

# OUTSIDER!

*By Gavin Mitchell*

To the outsiders of the world.

Thanks also to Jonathan Hughson, Mayavan Thevendra and Wes Dixon, whose firefighting went at least some way to ensuring each paragraph led where it should.

## ABILITIES

Your SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK work the same as in other Fighting Fantasy books and should be determined and managed appropriately.

Roll one die. Add 6 to the total. This is your PSYCHIC score. There is no separate INITIAL score.

Your mother was a witch, and as such you have inherited a range of abilities which the other inhabitants of Fighting Fantasy books cannot usually lay claim to.

### *Telepathy*

Using this power, you may read the thoughts of others. When given the option in the text, you may roll one die and add 6 to the total. If it is equal to or lower than your Psychic score, the attempt will usually succeed.

### *Telekinesis*

This power allows you to move and manipulate objects using only the power of your mind. As above, when given the option in the text, you may roll one die and add 6 to the total. If it is equal to or lower than your Psychic score, the attempt will usually succeed.

### *Precognition*

This is a power allowing you to augur the future. Unlike the other powers, this is not usually under your conscious control. Instead, glimpses of the future come to you in dreams, in visions, in warnings, but not usually in situations when it's most convenient. The text will tell you when your *Precognition* comes into play.

### *Psychometry*

This is a power allowing you to handle objects and pick up something of their history – the activities of their last owner, etc. You will be told when you can use this power.

It is possible to acquire other powers during the course of play and you will be advised as to these. Your PSYCHIC score may well be almost as dynamic as your STAMINA score, as many things will change it, including mental training, psychic attack and magic use. Your PSYCHIC

score is the only score that pushes up its INITIAL level with each increase!

If at any time your PSYCHIC score increases to 13, note the number of the reference you are on and turn immediately to [103](#).

## **FLORENTINE FIGHTING**

You are an assassin, one of the deadliest in existence. You wield a longsword with consummate skill.

However, you are also a master of the ‘Florentine’ style of fighting – wielding a sword and dagger simultaneously. If at any time you roll a double for your Attack Strength, it gives you the opportunity to make a strike with your dagger. Roll for your Attack Strength again, and compare it to the monster’s original Attack Strength. If you succeed, you may inflict an additional 1 point of damage. If you roll a double on the dagger roll you cannot have yet another attack!

## **EQUIPMENT**

You start with the bare minimum of equipment, as you have been out of the limelight of your profession for a while. You are dressed well in black clothes, boots and cloak, and could pass for a wealthy merchant or aristocrat; however, unlike most warriors you wear no armour, for speed and stealth and because your skill with the sword does not warrant it. You have belt pouches in which items can be carried. A creature of the cities where food can easily be bought, you do not usually carry Provisions. (You will be told when you can obtain meals, and unless you are told otherwise, they will restore 4 STAMINA each.) You have, of course, your longsword and dagger. While potions and poisons often form part of your standard equipment as an assassin, your absence of leave from that profession has taken its toll; as of now, you have none. You have been spending your time in honeymooning with your ex-lover, and as such your funds have decreased to a mere 70 Gold Pieces. (This may seem a lot in comparison with other Fighting Fantasy books, but consider the point of view of someone who commands several thousand GP a hit...)

## **HINTS ON PLAY**

This is a complex and multi-layered adventure, and while many encounters and choices will eventually prove fatal, many others will result in one of many possible outcomes that could be considered victory. It is up to you to decide exactly what the word ‘victory’ means! It could be said that some of the victories have a higher ‘level’ than others; then again, some forms of victory may appeal differently depending on your personality. Ultimately, the choice is yours.

Please note that reference numbers (in bold at the top of the pages) are not the same as the document page numbers. It will be realised that entries make no sense if read consecutively; also cheating will lessen enjoyment during play. Note also that the paragraph numbers are not necessarily consecutive – the numbers go up to 1000 (created by a random numbering system) but there are not 1000 paragraphs in the book. Therefore, missing paragraphs do not necessarily indicate a corrupted file!

This adventure requires you to note down which creatures you have killed, any marks on your

body, any items you acquire, etc., *even if they seem unimportant at the time.*

It is also a good idea to note down any information or clues you are given by other characters, even if that too seems unimportant. They will only say it once!

## INTRODUCTION

Every move you make, every step you take, they're watching you. You watch, warily, out of the corner of your eye, for the inevitable blow – the inevitable curse.

Throughout your life it's been the same. In your earliest memories of other children, they have gone out of their way to attack and hurt you. You are bullied unmercifully throughout your schooldays, beaten almost beyond endurance. Why?

Your mother was a witch. She was burned alive.

Late one night in the peaceful Old World village of Ratzielburg, the townspeople came upon your mother's house with torches. Though she had told fortunes for the goodwives of the town, perhaps she had said something that sat ill in someone's stomach. Though she had sold information, plucked from men's minds, perhaps she had plucked something that should've stayed unplucked. Though she had defended the town from humanoid incursion with her movement of the mind, perhaps she'd let one too many Orcish arrows through...

And then again, she was no angel. Hadn't Mrs Regardie broken her spine after she'd spat at the witch? Hadn't some *very* odd men been seen entering and leaving her house at all hours?

And hadn't she spanked Mrs Mathers' little son just a little too hard for punching her own boy in play?

And so they burned your mother. They tied her to the stake and piled around it pitched kindling. It went up like a torch, and so did her blonde hair. You cried your eyes out as her sharp but beautiful features melted like wax in the flames. She shrieked out curses on the townsfolk with her last breath as the superheated air scorched her lungs...

...but the Burgomaster held you back firmly.

A stern and very pious man, he took you into his own home, preaching to the townsfolk that any sin could be cleansed by faith. However, it was clear that he considered you irredeemably tainted by sin. He would do nothing as his own children beat you senseless every single night. At school, it was the same, as the schoolmasters would grudgingly teach you, but not defend you.

And yet, you learned to *fight*.

As the number of your assailants ever redoubled itself – for you were never left alone – so did your prowess with fists and feet, teeth and nails. Time and again were you beaten to a pulp, but time and again did you have your revenge upon your captors. Until one day there were none who could stand against you, and you stood victorious at the centre of the schoolyard, while your assailants could only sneer and murmur from the edge, afraid to face you.

Yet you were alone.

You grew up with your eyes possessed by a hardness and coldness unimaginable. As a man, there was only one profession for one with your anger and hate – assassin. You became one of the deadliest in your field, fighting with sword and dagger. An extra edge was provided by the powers you've inherited from your mother, which appeared at puberty, long since no other child even dared approach you. And yet, you remain alone. Nothing ever touches the cold black void of your heart. You leave a corpse in every city, mountains in the badlands. You become fabulously wealthy. But nothing fills the hole.

Until one day, you meet someone named Eddora.

She's an assassin too – though of the Dark Elf species -- and you meet up by chance as you approach the same contact in a bar one night. You find yourself talking to her as you have talked to no-one for years. Despite yourselves, you exchange life stories. She's been exiled for years, and her heart holds the same rage and hatred as yours at her treatment.

But in each other, you find respite.

You become lovers, the first companionship either of you has ever known, and every day for you is a holiday from the cold. Together, you leave the assassination business for a while, and journey far away. You spend your time in an impromptu honeymoon living in the lap of luxury, spending your considerable resources. Happiness is an emotion you find almost strange in its novelty.

But one day, you wake up alone, finding only a hastily scribbled note. Eddora says she's sorry, but she needs to find herself again. Alone.

Initially, you feel rage that you should have been treated this way. Secondly, you feel desolation, and abandonment. Then, you miss her desperately.

Then... nothing.

But you feel something more, something within yourself. With some surprise, you find that your old anger and rage at humanity has finally faded. No longer do you feel such hatred of mankind as to kill them for pleasure. You're likely to still do it for profit, but to you, the difference is subtle.

Sitting there in your luxurious hotel room, something else finally occurs to you. All your life, you felt there was something missing. You've never realised what it was before now, but suddenly, you know; you never knew the identity of your father. You've never before wondered, but it comes to you now.

Though you've never made the connection, you have virtually memorised your mother's diaries, from reading them over and over; they're your last link to her. It seems, from people mentioned in those diaries, that there are three it could have been. A necromancer, a count, and a crusader. Perhaps your mother foresaw her fate, and wanted to spare them (at least, the more noble ones) the stigma of associating with a witch. For none of them are named.

It comes to your mind that you will try to seek out your father, if for no other reason than to ascertain his identity. For now, though, you will have to return to the business of murder, as the

money is running dry. But you will keep your purpose to mind...

NOW TURN TO REFERENCE ONE!

# 1

You reach the city of Altgarten just before nightfall, and make your way to a tavern you frequent, the Pied Cow. Altgarten is one of the most prosperous and populous cities of the nation of Perrereich, one of the most civilised in the Old World. Not civilised enough that there's not plenty of room for the likes of you, though.

Altgarten is a city of contrasts, ranging from fabulous wealth in the upper-class mercantile suburbs and the prince's palace to abject poverty and a raging crime wave in the slums, shanty towns and docks. As for the Pied Cow – situated conveniently on the borders between the docks and the suburbs – you'll never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy. It is quite upmarket, and sometimes daring and rebellious merchants' sons and daughters will drink here. But it is a place where assassins come to make deals, and though there is never any overt evidence of this, everybody down here knows.

You walk over to the bar and order lager beer. The barman's eyebrows raise at the sight of your face, but he knows better than to inquire. You look around for a familiar face. You spot him, sitting in his usual position in a darkened alcove out of the way.

You walk over and sit down opposite. His eyes widen.

'Black Aria,' he says. 'Talk about absent friends.'

'Joia,' you acknowledge. 'It's been a while, I'll admit.'

Joia the Fixer is a fence usually resident here. He acts as an intermediary between assassins, and those who have need of their services. He supplies a level of protection from reprisal for both parties – from wronged individuals seeking revenge, and from the law.

'Word was you quit the business, along with Eddora. Story had you shackled up in domestic bliss somewhere, no more wetworks.'

'Hardly,' you grimace. You feel a twinge of something indefinable at the mention of Eddora... then it's gone. 'Any idea what's happened to her?'

'Word is she took up business in Mauristatia,' the Fixer grins. 'A very long way away from you my friend.'

'That's enough of *that*,' you hiss, and Joia drops the subject instantly. He knows well enough to respect his murderous clientele. 'I want to get back into the business. Do you have any work for me?'

'Hmm. Well, you've been out of the business, so nobody's asked for you by name. They've taken to looking for the other guys for special requirements. However, I've got one open offer

that's just come along today.'

'I'm listening.'

'The name's Copper, a merchant living in the Lampenstrasse district. A business rival wants him done away with. It's a tough one, so the fee's a grand. The guy keeps a lot of servants and dogs down below. And his son's apparently a wizard. You interested?'

Do you accept the contract (turn to [975](#)) or not (turn to [2](#))?

## 2

Joia spreads his hands. 'Sudden attack of conscience, old friend? Well, if you're not going to take this one then I'm not sure I'm going to be able to help you again. The walls have ears, and if it once gets out that Black Aria's lost the critical edge...' He shakes his head.

If you want to change your mind, go to [975](#). Otherwise, you fume, but have no other option. Joia does not offer you anything else, though each day you pester him. He informs you – coldly and with a distinct lack of respect – that people have only been asking for the reputable assassins by name.

Until a couple of weeks later, when your money is almost down to nothing, he informs you:

'Got one open offer today. I'm surprised he even bothered to talk to me. Everyone knows I only deal with the best. But anyway. This one pimp wants to kill this other pimp. You interested? I know it's slumming for you but understand, Aria, this is the *last* thing I'm *ever* going to be able to come up with.'

Do you accept this? If so, turn to [289](#). Otherwise, go to [462](#).

## 3

'I accept,' you say. 'I want to come with you and learn the ways of the Right-hand Path.'

He smiles. 'Excellent. Would you be willing to help me in a small matter first?'

'I believe my destiny led me to this city to find you, my son. But the original reason I came, unimportant as it seems now, was to find an ancient sword wielded by one of the first Defenders. Sir Svendas was the greatest warrior of his generation, and his goal was to slay evil beings like vampires and black magicians. When he died the following Defender was a wizard who was unable to wield the sword, so it was laid to rest in state with his body. Many of his followers were laid to rest in his crypt at their own request when their call was heard, and they did go.

'In return for my teaching you, would you fetch for me this precious sword?'

If you consider this a fair bargain, turn to [543](#).

If you complain, turn to [732](#).

## 5

You reach the top of the stairs, looking somewhat the worse for wear, but determined to let nothing stop you in your goal.

The balcony extends round three walls of the house, bending at right-angles twice. You can look down upon the lounge and see the blood and bodies of those you have killed. At least it gets you back in the mood again. There is a door in each wall.

Will you take the first door (turn to [271](#)) the second door (turn to [523](#)) or the third door (turn to [185](#))?

## 6

Your horse is one of the finest of its breed, your horsemanship unparalleled. You pull ahead of the rest of the pack and draw neck and neck with the master of the hunt, who is frantically pursuing the poor fox and yelling at it. You draw closer and, from barely an arm's length away, you reach over and shove him off his horse.

The man collapses to the floor with a sickening crunch and a scream. You fight your own horse to a standstill and leap down besides the stricken man. The hunted fox bounds away to safety.

From the twisted and mangled appearance of the man's body, it's clear he's suffered multiple compound fractures.

You grab him by the neck and hiss into his face.

'Where is the secret base of Lasombra?'

'I don't know what you're talking about! Aargh, my back!' he wails.

'Liar!' you hiss. You stab out with your psychic powers, but are shocked to find he is telling the truth. You suddenly realise that fox hunting is not in the least profitable; but gambling on it is. So those involved in the hunt have no reason to be connected with the kingpin, whereas the bookies do. Lose 1 LUCK point.

You drop the man back to the forest floor with a curse; he gurgles. You hear the sound of approaching horses; you do not wish to be caught here. You rush back to Altgarten with your tail between your legs.

You now have no option but to go back to [348](#) and choose another option; you may not try gambling again.

## 7

There is only ever one person in the assassination trade who knows the client's identity...

...the fixer.

Staring with narrowed eyes over the expanse of the bar, you watch Joia ply his trade. His extroversion and sarcasm are as annoying as ever, but he has not spoken to you since you took the Nightshade Phantom contract. Indeed, if you watch him long and closely, you notice his eyes have a haunted, preoccupied look that wasn't there before. As though something was hanging over him...

How has Joia survived all these many years? His primary role is to provide a buffer between the client and the assassin, so that if either are caught by the law (which has never happened to you, of course) neither can give away what they don't know, and there is no motive, no modus operandi. It does however mean that Joia is known to most assassins for what he is – a fixer. Why then do they allow him to live?

You have heard rumours that Joia was once a magician's apprentice who failed due to lack of talent and went right back to the streets. Apparently he does know a couple of nasty spells to defend himself, but you have been far more impressed by the fact that he has proven immune to your own psychic powers. You have never been able to read his mind. Perhaps this is what made him unsuitable to be a mage, but you yourself are uninterested in such ideas.

It seems Joia survives because he has never double crossed an assassin (or, by inference, a client) and thus he is more useful alive than dead. You have to wonder, though, what could lead him to hire out one assassin against another. The client, of course. But why would they do that? And what has made him so afraid?

There are only two people who can answer this question – and only one in this bar.

Thus it is that one night, when business is dying off in the Pied Cow, and Joia is alone, you glide over to his table and sit yourself silently opposite.

'Aria!' says the fixer with very fake enthusiasm.

'Hello, Joia,' you breathe. 'Not often I approach you, is it?'

'No, I suppose not,' he says, eyes flicking to the door. 'Still, I have bases to cover today-'

'Not so fast, Joia,' you hiss, voice abruptly steel. 'There are things I would *know* and I would have words with you.'

The fixer looks at you – his face falls. 'Okay, what do you want to know?'

'Who is the client in the Nightshade Phantom contract?'

The fixer's eyes open wide – a look of misery and horror passes over his face. 'You gotta be kidding, right?' he says with a weak laugh. 'You know I never reveal the client. Why, the assassins in here would all lynch me!'



‘There’s one here who’ll *gut* you if you don’t,’ you snarl (but quietly – the barman is frowning in your direction). ‘I need to know the name of the client, Joia. There is something going on here and I plan to get to the bottom of it.’

The fixer’s fear is replaced by anger. ‘Well, that’s your problem, isn’t it?’ he sneers. ‘You’re the one who’s going to have to deal with the Phantom. I, however, am answerable to all the other assassins if this city for my honesty and integrity.’ You suppress a snicker. ‘It’s more than my life – and my job – is worth to give away information like that.’

‘I could kill you, fixer.’

‘You can only kill me once!’

‘That maybe so, Joia,’ you say, anger finally getting the better of you, ‘but I can always read your mind. Let’s see how tough your vaunted psychic barrier is these days.’

‘You’ll never breach it!’ he snarls, leans forward, grasps the edge of the table and adopts the expression of a man trying to pass something very unaccommodating upon the privy.

Roll three dice. If the total is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [809](#). If it is not, turn to [921](#).

## 11

She turns her alien eyes on you and speaks.

‘What is broken without being hit or dropped?’ she says.

You find yourself frozen to the spot. You cannot move, cannot think, of anything but solving this riddle. You are at the Kiasyd’s mercy.

Think of a word which can answer this riddle, then convert the letters of that word into numbers (1=A, 2=B etc.). Turn to the paragraph indicated by those numbers added together. If it is not a sensible answer to the riddle, turn to [230](#).

## 12

You have found the green venom of which the Succubus spoke.

Before a battle, you may smear the venom on your weapons, and this means that they will now inflict double damage in combat. However, after the battle the venom will wear off, and the potion has been used up. There are four of these flasks and you may take them with you.

The venom in fact works by coagulating the blood (Eichlan had to vivisect a good few haemophiliacs to work this one out). This means that it will work on vampires but not on zombies, who have no circulation.

Return to [594](#).

## 14

‘Well *done!*’ whispers the dark elf. She drags herself over to the bars and clumsily manipulates the tumblers, the banging of her wounded forearms against the bars bringing forth small whimpers of pain. But she gets it right! The lock clicks open and, unable to stop herself leaning against the door, it creaks open into the corridor.

You hear a startled curse from the end of the corridor. This must have been the guard Eddora spoke of. A huge form, clad in full armour and wielding a halberd, comes clanking down the corridor towards you and stands, staring in horror, over the stricken body of the dark elf.

‘Here,’ he says, ‘you shouldn’t be able to do that-‘

With her last strength, Eddora pulls herself up against the bars of the cell door and lunges up at the guard, fingers outstretched. Completely unable to anticipate this, he is taken entirely by surprise, and Eddora’s fingers stab directly through his eyes and into his brain.

He lets out a hideous scream and jerks his hands up to his face. Gasping with the effort, Eddora drags the door closed behind her, collapsing with her arms wrapped round the bars. The guard makes no effort to get to her however, only staggering around the corridor, setting up unbelievably loud wails of agony. Eventually he trips over his halberd and collapses in a corner, hideous fluids running from between his fingers, weeping uncontrollably.

Nobody comes to investigate these sounds. Perhaps they are commonplace.

‘Well, that’s him,’ says Eddora. She seems exhausted by the effort, and twice fails to struggle to her feet. ‘Nothing’s to stop us now... except for us.’

Unable to control your movements well, you nevertheless manage to struggle to a crawling position.

Turn to [116](#).

## 20

‘Nooooo!’ shrieks the Spiral Architect in the style of banished demons everywhere, and suddenly its Black Aria form is forcibly constricted into a single point of light. It sinks down into the very centre of the circle and is extinguished. The candles blow out in a rush of foul wind, leaving you collapsed, kneeling in darkness.

You rise, stumbling, and stagger out into the blinding sunshine. You fall again and kiss the very ground, which you are glad beyond existence to even see again. You raise your eyes to heaven and breathe a heartfelt prayer of thanks to the lord above.

But before long, you are yourself again.

If you now know the location of Defender, you will know where to turn; otherwise you must return to [881](#), and it goes without saying that you won't be summoning any demons again in a hurry.

## 22

The Kiasyd fixes you with a freezing glance.

'What is always coming, but never arrives?' she says.

You feel compelled to meditate on the riddle; fighting suddenly seems the most trifling distraction. Naturally, this puts you in a most vulnerable position.

Think of a word which can answer this riddle, then convert the letters of that word into numbers (1=A, 2=B etc.). Turn to the paragraph indicated by those numbers added together. If it is not a sensible answer to the riddle, turn to [230](#).

## 24

Try as you might, you can get no mental imprints from this boy. You begin to feel uneasy.

You can still choose to approach this boy by turning to [250](#), or you can still choose to just ignore him and carry on to the exit by turning to [560](#).

## 29

Fearfully, you prepare the essential workings of the spell. Flames at the compass's cardinal points. A pentagram impassable by the dead. A ritual athame for the slicing of your arm. A lot of bandages...

You have no idea how your mother will be after so many years in the next cycle of existence, but you feel you have to try.

You begin the spell, uttering words that are vile and blasphemous, derived by insect races long since extinct who desired the eradication of all humanity. The words burn your throat and threaten to stop your heart cold, but you carry on till the end. An end which involves you slicing your left arm open from elbow to wrist. Blood fountains forth... you stagger and nearly faint. Lose 4 STAMINA points and 1 LUCK point. You also know you will be scarred for life. Hurriedly you finish and bind your arm up tightly.

Then... silence.

You scan the pages of the book uneasily. Have you done something wrong? A missed syllable? Not enough blood perhaps?

Then...

Wisps of smoke from the incense start to coalesce. A thousand points of light seem to gather in one. The blood seems to evaporate and a red mist flows towards the apparition.

You watch with fearful eyes as the wraith of your mother forms.

Her skin is clear, mercifully healed from the ravages of the fire. Only her hair is gone, burnt down to blackened clumps on a smooth scalp. Her clothes are gone too; she is completely naked, and you start away guiltily when you find yourself admiring her slender body.

‘I’m alive...’ she whispers, her tones echoing and otherworldly. She looks down with a twisted smile at her body, whole again. ‘I am myself again. Is it you I have to thank? That face... The image of your father... I know you are my son!’

‘Mother!’ you gasp.

‘I thank you for your timely resurrection,’ she utters, smiling unpleasantly at you. She seems to enjoy your discomfiture.

‘Don’t mention it,’ you stammer. ‘Mother, there is something I must know...’

‘It will have to wait,’ she says dismissively. ‘Now that I am alive – or at least, not dead – I must see the world once more. Out in the Outer Circle I had no concept of time, but I knew it was flying. Now I have returned. You have no idea of how long I have waited for my chance at *revenge!*’

‘Mother! You must tell me-’

‘Forget it!’ she snarls and floats out through the wall.

You curse yourself for a fool, the hideous wound in your arm aching abominably. Lose 1 more LUCK point.

Turn to [827](#).

## 32

With a final sigh, the Kiasyd falls to the floor, leaking vitae from a dozen wounds.

‘Please don’t harm my books...’ she whispers with her last strength, and is gone.

You cut off a lock of her pure white hair as a souvenir. You may take her antique dagger with you if you wish; in the event you return to Altgarten Above and wish to sell it, it will bring you 550 GP from an antiques dealer. You look around at the books, but have no stomach for reading.

You leave the library and return to the corridor. Turn to [479](#).

## 33

The young woman's eyes catch you, and hold you in a hypnotic gaze like a butterfly pierced by a needle.

She utters the following riddle;

'What is broken when you name it?'

In that moment, answering the riddle becomes your *raison d'être*. Your sword hangs limply in your hand as the question looms in your mind in all its logical immensity.

Think of a word which can answer this riddle, then convert the letters of that word into numbers (1=A, 2=B etc.). Turn to the paragraph indicated by those numbers. If it is not a sensible answer to the riddle, turn to [230](#).

## 34

You fail to prevent the dagger from turning in your grip, and it breaks free.

To your incredulous amazement, its wings are now whirring too fast to see. It hangs in the air for an endless, nameless moment before arrowing, blade first, at your throat.

You are unable to react in time and the blade plunges home. You die in agony as it slowly sucks out your life's blood. You have fallen victim to the ultimate predator, a creature that has evolved the last word in camouflage, and faced with the full earthly might of the tiny **OBSIDIAN BUTTERFLY**, not all your assassin's skill can save you.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 35

'HOW DARE YOU!' you scream. 'I have been persecuted all my life, and I will not allow anyone to insult me again!'

'Then prepare to be put out of your misery, outsider!' spits back Defender, leaping to his feet and raising his enormous sword to point at you.

You leap to the attack:

DEFENDER  
STAMINA 19

SKILL 12

Defender was once the greatest knight of his generation, and represents the absolute ultimate in the human fighting capability of this aeon. He is also a Master of the Right-handed Path – your telepathy is not strong enough to affect him. His plate armour and magical potency also mean that telekinetic attacks will only do 1 STAMINA point of damage. Your one hope is that he is past sixty, and his body is more frail than once it was.

If you win, turn to [961](#).

## 38

‘Fire. A pox on your offspring!’

The Kiasyd glowers, but you are free of her powers. Return to [72](#) and continue your battle.

## 39

‘Candle. You are right. Curse you, mortal!’

The Kiasyd screams at you, but you are free from her powers! Return to [72](#) and continue your battle.

## 41

‘Icicle. Damn your perspicacity!’

The Kiasyd curses you with admirable invention, but you can move again. Return to [72](#) and continue your fight.

## 42

You curse – quietly – as a door underneath the stairs slides open. This house is entirely too well guarded for your tastes!

