 6
GREMLIN SCAVENGER	SKILL 4	STAMINA 3

You may fire an arrow before combat if you wish (don't forget to cross the arrow off the Arrows box on your *Adventure Sheet*). If you are fighting more than one opponent, you can choose which opponent to fight. Attack your chosen target as in a normal battle. Against any additional opponents you roll the die for your Attack Strength in the normal way; if your Attack Strength is greater than your opponent's is, in this instance, you will not inflict any damage; you can regard it as if you have parried an incoming blow. If your Attack Strength is lower than your adversary's is, however, you will be wounded in the normal way. If you lose this fight, turn immediately to **5**. If you win, turn instead to **12**.

46

Feeling slightly ridiculous, particularly since you know the eyes of Khazgar the Herder are upon you, you lower your weapon and indicate for the bird to talk.

'Squawk! Much thanks!' splutters the bird. 'Danger on the Pagan Plains! Squawk! Warband on the move! From the Bone Heap ruins, to Green Slime Hole, to Bitterford! Squawk! *Gore! Gore will come!*'

You wait but that is all – the bird is evidently exhausted by this outburst and

turns to lazily fly away – slow flaps of its black wings carry the bird north out over the grasslands. It must have been a JABBERWING – a large, crow-like bird capable of speech due to the surprising amount of intelligence they possess.

Only now that all the carrion birds have gone does Khazgar the Herder dare approach the stinking, rotting carcass. He confirms that it is indeed his bull, from the tattered harness strapped to the bloody mess of once what was its neck. The mission is thus successful – in finding Khazgar’s bull – even if the outcome is disappointing, and Khazgar pays you 2 Gold Pieces for helping him. Add them to the Gold box on your *Adventure Sheet*.

Later, you pass the Jabberwing’s information along to the Bitterford Guard. You expect to deal with a low-level underling, or perhaps Captain Vortnik, and thus prepare to leave out the source of your information to avoid being laughed at. So, it is with some surprise that you find yourself talking to Marshal Urad Blackaxe himself. As a result, you confess all to the grim, battle-scarred dwarf. Amazingly, Urad seems to believe you.

‘Tallies with what we know already,’ he mutters into his short, silver-flecked beard. ‘You did well to bring this to our attention. Capital work, youngster! Well done indeed!’

You are dismissed. Add 1 Hero Point to the total on your *Adventure Sheet* and turn to **41**.

47

You decide to help Venquis Glint guard his warehouse from the mysterious trailgear-stealing thieves. This entails following him through Bitterford, out to the partially-paved High Road that leads north-west, towards the city-state of Kaad, whilst listening to him complain about most things but especially the recent thefts.

‘See, normally I’ve got my own guards for this sort of stuff, by Fulkra!’ he explains. ‘But this current warband nonsense has got everybody spooked, and my guards signed on as extra Strongarms for that last caravan that was heading to Mirewater. The Bitterford Guard are too busy chasing their own shadows all over this corner of the Pagan Plains – I mean, I haven’t even seen Urad Blackaxe himself in town long enough to drain a tankard of Skullbuster these days – and so I need your help.’

Presently, you arrive at the warehouse, which is set some way back from the High Road, on the Pagan Plains side, and surrounded by a serviceable wooden stockade. Two stunted weeping willows grow just outside the back of the stockade. Framed beyond the willows, although you are still within Bitterford settlement proper, a seemingly endless expanse of greenish grassland stretches ever northwards – the infamous Pagan Plains. You shiver slightly at the sight – part in awe, part in dread. Somewhere, out there, beyond windswept stone circles where brutish nonhuman tribes gather to perform foul rites, and sickly poisoned waterholes choked with the weathered bones of the unwary, lies the River Kok, the Icefinger Mountains, and the far northern city of Fang...

Or so you amuse yourself, after Venquis has left, whilst you perform the tedious chore of guard duty at this quiet and somewhat eerie compound. The grey banality of an overcast day in Bitterford passes with agonising slowness and nothing untoward happens apart from the occasional passing of travellers on the High Road itself. With the advent of dusk, wind whistles off the high plains, carrying with it a few fireflies that glimmer haphazardly among the rustling threads of willow leaves. You busy yourself by lighting several slow-burning lanterns that Venquis has left for

you to illuminate the compound with, though there are far too few lanterns for your liking, and several parts of the compound are now cloaked in growing darkness.

During guard duty, you may eat up to two meals if you wish – don't forget to cross them off the Food box on your *Adventure Sheet*. If you have not yet eaten today, the first meal will restore 2 STAMINA points, but the second meal, if you eat it, will only restore 1 STAMINA point. If you have already eaten today, then both meals will only restore 1 STAMINA point each. Also, remember that your STAMINA may not increase to above its *Initial* score.

To see if you are now successful at guarding the warehouse of Venquis Glint, you must roll two dice and *Test your Luck*. However, you must add 1 to the dice roll for every meal you have eaten today, including if you ate breakfast at your hut this morning, as this may increase the chance of you sleeping on the job. On the other hand, if you possess at least 1 torch in the Torch box on your *Adventure Sheet*, you may use them to further illuminate the compound and thus detect anything suspicious. Therefore, for every torch you are prepared to cross from the Torch box on your *Adventure Sheet*, you may deduct 1 from the dice roll as you *Test your Luck*. So for example, if you ate 3 meals (+3) but lit two torches (-2), you would have to add 1 (+3-2=1) to the dice roll when you *Test your Luck*. Lastly, do not forget to deduct 1 from your LUCK score, after you have *Tested your Luck*, regardless of whether you are successful or not.