Emerging from the door are two enormous, pale, massively muscled and entirely hairless slaves, wearing only loincloths despite the cold. They glower at you in rage, and their throats work horribly. For one horrible moment you think they are going to bring the whole city down on you; but for some reason, no sound emits from their throats. Then you notice the scars across their necks, and you feel ill. *Someone has cut their vocal chords.* This makes even a hardened assassin

feel queasy.

Resolve this battle, using multiple opponent rules. Fortunately for you – and no doubt their masters – despite their size, the slaves are unarmed.

First SLAVE  
STAMINA 9

SKILL 6

Second SLAVE  
STAMINA 9

SKILL 6

If you win, nothing more is going to stand in your path. You stride up the stairs with icy determination.

Turn to [5](#).

## 43

You have exhausted all your leads and bright ideas, which fills you with a sense of rapidly growing unease. It was your intelligence and resourcefulness that allowed you to climb this high, regardless of your psychic powers and fighting skills; where are they now?

The one remaining bright idea you have is to not use the front door of the Inn. You don't want to make yourself any more obvious to the Phantom than you have to. You therefore decide to valiantly climb out of the privy window. It might make a mess of your clothes, but you figure this is the least of your problems by this point.

As you are climbing out of the window you feel a blinding shock to your skull. You try and lift it, but something very heavy is preventing you. It's the six-foot cold iron and silver bastard sword, which has split through your skull like a spoon through a boiled egg.

'I thought I'd find you here,' smirks the Phantom, who is perched on a ledge above like a bird. 'I knew you were good at sneaking around, Aria, but I never thought you'd combine business with nature's call like this!'

He leans down and pulls his sword from your skull; your body flops forward in the window, lifeless as the Phantom flits away. The next assassin who uses these conveniences is destined to have a bloody good laugh at your expense.

Your adventure is over.

THE END.

## 44

The Kiasyd catches and holds you with the overwhelming power of her gaze.

She speaks:

‘What lives on its own substance and dies when it devours itself?’

Your muscles are frozen into immobility. Your eyes glaze over, and your muscles go slack. You can think of nothing else. You *must* answer this riddle!

Think of a word which can answer this riddle, then convert the letters of that word into numbers (1=A, 2=B etc.). Turn to the paragraph indicated by those numbers added together. If it is not a sensible answer to the riddle, turn to [230](#).

## 45

Your polite speech of what you think is ‘Hello’ is met with simultaneous gasps of horror from every Wood Elf present. Your heart sinks, as you realise you must have made some mistake.

With preternatural speed, every Elf present draws their bow and fires, with the accuracy commensurate with those who must kill small, swift woodland animals to eat. You are pierced with several dozen arrows, and you sway, slowly, in a spiral before collapsing to the ground.

Your mistake, of course, was this: Eddora had naturally taught you her own Dark Elf language, and to the Wood Elves, any Dark Elf or their ally is an enemy to be killed on sight.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 47

You have evaded death in all its glory to get this far through the complex. But Fiorentino is clearly more vicious than you had even imagined.

The door slams shut behind you. Acid starts pouring from orifices in the corners, spikes start to extrude from the walls, and the ceiling and floor start slowly crushing together. There is no possibility of escape.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 48

Salome looks appalled as you grimly draw your weapons. ‘Why are you attacking me?’ she cries. ‘I thought we had something in common.’



Her face hardens. ‘What boots it? Soon you’ll be dead like the rest.’

You advance on her; turn to [577](#).

## 55

The Kiasyd turns with a ghastly laugh, and freezes you with her eye.

‘As long as I eat, I live. When I drink, I die.’

Your coherent thoughts shatter into pieces. This is your last resort. Suffocation... breathing... seem like the merest trifles, compared to the overwhelming imperative that you *must* think of the answer to this riddle.

Think of a word which can answer this riddle, then convert the letters of that word into numbers (1=A, 2=B etc.). Turn to the paragraph indicated by those numbers added together. If it is not a sensible answer to the riddle, turn to [230](#).

## 56

And so, you become count of one of the most prosperous territories of the Old World. Yourself and Eddora are married, and you enjoy the happiest of lives together, having many fine children. Few, if any, lords can bring to their calling the same depth of spirituality and power of magic that you have from being a Master of the Right-Hand Path, and you use them to the fullest extent, becoming the greatest ruler that the country has ever known. Few, if any, know of Eddora’s and your past professions, and it never comes back to haunt either of you. By the end of your reign, you have the most advanced and prosperous nation in the land, and your peaceful death is mourned for miles around.

THE END

## 57

As dusk closes, you stagger through the door of Defender’s hut. He is staring out of a collapsed window, as the sunset fills the sky with a riot of fire.

‘I have returned,’ you growl. You are about to drop the sword with a clatter, but think better of it and place it carefully on the floor instead. You have the sense of a great weight lifting from you – quite in excess of the literal truth.

Defender turns and stares at you. His eyes betray no emotion; his manner is quite different than when he saw you last.

‘I brought the sword for you,’ you say. Still he stares neutrally, making no reaction. Your anger

rises.

‘Well then, I hope you know I don’t do something for nothing,’ you hiss. ‘You better tell me what this little deed is going to buy me!’

‘Well, I don’t know that, but I will tell you what I do know,’ says Defender quietly. ‘Your heart is not truly evil... my son.’

You feel an initial shock of confusion, but suddenly your heart is pierced by the realisation of exactly what he means.

But you feign ignorance.

‘What?’ you sneer. ‘What the hell are you talking about?’

‘I see from your eyes that you know what I mean,’ he says quietly. ‘The sword was called the bane of evil because it burned all of evil heart it touched. Even if you had had the willpower to drag it here – and I rather imagine you have – it would have destroyed you utterly long before you could have made it back.’

‘I don’t believe you!’ you lie desperately.

‘Use your telepathy. Look into my mind, and you will see that it is the truth.’

Defender’s mind is opened to you, but there is scarcely any need for you to look within. Even if you had not realised the truth, your own powers could easily determine the properties of the sword now that they are not blocked by your own scepticism.

‘The sword is indeed valuable, but not so valuable as discerning your true character, son.’

You raise your fist and start to snarl, ready to curse and rail at Defender for endangering your life; but pausing, you fall silent.

Defender nods slowly.

‘The first glimmer of understanding in a clouded mind,’ he says. ‘Still. My offer remains.’

‘Will you come with me, and learn the paths of white magic?’

The choice is yours.

You cannot bring yourself to kill Defender after all this time. You may return to the Pied Cow, cancel the contract, and subsequently resume your assassin’s career. Turn to [877](#).

Or you can go with Defender and take the opportunity you nearly died a thousand deaths to acquire – the secrets of the Right-handed Path. Turn to [312](#).

## 58

You stare angrily at Eddora, readying a tirade about how she abandoned you, how you have been alone, the trials and despair you have faced – but your mouth says something entirely different instead.

‘Yes... Yes, I will.’

For the first time Eddora looks up. Her mouth cracks open in a razor smile.

‘I was hoping you’d say that,’ she grins. ‘So what now?’

Note down on your Adventure Sheet that you have Eddora with you. She is SKILL 11, STAMINA 21, less any injuries that might have been inflicted during your fight with her in the Grey Tiger disguise. She is armed with a longsword and dagger as you are and can use Florentine fighting techniques in the same way. She also has a Dark Elf shortbow, composite made of the bones and wood of subterranean beasts and plants, and you will be told when she can use this. She cannot use LUCK or PSYCHIC scores, but she can utilise any provisions, potions or venoms you have in your possession. Unless otherwise stated, anyone fighting the two of you together must use multiple combat rules. If Eddora’s STAMINA ever falls below 4, she will retreat from combat and you will draw any remaining aggression onto yourself, fighting the battle alone.

Turn to [377](#).

## 59

You draw your weapons cross-handed with a single practised movement and hurl yourself through the door, ready to bury cold steel in Defender’s aged body.

No luck. You had thought he was completely out of it, but with a speed of reaction that shocks even you, he leaps to his feet and raises his six-foot sword to a killing stance in one movement. You have a desperate fight on your hands.

DEFENDER  
STAMINA 19

SKILL 12

Defender was once the greatest knight of his generation, and represents the absolute ultimate in the human fighting capability of this aeon. He is also a Master of the Right-handed Path – your telepathy is not strong enough to affect him. His plate armour and magical potency also mean that telekinetic attacks will only do 1 STAMINA point of damage. Your one hope is that he is past sixty, and his body is more frail than once it was.

If you win, turn to [961](#).

## 66

The Kiasyd snaps out her long, slender arm and points her finger at you.

‘What lives in winter, dies in summer, and grows with its root upwards?’ she spits.

You lose your mind. You lose your sight. You lose control of your body. None of this is of any concern. All that matters now is... the riddle.

Think of a word which can answer this riddle, then convert the letters of that word into numbers (1=A, 2=B etc.). Turn to the paragraph indicated by those numbers added together. If it is not a sensible answer to the riddle, turn to [230](#).

## 67

‘Silence. How I wish that you would be just that!’

‘You’ll have to make me,’ you sneer in reply, and lunge at her with your sword. Return to [72](#) and face your destiny.

## 68

‘Alpha! Get him!’ snarls the necromancer and jerks the drawer of his desk open.

The Zombie standing against the wall sneers in recognition, and its mouth opens and closes in a grotesque parody of human speech. But from collapsed lungs, no sound can come.

Meanwhile, Fiorentino is working frantically to smear green liquid over a bejewelled scimitar...

The ZOMBIE ELITE uses Florentine fighting tactics as you do and can dagger-strike in the same way. It is immune to blood coagulant. This close to your target, you may not *Escape*.

ZOMBIE ELITE  
STAMINA 10

SKILL 10

If you win, turn to [734](#).

## 71

Eichlan gives one final, hopeless whisper of ‘Mother...’ and collapses to the floor, almost all of its tentacles hacked away by your blades. You collapse to the floor in exhaustion. Raise your *Initial* and current LUCK by 1 for killing Eichlan, and by another 1 if you killed its war ghouls as well.

Before your disbelieving eyes, Eichlan's body starts to buck and twist. You groan, and try to reach for your sword, but do not have the energy. However, it seems you won't have to. Eichlan's form seethes and boils with a weird chemical catabolism, until it simmers down to leave... the small, naked body of an un presupposing young man. Your eyes widen. What manner of creature, after all, was Eichlan?

Searching Eichlan's room, you find nothing of value, unless you consider unidentifiable limbs and rusty surgical equipment to be of value. You do, however, find a book.

Do you wish to read it?

If so turn to [874](#). If not return to the corridor at [443](#).

## 72

You clear your throat. Nothing happens.

'Hey,' you try quietly to the boy. He still sits hunched into the corner.

You reach out to tap him on the shoulder, and as soon as you touch him he flinches as though he's been stabbed and hunches away from you and twists his body even further away. 'Go away!' he snuffles, voice sounding blurred with tears. You frown.

If you wish to obey his wishes, leave by turning to [560](#).

If you wish to persist in trying to get through to him, turn to [760](#).

## 73

Your mother gives out one last ethereal scream, and then fades from existence. The ghostly armour vanishes from your limbs; the flaming blade vanishes from your hands. You collapse to your knees, panting.

Then you look over at Eddora.

If her stamina was reduced to zero during the course of the battle, turn to [105](#). If she's still alive, turn to [401](#).

## 74

Roll one die and add 6 to the total.

If it is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [539](#).

If it is equal to or higher than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [540](#).

## 75

‘Good riddance! My master will rest easy in his tomb without you!’ yells the Wraith, shaking its mighty mailed fists. It does not appear to wish to pursue you though – luckily for you – no doubt assuming you will flee the tomb complex in fear.

If this is what you want to do, deciding that the whole mission is too dangerous and difficult, your only option is to return to the assassin’s hangout and tell Joia you will no longer carry out the hit. Turn to [877](#).

If not, you find yourself once again in the haven of the Skeleton Warriors. Their bones are scattered and shattered amongst the shards of their weapons, but again by some miracle of unusual good fortune for you, they do not appear to have reanimated themselves. Unable and unwilling to face the Wraith for a second time, your only other choice is to take the other door and go to [664](#).

## 77

Eichlan lies still, but you cannot spare it a single glance. You fight the war ghoul as you have never fought before.

With one last mighty blow, you impale the monster through a chink in the armour at the thorax, and it gives a colossal roar of agony. It flails violently about in death throes; you crouch, terrified, in a corner of the room. Then, finally, it lets out one last roar and collapses, shattering the stone table like matchwood. Restore 1 LUCK point.

Before your disbelieving eyes, Eichlan’s body starts to buck and twist. Incredulous, you watch as Eichlan’s form seethes and boils with a weird chemical catabolism, until it simmers down to leave... the small, naked body of an un presupposing young man. Your eyes widen. What manner of creature, after all, was Eichlan?

Searching Eichlan’s room, you find nothing of value, unless you consider unidentifiable limbs and rusty surgical equipment to be of value. You do, however, find a book.

Do you wish to read it?

If so turn to [874](#). If not return to the corridor at [443](#).

## 78

‘War ghoul!’ Eichlan snaps in the middle of a pitched battle. ‘Freeze!’

To your utter amazement, the war ghoule does just that. You goggle as it stands, absolutely still, in the midst of a power lunge.

‘That’s it!’ breathes Eichlan. ‘The commands must be one word only!’

‘Lie!’

The creature complies, and you both waste no time in strapping it down again. Eventually Eichlan commands it to ‘sleep’ and you collapse to the floor, exhausted.

Eichlan, meanwhile, is propelled repeatedly into the air by his ambulatory tentacles. ‘I’m *so* glad we managed to pacify my beautiful war ghoule without slaying it!’ he cries in joy.

You beg to differ, but you do so to yourself.

Turn to [329](#).

## 79

You spur your horse to great efforts, but your horsemanship fails you, and the stupid animal seems not to like you. You remain at the back of the hunt for the duration, and only get to the front to find they’ve caught the fox and are now stewing the unfortunate victim’s blood all over themselves. Lose 1 LUCK point.

You now have no option but to go back to [348](#), and try another course of action. You will be unable to try gambling again.

## 80

Your telepathic probe hits the Kiasyd’s mind and bounces. You are shocked at her power. She looks on with renewed interest.

‘Oh, you know Auspex? You don’t look the type. I hadn’t figured you for a Kindred or ghoule. Or maybe you’re not? Tell me, what exactly *are* you doing here?’

You have little option but to answer or fight; return to [384](#).

## 81

The demon stares down at a corner of the pentagram, then straightens up – and smiles.

As easily as a man might step off a curb, it steps outside the warding you had so painstakingly drawn to keep it from you!

‘And now,’ it smiles, ‘for the fate that must befall all mortals impudent enough to challenge the Powers of Hell.’

Your face crumples up. And yet you have no one to blame but yourself.

SPIRAL ARCHITECT  
STAMINA 25

PSYCHIC 14

No possible concentration of material force, however applied, may kill the insubstantial spirit. You must battle it telepathically, or not at all.

If you lose, your mental reserves have been exhausted. The Spiral Architect takes your body for its own and sends your spirit howling down to Hell almost as an afterthought. For millennia afterwards, you will experience pains that are greater than the greatest pain of Titan. It *may* be possible to prove your loyalty, become trusted, and eventually rise through the Infernal ranks to be a Spiral Architect yourself; but those necessary several millions of years later, your current adventure will have long since been over.

If by some miracle you win, turn to [20](#).

## 82

‘TRAITOR!’

The one yelled word cuts a swath across the noise of the assassins, the bards, the barman and the rebellious bourgeois children in the Pied Cow. It is a word yelled by a tattered, bleeding, wounded and wild-eyed figure hanging in the doorway, seemingly barely able to stand. He’s pointing an outstretched finger.

The wild-eyed figure is you.

You’re pointing at Joia the Fixer.

Joia is, predictably, in the middle of a deal with an assassin at this point. But as the yell sets the whole room into a horrified silence the other assassin’s eyes go wide and he melts immediately away into the crowd. Joia gulps and backs away slowly from the table.

‘The traitor is YOU!’

Shaking, barely able to stand, you stagger across the room towards the Fixer. The assassins close ranks behind you and form a silent circle.

‘You sold us out to the Grand Councillor. You entered into a deal to have the assassins kill each other to thin out our numbers!’

There is a collective gasp throughout the room. The ring of assassins around the pair of you tightens to two sword lengths.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about!’ gasps Joia.



‘Leave it out, idiot,’ you sneer. ‘The Grand Councillor and the Nightshade Phantom knew about it. I killed them both.’

There is another gasp. ‘The Nightshade Phantom?’ is whispered incredulously around you. The circle opens out somewhat.

‘Well, Joia, will you admit it? You’re gonna die anyway.’

‘No violence!’ shrieks the barman. But the assassins are all shaking their heads.

‘This won’t be violence. This will be *Justice*,’ you say, drawing your swords, the blood of the Phantom and the Councillor still on them.

Joia jerks and twitches, whimpering, looking for some way out of the circle, out of the rapidly approaching end to his life.

‘All right! I made a deal. They were going to take me down if I didn’t. But I made a bargain, that I’d work for them and still be free.’

‘Then you die,’ you murmur. You advance upon the fixer. A susurrated, communal whisper of ‘Kill... Kill...’ starts amongst the assassins. A few lone aristocratic teenagers make a beeline for the door.

JOIA THE FIXER  
STAMINA 6

SKILL 7

If Joia rolls a double for his Attack Strength, he will cast the one spell he knows, a magical missile which will strike you unerringly for 2 STAMINA points of damage.

You cannot Escape. If you slay the traitorous fixer, turn to [780](#).

## 86

‘If you don’t help me you’re going to wind up with a sword through the head,’ you hiss at the king.

Not a good idea, as it happens. The thieves are outraged to hear you so publicly disparage their leader. This extends to the dozen or so thieves who’ve had crossbows trained on you from concealed emplacements since you’ve arrived.

One is so outraged, in fact, that his itchy trigger finger tightens enough to shoot you. Unfortunately for you, one crossbow bolt is just as lethal as a dozen. You die instantly, your heart shattered.

Said thief is later docked a day’s wages for shooting out of turn. However, this makes little difference to you at this point. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 88

‘Sorry Aria, old friend,’ says Tyler with a glint in his eye. ‘I’m afraid I don’t know anything about that.’

You curse. You are sure that Tyler is lying, but what can you do about it?

Return to [602](#); you may not take the option of trying to find contacts again.

## 91

You despair of the endless sight of the tunnel walls. You carve ‘BLACK ARIA WOZ ERE’ into one with the point of your dagger, but it achieves little for your mood.

There are doors to the north and south, a bend to the west and a straight section to the east.

North door ([715](#))

South door ([571](#))

Bend ([304](#))

Straight ([479](#))

## 92

With a single practise slash, you separate Magnus from the last of his metal limbs, and the barely-intact torso collapses to the floor.

‘Bloody hell!’ calls out the torso, metal eye still following you around. ‘What did you do that for? At least do me the courtesy of sticking me a new arm in.’

‘Somehow I doubt it,’ you mutter, looking around the room for something useful.

‘I’d do the same for you if you were in my position.’

‘I don’t doubt it,’ you say.

The haranguing of the ex-metal fetishist torso is beginning to tire, and you’re sure there’s nothing useful in his room that isn’t broken or rusted up to buggery, and so you determine to leave.

You have the choice of a left door ([886](#)) or a right ([532](#))

## 94

‘Then what are you doing here? I have a job to do. Kindly get out of my workshop.’

If you wish to comply, return to the corridor at [443](#).

If you want to kill it, turn to [646](#).

## 95

‘Promise. It was a black day for faerie kindred when you were born, mortal!’

The Kiasyd gnashes her teeth in fury, but you are free to fight again. Go back to [72](#) and show her what for.

## 96

With a hideous groan, you collapse to the floor. You are too badly injured to move.

Calmly, the hideous tentacled monstrosity known as Eichlan of the Tzimisce slithers towards you and turns you over with one of its thick, ambulatory tentacles.

‘A fine specimen,’ it trills. ‘Rather stupid of you to attack though. Still, I have no need of your brain; it will go to be your eventual food. I imagine your strong limbs, lungs and heart will serve excellently in my next generation of war ghouls, however. Yes... I think, next time, I shall not bother giving them heads.’

The only life left remaining to you is as part of a hideous, brainless gestalt entity mutated for the sole purpose of war. Your adventure ends here.

THE END

## 100

You let it be known by the arcane means that you wish to meet with the thieves, and after the customary blindfold journey you find yourself standing in the throne room of King Adora, leader of the Thief Guild.

And an impressive throne it is. Your eyes widen to notice that Adora is perched atop an enormous pyramid of gold coins – *ten* feet high.

Your keen eyes do also pick out the fact that the gold coins are welded irretrievably together to make the pyramid impossible to dismantle. Some things never change, thieves amongst them.

All around the huge cavern in which the thieves make their home, there are practise areas where they practise their skills of questionable utility... but you begin to feel distinctly queasy as looking around now, you notice *none* of the thieves are practising. They are stanced in a circle staring at you. They are all grinning. Their king is leering openly.

‘So what brings you to our lowly cavern, Aria?’ he sneers.

With those words you realise you should not have come here, but you are well aware of the importance of always keeping your cool. You resolve to continue.

‘I seek knowledge of the whereabouts of the Nightshade Phantom, or anywhere he may hide. I am willing to pay well.’

‘Who cares!’ yells the king. He leans forward so far over his throne you wonder if he’s going to fall off, but it is far from amusing; he seems in an apoplexy of rage, and you are sure there are concealed crossbows trained on you. ‘What has this got to do with us?’

The other thieves are still grinning, but most have venom in their smiles and hate in their eyes.

You really wish you weren’t there.

‘What’s this?’ you say in as neutral tones as you can manage. ‘Since when have the thieves turned down an offer of free money? The location will be worth a lot to you.’

‘Of course. That’s all we are to you, hired servants -- when we’re not being wiped out by assassins in the service of the bourgeoisie. Well, the boot’s on the other foot, assassin.’

‘Boot? What are you talking about?’

‘Your time will come, Aria, just as it has for the other freak. There’s not going to be any place for assassins any longer in this city.’

‘I see,’ you hiss. ‘Might I possibly ask why?’

‘Why? *Why?* Get out before I kill you myself!’

You glare at the leering thieves, and move your hand the merest fraction towards your weapons, but outnumbered hundreds to one, you soon think better of it.

You also consider trying to pluck the information from the king’s mind by psionics, but you have no idea of the number of warlocks within their ranks. You think better of that, too.

‘I’m gone,’ you say instead. ‘May we *never* meet again.’ You spin on your heel and head for the chamber exit.

‘I hear that,’ you hear the thief king growl as you leave.

As you cover the distance between the king and the exit, fighting with every scrap of willpower you have not to break into a run, you can feel the eyes of every thief in the city boring into your back with hatred and scorn. You cannot stop yourself counting the paces... one... two... three... four...

On five you hear a click.

Add your PSYCHIC score and your SKILL score and roll five dice. If the total dice roll is below the total score, turn to [536](#). If it is not, turn to [716](#).

## 101

Eddora, screaming at her assailant in their own language, finally gets off a lucky hit and shears the other dark elf's weapon hand off at the wrist. Nadria shrieks in pain, blood spurting from the stump, but Eddora does not give her chance to attend to the awful wound. She rushes at the other woman, pinning her handless forearm against her own throat with the hilts of her weapons and slamming her against the wall.

Neither notices the box just underneath them that connects painfully with Nadria's lower legs.

'Talk, you pathetic has-been!' shrieks Eddora, reverting back to the Reichstongue. 'Why are the dark elves being allowed into the city? Is there an alliance?'

'All right! All right!' moans Nadria. Blood is pouring freely from her stump, running down over her and Eddora, falling onto the box she is being held over. 'The Prince-

'Has no desire for his plans to be made known.'

A supernaturally beguiling voice of unearthly timbre has issued, oddly from the box. The voice is of such hypnotic quality that the pitched battle ceases immediately, all weapons hanging frozen in the air.

The lid of the box rises abruptly, hurling Eddora and Nadria into the middle of the room. As they struggle to regain their balance a figure sits up bolt upright in the box, as suddenly and jerkily as a puppet wielded by an amateur. It turns a piercing stare upon you all and *everything stops*. You cannot move. The figure is so mesmerically fascinating...

He is dressed in the fine, but subdued, clothing of a professional politician. His face is white and gleams unnaturally in the darkness, like polished marble. He is unnaturally handsome, his features too even and symmetrical, looking all too much like a shark or a predatory snake. He smiles slightly, displaying the inevitable and predictable fangs.

It is the Prince.

'I had no doubt that a few puny dark elf underlings would be no match for the finest assassins in the city,' he smiles. Both the puny dark elf underlings and the finest assassins in the city are powerless to respond. 'Still, all that they were was bait. It was the assassins I wanted. And now I have them.'

'I think it's time to have you removed to a place of my choosing. Sleep, Aria and Eddora,'

Suddenly blackness hits you, and you just feel yourself collapsing bonelessly to the floor, and are vaguely aware of Eddora doing the same, before you are gripped by the most profound sleep you

have ever known.

Turn to [953](#).

## 103

Your psychic powers have now increased to the point where they may be used offensively. In such a situation, you may substitute your PSYCHIC score for your skill when determining your Attack Strength. You must concentrate fully on these powers whilst using them, so cannot also use your weapons. However, bear in mind that many creatures cannot be hurt by telepathy – they have no psi to attack – others cannot be hurt by telekinesis – they are non-corporeal or too heavily armoured – and so you are forced to fight conventionally. Also bear in mind that your enhanced psychic abilities make you much more vulnerable in certain situations, especially because there are others out there with these powers...

The improvements to your powers are as follows:

### *Telepathy*

Your powers are now such that you can hurl blasts of psionic energy to cause injury and defend yourself from same. A higher Attack Strength than your opponent will cause them 2 stamina points of damage. However, many creatures have no psi and are immune, and yet others are more powerful than you!

### *Telekinesis*

Your powers are now such that you can hurl items offensively, or grip your opponents' body parts to stop respiration or blood flow. Most creatures are better able to defend themselves against physical attacks, so the SKILL penalty is reduced or absent. However, it works against the psi-blind, but not against the non-corporeal.

### *Precognition*

Your visions are stronger, more accurate and more numerous, but also more obtrusive. You have no more control over them than you did previously, and will often be left in danger as the visions come.

### *Psychometry*

Your power with this has increased, enabling you to gain much more information. You will be told when you can use this power.

## 104

'That would be... just fine,' he says, sounding oddly unhappy. 'I'd prefer to keep my Zombie Elite, since he's my only prototype, but I can let you have a Zombie First Class?'

Without waiting for a response, he goes over to a cupboard and opens it. You tense, fearing perhaps some super-weapon, but all there is is a corpse, lounging back against the far wall and looking quite dead. It's wearing chain mail armour and carrying a broadsword.

'Activation,' says Fiorentino to it, and suddenly it snaps to attention, the light of an evil intelligence appearing in its sunken, desiccated eyes. 'This is now your master,' he says, pointing at you. The ZOMBIE FIRST CLASS nods in acknowledgement. 'There you go, son,' he says. 'A zombie servant of your very own.'

The ZOMBIE FIRST CLASS has SKILL 9, STAMINA 9, and will aid you in any battles from now on. Your opponents must use multiple rules, and they must roll a die for each attack round to see whom they attack. If they roll an odd number, they attack the zombie. If they roll an even number, they attack you.

Unfortunately, it is impossible for your zombie to heal wounds and once he reaches 0 STAMINA, he is permanently destroyed. However, he is immune to blood coagulation venom.

If you are satisfied with this, you leave the tunnels the way you entered and return to the Pied Cow. You casually inform Joia that you are finished with the Fiorentino contract, and despite his gaping mouth and inept blustering, you calmly eat a meal and go to bed. Deduct 20 GP and restore 6 STAMINA points. Though if you had promised the Thief King a cut of your fee, you had better give them 300 GP, otherwise your life will be measured in hours. Go to [314](#).

If, on the other hand, the zombie isn't enough, go back to [569](#). Fiorentino appears uncomfortable and seems willing to accede to your demands.

## 105

Eddora is lying collapsed upon the floor. Her skin has gone a ghastly pale, and her eyes have rolled back in her head. Frost is slowly forming on her limbs and clothing. She doesn't appear to be breathing.

'Eddora! No!' you shriek, and drag yourself over to her side. You pull her into her arms, her head lolling sickeningly. The touch of her body burns you like ice, but you don't care.

Her eyes slowly swim back into focus. She smiles sadly.

'Farewell, Aria,' she whispers, with her last breath. 'Don't blame yourself for what happened. I hope you can forgive me for leaving. We should never have been apart. I have always loved... you...'

She dies in your arms.

'NO!' you scream up to the heavens. But no-one is listening. The dark elf's eyes close for the last time.

If you have a signet ring bearing the emblem of a boar rampant, turn to [550](#). If not, turn to [487](#).

## 106

The two take one look at another, then one look at you-

‘GUARDS!’ they yell at the top of their lungs.

‘Damn!’ you growl, and out of sheer rage fall forward behind your blades. They sink into the neck of each boy hilt deep and send them gurgling to an awful drowning death. You race for the window, throwing your arms across your face and hurling yourself bodily through it. The window partitions are heavy oak and the glass is thick and smoky; you are bruised, lacerated and shaken. Lose 4 STAMINA points.

You cringe, waiting for an impact of hard cobbles, but instead find yourself sinking above the tops of your boots into some sort of garden for carnivorous plants grown entirely in dung. Fortunately, whatever you might have expected, the plants are unable to handle anything more challenging than wounded flies, and you are able to go on your way, smelly but relatively unharmed.

Of course, there is the small matter of the fact that you still have no idea who the client is... Your options are now limited and you may only try opportunities you haven’t tried before.

If you have seen a boy’s throat cut as an example of cruel justice on your instigation, you have the option of turning to [275](#).

If neither is the case, your only remaining option is to turn to [7](#).

## 114

Bleeding from a thousand cuts, Fiorentino expires with a gurgle. You drop your sword and dagger and collapse, exhausted.

Before your wondering eyes, the skin on Fiorentino’s body magically withers and wrinkles and sags. Before long, the body before you is no longer that of a young dandy, but that of a man over ninety years old. You can only wonder at the true age of the necromancer.

You wish to spend no more time in this accursed, undead-riddled, trap-filled labyrinth. You eye the books spread across the shelves, but are sure they are necromantic spell books which would burn your fingers if you touched them and send you insane if you tried to read. You hack the jewels out of the hilt of his scimitar; Joia will give you 375 GP for them.

Otherwise you waste no time in hacking off Fiorentino’s old man’s hand and make haste for the entrance you came in by. You emerge into the streets of Altgarten, bleeding and dishevelled, and head at once for the Pied Cow.

Turn to [976](#).



## 115

Morrigan lolls on the bed, beginning to drool. Her block is down, and her will has been permanently broken.

‘While you are still sane I shall take your total knowledge,’ you inform her, and so you do. You scan her mind, channel by channel, and extract the information that Lasombra lives in a mansion in the mercantile district.

Satisfied, you issue the final, killing psychic blast, and Morrigan is slain. She fades out of existence as though she had never been.

Go to [914](#).

## 116

Eddora leans against the cell door again, and it creaks open. She uses the bars to pull herself to her feet. You manage to stand, but almost immediately manage to fall over again. Still, by grasping whatever handholds come to you both, you are able to shuffle out into the corridor.

The corridor is like any other ill-maintained dungeon; rows of cells line one wall, and guttering torches give light upon the other. You are clearly far below the earth, and trickles of foul water drip down the arched brick walls.

‘Our weapons are on a rack at the end of the corridor,’ murmurs Eddora. She smiles slightly. ‘This would be very convenient if we were in any fit state to use them.’

You both struggle towards the rack. Within the cells you pass are the twisted, broken remnants of what once were human beings. You see gouged eyes, amputated limbs, mutilated bodies. Soon you learn not to look too closely into the dungeon rooms, and none of these wretched creatures calls attention to themselves, assuming they can at all.

Except for one.

‘Is that someone there?’ calls out a broken voice as you are about half-way to the weapon racks.

You jerk around; Eddora’s eyes widen. The voice came from a cell to your left.

Do you wish to investigate?

To head towards the cell, turn to [316](#).

To carry on towards the rack, turn to [391](#).

## 117

‘You don’t *look* undead, but maybe Fiorentino’s skills have improved since the... unpleasantness. Anyway, come with me.’

If you wish to go along with it, turn to [932](#). If you would rather kill it instead, turn to [646](#).

## 118

Kandron is a sorcerer of great power, but yourself and Eddora are beating him back. His leather robe is ripped and torn, his imposing, inhuman exterior being gradually broken down as black skin and red blood show through the multitude of wounds in his robe.

‘Dark Elves obviously bleed the same colour as the rest of us...’ you sneer as Eddora slices deep into his forearm with her longsword, shrieking ‘That’s for the son you killed!’

‘Enough of this!’ roars the Prince suddenly. Eyes dilated with rage mixed with... something else... he suddenly leans forward and rams his spear through Kandron’s lower back. Kandron gasps in agony; his hood lowers as he leans down to look at the spearhead protruding through his stomach.

The Prince does not give him much time for contemplation. Yelling wordlessly in anger, he grabs Kandron’s hood, tears it from his head and rams his fangs into his neck. Yourself and Eddora pause in shock.

‘Talk about never trusting a politician,’ you mutter.

‘Or a vampire,’ Eddora adds.

But neither of the other two have any attention left for you. Kandron’s eyes are open in an ecstasy of agony as the Prince drains what remains of his life with complete single-mindedness. As you watch, Kandron’s skin fades from black to dark grey to charcoal ash, and the light of his cold, cruel intellect goes out of his gaze as he dies. Snarling, and wiping blood from his mouth, the Prince hurls the lifeless body aside. His skin is flushed, and he looks ready for blood of a different kind.

‘Who’s next!’ snarls Eddora, not one to be intimidated.

‘My pathetic dark elf ally could not take you down, it seems,’ hisses the Prince, pulling his spear from Kandron’s back, ‘but now I am fully charged, and now I have rid myself of that useless ite, I am more than willing to finish the job myself.’

‘This is the spear with which I emasculated the Count of Austrielheim,’ the Prince smirks, hefting it. ‘Rumours exist linking him with your mother, Aria; will it be nice to know this as I kill you?’

‘Who cares! Use the bloody spear before we use it for you!’ bellows Eddora as she leaps to the attack.

VENTRUE PRINCE  
STAMINA 30

SKILL 11

As with Kandron, yourself and Eddora can fight him normally using multiple rules with whichever fighting method you prefer. For each of the Prince’s attacks, roll one die. On an odd number, he will attack you. On an even, he will attack Eddora.

The Prince also has additional powers that he can invoke when he rolls a double for his *Attack Strength*. Fortunately for you, he cannot attack with his spear at the same time.

On a double 1, he will order whoever he is attacked that round to sleep, and due to the power of his eye contact and voice, that individual will immediately fall asleep for that round and the round thereafter. They cannot attack in either round and the Prince will attack the other person exclusively in the next round.

On a double 2, he will turn to the person he is attacked, bear his fangs and *scream*. His unearthly presence will raise his inhuman appearance to terrifying levels. The experience will shock that person so much that their Attack Strength is lowered by 2 for that round and the round thereafter.

On a double 3, he will invoke the full power of his unearthly majesty. He will suddenly become so paralytically handsome for that round and the round thereafter that neither of you can bear to attack unless you can succeed in a roll. Roll one die and add 6 to the total for each of you; if it is lower than whichever stat you are using to calculate your Attack Strength (always SKILL for Eddora, either SKILL or PSYCHIC for you) you can attack freely, but if it is not, your attack for that round must be forfeited (though you can still defend yourselves).

On a double 4, he will turn to Eddora and address her, saying that you are really her enemy and must be attacked. Unless Eddora can succeed in a SKILL roll as above, she will become convinced that the Prince’s words are true and she will attack you next round in lieu of the Prince. If her Attack Strength is higher than yours for that round, she will also succeed! (If your Attack Strength is higher than hers, it merely means you have defended yourself against her blow. You may continue to attack the Prince normally that round.)

On a double 5 he will turn and address *you*, saying that Eddora is really yours enemy and must be attacked. Unless you can succeed in a SKILL or PSYCHIC roll as above, you attack Eddora next round. If your Attack Strength is higher than hers for that round, you will succeed. (If her Attack Strength is higher than yours, it means she has defended herself against your blow. She may still attack the Prince.)

On a double 6, turn to [551](#).

If, after all that, you finally manage to win, turn to [194](#).

## 119

You finally run loverboy through and he falls to the ground with a groan. You smile in satisfaction.

The girl, however, on seeing the crumpled body of her lover and his blood upon your blade, fills her lungs – and lets out a colossal shriek. The window rattles, you wince, lower your head in your hands, and stride towards her, ready to shut her up for good; but it is too late.

Suddenly, two figures appear at the doorway. One is young, wearing a pointed hat, and a nightshirt embroidered with blue stars. The other is older, corpulent and wearing a plain nightshirt. He's carrying a cutlass.

The unarmed one is far from powerless, however;

‘Sis! No!’ he yells, and pushes out at you with his hands. A blast of blue flame scorches you; lose 2 STAMINA points. The older one, who must be Copper, runs at you full pelt with the cutlass. Resolve this battle using multiple rules, but concentrate on your target Copper exclusively:

JUNIOR WIZARD  
STAMINA 6

SKILL 10

COPPER

SKILL

STAMINA 8

If you defeat Copper, you may subsequently *Escape*: if so, turn to [933](#). If you remain, you may kill the boy (by reducing his STAMINA in the normal way) and then, disgusted, slash the girl across the throat. Her screaming finally stops. Then turn to [255](#).

## 121

‘Oh dear,’ intones the butler with little to no change in expression. ‘Sir has evidently wielded a sword before.’

He flies at you. Resolve this battle. The butler is tougher than a normal human, but unarmed and unskilled.

LASOMBRA ANCILLA  
STAMINA 13

SKILL 8

If you win, turn to [695](#).

## 122

You find yourself in Lampenstrasse. It is brightly lit by oil lamps raised from the street on poles (hence the name) which are filled each dusk by servants with enough oil to last the night. The

wealth of the street's inhabitants is self-evident.

You walk the last few hundred yards to Copper's house. Even without the number spelled out in copper on the door, his profession and name are obvious; three copper balls are suspended above the door.

The house is quiet and in darkness; the door, of course, is locked. You know well the value of entering a house in silence. Usually, you find it a simple task to enter a locked house using your unique telekinetic abilities; if you wish to do so now, turn to [988](#). However, if you have acquired some lockpicks and wish to use them instead, turn to [633](#).

## 126

'Oh shut up,' calls back Eddora irritably. 'It doesn't matter. Now come with me. I want to find some oil or something. I get the impression we should set light to this mansion before we leave.'

Suffice it to say, yourself and Eddora do of course manage to fire the mansion, and escape quite easily and without meeting any serious opposition before the place falls down around your heads. When you emerge, it is a beautiful starlit night, and the two of you walk dreamily hand in hand down a cobbled street as the most ancient building in the city goes up in flames, and the screams and wailing of the townsfolk grow higher and higher as they rush to fight the conflagration.

'You seem perturbed,' says Eddora as you sit on a bench by the blaze, watching the scurrying peasants frantically trying to beat the blaze.

'Oh... it's nothing,' you mutter.

'You still want to find out who your father was, don't you? It doesn't really matter.' She leans over and kisses you. 'We have each other. That's all that matters.'

'Oh, but it does matter, little girl! It does matter, very much indeed!'

You recognise the voice immediately. 'Oh, *no!*' you groan.

Rising from the ground before you, accompanied by an aura of bone chilling cold, is an awful figure. Eddora's eyes go wide at the sight of it; her fingers reflexively tighten on your arm.

'Who the hell is *this?*' she hisses.

You answer with utter dread:

'My mother.'

Turn to [324](#).

## 127

Roll one die and add 6 to the result. If this is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [597](#). If it is not, turn to [531](#).

## 133

Without a word, you draw your weapons. The expression on the old knight's face does not change. 'One of *those*,' he says. 'Well then, it's said that if you live by the sword, then you will die by the sword.'

'You now know the location of the sword and of the traps defending it. You cannot be allowed to leave.'

The knight draws his longsword and advances on you, holding it pointed straight out. You must fight.

REVENANT  
STAMINA 13

SKILL 10

The knight was clearly once a fine swordsman, but he is showing his age. However, he is true to his word; you may not *Escape*. He is (worryingly) immune to telepathy. When you have inflicted three wounds on him, turn to [315](#).

## 135

As the afternoon deepens into darkness you nurse the same glass of wine for hours, pondering your next move. There is an unspoken rule amongst the assassins that no violence takes place in the Pied Cow, so you know you are safe where you are. However, once you step outside that door, it is no holds barred.

It is essential that your weapon finds the Phantom's back before his finds yours, and you are well aware that this will require a subterfuge. However, after pondering all of the different courses of action, you cannot conceive of one being any more advantageous than the other.

By stretching your mental, physical and psychic skills to their limit, you think you might be able to follow the route followed by the Phantom on leaving the bar and track him to where he lies. To follow this course of action, turn to [773](#).

There is one group that knows more about the secret places of the city and where to hide than any other... the thieves. Perhaps, if you approached them, they would know something of where to find your quarry. To seek out the thieves, turn to [100](#).

One idea you almost refused to consider after thinking about it, but which refused to depart from your mind, hinges on the idea that the Phantom has to work just as do you; therefore, he has to

take any fairly lucrative looking contract which comes along. And due to the number of intermediaries you all go through on a day to day basis, how will he know whether a contract is real or fake?

You therefore conceive of the idea of actually hiring the Phantom to kill someone and stabbing him in the back along the way. This will be by far the most expensive and time-consuming course of action, but you have a weird sense that it just might work. To try it, go to [800](#).

And finally, you have the even wilder thought that if you sit in the bar nature will assassinate the Phantom for you. The life of an assassin is notoriously short, and even he will eventually end up taking on something more powerful than himself – a Spiral Architect, for instance. The only problem this involves is that you cannot leave the inn, you never collect the money and you look like a craven coward. But to do this, turn to [375](#).

## 136

You've seen enough to know that the thieves always stab their enemies in the back when they get the chance, they always look out for their colleagues and they are rarely subtle about either. You don't even need to look around; you simply grit your teeth and slam your boot out behind you. It connects crushingly with soft organs; there is an agonised groan and the sound of metal clattering to the floor. Some foolish thief is going to be passing blood for a week.

'Unwise,' you snarl. 'Just for that I'm going to have to *scar* you.'

'No! No!' he screams. 'I'll tell you!'

'The Nightshade Phantom contract was masterminded by the Grand Councillor of this city. He wants to turn the assassins against each other to thin out their numbers and make Altgarten a safer place. We thieves were told we had an amnesty... for now...' The youth breaks out into frenzied weeping.

'All right, I'll let you live,' you growl, and drop him crushingly to the floor. You ignore the two huddled bodies in the alleyway and stride away, mind already racing. A plot by the Grand Councillor of the city to thin out the assassins? What can this mean?

One thing's for sure – you and the Grand Councillor are going to have words.

Final ones.

Turn to [766](#).

## 137

'Tomorrow. I swear to Caine it'll never arrive for *you*, kine!'

'We'll just see about that,' you sneer, and lunge at her with your dagger. Return to [72](#) to finish

off this upstart.

## 141

Everything goes according to plan as usual.

Waldo duly hires Grey Tiger to kill Ajax on your orders and Ajax follows a tight schedule that you have planned out for him. Thus it is that one night, Ajax – disguised as a dockworker – is carousing in a wharfside tavern of frightfully low class. You have ordered him to get extremely drunk and to leave the tavern with a couple of women of ill repute, and this he does. With relish.

Around midnight Ajax staggers from the tavern, and yourself and Waldo, similarly disguised but only pretending inebriation, follow him at a reasonable interval. He has an arm around the waist of each of two tired, middle-aged women with faces caked in paint. Waldo is kicking up a hell of a noise of singing and dancing, and the two women are keeping up half-heartedly.

Only you can see a grey-clad figure detach itself from shadows and sneak after them.

This Grey Tiger is good, no doubt about it. Darkness seems to cling to her as though she was born to it.

You feel something nagging at you, like a bad memory, or a vision, but you frown and push it back.

Ajax makes a pre-arranged turn down a dark alley. The drunken singing is muffled somewhat. The Grey Tiger follows.

‘Stay here,’ you whisper to the junior assassin, and break cover. You take a few steps in pursuit of the Tiger, intent only on one thing.

‘Do you want me to come with you, Master of Assassins?’ whispers your subordinate.

Infuriated by the intrusion, you wheel and hiss at the junior assassin. ‘I said stay here! This is a private matter.’

Turn to [452](#).

## 154

The secretary’s mouth purses in faint disapproval.

‘I see, sir,’ he says. ‘In that case would you be courteous enough at least to tell me your name.’

‘Aria of Altgarten.’ [357](#).

‘Aria of Ratzelburg.’ [469](#).



## 157

You finish the conjuration and stand, breathing heavily, staring into the centre of the circle.

A tiny flame begins to burn in the middle...

With shocking suddenness, the flame roars up into a spiral that hits the ceiling. You yell out and jump back. With equal speed, the spiral contracts down... into the form of a man shaped of living, liquid fire.

Wide brimmed hat, cloak, rich garments, longsword and dagger...

Your heart palpitates as you realise the Spiral Architect is wearing *your own face*.

Yet you force yourself to remain calm. You are aware that demons always take the form that will most disconcert their summoners, and you are just going to have to deal with that.

The Spiral Architect is stalking around the edges of its constraining pentagram, staring hard at the chalk lines and symbols, like a caged animal – which you realise is precisely what it is.

You can't help but feel you'd be better off with the animal.

'I am on the mortal plane once again,' booms the demon, 'mere hours after I was rudely expelled from it. And now I find myself constrained! Explain yourself quickly, human.'

'Spiral Architect,' you begin confidently, just about managing to keep the quavers from your voice, 'I am an assassin who has been hired to kill the man who sent you back to Hell. If you can tell me where he is, it will be to the advantage of both of us.'

'An assassin, eh?' rumbles the spirit of fire.

*Test your Luck.* If successful, turn to [772](#). If not, turn to [554](#).

## 161

The chitinous form of the War Ghoul is still collapsed over the shards of the table where you left it. It seems to be rotting and falling to pieces at a much greater rate than you'd expect; the smell is indescribable. You hurl the cloth of your cloak over your mouth.

The incongruous young male body of the huge, monstrous Eichlan has turned to ashes upon the floor. You wonder at its true nature.

Otherwise the room is as you've left it, and there is still nothing of value. Return to the corridor at [443](#).

## 166

You panic, and your nerve fails you.

‘What the hell are you talking about?’ you stammer. ‘Have you looked in a mirror recently? Have you seen what you’ve done to yourself?’

‘Sticking all that metal in yourself made you *die*, and now you look even worse! And you think you’re going to try doing it to me? That’s crazy talk!’

The creature rears back, hideous eyes widening in affrontation.

‘Well!’ it hisses. ‘That wasn’t very nice, wasn’t it? Imagine going to someone’s house and talking to them like that. And talking such rubbish as well. It’s a dose of metal you need. You just don’t know it yet. You don’t know what’s good for you...’

‘You’ll have to go through me first,’ you declare, drawing your weapons with a low hiss.

Turn to [530](#).

## 172

‘Well then, old man,’ you declare, ‘it seems we have nothing further to offer each other.’

‘Not even the money you could gain by killing me?’ he asks quietly.

You merely stare at him levelly.

‘I suppose not,’ he mutters. ‘I wish I could offer you the same favour, but unfortunately I serve a higher authority.’

‘I am sorry you did not make another choice. Fare thee well.’

You have no option now but to go back to Joia and tell him to give the contract to someone else. Turn to [877](#).

## 175

‘Are you really. I’m imagining this is the first time you’ve done that in your life.’

‘Well then, listen well, *assassin*.

‘I will take you in and teach you of the ways of the Right-handed Path. Your powers are most impressive, but you lack discipline and control. The Right-handed Path will bring you that control – but at the cost of your precious rage.’ He sneers as he says this last.

‘I will teach you this of my own free will. However, I shall not do it unless you fetch me that

which I originally came to this city to find.

‘Sir Svendas was the greatest warrior of his generation, and his goal was to slay evil beings like... mad little assassins with psychic powers, in fact. He wielded a mighty sword of great holy powers. When he died the following Defender was a wizard who was unable to wield it, so it was laid to rest in state with his body. Many of his followers were laid to rest in his crypt at their own request when their call was heard, and they did go.

‘Fetch me this precious sword, or the deal is off, and I shall not teach you a single thing. After all white-aligned warriors such as I hardly make a habit of teaching our powers to our enemies.’

If you swallow your hurt pride and agree to do this for the chance of gaining greater power, turn to [254](#).

If you curse his name and refuse, turn to [515](#).

## 176

‘This isn’t the tunnel, and I have no need of maintenance. Get out.’

You may leave by turning to [304](#), or if you’re really desperate to fight the stone golem, turn to [710](#).

## 177

‘There’s only one chance left,’ mutters Eddora. She calls out down the corridor, as loudly as she can manage – about a normal speaking voice. ‘Hey! Hey! Listen to me!’

You hear a heavy clanking from the end of the corridor, and before long a guardsman comes into view. He’s wearing full armour and carrying a halberd. Rather an overkill for such stricken prisoners as yourselves. He glares down at the two of you coldly.

‘What do you want?’ he says.

‘I’m gonna die soon,’ whispers Eddora.

He smiles unpleasantly. ‘Yes, a public execution for the two worst assassins in Altgarten. Just like the Prince wanted. Your point being?’

‘We dark elves...’ begins Eddora and swallows. Your eyes widen. ‘We dark elves... have more... accelerated... needs than humans. I want to make love again once more before I die...’

‘Eddora, no!’ you whisper in horror. But you are powerless to do anything.

The guard’s expression changes. His mouth twitches upwards in a smile.

‘Oh yes? And don’t you have loverboy fellow assassin there?’

‘His brain’s fractured. He’s no good to me.’

‘So it’s me you want...’

Flexing her wounded arms slowly and painfully, Eddora reaches up and pulls her leather tunic over her head. You wince. Collapsed naked at the bottom of a barred door, she merely looks pathetic; you can’t even bring yourself to be attracted to her.

The guard’s mouth twitches. He licks his lips.

Test your Luck. If you are Lucky, turn to [994](#). If you are not, turn to [323](#).

## 181

You sit up all night, hyperventilating in terror, listening to the sounds with your sword across your knees. You know, however, that it would be useless. Even with your senses stretched to their utter limits, you can sense no psychic impression.