If you are *Lucky*

turn to **19**

If you are *Unlucky*

turn to **4**

48

You sit down at the table with the two adventurers and introduce yourself. The man grunts and looks vaguely amused, but the woman smiles and speaks with you.

'I'm Raitharve. That's Melric,' she says. 'We just arrived here today.'

'Where have you come from then?' you ask.

'Anvil, originally. Then Gateway, near Firetop Mountain, and then across the Pagan Plains to here,' she shrugs.

'You crossed the Pagan Plains!' you exclaim incredulously. 'Wasn't it dangerous?'

'A little.' This is spoken by Melric. 'We had no choice – we had to find and explore a ruin everyone in these parts calls the Bone Heap,' he continues. 'Problem is, it had already been totally plundered and my gold is on this warband people are talking about, being the culprits.'

'You saw the warband?'

'Just dodged them at Green Slime Hole,' says Raitharve. 'They're mean all right. Don't know who their leader is, but his name is carved on stuff all over the Plains'

'...trees, boulders, bones, bodies...' mutters Melric, scowling.

'What's his name?'

'*Gore. Gore the Grim.*'

Having spoken this, Melric drains his pint, as if to wash the name from his mouth. Raitharve does likewise.

You try to convince the adventurers they should talk to the Bitterford Guard about this whole matter. Initially they look wary about the idea, but gradually they come round to the reality that it would be a good thing to warn the people of Bitterford about what might be out there lurking on the Pagan Plains. Thus, they accompany you out of the Two Trolls Tavern to the Guard Barracks to talk to Captain

Vortnik about what they have seen. You have done the Bitterford Guard a valuable service by introducing them to Melric and Raitharve. Add 1 Hero Point to the box on your *Adventure Sheet*. You return to your hut. Turn to **31**.

49

You are advancing down the cloying confines of the mausoleum corridor, when it opens up into a small, ornate stone chamber whose floor is completely submerged under black, stagnant water, so rank as to make you retch. Rising from the water, in the centre of the chamber, is a low carved stone plinth on which lies a ceremonial sarcophagus.

Even as your peer into the chamber, illuminated feebly by the flickering light of your torch, the waters around the plinth begin to bubble and seethe in alarming fashion. A skeletal hand suddenly breaks the water surface, followed shortly by another, and soon an entire human skeleton, trailing a loathsome mess of slime, mud, and decomposed flesh, is wading through the water towards you!

The stench emanating from this foul undead MIRE-MAN is detestable but there is no choice: you must fight!

MIRE-MAN

SKILL 7

STAMINA 7

Note that you cannot use a bow and arrow at the start of this combat as you need to hold a torch in one hand. At the end of the second Attack Round, and the end of every Attack Round thereafter, you must deduct 1 STAMINA point from your total, regardless of whether you won the Attack Round or not. This is because the fetid odour surrounding the MIRE-MAN is a hazard in itself, and is slowly weakening you. However, if you own a set of nose filters (written down in the Equipment section of your *Adventure Sheet*), you are invulnerable to the stench and may fight the MIRE-MAN as normal, without taking any extra STAMINA damage due to the smell. If you defeat the MIRE-MAN, turn to **38**.

50

Your last blow sends GORE THE GRIM crashing lifeless onto the packed dirt that has soaked up the blood of so many of your fellow citizens of Bitterford. Recognising the source of the Rhinoman's power, you prise the silver circlet from his matted scalp and instinctively place it on your own head.

There is the most bizarre sensation as everything around you is replaced with oppressive darkness, as if you have suddenly been transported to some foul and long-forgotten pit of shadows. Far-off, unguessably distant, you see what appear to be two enormous flaming eyes staring in your direction from across the void. They blink once, twice, almost in surprise, you feel, and then –

– you find yourself back in the smouldering rubble of Bitterford, one foot planted firmly on the corpse of Gore the Grim, your weapon raised to a sky laced with plumes of smoke, and howling a wild and irrepressible battlecry. Seeing the fall of their leader, the remnants of the warband flee clumsily in disarray, harassed by yourself and surviving Bitterford Guard members. You even spot Marshal Urad Blackaxe himself leading a charge to wipe out the remaining members of Gore the Grim's Troll bodyguard detail.

Bitterford is saved! After the last few warband marauders have escaped back into the trackless depths of the Pagan Plains, a short ceremony is conducted at the Market Square by Urad. Its purpose is to recognise your valiant and outstanding

efforts at saving the town from certain destruction, and, as a reward, offer you a valuable commission as the newest and youngest member of the Bitterford Guard. You are presented with your own uniform of studded leather armour and a black surcoat featuring the Guard insignia of a grey stone bridge silhouetted against a red sun. The celebrations that night are long indeed, as survivors crowd the Square to share news, drink, food, and song! Congratulations on successfully completing *Impudent Peasant!*

Later, whilst slumped half-drunk from the festivities at a table outside the Two Trolls Tavern, Urad approaches you and removes the silver circlet from around your head – you had forgotten it was there. There is a brief spell of dizziness – and vast shadowy vistas inhabited by a furiously fiery pair of eyes – and you look at Urad confusedly.

‘I think it best we hang on to this for safe-keeping,’ he says in a low voice. ‘In fact, it could be your first real job as a Guardsman.’

‘What do you mean?’ you reply.

‘The circlet is obviously magical, and possibly dangerous,’ says Urad. ‘We don’t have the capability to understand such things here, but I know of one who does.’

‘Who?’

‘Yaztromo the Wizard. In a day or two, how would you like to be a part of a Guard unit assigned to take this circlet to Yaztromo for identification? He lives in a stone tower at the southern edges of Darkwood Forest. What do you say?’

THE END