The sounds last until dawn, at which they finally die away. By that point, your nerves are utterly shattered. Lose 2 STAMINA points. You rouse yourself, staggering like an old man, and walk on, horseless.

Around noon you find the branch in the road which leads to Austrielberg. Unfortunately, it is much lower in technology than the section built and maintained by Perrereich, reducing to a mere dirt trail. You have no option but to follow it.

Later in the afternoon, when you have long since given up paying attention to your blisters, you hear a cough, the type of cough that is designed to get one’s attention. You look up, wearily.

You are utterly surrounded by Wood Elves stood between the trees.

You flick your eyes from right to left. They are armed with leather armour, swords and bows similar to Eddora’s. You cannot hope to fight them all. However, they seem by no means hostile, registering no more than polite interest.

Eddora did teach you a few words of her language once.

Do you wish to call out to them with these few words? Turn to [45](#).

Or do you wish to keep quiet? Turn to [405](#).

## 185

Jackpot! As you open the door, you see, shown up by the dim radius of a night-light, the heads of a middle-aged couple, facing one another in bed. This must be Copper. A room festooned with

copper-coloured ornaments confirms your suspicions.

You stride purposefully towards the bed, drawing your sword; you intend to make a quick ending to this. *Test your Luck*. If successful, turn to [215](#). If not, turn to [846](#).

## 186

Bristling with weaponry, Anita burst into the room filled with vampires loyal to the prince, Master of the City that Jean-Claude had sent her to... for some reason.

‘Not surprisingly they all were hostile and wanted to do pervy things to her. However, they were all also gorgeous men with their shirts hanging open. So it was with a brief flash of regret that Anita summoned her awesome necromantic powers and blasted them all to kingdom come. From the nearby Marvel Universe, the X-Men looked on, green with envy.

“Oh no,” she thought. “I’ve killed again. I must be a psychopath,”

“What marvellous legs,’ said a vampire, who was conveniently expiring in a position where he could see up her tiny skirt.

“What fantastic tits,’ said another, before dying.

“Gosh, I have a really low idea of my own attractiveness,” thought Anita.’

*Hmm*, you think.

Turn to [700](#).

## 187

‘I cannot,’ is all you say.

Defender stares at you for a while, and then drops his gaze, his face creasing up. He seems to age years in the space of seconds.

He rises, slowly and painfully, and walks over to the window.

‘Perhaps it is for the best,’ he says. ‘Perhaps the world doesn’t need Defenders any more. Increasingly in my last years I have had this thought, as there are always more monsters, always more undead, always more black magicians – The world doesn’t want to be saved, only left alone. Perhaps it is time, the first time in centuries, that the Defenders left the world alone.

‘The world is wrong for us now. No longer do the aristocratic knights – from whose ranks the first Defenders were drawn – have the power, but instead it rests in the hands of the bourgeoisie. No longer is knowledge in the hands of magicians, but in the hands of philosophers. No longer do men seek careers from tilling the land, but from industry within the

cities.

‘Worse, the philosophers have started to say that mankind should now grow beyond good and evil. They have spoken that God is dead, and we have killed him. They have extolled the virtues of education and equal opportunities for all, which will wipe out more evil magicians than I ever could. The world no longer needs absolute blacks and absolute whites. It no longer needs Defenders.’

Listening to his words, you feel a crippling sense of loss. You have the crushing realisation that your own days are numbered. Beforehand you had felt that you wanted to find another path than assassin because your anger had faded. Now, you have an inkling that soon there will simply be *no assassins left anymore*.

But you cannot think about it now...

‘The world needs *us*,’ you say, your voice shaking with fear.

‘Assassins? Perhaps so. But there are new ideas coming out about law and order, as well. Some have said there should be created a permanent force to take the fight against crime to its source, and-‘

‘Shut up!’ you yell. ‘I don’t want to hear your depressive ramblings, old man. Your railing against the world is just a rationalisation of the fact that you’re not long for it!’

‘Whatever you say, Aria,’ mutters the old man, still staring from the window. ‘Whatever you say.’

There is nothing more that either of you can say; and so, with the conversation over, you leave in silence.

You go back to the Pied Cow to find, as usual, that you have been away so long that you and your mission have been forgotten. They are presumably, used to it by now. You order a single glass of wine and sit, staring into space, until long after the innkeeper has stopped serving and gone to bed.

Turn to [877](#).

## 190

You have burst into a plushly-decorated study and there, seated at a desk, is Fiorentino. He blurts out a barely-controlled gasp of horror as he sees you.

A Zombie armed Florentine-style and dressed in plate armour is leaning against the far wall. Its decaying, dried up eyes narrow as it sees you, but it doesn’t make a move. Your eyes flick over to it... then drop back to Fiorentino.

At least, that’s who you assume he is. For one thing, he’s the only human you’ve encountered in this entire tunnel complex. However, he doesn’t *look* much like a necromancer – more like a

dandified aristocrat. He's dressed in ridiculously frogged and epauletted, colourful finery, and he doesn't look old enough to be your father. He has long floppy black hair and the slender build of one who never does honest work. Then again, there's dark circles around his eyes, his complexion is too waxy, and the stench of the grave clings to him.

'Er... hello,' he stammers, his hair flopping about. 'I'm... er... Fiorentino.' This answers your question. 'I'm not sure who you are but surely there's been... ah... some mistake?'

'No mistake here,' you hiss.

If you kill him, turn to [68](#).

If you accuse him of being your father, turn to [297](#).

## 194

Onto the floor during the battle, the Prince has leaked all the stolen blood he has taken through the ages, and most recently from Kandron. Now, there are so many holes in him he can no longer keep it in his body.

With a final groan of defeat, he collapses, and yourself and Eddora step forward and strike his head from his shoulders with a double, scissor-action longsword strike. The head and the body are dust before they hit the floor.

Suddenly, the corridor goes silent. Your eyes flick from side to side, taking in the bodies of the Healer, the guard, Kandron, the river of blood, the blowing dust of the Prince.

'Is that it?' you say in wonder.

'Yes, Aria, that's it,' says Eddora, sounding tired. She heaves a sigh and starts to clean the blood off her weapons. 'We've finished off all our enemies. We've tied up all the loose ends.'

Though you've just fought the battle of your life, somehow, you're not convinced.

'Are you *sure*?'

'Yes Aria, I'm sure. Now stop angsting about it and let's go home. Well... such a home as we can find for ourselves, anyway.'

You sigh. Eddora is probably right. You clean the blood from your own weapons and sheath them, following Eddora as she starts to walk out of the corridor. There is probably no opposition left in the Prince's mansion that can face you now.

Yet you turn and look back just as you reach the bend.

'I never found out who my father was...'

Do you have a self-inflicted scar running down the inside of your left forearm?

If you do, turn to [126](#).

If you don't, turn to [977](#).

## 195

You head for one of the meeting spots of the Thieves – careful to keep your hands in plain sight – and scrawl upon the wall in their indecipherable cant that you wish to meet the Prince of Thieves. You then make your way back to the Pied Cow, and wait.

The thieves move fast – or at least they do for a distinguished guest such as yourself. Before you have even finished one drink, your table is approached by two hooded men wearing all over black – black which is somewhat tattered and faded.

‘The Prince will see you now,’ says one of them gruffly.

You get up and go with them without comment, followed by the stares of the other patrons. They lead you into an alleyway, and you allow yourself to be blindfolded. For a moment, you panic, but you remind yourself that you are quite adept at blind fighting, and the thieves are indeed fools if they think they might take down one such as yourself.

Turn to [704](#).

## 204

You flee from the house. The hellhound growls at you from the door, but does not pursue you.

Since you failed to find the Grand Councillor in his mansion, your only remaining option is to go to see him in his normal working hours. Turn to [510](#). (Of course, your other option is to wait around for the Nightshade Phantom to kill you, but that looks to be distinctly more lacking in possibilities).

## 205

At the entrance to the alley you stand with your back to the moonlight. Your shadow casts itself across a tableau of death.

Both the prostitutes' throats have been slit. Still alive, they are clawing in soundless agony at their necks, trying in vain to draw breath to scream. Ajax was clearly outmatched – the Grey Tiger has six inches of steel in his throat from the sword in her right hand. The dagger in her left hand is bloodied... you grow cold. Another Florentine fighter... this will be a difficult battle.

‘Grey Tiger!’ you call out down the alleyway. She freezes, then her gaze flicks over to you. Her eyes open wide in horror. They are a particularly intense shade of green... set in flesh which



oddly doesn't reflect the light...

The Grey Tiger has the slim, toned body of a woman in peak physical condition. She is as tall as you are but far more slender. Her body seems wrapped entirely in strips of cloth of a dark grey. Her head is masked and hooded. Apart from her eyes, nothing of her can be seen.

Something about those eyes...

'You are practising the trade of assassination in a city in which all assassins swear allegiance only to me as their true master,' you hiss. 'My agents have approached you to accept my benevolent rule and you have turned them down. This is an insult that cannot be born. I am Black Aria, the Master of Assassins, and it is my duty to kill you now.'

You advance on her. Desperately, the Grey Tiger looks away from you. But you knew from the start that this was a blind alley. There is no escape.

She jerks her sword from Ajax's throat, and turns to face you. She knows the same Florentine fighting techniques as yourself.

GREY TIGER  
STAMINA 21

SKILL 11

After one round of combat, turn to [549](#).

## 209

The hunters meet at the crack of dawn in a copse in the woods just outside Altgarten. All are masked, as are you, having been told of the protocol here by your contact. However, their fine clothes merely confirm your suspicions; that these are all members of the upper classes, who must now go incognito to resume their favourite sport which is now banned.

The hunt starts off, and you do your best to try to force your horse to draw neck and neck with the Master of the hunt.

Roll one die and add 6 to the total. If the number is equal to or below your SKILL score, turn to [6](#). If it is greater than your SKILL score, turn to [79](#).

## 210

'Great. Well, I'm afraid I can tell you nothing else about the contract. Then again, you *are* supposed to be this ace assassin...'

Joia gets up and leaves, and you ponder how you will carry out this mission.

It looks to be your most difficult job yet. Quite apart from the fact that the Count lives in a castle surrounded by soldiers, you will have to make your way across country to his territory. His land

is in a state of ‘armed peace’ with yours and frequently has ‘border actions’ which you will have to avoid. And despite the Old World being the most advanced region of Titan, the roads are still dangerous in the days before police. However, you begin to feel the old juices flowing again – quite apart from the clear implication that this is one of the men who could be your father – as you consider the *challenge*.

It is clear that you will have to buy a horse and sufficient sauerkraut, black bread and sausage for the journey (deduct 560 GP, and note down that you have 6 Provisions. Each will restore 4 STAMINA points, but they can only be eaten one per paragraph you do not have to fight).

This done, you have a decision to make. There are no roads between the two unfriendly nations. However, roads run to the two neighbouring, friendly nations of Nibleheim and Kalm. Half way along, they branch and lead back to Austrielburg. The Nibleheim road runs through dense forest, the Kalm one through grassland valley.

Which do you choose?

Forest ([227](#))

Or Valley ([495](#)).

## 215

Nothing now prevents you from the successful completion of your task. You reach Copper’s side and, without further ado, run the length of your sword through his fat stomach. He gives one last gurgle and dies; his blood begins to pool within the bed. His wife sighs in her sleep and cuddles closer, oblivious.

Turn to [255](#).

## 216

If the Tzimisce war ghoul is dead (but not Eichlan) turn to [799](#).

If Eichlan is dead (but not the Tzimisce war ghoul) turn to [942](#).

If both are dead, turn to [161](#).

Otherwise, keep reading.

You find yourself in a charnel house. The room is liberally strewn with the limbs and body parts of humans, animals and more bizarre creatures. Can this be the necromancer’s workshop? You quail.

Lying on the table is the fruit of someone's efforts. A huge figure which is human only very approximately. It is fully nine feet tall, with an enormous horn sticking out of its forehead, limbs covered with chitinous spines and blades, a bony carapace covering its body, and all manner of such alterations. It looks by far the most deadly creature you've ever seen.

It appears to be unconscious...

If you wish to free it, turn to [824](#).

If you wish to run it through with your sword, turn to [725](#).

If you wish to ignore it and go through a door into a next door room, turn to [449](#).

If you wish to ignore it and return to the corridor, turn to [443](#).

## 219

You find yourself in a room packed floor to ceiling with food. It is filled with shelves and cupboards groaning with black bread, sausage, sauerkraut and every other staple of Perrereich cuisine. You feel quite elated.

If you wish to pause here and eat, you may restore 4 STAMINA points. You may return here again any time you are in the tunnel complex for another meal worth 4 STAMINA, on proviso that you have explored at least one new room in between meals... even assassins need time for digestion.

When you're done, return to the corridor at [544](#).

## 220

She scowls at you.

'Sure I do,' she spits. 'He's done me a couple times. Always makes me pretend to be dead. You're an assassin, ain't ya? I wouldn't mind seeing that guy dead. Go to the manhole on the corner of Lieberstrasse and Drossenstrasse. The entrance to his base is there.'

You thank the girl and walk away. You hear her mutter behind you, 'Bleedin' ponce. Bet he's gay.'

You ignore her and make your way to the manhole. You climb the ladder to the bottom; turn to [891](#).

## 223

His eyes light up with joy, and he smiles.

‘Excellent! Is there anything you need to bring or tie up above ground?’

You shake your head, still reeling from these events.

‘In that case how would you like to start your apprenticeship *right now*?’

You can only acquiesce.

Go to [666](#).

## 224

You despair of ever getting out of these tunnels. They’re just too monotonous for words. There is a door to your east and another to the west. To the north there’s a right angle bend; to the south the tunnel carries on straight.

Your choice:

East door ([946](#))

West door ([47](#))

Northern bend ([443](#))

South down the tunnel ([304](#))

## 226

One good hit smashes the dagger out of the air and it falls to the floor, cracking in several places. A green ichor seeps slowly out from its insides. You crouch down and examine it, incredulous, poking through its... carapace?... with the tip of your own dagger.

It’s clear it was some sort of insect or reptile... but shaped like a dagger? Your mind stumbles for an explanation and comes up with something, at least, close to the truth. The creature lived on blood, and camouflaged itself as something that would be most likely to be plunged in it. How it came into existence, though, is something you’ll have to leave to the philosophers.

Return to [571](#) and try something you haven’t already tried... remembering, of course, that *leaving* is always an option!

## 227

On a bright summer morning, you set off on your horse along the Nibleheim road. The dense forest looms in the distance, formed of mighty steelwood trees.

The forest is not considered of much use to the surrounding human lands, as the trees are generally too difficult to cut down. Eddora once suggested that Wood Elves lived there, a race to which she was culturally predisposed to feel an elite contempt. They have no contact with your own race, however.

Before long you enter the forest and plod along the road alone. Despite the darkness and ominous aura, you encounter nothing threatening, nor anything else. There are no other travellers.

Later on in the afternoon, whilst you are falling asleep with boredom on your horse, you hear off to the left a woman's scream and a horse's whinny.

Do you get off your horse and plunge into the woods to investigate? ([611](#))

Or keep riding on? ([736](#))

## 230

'Fool!' she sneers. 'That is not the answer.'

She slashes out at you with her dagger; you are powerless to resist. Lose 2 STAMINA points; she laughs as she sees your blood fall upon the floor.

Think of another answer to the riddle, then turn to the appropriate paragraph: if it is wrong, lose another 2 STAMINA points. For each subsequent wrong answer, you will lose 2 STAMINA: get it right before you end up leaking like a sieve!

If your STAMINA is ever reduced to 4 or below, the Kiasyd laughs and tells you the answer. Return to [577](#) and fight; she will not use her powers of *Riddle Fantastique* again, but your situation is *most* dire!

## 238

'The person I have in mind,' you say, 'uses magic. He should be fairly easy to locate on the telepathic plane,'

'Marvellous,' the dark elf mutters.

'If you could just stop criticising for just one second...'

Roll one die and add 6 to the figure. If the total is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [561](#).

If it is not, turn to [294](#).

## 241

In times past, everyone in the city knew who its three deadliest killers were; yourself, Eddora and the Nightshade Phantom. With yourself and Eddora departing for pastures new, Eddora's disappearance and your belated return, and the gradual shift in the wetwork business, such classifications and comparisons eventually fell by the wayside in a profession which naturally silent, became doubly so.

But you have no doubt; there are only two possible contenders for the title of best assassin in this city. More than anything else, Nightshade Phantom is your equal because he is possibly the only assassin in existence who, like you, can lay claim to powers beyond the norm.

Once, so legend has it, Nightshade Phantom was a spoiled rich kid who was sexually tormented and robbed of his innocence by his nanny, who eventually stole him away to be her servant and lover. Being a dabbler in the sorcerous arts, she devised a ritual to increase his powers, a ritual involving the symbolic death and rebirth lying behind much witchcraft. In this ritual, he slashed his wrists and took a sojourn in the next cycle of existence; returning scarred, and greatly changed. He was the servant and apprentice of Sascha the Sorceress, as she became known, for some years after that – but finally, Sascha's ineptitude and perversity got the better of her, and she was slain. Rumours differ as to whether the Phantom himself struck the killing blow, but regardless of this, he went on to become a power in his own right.

Now, the Nightshade Phantom uses his sorcerous powers to advance his career as one of the deadliest assassins in existence, and perhaps he follows your career as closely as you have followed his. It is clear that somehow, he uses his psychic powers to boost his strength and speed to fantastic levels. Formidable as this is, you have searched the rumours – somewhat obsessively, the truth be told – for a weakness he might have. You think it may be this... while the ability to use psionic energy to boost your physical attributes is not known to you, you do not think that the Nightshade Phantom truly understands it either; and correspondingly he lacks control over the more intellectual abilities which you, as a witch's son, have at your command.

'Hurry, hurry, man, I gotta get out of here!' whines Joia, continually looking at the exit. He has not even sneered at your pauses as he usually does, though this one was not even a vision.

'You look for all the world like a man in need of a privy,' you whisper, though your heart is not really in humour at the moment either. The Nightshade Phantom...

'Just tell me whether you're gonna take it!' moans the Fixer. He starts to rise to his feet...

... and you blurt out something.

Will it be yes? Turn to [590](#).

Will it be no? Turn to [347](#).

## 244

The prostitutes cheer and offer you their favours, but you depart with a growl.

But wait... Fezzy's hat is really quite nice, much better than yours. It's black leather with a wide brim. You decide to keep it. You hand your own hat to a pale and sweating businessman trying to solicit the whores, and replace it with Fezzy's – note this on your *Adventure Sheet*.

'Nice job,' says Joia with semi-sarcasm as you return to the Pied Cow, bearing the miscreant's scalp. 'Here's 50 GP.'

You know that this is no more than you deserve.

'Well, if you're interested, the Copper job's still up for grabs,' he adds. 'I gave the job to Shady, but he really screwed up. I hear the security's a lot tighter now... Waddaya say?'

If you agree to take out Copper, turn to [975](#)... but be aware that everyone in the house must now add 1 SKILL and 2 STAMINA to their listed ratings! If you don't want to, turn to [547](#).

## 245

The Tzimisce War Ghoul, bleeding purple ichor from a thousand cracks in its chitinous armour, lets out a colossal roar that deafens you. Then, finally, it rears up, raises its arms to the air in one last futile gesture of rage, and collapses, shattering the stone table like an eggshell beneath it.

Now there is its creator to contend with...

'How dare you murder my poor war ghouls?' it cries. 'All I wanted to do was build a giant war ghouls, and destroy everything.' Borne upon a score of tentacles, it scuttles towards you. 'I'll get you for that!'

Eichlan, master bodycrafter of the Tzimisce, has a wide range of tentacles and appendages equipped with weaponry such as claws, strikers and spines. Its mass and volume are huge, and its organs are by no means in their original places.

EICHLAN

SKILL 14

STAMINA 27

Any time Eichlan gets a double for its *Attack Strength*, a blast of flame issues from one of its unidentifiable orifices and burns you severely. Lose 3 STAMINA points. You must also deal with his standard attack for that round!

Eichlan's tentacles are very long and very swift, and very able to catch hold of you; you may not *Escape*.

In the even more unlikely event that you win, turn to [71](#). If your STAMINA is replaced to 2 or below, turn to [96](#).

## 249

You pick up the sword. It handles extremely well, and for all its size, is light enough to be wielded one-handed. It must, in fact, be magical.

Your suspicion is confirmed by the fact that it seems to stir and murmur -- though not enough that you can't be sure you're not imagining it. Though what you can definitely feel from the sword is pure bloodlust, a determination to get to grips with enemies, and drink their lives...

The Black Sword is a powerful magical weapon, but it carries a number of heavy penalties. It is bloodthirsty and dangerous, with an in-built lust for destruction, but it has little regard for your safety while it lunges forward; hence you may add nothing to your SKILL when you wield it. Its most vaunted ability is to drain the lives of your enemies. For every 2 STAMINA points it inflicts on your opponents, you may add 1 to yours up to your *Initial* level. Naturally, this doesn't work if you're not using the sword, such as with your 'dagger strike' or a psychic combat. Finally, though, its willpower will often get the better of yours. You may never *Escape* with the sword in your possession, and whenever you are given the option of killing anyone whom you meet, you must roll one die. On a roll of 1-2, you *must* take the option to kill them and fight to the death! You will also be constrained to use your sword and nothing else here... regardless of whether or not the sword is ineffective. It doesn't care if *you* die, after all. If you are given the option to spare someone's life part way through a combat, roll one die. On an odd result, the sword will not let you, regardless of whether you wanted to or not!

If you consider these considerations worth while, you may take the sword, or otherwise leave it here; but in any case return to [571](#).

## 250

Tentatively, unable to prevent yourself sneaking despite the lack of any obvious threat, you slink towards the boy. He does not move at all and shows no sign of having noticed you, but in the dim light, you are able to get a closer look at him.

He is seated in a rough wooden chair like the ones used in village schoolrooms – the carpenter, probably working out of the real or enforced goodness of his heart, has scarcely bothered to trim the knots in the wood or make the legs straight. He is wearing the coarse and uncomfortable, rough woollen garb of a peasant, and appears to have straight blonde hair cut into a pudding bowl haircut like a monk, though with little care or neatness.

You get a foot away, and he still hasn't responded.

If you kill him, turn to [775](#).

If you call attention to yourself, turn to [72](#).

If you forget this and go to the exit, turn to [560](#).



## 254

‘Very well, hellspawn. Svendas’s crypt is in the Mutti Kursch cemetery of Altgarten, and bears a statue of a noble knight. And may the sword burn the flesh from your hands, and Svendas’s servants rise from their graves and rip your black soul from your breast.’

You make no answer other than a gob of phlegm on the floor as you march out in disgust. You head for the cemetery, seething and wondering what the blazes you have gotten yourself into.

Turn to [374](#).

## 255

You have now completed your hit; all that remains is the proof. You slice some of Copper’s hair and scalp from his head and store it carefully.

You now have free run of the house; however, given the level of guardianship you’ve seen already, you decide against checking out any more of the rooms. The ornaments look valuable, but too heavy to carry; however, you find 137 Gold Pieces in a bedside table in Copper’s room, which you may take.

You return to the Pied Cow at your leisure. Turn to [356](#).

## 256

‘Excellent. The person I desire to have assassinated is named Salome, and she’s a Kiasyd. She spends all her time in the library of these tunnels. An assassin like you shouldn’t have too much trouble, but be careful of her riddles. That’s about all you need to know.’

If you dare ask why she wants this Salome killed, turn to [370](#). Otherwise go to [916](#).

## 260

To your considerable discomfiture, the arm bucks in your grip! You clutch harder, gasping in shock. A grisly liquid flows over your fingers... you wince. But what is it doing? It seems to be pointing...

In wonder, you follow the arm as it points out your route. It takes you through the length and breadth of the city, and many are the horrified glances you get. (Though some people think you’re a mime, and applaud and toss coins). Eventually the arm points down... at a manhole cover. Bingo!

You open it up and climb down the ladder... turn to [952](#).

## 261

In another world in another time, schoolboys would chant the following rhyme to help them with their chemistry lessons:

### **Poor Hislop Minor**

*Lies dead upon the floor.*

*For what he thought was  $H_2O$*

*Was  $H_2SO_4$ .*

Unfortunately for you, you have no cognisance of chemistry, sulphuric acid or the rhyme. Eichlan of the Tzimisce calls this chemical something else, but it has exactly the same purpose. The acid dissolves your gullet, your stomach and the roof of your mouth, and you die in unthinkable agony. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 271

You stride into the room and are confronted by a young man sitting up in bed. He's wearing a nightgown inscribed with blue stars, a stereotypically pointy hat, and he's reading an enormous leather-bound grimoire. It doesn't take much psychic ability to work out that this is probably Copper's wizard son.

'A miscreant!' he gasps. 'I must take care of him!'

He flexes his fingers and a roaring blast of blue energy streaks from his hands and strikes you. You stagger; lose 2 STAMINA points. Only at this late hour do you realise that someone with as many enemies as Mr. Copper probably wouldn't sleep in the room nearest to the point of access.

Resolve this battle. The young man's magical powers are fierce, but his body is frail.

JUNIOR WIZARD  
STAMINA 6

SKILL 10

After 2 rounds, a corpulent man bursts in wielding a cutlass. 'Dare you hurt my son!' he splutters. 'I'll get you!' He lays about you in a fury. He has SKILL 6, STAMINA 8. Realising that this must be the Copper you're meant to kill, you concentrate your efforts on him exclusively, but are still open to attack from the son.

If you kill Copper, you may Escape by turning to [933](#), or you may remain and kill the son, then

turn to [255](#).

## 273

Fiorentino has ugly gashes over most of his body and has lost a lot of blood. He is reeling and looks close to death. You smile in triumph.

But suddenly, he catches you off guard (taking advantage of your overconfidence?) and lunges into his desk drawer. He pulls out a blue potion and gulps it down! Immediately, and to your dismay, most of the wounds on his body heal.

You shout in rage and lunge at him with your sword, but the damage has been done. Fiorentino is almost back to full strength.

FIorentINO  
STAMINA 7

SKILL 9

His scimitar is still coated with venom. If you win, go to [114](#).

## 274

You spend the night in an inn (deduct 10 GP, and restore 5 STAMINA) and in the morning return to your vigil. It is even more boring, if anything. You have not seen a single instance of the written word in the entire time you were there, and you cannot even acquire pen and parchment on which to continue your multiple-choice adventure novel about an unemployed scholar living in a futuristic setting.

You must eat 2 Provisions during the day to keep your strength up, and for each you miss you must deduct 2 STAMINA points.

As night begins to fall, so do your spirits, and you are utterly horrified when, towards the end of the day, the secretary minces his doleful way towards you.

‘Not again!’ you cry.

‘No, sir,’ intones the butler. ‘I fear that in fact there will be no “again”.’

‘Unfortunately, today the situation between ourselves and your own nation switched from ‘cease fire’ to ‘martial emergency.’ My liege no longer feels it would be prudent to entertain any Perrereich national. You might, sir, after all, be an assassin.’

You can only stare at the butler.

Turn to [873](#).

## 275

From the odd behaviour of the thieves, you begin to feel certain that they know something they're not letting on. Perhaps they have an inkling of the mysterious client who has hired you to slay the Phantom.

You have not and will not let on the location of the Thieves' Guild secret entrance, but there is nothing to stop you hiding in the shadows waiting for thieves to emerge, your skill in stealth far in excess of that of any common burglar. You settle down and wait to catch yourself a thief...

It is barely minutes before one emerges on his noxious task, a stunted and hunched youth with a frightened and miserable expression. You swoop out of the shadows like a raven and grab the thief by the neck, your dagger under his chin. He is so malnourished you can lift him easily from the floor.

'I am Black Aria,' you hiss, 'and I can make you dead before you draw another breath. You may have been one of those laughing at me in your cavern when I visited – I neither remember nor care. One thing I do know is, you thieves know who hired me to kill the Nightshade Phantom and why, and I intend to find out whether I leave you alive or dead! TALK!'

With terrified eyes, the thief opens his mouth. 'I'll talk! I'll talk!' he shrieks – and then his eyes flick abruptly to your left.

Roll two dice. If the total is lower than your SKILL score, turn to [136](#). If it is not, turn to [612](#).

## 277

Walking into the other room, you find it to have the same bare walls, floor and ceiling as the golem room. However, the furnishings are much different. The room is dominated by a huge, luxurious four poster bed, swathed in black silks.

Reclining upon it is a woman.

She's large, voluptuous and brunette with heavy, arrogant features, and she's barely dressed in ragged underwear made, bizarrely, of black leather. At the sight of you her eyes widen: she thrusts herself forward off the bed and walks towards you.

A blistering ache in the back of your head suggests that this is something much more psionic than human.

'So what have we here?' she murmurs. She shrugs her way out of her tattered smalls; your eyes bulge, and you are transfixed. You feel an awesome psychic power clamp down on your mind and hold it like a fly in amber. 'I believe you've slain my servant and guardian. That really wasn't very nice, was it?' She sidles up to you, nude, and leans her long body against you. 'I believe the best you can do is do... a few things for me in return.' She places her long bare arms around your neck, and kisses you.

Over the months that follow, your life and energy are slowly and agonisingly drained as you learn new meanings of both pleasure and pain. You are in the grip of a SUCCUBUS, a powerful magical creature with domination over all males, and there is no escape.

Eventually you die, and join the Satanic hierarchy as an Incubus; but your previous adventure ends here.

THE END

## 279

You walk into the room, and are surprised to find that rather than grey rock, the chamber is entirely black in floor, walls and ceiling.

Very black. So black, in fact, that you cannot make out any detail of the walls, ceiling or indeed floor. So black there seems to be nothing there at all.

You begin to feel perturbed at the nature of this chamber, and rapidly turn round for the exit. An exit that is no longer there. There is endless, nameless black where the door was... and blackness and nothingness beneath your feet.

Too late, you remember a long-forgotten rumour. A spell whereby a wizard could create a pocket universe, with an entrance that, once used, would evaporate into the ether. A spell that was rumoured to be the *ne plus ultra* of the oubliette for one's enemies. A spell that, you realise with a sinking heart, is the last bastion of Fiorentino's defences.

You are lost in the Black Chamber, and there is destined to be no escape.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 288

The nine-fish is a very odd creature that can thrive only in water with a large number of dissolved halogens, alkali-metals and rare earths, which would be absolutely lethal to humans. When put into pure water (which it considers *very* disagreeable) it estivates rapidly and goes into a form of suspended animation. In this form they can be easily packed, leading to the rapid acceptance of nitrolabe as a drug.

Its status as a drug-producing animal stems from the fact that its means of defence is its thick coating of needles, which secrete a nerve toxin lethal to the inhabitants of its soupy seas. In humans, however, the poison leads to an orgasmic trance lasting for over an hour.

You would have done well to notice that the workers were wearing thick gloves to handle them. Because even with the steady hand and dexterity of a top assassin, it is virtually impossible to

avoid being pierced by one. Which you are.

You experience utter bliss, a bliss that blocks out any awareness of your surroundings. Were you ever to snap out of it, you would find yourself with a crippling addiction that would rapidly destroy your nervous system. However, you do not live that long, because before long the manager of the plant finds you on one of his walk throughs and puts an end to your life without the slightest opposition.

A woeful end for an assassin; you die without ever knowing what hit you. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 289

‘All right. His name is Fezzy the Stoat. He wears a black hat and cloak. He plies his trade down by the fishermen’s region of the docks. And Aria... don’t screw up.’

You glare at Joia and take your leave.

It is but a short walk to the docks, and you reach the fishermen’s region soon enough. Of course, no one ever comes here but fishermen, the poorest of the poor; and the creatures of the night here are no exception.

Fezzy is easy to spot. The black hat and cloak are the biggest things about him. He is surrounded by hard-faced, ugly, low-living women wearing little but short tunics. You watch awhile; his face never loses a look of abject fear, but he hits out at the prostitutes almost without pause.

*Enough of this*, you think.

You stride out of the shadows, pulling your weapons with a low hiss. Fezzy looks up, a spasm of terror crossing his face. He tries to mask it by petty hatred, but fails.

‘It’s Black Aria,’ he hisses. ‘What does you wants?’

‘Your life shall be mine,’ you intone, feeling sick to your stomach. You are an assassin; but this will be *murder*.

‘Oh, god...’ Fezzy whispers. He backs away, face twisted in abject terror. ‘Oh, please. Whatever they’re paying you, I’ll double it... treble it... anything. You can have any of my girls... I’ll find you an Elf special...’

‘You should know that I never bargain,’ you hiss. ‘Draw steel, or I’ll cut you down in cold blood.’

‘Lord have mercy on me,’ he whimpers, and draws a rusty stiletto dagger. The whores cheer you on with foul-mouthed abandon.

## STAMINA 6

If you lose, you have no excuses. If you win, go to [244](#).

## 290

You get even more bored, and waste even more money (deduct 750 GP). You also start to drink more than you should, and start cursing the other assassins more than you would have liked – ‘You bloody shrimps don’t know you’re born,’ you slur. ‘*Your* mother wasn’t a witch who was burned alive. *Your* only love didn’t abandon you.’ And so on.

Waking up with increasingly thicker hangovers, you realise this has to stop. They are all naturally too afraid of you to argue, but you are giving away rather too much detail about your life, and there is no knowledge that is not power. You regain STAMINA from the rest, but thanks to the drink, it is only 4 points.

To try to track the Phantom down directly from here, turn to [773](#).

To try to get information from the notoriously anti-assassin Thieves’ Guild, turn to [100](#).

To try to dupe the Phantom into carrying out a dummy hit, turn to [800](#).

To try to stick out sitting in the pub for a while longer, turn to [822](#).

## 291

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ he sneers. ‘Do we look as if we have a lack of space? Get out of here and quit wasting my time.’

You are dragged out blindfolded once more, and deposited rudely in the gutter. Lose 1 LUCK point. Go back to [759](#) and try another tactic; you may not approach the thieves again.

## 292

A few days later, yourself, the count and a couple of dog handlers go out to the forests to hunt wild boar. To say that you get more than you bargain for is an understatement.

Boars are known to be vicious creatures, so you are well armed. The dog handlers have two Austrielburg Shepherds on tight leashes, and they carry spears. You have your usual weapons; the count has a crossbow. All of it is for naught.

The attack comes without warning; a vicious, squealing ball of bristles and tusks comes barrelling out of the forest. It guts one of the dogs with a single wave of its tusks. Howling with fear, the other dog turns tail and runs, breaking several of its handler’s fingers in the process.

Terrified, the other handler levels his spear at the boar, but it is on him in an instant, knocking him to the floor and savaging his throat. He gives out pitiful cries, which soon turn to gurgles as he drowns in his own blood. The other handler, cradling his injured hand, turns and flees.

The count looses his crossbow at the boar, but the bolt sticks hard in its shoulder blade. Grunting in pain, it turns and gouges deep into his leg with its tusks. He goes down in a fountain of blood.

Without thinking, you leap in front of the boar, weapons drawn.

WILD BOAR

SKILL 9

STAMINA 8

If you win, turn to [860](#).

## 294

You struggle to clear your mind, to focus only on the blue of the sky, but the telepathic plane remains closed to you.

‘Damn,’ you mutter.

Eddora bows her head. ‘I shouldn’t have been so sceptical. I’m sorry.’

You stare at her in puzzlement. ‘What do you mean, sceptical? What does that have to do with anything? It’s me who failed.’

‘In the world below, the sorcerers always believed scepticism harmed their spells, and there were severe punishments if they thought the other castes were hindering because of it.’

‘To cover up their own insecurity, perhaps?’

‘Maybe so, maybe not. Anyway, what are we going to do now? The dark elves will have hidden themselves away for the day by now, and attack is always the best defence.’

‘Our only option is to sneak into the prince’s house to kill him there.’

‘By night, or by day.’

You think about the typical foes you have faced, and the race of the Prince’s new allies. ‘Day,’ you decide immediately.

Turn to [525](#).

## 296

You find yourself in a deserted factory. Curious about the manufacturing process of nitrolabe, you wander over to one of the table and take a look inside one of the packing crates.



It's full to the brim with... fish? They appear very desiccated, and are covered with needle-like spines.

If you wish to pick one up for a closer look, turn to [288](#).

If you want to leave them well alone and go looking for the manager, turn to [676](#).

## 297

His eyes shoot up into his hair.

'Goodness gracious me,' he says. 'You're quite the young man. Who would have thought it. What did you say your mother's name was again?'

You tell him.

'Hmm, yes, I do remember her,' he says, staring uneasily at his desk. 'A most beautiful woman... I loved her true...'

If you wish to use your power of telepathy to read his mind at this point, turn to [317](#).

If not, turn to [569](#).

## 299

'I'm glad I've found you, my son,' says the old man quietly. 'You are everything a father could be proud of. I know of you by reputation, and while your profession is deplorable, I suspect that you are misguided by your environment, and are not truly evil. I know you for a great warrior and mentalist.

'However, while you have mastered many aspects of your psychic powers, I fear that they are still the tool of a mind in chaos. Unless you were to gain the spiritual advancement and clarity of purpose that only a Master of the Right-hand Path can possess, not only will your powers always stay at a low plateau, you will never find peace within by perpetrating violence without.

'Your past and future profession is not important at the moment. I would, however, like to offer you the chance to study with me. You have had the chance to learn powers neutral and evil; I would like to show you the good.

'Will you come with me to learn of the Right-hand Path?'

Will you?

If you like the sound of this turn to [3](#).

If not turn to [403](#).

## 301

It is a simple matter to ambush one of the workers and take his uniform. You duly dress in it and tag along to the end of a group coming on to the night shift. You blithely walk in, whistling a nonchalant tune.

A heavy hand like a side of beef falls upon your shoulder.

‘‘Ere,’ says a huge, muscular bruiser with an overall bearing the legend FOREMAN. ‘I ain’t seen you before. What’s the password?’

This comes as a shock; you may not concentrate enough to use your telepathy.

Note down your answer, and turn to [821](#).

## 304

You find yourself in a new region of tunnel. There is a door to the west, a straight region of tunnel to the north, and a bend to the south.

Take your pick:

West door ([682](#))

Northern straight ([224](#))

Southern bend ([91](#))

## 305

The secretary looks slightly offended. You are offering to maybe put him out of a job, after all.

He hides it well, though.

‘I do not believe that there are any opportunities for such a career available at the moment. Sorry to disappoint sir.’

You curse. This obviously isn’t going to get you to the count. Rather than go home to ignominious failure, you will have to change your story. Return to [769](#).

## 309

You talk to your contacts, and are able to find out that a brothel on Rosenstrasse is owned lock,

stock and barrel by Lasombra.

You put on your best bib and tucker and duly take yourself off to the brothel. It's a mansion that would suit the richest merchant, and inside on the lower floor is a plush, red velvet-lined reception room. Inside, nervous businessmen are being served drinks by beautiful girls in filmy dresses.

'Good evening,' you address one pleasantly. 'I'd like to talk to the manager of this establishment.'

'Talk?' she lilts, stressing the word slightly. 'Well if that's what you want to call it. She is an expert in the erotic arts, and costs extra. 100 GP.'

You may or may not wish to pay this, but short of murdering everyone in the household (which would give the assassination trade a bad name, and probably scupper your career into the bargain) you are not going to be able to get to the manager.

If you wish to pay, go to [653](#).

If not, you will have to go back to [348](#) and try another lead.

## 311

You whimper with fear as you watch your blood flow. The Kiasyd stands and stares. Then, suddenly, she drops her dagger and flies at you. Horrified, you raise your arms weakly to defend yourself, but she smashes them away with preternatural strength.

Your worst fears are realised. The Kiasyd is in fact a type of vampire.

Losing consciousness, you scarcely feel her razor-sharp fangs biting into your carotid artery. As you feel your blood drain, you await the final curtain. You are hardly aware of her biting... into her own wrists.

But a burning flood of liquid gushing into your mouth from her arteries revives you.

After the initial agony of the Embrace, you grow accustomed to your new, undead existence. You find your sire to be a fascinating companion, and increasingly you find the idea of spending the rest of eternity sitting in this library – or any other – reading for centuries at a time to be the epitome of bliss. Gradually you forget about Eddora and your father in a quest for more worthwhile knowledge. But as for the tale of the Outsider, your adventure is over.

THE END

## 312

And so your apprenticeship as a White Magician begins.

From the start, you are shocked.

‘You want me to attack this... wall?’ you say incredulously.

‘Oh yes,’ says Defender calmly. ‘In slow motion.’

You utter a bad word.

‘Language,’ Defender mutters as he wanders away into the surrounding desert to wave his weapon around.

This is by no mean the most bizarre thing you have to do. You are required to stare at your hands for hours on end, touch hands with Defender whilst blindfolded and tell him his exact stance and position, and write letters to all the people you’ve hurt and explain to them why you did it.

Some of the training, however, is of more obvious utility. Duelling with Defender, blindfolded, in slow motion, with imaginary weapons, sometimes even normally, is a major part of training. You are taught to meditate, on single static images, on imaginary scenarios or clearing your mind entirely; and soon you reach the state where whilst meditating, you are unaware of your surroundings. You are taught the theories of white magic – how the universe is ten successive emanations from the Nothingness that was before God; how that which is above mirrors that which is below; and the connection between yourself and the universe, and between all other things.

Occupied day in and day out with these bizarre practises, time seems to stand still. You have no idea of how long you are there as you train from dawn till dusk, and sleep with night’s coming. And gradually you cease to think of the great trials and tribulations of your life. You cease to think about Mother, about Eddora, about all those who have persecuted you all your life. Your every waking moment is occupied with the keys to the universe that you are discovering.... And they are far more fascinating.

‘You are a quick learner,’ Defender tells you after a time. ‘Much of what I have to teach, you already knew, though would not admit it to yourself. It matters not whether you learnt it in this life or the last, but soon, you will be ready to pass the Abyss.’

Defender is true to his word. Before long, you enact the ritual whereby you are raised to the rank of eighth-level magician. You are stripped of all your achievements and of yourself as well, and find yourself newborn.

What this means is... indescribable. For one moment at the end of the ritual, you spiral down into yourself and see exactly the reasons for everything that has happened to you. You understand now why you reacted the way you did, and see that it and all other things *must* be. You see, finally, how you are the universe and the universe is you.

You open your eyes, ready to speak of what you have seen in wonder, and it is gone. You want to weep at the loss, but Defender interrupts gently.

‘It will return in time,’ he says, ‘but not now. There are other levels...’

You look down at the palm of your right hand, and see the faint, glowing etch of a five-pointed

star upon your skin. Even as you look, it fades almost from visibility.

‘The symbol of how a man can achieve union with the macrocosm,’ states Defender reverently. ‘Whenever you are in greatest need, the symbol will remind you that once, you knew it.’

Add 3 to your PSYCHIC score.

Turn to [900](#).

## 314

The weeks go by like broken arrows.

During that time, you have several contracts, but none as unusual as that of Fiorentino. Mostly they’re just fat businessmen like Copper. You are whole-heartedly successful, however, there is not much of a challenge for you, and you begin to grow rather bored. You make a profit of 2978 GP... and you throw them on the pile.

Then one day...

‘Okay, this is the Big One,’ says Joia to you one night, leaning very close to you and looking behind him continually. You wonder why; the lifestyles, if not lives, depend on everyone’s discretion in the Pied Cow.

‘I’m listening,’ you offer.

‘You know, of course,’ he begins, ‘that Altgarten is blighted by crime. There is vice – selling of skin, prostitution, blackmail, love slaves and so forth. There are drugs – marijuana, bentlam, hadive, ladolian, nitrolabe, heroin and thionite. There is gambling – cock-fighting, bear baiting, dog death matches, fox hunting-’

‘And assassination,’ you interrupt coldly. ‘I am well aware of all of these. Do you think me a blind moron?’

‘Most don’t know, however,’ he continues, unruffled, ‘that the whole of the crime scene is run by a very few kingpins. Kingpins who are intense business rivals, but who are marginally satisfied with their stalemate and static market shares.’

You begin to see where this is going.

‘Now all that changed recently. A new kingpin came on the scene, one rumoured to have strange powers, who was able to give those powers to his underlings and inspire in them fanatical loyalty. He has cornered the markets in brothels and love slaves, nitrolabe and thionite, animal fighting rings and fox hunting. He is known only as *Lasombra*.

‘In an unprecedented move, the other kingpins have set aside their differences and ganged together against him. However, their goons were helpless against his special powers and those given to his men.

‘This is where you come in.’

‘Special powers are my sauerkraut and black bread!’ you declare arrogantly.

‘True enough. Well, the kingpins got together and are offering 7000 GP for the best assassin in the city to do in this kingpin. You interested?’

‘I warn you that if you don’t accept I’m taking this job straight to the Nightshade Phantom.’

If you would rather die than let Nightshade Phantom get a job you could do a thousand times better, push out your chest and turn to [348](#).

If you’d rather send Nightshade Phantom to an almost certain death fighting a super-powered kingpin and his super-powered gangsters, go to [355](#).

## 315

Your blows have left rents in the chainmail gaping through to aged flesh beneath, but you realise that they are making no impression on the knight’s skin. Try as you might, you cannot wound him.

You panic as you realise the immortality of your opponent, but worse is to come. Not only can he not be injured, he does not appear to grow tired, and as you begin to flag you find yourself beaten back till you are forced against the sarcophagus.

There can only be one outcome to this fight. Terror grips you, and it does not take long before you throw down your weapons and beg the revenant to make it quick. The knight is a man of chivalry and honour. He ends your life with a swift thrust to the heart.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 316

‘What are you doing?’ hisses Eddora. ‘Let’s go!’

‘Wait...’ you murmur. ‘I want to see who’s calling out to us.’

You approach the cell. The barred front offers little privacy, but you are amazed to see that the door is open. Evidently the captive here is considered even less of a threat than yourselves and Eddora in your weakened state. As you catch sight of him, and your eyes widen in horror, you can see why.

Chained to the wall of the cell is what was once a man. He has clearly not received any grooming or attention for many years —he is covered in filth and his matted hair and beard hang to his

chest. From what you can see of his skin, he looks old. He is dressed in the tattered remains of what might once have been a robe.

He has been mutilated beyond all possibility of escape. His hands have been cut off at the wrists – he is hanging from manacles at his elbows. His legs have been cut off at the hips. His eyes have been gouged from their sockets.

‘You approach me, then?’ he speaks. His throat is obviously dry and cracked, but his voice sounds like it might once have been strong. ‘No one has done so for many years. This can only be because you are prisoners who have escaped. Tell me that this is so!’

Eddora gasps at the sight of him. ‘Aria, what do you want with this... wreck? Come on! We still have a chance of escape!’

‘I hear you! I see that my guess was true, and that you are escaping. Please... stay and talk with me a while longer.’

To do this, turn to [711](#).

To leave him to his fate and head to the weapon racks, turn to [391](#).

## 317

Roll one die and add 6 to the total.

If this is equal to or lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [705](#).

If it is greater than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [895](#).

## 318

You feel the fear of death and know that you face it now.

‘And now,’ your mother laughs, ‘the final curtain.’

She slashes out at you with her claws. You block them easily with your sword and dagger – only to find that the claws go through the steel as though it wasn’t there! A burning cold strikes your hands, and you cry out in agony. You drop your weapons and they fall to the floor – taking much of your flesh with them.

You realize that your mother is immune to all possible earthly weapons, and that you are facing certain death.

‘Eddora,’ you gasp, ‘RUN!’

Eddora wails and moans, but she isn’t stupid; she takes to her heels. Your mother’s claws strike home, and you are hit with a darkness beyond imagination as they rip through your insides. You

black out, never to regain consciousness.

You never know if Eddora escaped or not; but your spirit will forever haunt Titan searching for her. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 319

Eddora falls to one knee, sniffs at the ground, and nods, grinning. ‘Excellent! I have the chapter leader’s trail. Let’s go!’

She sets off at a rapid pace through the streets. You can see no advantage to this direction over any other, and there was no obvious evidence whatsoever of any dark elf tracks. You make this comment.

Eddora tuts arrogantly.

‘Half the battle is understanding the dark elf mindset, Aria. All dark elves know that *of course*, the surface dwellers will seek to kill and torture them on sight. Only chapter leaders – and assassins – are taught enough initiative to be able to do anything about it. I predict that our anonymous chapter leader will want to go somewhere that no surface dweller would possibly wish to go.’

‘This doesn’t sound good,’ you mutter as you head into a part of the city you have never gone. You head through the docks, through the slums, through the shanty town, past where you thought the boundaries of the city even were. The wind changes and you smell the foulness of all things dead. You begin to grow uneasy.

‘Where the hell are we going, Eddora?’

‘We’re following the chapter leader’s trail... like I told you.’

To all intents and purposes, the city has now ended. The wretched shanty huts, little more than piled-up structures of waste wood and metal, thin out and stop altogether. The ground degenerates into a swamp. Eddora continues to pick her way through, finely-tooled leather boots squelching, tight-lipped and silent.

Ahead of you, shrouded in a mist rising from the marsh, loom up a cluster of low buildings, and you halt dead in horror. You have suddenly realised where this is.

‘Eddora, stop!’

She wheels and turns on you. ‘What?’ she roars.

‘We’re heading into a leper colony!’

‘That means nothing! Our sorcerers have studied captured lepers for years. Not only are dark elves immune, but the disease is only communicable to human children in any case, to return



decades later. ’

‘I don’t even want to know how your sorcerers worked that out, but I don’t trust them as far as I can throw them... I wasn’t under the impression you did, either.’

‘Would you let your lover walk into this unaccompanied?’

Eddora glares at you murderously, but you see how perturbed she is beneath the angry mask. You decide to comply.

‘Something’s going to kill me anyway,’ you mutter as you step up to her side.

By the time you reach the outskirts of the wretched refuge Eddora is beginning to shake visibly. Compulsively she draws her bow and nocks an arrow to the string.

You see your first lepers.

They are clad in rotting grey clothing, mercifully covering their own rotting limbs and faces. Most crouch in the mud, resigned and defeated, flies buzzing around their horrifically liquefied stumps. The strongest call out to you, wailing to you to go away, moaning out the name of their disease, lurching behind their buildings to conceal their deformities. Some do not move, but merely cry out for death. You do your best to ignore them all.

Eddora goes a particularly odd shade of dark grey-green, and her breathing comes in harsh gasps. When you see a male leper, lacking legs below the knees, fall upon a female leper lacking hands and arms, Eddora cries out and buries her face in your chest. You place your arm protectively around her head, and hurry her on ahead.

‘Just block it out, and lead us to the chapter leader. It’ll be over soon.’

‘That last building,’ she moans. ‘Over there on the right.’

You make your way hurriedly to a tumbledown hut. Mercifully, the area is free of lepers; perhaps the Dark Elves killed them all. You pause outside while Eddora takes quick, rapid breaths, staring at the floor in horror.

‘Are you all right?’ you ask cautiously.

‘I’m all right,’ she says, sounding not like it at all.

You stare at her curiously. ‘What are you more afraid of?’ you say mildly. ‘Disease – or defeat?’

Her face snaps up, her eyes alight with absolute fury. You step back involuntarily in shock.

‘Aria, you-‘

‘All right! All right! I’m sorry.’

She glares at you murderously. For a moment, you think you are going to have to draw steel on your own lover. Then, she turns away abruptly.

‘Let’s get into character,’ she says.

Turn to [668](#).

## 322

Against the psionically-enhanced speed of the Nightshade Phantom, your own muscles are as nothing. You can barely move before the magical cold iron and silver sword slashes through your neck and strikes your head from your shoulders. Your consciousness lives long enough to register the sickening whirl through the air and *thud* as you come to rest in a corner. You can only blink curiously at the wall until your very rapid death. Your adventure ends here.

THE END

## 323

The guard leans down at the collapsed Eddora, still weeping blood from the awful wounds in her arms, barely able to keep her eyes open.

‘No thanks, dark elf,’ he says. ‘Neither of you are obviously going anywhere tonight, so I’m going to find a floozy who still looks human.’

The guard clanks off, chuckling unpleasantly to himself, and abandons you both to your fate.

Turn to [894](#).

## 324

‘That’s right,’ sneers the wraith. ‘Aria’s mother. I’m sure you’ve heard plenty about me...’

‘You don’t look exactly how I expected!’ ejaculates Eddora.

Your mother has not changed in appearance since you raised her from the dead. Her blonde hair is still burnt down to stubs close by her skull; but other than that, she still shows no signs of her awful death. She still appears as a tall, naked and beautiful woman; but many things make it clear she is not. She radiates an aura of bone-chilling cold, she is transparent to the burning building behind her, and she floats several inches from the floor.

‘Your lover was stupid enough to resurrect me. You must be Eddora, the dark elf exile. My son’s concubine.’

‘I am no one’s concubine!’

‘All women are concubines, dear, except us witches. As for you, Aria; how is the assassination business?’

‘I can’t believe you’ve hunted me down again just to make conversation, Mother,’ you say, your voice tight with anger. You have an inkling she might have made just this time to put in an appearance, according to some ulterior motivation of her own.

‘Ah yes, I remember what a disappointment to you I was when you summoned me back to this plane. All you wanted was to know who your father was. But I, being a weak and feeble woman, had other ideas.’

‘How would you like to know what I’ve been doing all this time upon Titan, Aria?’

‘I get the impression you’re going to tell me, regardless.’

‘Sarcastic as ever. Well, I have walked up and down upon this world, and gone to many places upon it. I have seen and learned much. I know all there is to know about yourself and your dark elf slut here. I know all that either of you have ever done. Still, I don’t intend to let either of you benefit from the knowledge or wisdom or experience I’ve gained.

‘What I’ve chiefly been doing is hunting down all the people who burned me, and having my revenge. Like you should have done long ago, Aria.’

‘No. He shouldn’t.’

‘You should have stayed out of this, dark elf. But now you’re involved. Oh well, that’s your problem.’

‘You obviously have some kind of problem with me, Mother,’ you hiss at her. ‘It obviously means little to you that I gave you another chance upon this world. Why don’t you spit it out so we can sort it out once and for all?’

‘So now we get to the meat and bones of the discussion. Well, first I’ll give you your wish, Aria! I’ll tell you who your father was.’

You gasp. You are unable to prevent yourself leaning forward, despite your mother’s freezing aura. Your mouth hangs open. Beside you, Eddora is shaking her head in her hands, moaning ‘no... no...’

But you are oblivious.

Turn to [361](#).

## 326

Contrary to what you might think, gambling is not illegal in Altgarten. However, such bloodsports as cockfighting, bear baiting and fox hunting are, along with gambling or running a book on their outcome. There are always rich and sick individuals willing to gamble on such things, and for those willing to provide, there is a handsome profit to be made.

Using your network of contacts, you are able to find the secret location and starting time of the

next foxhunt. You aren't able however to find the names of any of the bookies or organisers. So your only option would appear to be to infiltrate the hunt and try to interrogate anyone senior you find.

If this sounds like a good idea, turn to [209](#).

If not, go back to [348](#) and choose another option.

## 328

The wizard collapses with an anguished scream, pressing his hand to the fountain of arterial blood spewing from a huge gash in his neck. Infuriated, you vault effortlessly over the counter and grab the wizard round the neck. Shaking with rage, you haul him up to a point where you can drop him on the point of your sword.

'Now, you spoilt little brat,' you hiss, 'tell me where Defender is or it will be a waste of your life!'

'Never! I'll never sell out Defender to the likes of you!' he shrieks, twisting frantically to avoid the points of your weapons.

'All right then,' you intone coldly, 'you asked for it,' and with the tip of your dagger, you slice off his eyelids.

He shrieks in utter terror, blood filling his eyes.

'All right! All right! I'll talk! Defender is at Checkpoint [847](#) from the last war. Just please let me live!'

'To seek out vengeance again? I think not,' you sneer, and you drop the wizard. He screams in agony as the three feet of polished steel of your longsword pushes its length through his gut, and then never speaks again.

You retrieve and clean your weapons in disgust. Looking round the shop, there appears to be nothing you can use (that isn't likely to blow you up, anyway.) You stalk out of the shop and start on the long path to the checkpoint.

## 329

'My most humble apologies,' Eichlan stammers. 'I had no idea that it would do that. I must make recompense to you.'

'I have an apothecary at the opposite end of this complex, and there I have prepared some flasks for easy transportation. The blue flasks are healing potions. Feel free to help yourself to any or all of them. I'm *so* sorry to have put you in such danger...'

Eichlan wrings his tentacles together in shame as you storm out, annoyed.

Turn to [443](#).

## 330

It is many, many hours before the count regains consciousness, and when he does, he sends immediately for you.

It is night, and there is but a single candle in the count's room. His Chief Surgeon glowers at you, ensuring that you keep quiet and calm, as the stricken figure gestures weakly for you to approach. You can barely see. While the count's face is still paler than his bedclothes, you can see an odd light of peace in his eyes.

'Thank you, my friend,' he whispers. You must hold your ear practically to his mouth to hear him. 'If not for your prompt action, I would not be alive. Only you had the power and vision to help me.'

'Well, you know...' you mutter.

'Here, I want you to have this.' He presses something rough into your hand, which you cannot see. 'The boars of Austrielburg have always been the symbol of our noble family, and I want it to be your symbol too. For now, my son, you are one of us.'

He leans back, eyes closing painfully. The surgeon starts plucking at your sleeve for you to leave.

Outside the door, you look down at what you have been given. It is a signet ring bearing the image of a boar rampant.

Now that the count is safe, you are forced to decide what to do.

If you wish to remain until the count is well again, turn to [448](#).

If you wish to secretly leave the castle and return to Altgarten, turn to [925](#).

## 331

Now that you are back on track, you begin to feel better. You pack in the drink and breakfast on some dry white bread, toasted. Restore 6 STAMINA points for the rest and renewal of hope.

Tapping on the table with your fingers and staring across the tavern with eyes that are clear once again, you consider how you can track down the client. The Nightshade Phantom obviously knows more than he's letting on, but you don't think he's the one to approach.

If you have seen a boy's throat cut as an example of cruel justice on your instigation, you have

the option of turning to [275](#).

If you have been double-crossed by the heir to a biscuit fortune, you have the option of turning to [649](#).

If neither is the case, your only remaining option is to turn to [7](#).

## 340

You enter the room and are immediately struck by an appalling, nauseating stench. It is the stench of rotting excrement, of unwashed humanity, of festering urine.

You can barely stand it, but throwing your cloak over your mouth you are able fitfully to discern that the room is bare, save for a large sack upon the floor. Something bulky is inside.

Your options are limited...

If you want to open the sack, turn to [875](#).

If you want to leave well alone, return to the corridor at [893](#).

## 341

‘I have inherited much from my beloved mother,’ you hiss, and send out the awesome might of your telepathic probe. Almost immediately it is met by a solid wall of immense psychic force.

‘Stay out of my head, murderer!’ snarls Defender.

If you wish to try to break through his mental blocks, turn to [853](#).

If you wish to kill him, turn to [35](#).

If you wish to abandon psionic intervention, and hurl verbal abuse instead, turn to [927](#).

## 342

Nothing happens... the stench of the arm merely makes you sick to your stomach. Lose 2 STAMINA points. If you wish to carry on with this, go to [376](#); if you wish to hurl the arm away in disgust, go back to [602](#) and try something else.

## 343

As before, the room is stone and entirely bare save for the glowing stone jewels. However, as is

becoming uncomfortably common, this room too is occupied.

Standing in the middle of the floor is a figure. It wears a long robe of white into which its white hair and beard flow. Cold blue eyes glare out at you from a lined and old face.

A jewel on his right hand glows with a light so bright it hurts your eyes, but it is not this that worries you the most. It's the fact that you can see the opposite wall through the figure.

'After all the centuries,' speaks the figure coldly. 'When I laid myself to rest in this holy tomb I knew I would rise to defend it against the scum of the earth, determined to rob it. But who was to know that they would wear the garb of an aristocrat. The world has irrevocably changed for the worst.

'With this ring of power Sir Svendas gave me so long ago, I shall end your life, villain.'

The figure advances before you, stabbing out at you with the glowing jewel. You make a fearful guess at what this being has become, and you are right. Your weapons will avail you naught against this RING-WRAITH. You must fight it telepathically, or not at all.

RING WRAITH  
STAMINA 15

PSYCHIC 12

If you do not possess offensive telepathic powers, you have no hope of winning, and must *Escape* by turning to [648](#).

If you win you may turn to [499](#) instead.

## 344

Immediately the unicorn dies, before you even have chance to wipe the blood off your sword, the girl jumps on you, wrapping her arms around your neck and her legs around your waist.

'Ohthankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou-' in floods of tears she cries.

With some difficulty, you manage to prise her away. But she stays staring at you admiringly, preening and making no effort to hide her bare limbs.

'Oh thank you!' gushes the businessman. 'You've saved the day! How can we ever repay you?'

'What happened here?' you say with a show of coldness.

The businessman looks embarrassed. 'Well, my daughter... ah... was trying to get a unicorn.'

You look her up and down. Her legs and body are nice enough, but her face looks like a box of frogs. You consider that the unicorn legend probably applies rather to beautiful girls who would find it hard to remain virgins, as opposed to ugly ones to whom it would be extremely easy.

'It's unwise to mess around with the ways of magic,' you say instead.

‘We’ll certainly remember that in future,’ the businessman effuses. ‘Now then, I think there’s something my daughter would like to offer you...’

‘I’m *very* grateful,’ she says with a consummate lack of subtlety, smiling and drawing her tunic up her hips.

You look her up and down.

‘Truly I thank you for your generous offer, but I fear I must respectfully decline,’ you reply coldly. ‘I prefer the love that dare not speak its name.’

That gets rid of them, all right.

After they have gone, you sit down on a log and ponder the unicorn, trying to remember what you know of it. You’re sure there’s something there that’s useful to you, you just can’t quite remember...

Of course! An infusion of unicorn horn boosts psychic powers!

You duly grind up the horn and serve it up in your tea. It tastes foul, but it adds 1 point to your PSYCHIC score!

Turn to [736](#).

## 345

‘Dark Elves new to the surface will be unable to conceal their tracks,’ states Eddora with absolute confidence. ‘They have no concept of weather or climate changes, for instance. In fact, the chief difficulty will be in discerning the one who has left the *least* tracks. They’ll be the chapter leader.’

‘I have absolute faith in your abilities, Eddora,’ you say heavily.

The dark elf stares about her, looking at odd points on the floor for no apparent reason, eyes bright.

Roll one die and add 6 to the total. If it is lower than Eddora’s SKILL, turn to [319](#). If it is not, turn to [524](#).

## 346

The count insists that you stay as a guest in his castle, and you do not know how to refuse. That night, he throws an enormous banquet in your honour, though he does not tell the people the reason. However, from the gestures of deep respect they make to you, you suspect that they have guessed.



Subsequently he offers you your choice of entertainment, and spends all his available time with you – indeed, he is impossible to get rid of. You go hunting, riding, on tours of his domain, inspecting the castle and the disproportionately large army, and so on. You are particularly interested in the royal fencing tutor – apparently the best in all the land. You ask to be allowed to train with her and your father is more than happy to allow you to do so. She teaches you things even you did not know. Add 2 points to your current and *Initial SKILL*.

The count dotes and fawns over you continually, far past the point where it is embarrassing. You watch, somewhat unnerved, as the shadows fall away from him and he become strong and healthy once again. His behaviour seems excessive even for someone finding a long-lost son he didn't know he had, and you cannot work out why.

Only when you have been at the castle for weeks do you discover the reason.

You are eating evening meal in an enormous, deserted banquet hall – much of the castle is unused, and the count no longer has guards when you're with him – and the count has been uncharacteristically silent for some time, and toying with his food. Eventually he speaks.

'My son,' he begins, 'you cannot know what you have brought to me by revealing your presence to me.'

You merely wait.

'I had long since given up hope that such a thing can occur. You see, I have lost the means to have children of my own. In a battle with Altgarten's accursed Prince, I was grievously wounded in a place no man should have to take a blow. I resigned myself to never having an heir, and knew that my kingdom would fall apart on my death.

'Now that I have found you, I can live again.'

Turn to [292](#).

## 347

Joia's face falls apart in horror.

'No?' he gasps. 'What do you mean no? You can't say no! You have to say yes!'

You are treated to the unbelievable sight of Joia the Fixer beginning to climb over the table in order to strangle one of the deadliest assassins in the town in a frenzy of apoplexy. Your eyes widen and you reach for your dagger, not really expecting to need it. But then even stranger, his face goes abruptly slack, and he halts. Your hand freezes on the hilt of your dagger.

Both of you hold the pause for a couple of seconds, then Joia sinks into his seat, as slowly as a marionette.

'All right,' he says, in dull tones and with a total lack of affect. 'It is unfortunate that you will not take the contract. But no doubt someone else will be found.'

Slowly, Joia stands and walks out as though his body was hanging down from his head.

Glancing after him curiously, you wonder exactly what was going on. You think of rumours that some witches can use psionic abilities to influence others at great range. You stare at the ceiling, swirling your wine in its glass, while mentally agreeing with yourself one thing. It was definitely a good thing you decided not to take the Nightshade Phantom on.

When you glance back, the Nightshade Phantom is sitting opposite you.

It takes all the power and control you have learned in your long years as a psionicist to not show your shock. You have no idea how he got in. Were you truly distracted that long? Or has he learnt even stranger powers? Perhaps his psychically-enhanced speed has now advanced to the point where he can move faster than sight. Perhaps he has learned the trick some vampires are said to have, of clouding the minds of those who might see him. Perhaps the answer is all or none of the above. You only know the Phantom is unlikely to answer the question.

‘Nightshade Phantom,’ you say a trifle too loudly. ‘How nice to meet you after all these years!’

‘Black Aria,’ rumbles the Phantom deep in his cavernous chest. ‘The pleasure is all mine.’

The Phantom is huge, bigger than any man you’ve seen from Perrereich or its surrounding lands. His skin is also shades darker than anyone here, and you recall the rumours never stated, exactly, where he was from. He is massively muscled, and his head is shaven entirely. Like you, he dresses in the black garb of an aristocrat, but on his back and beneath his cloak is a bastard sword which, unlike anyone else could, he wields one-handed. You know for a fact that he wields also a longbow, though it is not in evidence today. Evidently this is a social call.

‘To what do I owe this pleasure?’ you say, fear rising slowly within you. You already know it must be about this contract.

‘As if it wasn’t obvious, Aria,’ booms the deep bass voice of the Phantom. ‘I have heard that a contract has been put out on me, and that you are the assassin that has accepted it.’

Your eyes go wide with shock and fear. ‘That – that’s not true!’ you gasp. ‘I was offered the contract, but I didn’t accept it. I would never go against such... a respected colleague as yourself.’

‘Too little too late, Aria,’ growls the Phantom. ‘Your ruse is beneath you. The fact that you have taken the contract is known to me. I also knew your holy pride would not allow you to refuse it.’

‘But I didn’t take it!’ you whine. ‘You’ve got to believe me!’

‘Please, Aria,’ grins the Phantom. ‘Playing at being afraid and pathetic does not become your reputation. I came here to *help* you, and help you I shall.

‘*Know* that this contract is not all it seems. *Know* that there are hidden agendas here of which you, Aria, for all your powers as a witch, know nothing.’

‘But why are you telling me this?’ you snivel, feeling like you might cry.

‘Because, there are changes afoot, and I think all of us assassins – even my closest rivals – need all the chances we will get,’ he says. He stands up. ‘Goodbye, Aria. You’ve got the last chance you’ll get from me. After you leave this inn, you’re fair game.’

The Phantom leaves.

An abyss opens up in your heart, a cold and freezing void. You realise how desperately you don’t want to die, and you decide that if you face the Phantom, the loser will more than likely be you. You drop your head into your hands, and prepare to weep, for all the misery that has befallen you, for your lost love, for how life has passed you by, for how young you will be when you die...

Then you burn out that part of your personality forever, as you have done so many times before; and when you raise your head from the table, you are yourself again.

All that remains is that when Joia appears again slightly later on, you tell him you have changed your mind and have accepted the contract after all. He seems to be under the impression you had accepted it in the first place.

Turn to [135](#).

## 348

‘All right. I’m afraid I can’t give you any further information on Lasombra, even the kingpins don’t know where he lies. You’ll have to find that out for yourself.’

Joia gets up and leaves, and you sit and ponder carefully. How can you get to Lasombra? Not only will he be guarded by thugs everywhere he goes, you don’t even know how to find him.

The only option you have, you decide after much thought, is to go after his underlings involved in the more visible aspects of his shady dealings.

Will you investigate his vice: [309](#)

His drugs: [783](#)

His illegal gambling: [326](#).

## 352

You steel yourself for a not inconsiderable tramp through the streets of Altgarten. The Pied Cow being where it is, a direct route takes you directly through the slum district, home of the poorest indentured workers; you keep your hood up and try to look as menacing as possible.

Still, before long as you stride through a rubbish-strewn alley, a group of ragged and starved figures melt out of the darkness in front of you.

‘I think you know the drill, stranger,’ hisses the foremost. ‘Your money or your life.’

You feel a twinge of amusement at the thought of street dregs attacking one of the most deadly assassins extant.

‘Do you know who I am, children?’ you declare in booming tones. You throw your hood back. ‘I am Black Aria. Even the Dark Elves know me as Death.’

‘Never heard of you,’ says the leader. ‘Let him have it, lads.’

You ponder the vagaries of reputation as the footpads rush you. However, you aren’t going to let yours get any worse by backing down to this rabble. They attack with rusty knives: fight them as one monster;

FOOTPADS

SKILL 7

STAMINA 9

If you win, you search their ragged bodies to discover 12 GP, some lockpicks and a crust of bread. Gain 1 LUCK point, even if it takes you temporarily over your INITIAL rating. Then turn to [122](#).

## 353

Fiorentino turns to his desk and duly writes out a check for 10,000 GP payable from the Altgarten Black Bank. (Perrereich’s pioneering system of commerce has been a major factor in making it the most advanced nation on Titan). You thank him and leave.

Satisfied with this, you leave the tunnels the way you entered and return to the Pied Cow. You casually inform Joia that you are finished with the Fiorentino contract, and despite his gaping mouth and inept blustering, you calmly eat a meal and go to bed. Deduct 20 GP and restore 6 STAMINA points. Though if you had promised the Thief King a cut of your fee, you had better give them 300 GP, otherwise your life will be measured in hours. Go to [314](#).

## 354

‘Buddy,’ growls the muscular bruiser, ‘you got a serious attitude problem.’ He swings an enormous fist at you. The workers form a ring around you and start cheering and hurling coarse oaths.

The GHOUL FOREMAN is stronger and tougher than a human. Resolve this battle:

GHOUL FOREMAN  
STAMINA 14

SKILL 10

You are surrounded by spectators on all sides. You may not *Escape*.

If you win, the workers give you one look, and then leg it out of the factory, clearly unwilling to

face someone who could take down their foreman. Turn to [296](#).

## 355

Life goes on, and becomes increasingly hollow. You continue to slay the victims of every contract that crosses your path, but you no longer gain any satisfaction from ridding the world of your fellow man, despite how cruelly they have treated you.

A small rhyme from a song you once heard keeps running through your head: *They say that you can't miss something that you've never had*. It forces you into the uncomfortable realisation that before you met Eddora, you desired nothing more than to have your revenge upon these worthless creatures. However, now you realise now just *what* you are missing. The feeling of loving and being loved is, you realise belatedly, of far greater satisfaction than the feeling of ridding the world of those who have oppressed you.

You cannot escape the fact that you are bored and disillusioned with the assassination business, and nothing within the assassination business can react against it.

But one day, there is change.

Joia comes over to you one day as you sit slumped in your usual cubicle, desultorily playing Freecell with Tarot cards. He keeps away and addresses you a little uneasily.

‘Hey, Aria,’ he says diffidently. ‘Someone asked for you by name.’

‘Sit down,’ you say tonelessly, keeping your eyes fixed on the cards.

‘The client’s one of the wealthiest, most influential men in the city. Naturally, the identity’s a secret, but once you hear the target you can work it out for yourself.’

‘I’m listening,’ you answer emptily.

Joia pauses for dramatic effect. ‘Count... von Lowenherz. 10,000 GP.’

Initially the name means little to you, like everything else. You know, of course, that von Lowenherz is ruler of the rival country of Austrielburg, and naturally himself and the prince of Perrereich would be rivals, if not enemies. You dispassionately consider the challenge.

Then, everything goes black.

I’m stepping up to my father’s throne... He’s denouncing my older brother to exile on his deathbed... The knights swear defence of my honour.

*I’m making love to a beautiful blonde... She’s telling my fortune with weird looking cards... I’m hearing her tell me she can’t marry me.*

*I’m leading a punitive expedition against Perrereich... Their prince is seeking me out... His spear is severing my testicles... My doctor is telling me I can never bear children.*

Suddenly you're back in the Pied Cow. You realise you've lolled back in your chair, and sit upright with rapidity, feeling rather embarrassed and weak.

The whole tavern is staring at you.

'Whoa,' you say.

'You okay?' sneers Joia with his customary lack of concern.

'Yes,' you say coldly.

'When you flip out on me like that, it usually means you're gonna take it. So, that the case here?'

Is it?

You wonder to yourself if you will ever have such a clear indication of a purpose again.

To accept the contract, turn to [210](#).

To turn it down, turn to [615](#).

## 356

Back at the Pied Cow, you pay the barman 20 GP for a meal and a bed for the night (despite that it's near dawn; this says a lot about the clientele) and collapse, exhausted. Still, you may restore 6 lost STAMINA points for the food and rest.

The next night, you meet up with Joia the Fixer. He's sitting in his usual cubicle.

'I have done the deed,' you announce without preamble, dropping into the seat opposite. You hand over the scalp, and Joia fingers it gingerly. He makes a few passes, mumbles a few words, and it glows green.

Joia looks at you impressed, and with renewed respect. 'Really? For a minute there, I thought we'd lost you. Well done – that was a tough nut to crack.'

'You're telling me,' you respond with some feeling.

'Yeah, well, why else did you think it was an open job? You pay peanuts, you get monkeys, right?'

Something in your resulting expression obviously upsets Joia, because he chokes alarmingly, gulps and goes pale. 'Er... anyway... here's your fee.'

'*Thank* you,' you hiss, as he passes you a heavy bag. Less his handling fee, it comes to 850 Gold Pieces.

'Now you're a force back on the streets again, so I can go about getting you some more work, right?' he gulps, afraid.

‘You better,’ you respond menacingly.

Over the next weeks, Joia lives up to his promise (turn to [602](#)).

## 357

‘I see, sir. I shall announce you to the count.’

He passes through a door opposite to the one you came in by, and returns within a few minutes. ‘Your presence is announced, sir. Please wait here, and the count will see you presently.’

The afternoon drags on... and on... and on. You’re aware that these things can take some time, but after an hour you are extremely bored. You try reading the guards’ minds for a snippet of something interesting, but their thought processes are strictly Neanderthal, centring around beer, sex, puking and other crude bodily functions. You cannot even practise your other psychic abilities, for fear of being obvious. Needless to say in this deprived nation, there are no books.

As night falls you begin to feel hungry – no doubt exacerbated by the lack of activity. You may either eat some Provisions, if you have any left, or otherwise be penalised 2 STAMINA points.

Towards nightfall the secretary comes to see you again. The guards are falling asleep on their feet, and you are getting thoroughly browned off with the whole affair.

‘I am sorry, sir,’ he gravely informs you. ‘I am afraid the count is unable to see you today. Perhaps sir would care to stay in an inn and return in the morning?’

‘What! You mean you aren’t even going to offer me a guest bedroom?’ you snap.

‘Unlike Perrereich, we cannot afford such luxuries,’ says the secretary primly. ‘Now I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to leave.’

You fume, but surrounded by guards, you can do nothing.

If you decide to cut your losses and go back to Altgarten, go to [873](#).

If you instead wish to stick it out, go to [274](#).

## 358

You feel somewhat awkward as you tiptoe into the hut, but Defender does not alter his position at all, or give any sign he’s noticed your presence. Feeling even more foolish, you tuck your legs beneath you and close your eyes.

You start off feeling foolish and bored, and consider using your powers to scan the area, but before long, a feeling of inner peace comes over you. You feel calmed, and for once, the endless rage over your upbringing and the raw sorrow and pain over the loss of Eddora fades for a while.

Instead, you feel you are a child of the universe, with the same right to be there as everything else, and everything has proceeded, and will continue to proceed, as it should. Raise your *Initial* and current LUCK by 2, and restore 2 lost STAMINA points.

You open your eyes, enlightened, and find Defender gazing at you. As you open your eyes, he smiles slowly.

‘Blessed be, pilgrim,’ he says.

Turn to [992](#).

## 359

The woman’s eyes stare into your own. You feel an unpleasant itch at the back of your brain, and a feeling of electricity like the gathering of the storm.

Then, a ravaging blast of psychic energy tears through the ether between her mind and yours and sears into you. You scream in unbelievable agony, and collapse to your knees. You plead for the woman to stop, but it makes no difference as you claw at your face in pain.

Every synapse in your brain is burnt to a crisp. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 360

‘Hey!’ calls out Eddora to the guard, whom you cannot see. ‘Over here!’

You hear a grunt of annoyance from down the corridor, then a series of clanks and creaking of armour. A fully armed guard appears at the doorway of the cell, huge, hulking, and blocking the light.

‘What do you want?’ he inquires coldly.

‘We’re sick,’ you whisper. ‘We need medical attention. My stomach hurts...’

The guard looks at you both, and an ugly smile spreads across his face.

‘Too right you’re sick,’ he smirks. ‘You’re the assassins. She’s been drained of blood by the Masters, and you’ve had your skull broken. You’re dying tomorrow; you seriously think we’re going to provide a doctor for either of you?’

The look of horror on both your faces is obviously comical, because he throws back his head and laughs.

‘Look at you both. You obviously aren’t going to put up any serious resistance, and neither of you have a snowball’s chance in hell of escaping. There’s no point me being here tonight. I’m



off down the boozier, aren't I.'

The guard clanks off, still chuckling unpleasantly to himself, and abandons you both to your fate.

Turn to [894](#).

## 361

Your mother throws her bald, burnt head up to the sky and laughs cruelly, long and loud. 'Your father was the village idiot, Aria!'

An iron hand takes hold of your heart and crushes it permanently. 'No!' you cry out in anguish. 'That can't be!'

'Oh, it is and was!

'I know about all that rubbish you read in my diary. I knew you became convinced that your father had to be the necromancer, the count or the crusader. All very nice, romantic notions.

'Didn't you ever consider I wrote them in my diary *because* they were nice and romantic?

'For the longest time I thought I might be able to escape my fate and live as did other women. Marry, settle down and live in peace. Beautiful little babies, pink and blue. But I was a witch, and that was the path I was born to follow. I realised eventually I could never throw my life away like those idiot housewives in that dreadful village. I wanted to live! I wanted to grow strong in my Art. And I didn't need marriage or children to tie me down.

'And so, I used my magic to abort every child that anyone ever planted in me. It was a simple enough operation to visualise a pentagram within my womb and crash it down. It never failed. Except one time.

'One night I was drunk, and I had an itch that needed scratching. I wanted to debase myself – see how low I could go. Smerdyakov, the slack jawed yokel was wandering outside, singing to himself, and I invited him in... You can imagine the rest.'

You don't want to, but you do.

'The next day I was too hungover, too horrified and debased with the knowledge of what I had done to cast the termination spell. I was more concerned with erasing the memory within Smerdyakov's mind of what we'd done together, lest he blab about it and drop my status within the town any lower than it was already. But his fractured mind was very resistant to my psychic powers. Eventually it just drove him completely insane and he murdered one of the richest men in the village... but that's another story.

'Anyway, by the time I learned I was with child, after all that it was too late.'

'You're lying!' shrieks Eddora in fury. 'You're making this up to bring Aria down! Even the dark elves have more respect for their children than you!'

‘You’ll pay for that remark, bitch, sooner than you think. But, for now, let your lover use his own powers to see how the words I speak are true!’

Driven by a terrible, awful compulsion, desperately hoping that it really *is* all a lie, you drive out your telepathic probe. You are met half way by a psychic claw of far greater power than your own and dragged forcefully into the twisted depths of your mother’s psyche.

Past titanic wells of hatred, of filth, of an insatiable desire for revenge, you are dragged till you reach the appropriate memory location. With a terrible despair you always knew your mother was telling the truth; but now she forces you to see for yourself. The first thing you see is the slack-jawed face of the imbecile relax into an idiot smile, as he thrashes away above your mother’s body at the moment of your conception. It is downhill from there on in.

You are dragged through scenes of vile perversion, hideous depravity, and through it all you are faced with your mother’s dual pleasure; of the act at the time, and of forcing you to watch it now. When she finally allows you to snap back into your own consciousness – after what feels like an eternity but can only have been minutes – you are shaken and weeping. You stagger and nearly fall, but Eddora puts out one arm to support you. Her muscles feel like steel, and she is tight-lipped with rage.

‘For doing that,’ Eddora whispers, ‘I’ll kill you for a second time.’

‘Think you so? You’ll get the opportunity very soon.’

‘You now know that Aria was a mistake. Since my transformation under the spell my son was stupid enough to cast, resurrecting me as a wraith, I’ve been systematically going around Titan and wiping out all those who once dared to oppose me.’

‘Now it’s time to erase *this* mistake. Goodbye, Aria and Eddora. It wasn’t nice knowing you.’

Claws sprout from the ends of her fingers, and the two of you draw your weapons in horror.

This will be your final battle...

MOTHER  
STAMINA 34

PSYCHIC 16

If you bear the Black Sword turn immediately to [585](#).

If you do not bear the Black Sword, but have a glowing pentagram inscribed upon your right palm, turn to [981](#).

If you have neither, turn to [318](#).

## 362

The look in the boy’s eyes wavers – and turns into rage!

‘Never!’ he spits, and leaps for a pile of clothes by the side of the bed. Your heart sinks as he

picks up a fancy and bejewelled rapier. He attacks you completely naked; though fortunately, it seems he does not want to be discovered any more than you do, and maintains an oppressive silence, even when most sorely wounded. His girlfriend looks on in terror, sheet pulled up to her chin.

TEENAGE CASANOVA  
STAMINA 7

SKILL 8

If you win, turn to [119](#).

## 365

Priests have been much more accessible since one of their number rebelled against their earthly, mortal high authority and nailed a vituperative list of grievances onto the Archbishop of Femphrey's door. This was especially helped since the petty, infighting nobles of your local lands sought every possible advantage in rebelling against the organised church, and took many such radically-thinking clerics under their wing. Since then, clerics as a whole have done their best to connect with their mortal flock much more than their distant and high-handed human leader, especially stressing the value of redemption by faith over redemption by works.

It is to one of these 'reformed' churches that you take yourself. You have timed it for confession hour, and you drift invisibly with your assassin's skill to the confession box and slink inside.

You are perturbed when the priest's grille slides across, seemingly of its own accord!

'Bless me father, for I have sinned,' you murmur correctly, if uneasily.

'Tell me your confession, my son,' intones an ancient, gravelly voice.

Will you tell the truth (turn to [889](#)) or dissemble ([778](#))

## 366

You continue your assassination activities for a while (add 3721 GP) all the while tersely waiting for something to happen. Every time Joia approaches you, you think, *This could be the one*.

It isn't.

Except one night...

'Okay, another unusual one for my friend Aria,' says the fence breezily, dressed in his usual ridiculous finery. His hat has currently grown a feather.

'I'm listening,' you mutter in boredom, looking away from the riot of colour he constitutes.

'Well, once again a consortium have gotten together to offer money to rub someone out they're

all afraid of. If you knew the people on this one though, hell, you wouldn't sleep too good.'

'Oh really?' you sneer.

'Oh yeah. I have to wonder why any of these guys would need to hire an assassin at all. Ready for it?'

'Spit it out, you dandified idiot,' you snarl.

'Okay, don't say I didn't warn you. Joriach the Chaos Mage of Nibelheim, Earl Grigorov, the Vampire Lord of Dresberg, Brachius the Warlord of Dracia and Sephtiel the Lich King of Necrovent.'

You stare at the fence. 'I've never heard of any of these people,' you offer. 'Are you sure you haven't just made them all up?'

'Well, whatever. Look, the damn offer is 15000 GP, so decide whether or not you want it, and quit the hell out of making fun of me.'

'You haven't told me who I'm supposed to kill yet...'

'Okay, get this. *Defender*.'

'Defender?' you say curiously. You feel a vague stirring of memory.

'You don't mean to say you've never heard of him either?'

'Well, vaguely. I know the legend of a Defender, champion of good, helper of the helpless ones, who all look up to him or her. I know the title's supposed to be passed on from generation to generation, but not much else.'

'Well, you better stop dreaming and start believing, because Defender is real all right, and he's coming to this very town. All those guys want him dead, and let me tell you he is one bad mother. So, you reckon you're up to the challenge?'

You are about to discuss the matter further, when suddenly you are falling into a space behind your own eyes, and an abyss within your mind has swallowed you whole.

Turn to [691](#).

## 368

*Finally*, you think to yourself. Standing on a deserted street corner under a lamp-post between four warehouses, is a dark-skinned figure.

You sneak up to her as close as you can without being observed – which is damn close. She is dressed very oddly for a prostitute, wearing strange, tight leggings of some unidentifiable material, and a leather band -- oddly purple, a pigment no prostitute should be able to afford -- around her breasts. Like all prostitutes, she looks tired and unhappy as she tries to show off her

wares.

You are bitterly disappointed as you get close – the woman is not Eddora. She does not remotely look elvish either; she lacks Eddora’s fine bone structure, pointed ears and slanted eyes. She is plump and stocky, not tall and slender, and her features are coarse, plain and unattractive, without Eddora’s unearthly, lethal beauty. You curse those human fools for thinking this being an elf.

In fact, she does not resemble a Dark Elf at all – she resembles an odd coloured human. Her skin is black, her hair is white, but even the Dark Elves do not have purple tongues, and black teeth. The very pupils of her eyes are white, their surrounds black. This is nothing you have ever seen. This is a human, with the colours somehow... reversed.

This far into your quest, you feel compelled to approach her. But do you do so aggressively, with your weapons drawn ([634](#)) or in peace, with your weapons sheathed ([467](#))?

## 370

‘We were lovers,’ says the Succubus with a lewd smile. ‘You have to ask?’

Go to [916](#).

## 371

‘Hello?’ calls the musical voice of Salome from the other room. You see, through the door, her white-haired, black-eyed head peering quizzically at you. ‘Oh, it’s you.’ she says. ‘I fear I have no further time to talk right now. I must ask that you keep quiet, so as not to disturb my studies.’

You feel it prudent to leave the bookish creature to her own devices...

... unless you want to kill her.

To return to the corridor, go to [479](#).

To draw steel on the Kiasyd, turn to [48](#)... but lose the LUCK point you gained for befriending her.

## 372

King Adora grins. His grin seems a trifle... unpleasant.

‘Certainly,’ he says. ‘We’d be quite happy to help out such a famous assassin as yourself. Perhaps this will improve thief/assassin relations. In any case, you can find his base down a manhole on the corner of Lieberstrasse and Drossenstrasse.’

‘Thank you, King of Thieves,’ you say, and bow respectfully. However, internally, you are dancing around with glee. How easy was that!

The thieves escort you back to your start location, and you waste no time in finding the manhole and practically leaping down the ladder. Turn to [891](#).

## 373

You are awoken in the night by the sound of a horse screaming, flesh rending, and a beast’s hideous snarls. You leap instantly to your feet, weapons drawn, and behold an awful sight.

Your horse is down on the ground, intestines being ravaged *while it’s still alive* by an enormous, somehow misshapen white wolf. It is ripping into the horse’s guts with enormous jaws lined with teeth like daggers, bigger by far than any normal wolf. You realise belatedly that you’re going to have to continue your journey on foot. Lose 1 LUCK point.

The beast senses you somehow, and wheels round, abandoning the horse to die in agony. Blood drips down its white fur, and its red eyes stare into yours with an undying hate and a strange intelligence. It leaps at you; you must fight.

WAMPHYRI WEREWOLF  
STAMINA 14

SKILL 11

The creature seems to breathe mist, making you unsure exactly where it is. You must deduct 1 from your *Attack Strength* for the duration of the combat.

If you win, turn to [641](#).

## 374

You reach the cemetery quite quickly and by the time you are striding amongst its gravestones – some overgrown with lichen, some well maintained – it is high noon. You realise this is incongruous for a daring raid on an ancient knight’s crypt, but reason you are hardly likely to wait around till nightfall.

Mutti Kursch is one of the oldest cemeteries in Altgarten. When the city began, everyone was buried here, but that included warrior heroes who defended the place against the long-extinct humanoids. Before long, later heroes wanted to be buried with their own, which started the gradual disinterring and removal of peasants’ remains which is now de rigeur in the cemetery. As civilisation progressed, it was no longer just warriors, but philosophers, merchant princes and wealthy entertainers who wished, and paid well, to be buried here; and now, the original small and battered peasants’ gravestones make up less than a quarter of the cemetery’s unliving population, dwarfed by the statues of masters of the stage, and busts of great philosophers with their pithy epithets cut into stone blocks a yard wide.

To the more popular gravestones – usually those of actors and musicians – graffiti directions are scrawled. You see crudely-painted arrows and legends such as ‘THEATRE DES VAMPIRES THIS WAY’ and ‘MOLLY OF THE PARK HALL THIS WAY.’ You pass a group of rebellious bourgeois sons and daughters sitting beneath the enormous, naked statue of an actress deceased through suicide a few years ago. They talk languidly of rebellion and philosophy, and smoke odd-smelling substances.

‘Make love not war, man!’ one of them calls out to you as you pass, sword and dagger close to your hands.

You fix her with your most nihilistic stare, and she grows pale and silent.

Eventually you find the crypt of Sir Svendas. An enormous statue of a knight wielding a massive sword jostles shoulders with an even bigger bust of a patriarchal, bearded man beneath whom is carved ‘GAMBLING IS THE ROOT OF ALL LOSS OF MONEY.’ You look closer and notice that the scraggling, overgrown lawn dips sharply beneath the statue of Svendas, leading to a door which by the encrustation of lichen, looks to have not been opened in some hundreds of years.

Having come this far, you feel you have little choice but to try to open the door. You step cautiously down and heave at the handle.

You soon discover why no tomb raiders have raided this particular tomb. The door is far too heavy to open. You are in the peak physical fitness your profession requires, and you cannot budge it in the slightest.

You do have your telekinesis, however... Turn to [127](#).

## 375

The chief adversity you face in the Pied Cow is managing to drink as little as possible so you don’t lose your alertness. This is difficult, as the barman keeps bringing them over, knowing you have probably more money than anyone else there (naturally the Phantom is staying away).

Another adversity is the rich food and lack of activity. You stare at your stomach in a paranoid trance, dreading the moment when it starts to come over your belt buckle.

Yet another is the boredom. Most assassins do not share your refined taste and love of the philosophy of the age, and so scintillating conversation is hard to come by. You send messenger boys on errands to acquire some of the leading pamphlets of the hour for you to read, but half of them simply abscond with the money (deduct 500 GP) leaving you bereft of both gold and reading material.

In fact, sitting in the Pied Cow really *sucks*. The only benefit is that you may restore 6 STAMINA points for the rest.

To try to track the Phantom down directly from here, turn to [773](#).

To try to get information from the notoriously anti-assassin Thieves’ Guild, turn to [100](#).

To try to dupe the Phantom into carrying out a dummy hit, turn to [800](#).

To try to stick out sitting in the pub for a while longer, turn to [290](#).

## 376

You take the grisly item out of the bar – to the gratitude of all – and hold it in your arms. You close your eyes and drift away... willing your powers of *psychometry* to make an appearance.

Roll one die and add 6 to the total. If this is equal to or lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [260](#). If it is greater than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [342](#).

## 377

‘What now?’ you respond. You feel a great weight lift from your heart – one you hadn’t even known was there.

You rise to your feet. Looking slightly puzzled, Eddora follows suit.

‘Assassins of Altgarten!’ you call out. ‘This is Eddora, expert assassin of the dark elves. I hereby declare her, my second in command. From now on, you obey all orders from her as you do me... and disobeying will cause you to meet with the same fate.’

Eddora rounds on you.

‘Hogwash!’ she snaps. ‘I’m not doing that.’

You grit your teeth in fury. ‘Fine! Assassins of Altgarten, I make *myself* second in command. Eddora is now your new Master of Assassins and you will obey her as you did me!’

‘Rubbish!’ Eddora shrieks at you. ‘I’m not doing that either! I’m not yours to command like these people!’

You clench your teeth, feel your hands rising into fists, your shoulders rising... you turn on the dark elf. Around you, the assassins are looking increasingly confused and angry.

‘Eddora, what the hell are you doing?’ you hiss at her. ‘You’re undermining my authority here!’

‘Nuts to your authority!’ she screams at the same ear-splitting volume. ‘I don’t give a damn about any of these people, any more than you do!’

You feel your tendons tighten in your neck. You prepare yourself to tear into the dark elf... and suddenly change your mind.

You turn back to the assassins.

‘Assassins of Altgarten!’ you call out. ‘From now, our hierarchy and organisation is disbanded.’





After you have defeated them, the second pair move into the fray. They are swifter and smarter as well as better armed.

ZOMBIE SECOND CLASS

SKILL 7

STAMINA 7

ZOMBIE SECOND CLASS

SKILL 7

STAMINA 7

After they fall, you leap over their bodies and, without bothering to sheath or clean your weapons, you fling open the door and leap inside. Turn to [190](#).

## 379

Fiorentino merely looks at you while you stand in silence, surprised by the request. ‘Look,’ he says, ‘I’ve always thought there was something missing from my life. Maybe you feel the same. Seeing you after all those years, I have an idea what it might have been.

‘If you will allow me to do so, I will adopt you as my son. We can have as much or little contact as you like, but what I would really want is an apprentice, someone to pass my knowledge of necromancy on to. I’ve been really impressed by your skills, and I would love to have you on board.

‘How about it... son?’

You are staggered by the offer. One thing is clear to you, though... the acquisition of this power is not to be sniffed at.

If you agree, go to [223](#).

If you do not, return to [569](#) where the disappointed Fiorentino seems determined to give you some kind of gift.

## 383

You are growing very weak, but are still confident of victory. Then suddenly, a blinding pain strikes you like a lightning bolt in the left side of your brain. You go down like a ninepin.

You’re lying on the floor. There’s no feeling and no movement in the right side of your body. There’s a hideous taste of copper in your mouth. You try to speak, but only slurred sounds come out.

It would take the science of another world and another time to explain what has happened to you. But one of the blood clots induced by Fiorentino’s poisoned scimitar has broken off in your bloodstream and gone directly to your brain. You have suffered a massive stroke.

Fiorentino puts down his cutlass, tucks up his pants and kneels down to face you.

‘Hmm, that often happens,’ he says introspectively. ‘I wish I knew what Eichlan put in his green stuff. Anyway. I should leave you to the fate of the other assassin, but your skills seem a cut above the rest. I think you deserve to be the prototype for a new breed of zombie, since you took down my best one.’

‘Hmm... What sounds better than Zombie Elite?’

‘I know... *Divine Assassin.*’

After Fiorentino pumps out your blood and replaces it with Protoblood of his own creation, your wounds are healed and you become invincible and immortal. Unfortunately, you are also his mindless tool of destruction. Your adventure ends here.

THE END.

## 384

‘Hello?’ calls a liquid, musical voice from the next room. ‘Who is it? Why don’t you come on through and introduce yourself.’

For some reason, your limbs stiffen up; your brain refuses to make them obey you. You feel compelled to do as the voice commands, and stalk awkwardly into another part of the library. The back of your brain itches; this is the work of psychic power!

Standing behind a desk on which books and papers are strewn is what appears at first sight to be a young and beautiful woman. However, she is no less than six and a half feet tall, though perfectly proportioned. She has pure white hair down to her shoulders, her skin is a bone-like bleached white with an odd tinge of blue, and her eyes are pools of black, no pupils, no irises.

She speaks to you pleasantly;

‘How do you do? I am Salome of the Kiasyd. Tell me, what brings you to this library?’

The ache in the back of your brain tells you that you are most *definitely* in the presence of the initiator of the psychic power that brought you here!

If you have accepted a contract from Morrigan and wish to honour it, turn immediately to [667](#).

If you reply that you’re on a mission to assassinate Fiorentino, turn to [845](#).

If you say that you’re here to study in the library, turn to [804](#).

If you answer that you’ve come for tunnel maintenance, turn to [601](#).

There is another tactic... you could try to read her mind to see what answer she'd *like* to hear. To do this, roll one die and add 6 to the result. If this is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [80](#). Otherwise, you get no sense of anything. You may not attempt this again; pick one of the above responses.

Finally, if you just want to kill her first and answer questions later, you draw your weapons. She smiles grimly, saying ‘Someone up to no good, obviously!’ Turn to [577](#).

## 386

As luck would have it, you come across an old beggar, Tyler, crouched in a doorway plying his wares at the edge of the mercantile district. He sees you coming, and utters a piteous moan. ‘I’ve nothing of value,’ he whines. ‘Please, leave me be.’

A few passing merchants glare at you in disgust. You don’t allow yourself to be fooled, though; you know this show is entirely for their benefit. You stride over to the beggar and stare down at him, cloak swirling around you. He looks up at you with shrewd, keen eyes.

Tyler doesn’t make his living from merchants. He makes it from the likes of you. He sells information... information... information. If Tyler hasn’t heard it, it hasn’t been said. Some say he speaks with the rats, some say he has the secret of invisibility; but all acknowledge the truth of his words.

‘Aria,’ he says. ‘What do you need?’

‘I’m looking for a man named Fiorentino,’ you say. ‘I hear he lives in the sewers. Do you have any idea where?’

‘As usual, one has to cross my palm with gold to hear the future,’ he cackles in a put-on crone voice. He holds out his hand, grinning.

Note down how much you want to pay the man, then turn to [489](#). Or if you don’t want to pay, you can go back to [602](#) and try something cheaper.

## 388

The wizard looks at you arrogantly. ‘Yes? Can I help you at all?’

‘I’m looking for Defender,’ you say, trying to look arrogant yourself.

‘Oh yes? I hear a lot of rumours that an assassin’s out to get him.’

‘Is that so?’ you enquire innocently.

‘Yes,’ he snaps. ‘So it’ll cost you 1000 GP.’

‘By my faith,’ you mutter ironically. ‘Loyalty isn’t worth much to you lot.’

‘My father was a merchant,’ says the wizard haughtily (in case you didn’t already know) ‘so I know which side of my bread the sauerkraut’s on. Defender can look after himself.’

With no other leads, you pay the man (deduct the money).

‘Right. Defender is in Checkpoint [847](#) of the last war. I hope he rams his flame blade right up your-‘

‘Yes, yes, thanks,’ you mutter offhandedly, and stalk from the shop.

## 390

As one, yourself and the Nightshade Phantom strike the cloudy glass of the window, shattering it outward in a thousand points of light. For one nameless moment, you are flying along on your back, staring up at the stars, and the pieces of glass, refracting the white light of the lamps along the street in a million colours like a prism, are floating along with you as fellow travellers. You remember with a flash – this is how it was, after you died for the last time, and before you were born.

Then you realise that you are three stories above the ground and about to crash into a very hard floor. You twist and flail desperately, trying to right yourself. Besides you, the Nightshade Phantom seems in his very element, righting himself gracefully like a crane in flight. He alights delicately on the cobbled street and starts to saunter leisurely away.

*Arrogant bastard*, you think. Unfortunately, this is the last thing that ever goes through your mind, as you strike the cobbles head first and your skull is smashed open like a hollow eggshell.

Well... the *second* to last thing to go through your mind.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 391

Deciding to stick with what you know best, yourself and Eddora head over to the weapon rack and retrieve your arsenal, determined to make your escape.

You don't get far.

Past the very next bend in the corridor is another guard in full armour with a halberd; and what you might have each have taken out easily in your career as master assassins, is a challenge you cannot hope to face in your current weakened state. The guard finishes Eddora with one downward strike with the halberd's axehead, and eviscerates you with the spearhead on the upswing.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 392

‘Easy enough for you to insult me now,’ you hiss. ‘It was easy enough for you to abandon my mother after she became pregnant with me. But for your abandonment, I would have grown up the son of a noble knight, not some stinking peasant whose mother was burnt as a witch. I’m a product of my environment, and it’s your fault I was there!’

He stares at you, eyes narrowing.

‘Ah yes... I see it now, in the hair and face. Your mother was a psychic for the villagers, was she not? A very fiery, intelligent and beautiful woman. But she had no self-control, and a nasty streak a mile wide.’

‘And that was your sole reason for not marrying her, as your calling and status said you should?’ you say in a voice rapidly rising to a yell.

‘Calling? Status?’ shrugs Defender. ‘I think I was merely an Adept then, and very fond of the dictum of one of the greatest Masters of the past. “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the law, love under Will.” Your mother was a beautiful woman, and none too particular about whom she took to her bed. I wished to make love to her, and I did. Where is the problem in that?’

Your blood boils over.

If you wish to attack him now, turn to [35](#).

If you wish to use your psychic powers to test the validity of his claim, turn to [341](#).

If you wish to hurl verbal abuse at him, turn to [927](#).

## 400

‘The other necromancer lives at the opposite end of the complex. Kindly get thee hence.’

Well, it’s some free information, at least.

You may return to the tunnel by turning to [304](#), or if you want a piece of stone golem, turn to [710](#).

## 401

Eddora lies over to one side, collapsed. She doesn’t appear to be breathing.

‘Eddora! No!’ You drag yourself over to her and pick her up into your arms. You fear the worst... but her eyes flick open. She coughs. A barrage of joy assails you.

‘Eddora! I’m so glad you’re safe!’

‘I’m all right,’ she croaks through a bruised throat. ‘Really.’

She doesn’t look alright – in fact, she looks awful – but you don’t let that worry you. You crush her to your chest, weeping with happiness.

‘I never should have left you,’ she croaks. ‘I’m so glad I’ve found you. I have always loved you. I’m never going to let you go... again.’

If you have a signet ring bearing the emblem of a boar rampant, turn to [883](#). If not, turn to [714](#).

## 402

The secretary leads you through labyrinthine tunnels which seem deserted save for an enormous population of guards, and indicates a plain wooden door. You step inside.

The count’s receiving room is as bare as the rest of the castle, save for a high wooden chair. It is flanked by four guards, who stare unendingly at two more either side of the door. Upon it is the man himself.

Nothing about his appearance or dress is remarkable, but his carriage and mien strike you overwhelmingly. Every fibre of his being speaks of an endless sorrow, an all-consuming depression.

Yet you see that he is agitated, and you sense that this is the first such occurrence in years. His eyes burn with an unidentifiable light as they fall upon you.

‘Guards!’ he barks with considerable authority. ‘Leave us.’

The guards are obviously surprised, but leave the room anyway.

He twitches, seemingly barely able to stay put in his chair. ‘You gave the secretary the information that you came from the village of Ratzelburg. Only once in my life have I encountered someone from there. Tell me, have you ever known a woman with blonde hair who told fortunes for the village?’

Your eyes widen, but before you can speak the count interjects:

‘You are the image of her! Tell me, you must: you must be her son!’

If you agree and go on to add that you are his son too, turn to [670](#).

If you decide to kill him now while the guards’ backs are turned, turn to [603](#).

## 403

A light goes out of Defender's eyes.

'Very well then,' he mutters. 'Understand, that you have now turned your back upon the side of Good forever. Not doubt we shall encounter one another again, but I fear our meeting will not be so pleasant.'

You can only shrug. You can decide to kill him now by turning to [792](#), or you can simply leave by going to [172](#).

## 405

The Wood Elves make sure they've got your attention, then one calls out to you with totally incomprehensible words which sound nothing like the language used by Eddora.

You can only shrug exaggeratedly.

They mutter among themselves, then one steps forward from behind the ranks.

She is a handsome woman of middle years, with a perpetual, generous smile. She's wearing the same arms and armour, but her hair is thick with flowers and feathers, and her face and body are painted with many colours.

You feel insinuating fingers at your mind.

*What?* you think back, and her eyes light up with delight.

*A fellow psionist!* she sends back. *It has been long and long since I met with such.*

*Myself, too,* you acknowledge.

Apologies for the heavy-handedness. However, we Wood Elves make a point of greeting all those who pass through our forest to ascertain their agenda is not against it.

My agenda does not adversely affect your forest, you answer truthfully.

I sense your truthfulness. I might ask if you would sojourn here awhile, so that we might exchange knowledge of the telepathic abilities, but I suspect your agenda is urgent...?

<p' You are tempted...

Thank you, but no, you respond. I have promises to keep.

Then fare you well, she thinks. Avoid the forest in that direction, for there lies a great manifestation of evil that we have yet been unable to dispel.



She waves and smiles, and herself and her tribe melt back into the forest.

You continue on your way, your mood somewhat improved.

Turn to [614](#).

## 411

You cough and clear your throat preparatory to greeting him. Defender opens his eyes and glares at you.

‘What the bloody hell do you want?’ he snaps.

You are taken aback by the language and hostility from a supposed holy crusader. ‘I wanted to meet the great Defender,’ you say lamely.

‘Yeah, right. I have heard numerous rumours that an assassin has been hired to slay me by a cabal of my enemies. I have also heard a little of your reputation, Black Aria or whatever you call yourself.’

You open your mouth to deny your identity, but he cuts you off. ‘A word of advice. Exceedingly few aristocrats dress entirely in black. It’s not expensive enough a colour. Few others than assassins know how to fight Florentine-style in these parts, either.’

You are growing irritated. After the end of your childhood, you swore a blood oath that you would never, *never*, allow anyone to talk to you this way again.

‘I don’t think I like your tone,’ you hiss back.

If you wish to kill him for his impudence, turn to [35](#).

If you wish to accuse him of being a negligent father, turn to [392](#).

## 413

The demon stoops, staring hard at a corner of the pentagram inscribed with runes of an ancient tongue. It straightens up and glares at you.

‘For once, mortal, someone has scribed a warding I am unable to escape from,’ it hisses. ‘You were lucky – this time. Do not presume to summon me a second time, or you will find you may not be so lucky again.’

‘Do not insult me by speaking the banishment. I shall exit your plane on my own.’

With that, the demon vanishes, leaving a purple haze in your eyeballs and a distinct lack of oxygen in your lungs. You stagger out into the outshined sunshine, gasping. You realise you are lucky to be alive.

If you now know the location of Defender, you will know where to turn; otherwise you are going to have to try alternative methods. Turn back to [881](#) and choose again.

## 428

You walk through into an identical room. Bare stone and glowing blue jewels are all you see... save that there are three SKELETONS. You heave a sigh.

Right now, the skeletons are immobile. In fact, they're each hanging from a nail stuck in the wall. But you have the sneaking suspicion that as soon as you step towards them, they will come to life and leap to the attack.

Raising your eyes to the heavens, you set one foot forward – and the skeletons leap from the nail and jump maniacally towards you like morbid jack-in-the-boxes. You must fight.

First SKELETON	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6
Second SKELETON	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6
Third SKELETON	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6

Fight using multiple rules.

To make matters worse, the skeletons have no minds (or brains, as far as you can see through the eyeholes) and thus they are immune to your telepathic powers. Your sword and dagger rely on slashing and stabbing, and thus cannot do much to creatures who have no internal organs – they do only 1 STAMINA point of damage each. Only telekinesis can help you here; it will do normal damage.

You cannot bring yourself to run away from pathetic skeletons, no matter how many. If you win, turn to either [343](#) to go straight on, or [664](#) to go left.

## 435

‘Really? We don’t care much for thieves around here. Imhotep, get him.’

The statue lunges ponderously at you. Turn to [710](#).

## 443

Same rotten old tunnel. There is a door to your north. To the west there’s a right angle bend; in the east, the tunnel carries on straight.

Your choice:

North door (216)  
Eastern bend (224)  
West down the tunnel (544)

## 445

You stare at each other with a horrified shock of recognition.

‘*You!*’ snarls the wizard with blistering hatred.

‘Me,’ you mutter uneasily. ‘So – time I was leaving...’

‘You killed my father, you assassin scum!’ shrieks the young man. ‘Prepare to die!’

He raises his hands in an apoplectic fury and hurls a ravaging blast of blue energy at you. Roll two dice; if the result is higher than your SKILL, lose 3 STAMINA points as the flesh is seared from your chest. You leap to the attack in terror.

COPPER’S SON SKILL 12 STAMINA 9

The junior wizard has improved his powers considerably since you last met. His power blasts now do 3 STAMINA points of damage every time his *Attack Strength* is higher than yours. He is your only lead; you may not *Escape*.

If his stamina is reduced to 2 or below, turn to [328](#) if you were using SKILL, [625](#) if you were using PSYCHIC.

## 448

The count recovers surprisingly quickly, and by that point you have given up any desire to return to Altgarten or the life of an assassin. The count proclaims his endless gratitude, creates a holiday in your honour, and offers you the position of his chief adviser, which you are only too happy to accept.

Not long after, the count dies peacefully, as though he had now given up the ghost at last. Papers are found proclaiming the count’s desire for yourself to be his heir, though this had been obvious to everyone for some time. You become the count yourself, and are a just and wise ruler. You do much to undo the chains of poverty that shackle this land, and are well loved by the people. However, your love for Eddora haunts you to the grave, and you never see her again. You no more marry and have children than the previous count did, and you die alone. The land is carved up by the petty nobles immediately after your death, and eventually nothing remains to show you ever ruled here, or did anything else.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 449

This room is much the same as the one you have just left, with scattered limbs and rusty surgical equipment; however, there is a desk pushed against one wall, piled with papers and more body parts and ferrous knickknacks.

Situated in front of the desk is a *thing*.

It is a hideous mass of writhing tentacles, murderous spines, bony strikers, and chitinous scales. It does not look even remotely human. A couple of its minor tentacles are awkwardly clutching a quill pen, as it writes in a green book.

Several of its weirdly stalked eyes swivel in your direction...

The thing *speaks!*

‘Good day to you,’ it says in a surprisingly pleasant and mellifluous voice. ‘I am Eichlan of the Tzimisce. Has Fiorentino sent you to help me with my war ghouls?’

‘Yes.’ Go to [742](#).

‘No.’ Go to [94](#).

## 450

You taste the red liquid, and feel slightly stronger. This potion is evidently designed to raise strength. You may take the four bottles with you. Before a battle, you may quaff one bottle to raise your SKILL by 2 points for the duration of that battle. However, the potion is then used up, and it is entirely ineffective for a battle fought psychically.

Return to [594](#).

## 451

You trudge up to the open drawbridge, and are immediately blocked by two guards, armed with halberds and chainmail.

‘Ere,’ says Tweedledum. ‘What do you want?’

‘I’m here to see the count,’ you say, looking and sounding as hangdog as you feel.

Tweedledum and Tweedledee exchange glances.

‘You wha’?’ utters Tweedledee rudely.

‘‘Oo does ‘ee think ‘ee is?’ ejaculates Tweedledum.

‘Your name, private?’ you snap at last, running out of all patience.

‘Wha’?’ they say together, looking perturbed. ‘Wha’s you on abaat?’

‘Your names. Now.’

You can almost hear the wheels grinding. Finally, a slow look of worry crosses their faces like a glacier at full throttle. ‘Er... ‘ang on,’ One guard pulls a bell.

Almost immediately a doleful countenance, on top of an unbelievably lanky body dressed in a faded and patched tailcoat appears before you. ‘Greetings,’ it moans like a graveyard zephyr. ‘I am Mortimer, personal secretary to Count von Lowenherz. Can I... help you at all?’

‘Yes, you can,’ you grate. ‘You can recommend Tweedledee and Tweedledum here for immediate demotion. If not execution.’

The guards quiver, but dare not retaliate while the secretary is present.

‘I... see,’ intones the butler. ‘Perhaps you would like to see the count, as a preference.’

‘That would be... just fine.’

‘I see, sir. Please walk this way.’

The butler minces off, knee joints cracking alarmingly. You refrain from re-visiting the ancient joke and follow him normally; turn to [769](#).

## 452

The junior assassin crouched irritably in the shadows, automatically maintaining the stealth techniques he had been taught. The assassination business had seemed such an escape from the slums he had grown up in. The hierarchy and organisation had given his life a sense of purpose and belonging it had never had, and in the course of his career he’d seen things he could have never dreamed of.

However, all that had changed since he started shadowing Black Aria. Since then he was tired of fighting, tired of killing, tired of working for men like him. Once he had been more than happy to kill for profit – it had been his way of getting revenge for where society had put himself and his family. But meeting Aria had shown him another side – he had been forced to come to the conclusion that the Master of Assassins was the most evil man he had ever met, and mad with it. He cursed his ex-lover’s name – and praised his mother’s – on a continual basis. He slew all who dared gainsay him, and with those weird powers – he wore his status as a witch’s son like a badge of honour – nobody could hope to stand up for themselves. He spoke continually of a

hopeless future in which all the assassins would be wiped out by the Watchmen. All in all, he really needed to get a life.

If the assassination business took men and turned them into the likes of Black Aria, then the junior assassin wanted no part of it.

Unfortunately for him, your psychic powers happen to be activated at that point.

The junior assassin's heart nearly stops as you appear to him, seemingly out of nowhere, a hand's breadth away, eyes dilated with rage.

'You want no part of the assassination business, Waldo?' you hiss. 'Then you shall have no part in it... forever!'

You pluck your dagger from your belt and, in a telekinetically enhanced throw, sink it to the hilt in Waldo's neck. He gurgles and dies.

From the alley you hear two feminine shrieks and a masculine groan. The Grey Tiger has gotten to Ajax!

You pull out your sword, mentally move your dagger back to your hand and rush over to the alley. You have already lost two assassins this night, but by the caves of the dark elves you're not going to lose any more.

Turn to [205](#).

## 453

His mind opens to you – his defences are down in any case. He desperately wants to believe you are his son, and it is with some difficulty that you bypass this searching for memories of your mother. He does consider that he was with her at the appropriate time to have a son your age.

Turn to [346](#).

## 457

“Excellent,” said Zeratul. “You have successfully completed your training to become a Second Stage Lensman.”

“A what?” complained Jim Raynor. “I thought I was going to be a Dark Templar.”

“Oh yes.” Zeratul looked shifty. “You are indeed one of the characters in question. Anyway, here is your lightsabre.”

“Lightsabre?” complained Raynor. “What happened to the Warp Blade which focuses the dark blue force of entropy and all that business?”

“Ah yes, of course. The power of entropy is now yours.’

“Kickin’.’ However, Raynor suddenly felt a bit discomfited. There was an odd burning sensation in his arms.

Frowning, he took up some cam cream and traced the pain with it.

One arm spelled out – U = BTL. The other spelled – DYING.

“Suddenly Kerrigan appeared. ‘Ah, I see you have figured out my zone of compulsion.’

“Zone of plagiarisation, more like.’ Raynor grumbled.“

*Hmm, you think.*

Turn to [700](#).

## 460

Both this room and the adjoining one are now entirely empty. There is no sign of the bed, the statue or Morrigan. There seems no point in remaining; turn to [304](#).

## 462

Something goes out of Joia’s eyes when you refuse. You identify it only much later, when you run the episode through your mind again and again. It’s the final running out of respect.

‘Suit yourself,’ he says. ‘A friendly piece of advice; I wouldn’t show your face in here again. They tend not to be very sympathetic to those not in the second oldest profession.’ You walk out of the bar numbly, followed by a couple of muted jeers.

You are finished in the assassination business. You never see Joia again, nor Eddora, nor any of the other wetworkers. You find work to survive – maybe as a docker, maybe as a bodyguard, maybe as a mercenary. You find another girl – a plain, dull human this time, maybe an ex-prostitute, maybe a dishwasher, maybe a pauper’s daughter. She is nowhere near as beautiful or deadly as Eddora, and somewhere deep down, you never forget her. But dull and predictable your life might be from here on in, at least your conscience is clear.

You never determine the identity of your father.

THE END

## 467

You approach the girl cautiously, arms held wide and open. She turns to you and tries to smile.

‘Want business love?’ she says, sounding none too happy about the prospect.

‘No, not exactly,’ you say cautiously. ‘I’m just curious about... the way you look.’

Her face twists in distress. ‘Where I come from, everything looks like me. I don’t know how I ended up here, in this horrible place with its pink people and its blue sky.’

*What?* you think. ‘You mean to say you’re from another world?’

‘I guess. Can you help me?’

You have heard of such things, but know virtually nothing about them. ‘Why do you want to sleep with men for money?’ you ask instead.

Her face twists, becoming hostile. ‘It’s the only thing I know how to do, all right? There’s not that much option for girls like me.’

‘But why do they keep dying?’

Her face fills with fear. ‘Everything I touch keeps dying! Everything!’ She begins to grow hysterical. ‘Look, you have to help me return to my own world! I’ll do anything! Anything!’

She rushes towards you, trying to grab you in supplication, weeping and wailing. But you are horrified by what you now know her touch will do to you, and draw your sword!

SHADOW ELF  
STAMINA 8

SKILL 7

Her fighting skills and fortitude are no better than any unfit prostitute, but all she needs is the merest touch to drain your life to the tune of 1 SKILL, 1 LUCK, 1 PSYCHIC and 2 STAMINA per hit!

If you lose, you are aged ninety years in the space of a few seconds, and your adventure ends here. If you win, turn to [604](#).

## 468

On the other side of the tangled mess of door and clerk you see an unusual sight. The room is huge and bare save for a wooden desk. Standing before the desk are two people. One is draped in the diaphanous silks of a high-class prostitute. Her head is tilted back, and her eyes are closed in ecstasy. The other is a wiry man dressed in the spare, yet expensive clothing of a gentleman soldier off duty. He is sucking avidly at the young woman’s neck. A thin trickle of blood down to her voluminous cleavage betrays what is going on here.



‘Another vampire,’ you mutter. ‘Well, you’ve all died pretty easily before.’

The Councillor shifts the weight of the woman abruptly in his arms, turning to face you. His eyes are alight with rage – however you are amazed to notice an extra eyelid in his forehead.

He pulls his mouth away from the prostitute’s neck, wipes blood from it and speaks.

‘How DARE you disturb me while feeding?’ he snarls. The prostitute’s eyes open abruptly; she screams. She claps a hand over the pouring wounds in her neck and struggles to break free; the Councillor lets her go. Blood welling through her fingers, she runs past you and out of the door.

‘I see that my clerk was not barricade enough,’ he continues. ‘Nor my doors. For disturbing me you will of course die; but I would know who you were, and what you wanted.’

‘Who am I? I am Black Aria, the king of assassins. As to what I want... I have heard about your plan to wipe out the assassins of this city, and since one of your first targets was me, I intend to have your head.’

His eyes widen. ‘Is that so? Then surely something must have broken down for you to make it this far. Tell me, from whom did you learn this information?’

You say nothing.

‘Well then, you probably know that I was able to put... suggestions... into your Fixer’s mind at long distance which would reinforce the blackmail I had already set up. From there it was a simple matter to hire you out to kill the Nightshade Phantom. Have you done it yet?’

You say nothing, again.

‘Well, it matters not. I have achieved one of my aims – one of you ites will die today.’ He reaches onto his back and pulls out a huge, two-handed sword.

‘Well, it ends as it always ends – with a fight,’ you say. ‘But I still want to know – why do you want the assassins gone so badly?’

He appears so surprised by the question that he stops advancing on you. ‘You ask why? You look at all we have done for this city, and you ask why?’

‘We have brought trade and commerce, industry and wealth, employment and a productive bourgeoisie class, no longer shackled by the petty concerns of the aristocracy. Nothing that threatens this change can be allowed to survive, and assassins are a relic of the past. We can no longer allow people to obtain wealth and fame through the foul art of murder. Our new Watchmen would have wiped you out eventually. I just wanted to force the issue.’

‘It doesn’t matter what you do to this town, Grand Councillor,’ you sneer by way of reply. ‘It’ll still be *rotten*.’

‘Our city has no place for you.’ He brings his sword up into the ready position. ‘For honour!’

Whenever the Grand Councillor rolls a double on his Attack Strength, his third eye will open, and the blazing red orb will fill you with dread; you may take no action that round. Therefore, even if your Attack Strength is higher than his, you will not wound him; but if his is higher than yours, he will wound you in the normal way.

If you win, turn to [748](#).

## 469

The blank look in the secretary's face makes it clear that he has never heard of the place. Not many people have.

'I shall announce your presence forthwith, sir,' he says, and minces from the room.

He has been gone barely five minutes when he comes back, flustered and in a great hurry. His eyes are wide with shock.

'The count will see you at once, sir,' he says as though he can't believe his own words.

*Great!* you think. *That was easy.*

Restore 1 LUCK point and turn to [402](#).

## 474

The dogs completely ignore the crust of bread you have just generously thrown them. They are carnivores, after all. Lose 1 LUCK point. You curse and fumble to pull out your weapons as the dogs rush you. For the first round of the next combat, lower your SKILL temporarily by 2 points. Go to [699](#) and fight.

## 475

The naughty couple surrender to you. They stand back to back, nude, and you bind and gag them hand to foot with the bedclothes. Let someone else deal with them from now on.

You leer at the girl, and head for another door; turn to [271](#) for the first, [185](#) for the third.

## 477

This is a very small mace indeed. The handle is made of wood and is barely big enough for your hand to grasp. Atop it is a cylinder of metal which is shorter, but fatter. You are at a loss as to what it could be used for.

Maybe if you hit someone over the head with it? That could work...

The 'mace' explodes, spattering small pieces of assassin all over the armoury.

Unbeknownst to you, Fiorentino the necromancer, Eichlan of the Tzimisce and Salome of the Kiasyd have been collaborating on a revolutionary new weapon. A weapon which could be thrown and would magically explode when near the enemy. They've got the explosion bit down, but they're having a bit of teething trouble with the trigger mechanism...

You may be gratified to know that from your tattered fragments, Fioretino can garner much evidence to help Titanian sciento-magickal research. But for you, this adventure is over.

THE END

## 478

The woman fires a telepathic bolt of enormous magnitude at your mind. However, you are strong enough to deflect it, and it dissipates harmlessly.

'How can this be?' she gasps. 'No normal human can have a mind like yours!'

'I am no normal human,' you sneer. 'I am Black Aria, the king of assassins!'

She hurls another bolt at you. The battle is joined.

MORRIGAN  
STAMINA 8

PSYCHIC 11

You must resolve this battle telepathically; the woman is a SUCCUBUS and is immune to physical damage.

If you win, turn to [115](#).

## 479

You find yourself in a new region of tunnel. There is a door to the west, a straight region of tunnel to the north, and a bend to the south.

Take your pick:

West door ([798](#))

Northern straight ([91](#))

Southern bend ([893](#))

## 480

With dimming eyes, barely able to stand from exhaustion, you strike the final blow against the Phantom. He says nothing as you deal the mortal wound; merely raises his sword to the sky and topples like a felled tree.

‘Farewell, Aria,’ he murmurs from the floor. ‘You were a worthy opponent. And... you are the master of assassins.’ Then, he breathes his last.

You collapse to your knees besides the titanic corpse, as blood flows sluggishly from both your wounds. The austere offices of the Grand Councillor have become a scene of absolute carnage, and all without a single person coming to investigate.

The moon is high in the sky... you close your eyes for a second, only to see it has moved quite a distance across the sky. Did you pass out for a while? That won’t do; you have to keep moving.

You crawl over to the Nightshade Phantom’s corpse and search it. He is carrying little; you find only 23 Gold Pieces which you may take, his huge sword and what appears to be a unicorn horn.

If you wish to take his bastard sword of cold iron and silver, you cannot wield it one-handed as he did; you must wield it two-handed, and thus forfeit your Florentine dagger strike. It is quite magical; you may add 1 point to your Attack Strength and 1 point to damage when you wield it. Against creatures aligned with the Light, these figures go up to 2 – you will be told when this applies. However, it will take time to learn how to use it – you may not apply the Attack Strength bonus in your very first combat, though the damage bonus still applies. You can wield the sword as normal after the very first combat.

Some further investigation of the unicorn horn reveals that the top has been fashioned into a screw cap, and the inside has been hollowed out to form a bottle. Inside there is a liquid; hazarding a guess as to what it is, you gulp it down. It tastes foul, but your suspicions are confirmed; it was a potion of infusion of unicorn horn, and it has added 1 point to your PSYCHIC rating.

Taking such new possessions with you as you wish, you stagger to your feet.

It’s time to head to the Pied Cow.

You have some scores to settle and some changes to make.

Turn to [82](#).

## 481

The secret agent collapses with a groan, blood pouring from his many wounds. You are on him in an instant, twisting the collar of his silk robe around his neck with your fist.

‘Talk, you overweight poseur!’ you hiss into his face. ‘What is going on with the Prince and the dark elves?’

‘Talk, or I’ll skewer something you really wouldn’t like skewered,’ growls Eddora, holding her dagger pointed at his crotch from inches away.

‘All right! All right! I’ll tell you!’ gasps the luckless sorcerer. ‘The Prince, and Kandron-‘

Suddenly a blinding flash of agony rips through your head. Everything goes black for a moment, and you find yourself lying on your back on the floor, with no idea how you got there. Kneeling across the fat man’s body from you is Eddora. Her hands are clasped over her ears, which are pouring with blood, and her mouth is stretched open in a soundless scream.

A new figure has appeared the room.

It is dressed in a huge robe of black leather that covers its entire body. No face can be seen beneath the hood.

‘I thought I would find you both here,’ it says with unearthly timbre. Your head is pounding with pain, but you think you can hear the unmistakable tones of telepathic reinforcement to the voice. ‘Naturally the human dilettante would not be sufficient to neutralise your threat, but I can, and did.’

‘Sleep tight, assassins. Soon you will get your wish... to find out exactly what the Prince and I want to achieve.’

He gestures one gloved hand from within his huge sleeve, and everything goes back to black.

Turn to [953](#).

## 482

You have learned much in the course of your travels, and as a result of your experiences, your psychic powers have grown to rival the most potent magicians. Options are available to you which are not available to just anyone.

If you have served as a necromancer’s apprentice, turn to [762](#).

If not, turn to [663](#).

## 483

Eddora coughs, but her voice seems to take on a little more strength.

‘You know, now, why I was exiled from the dark elf kingdoms. You know what I was doing in the human lands.

‘I’m sorry I left you back there. I really am. I told you I had to find myself again, alone. That was true. I’m sorry I couldn’t have left more explanation at the time. But I didn’t know then what I

know now.

‘When we first met in Altgarten, we were two of the finest assassins in the city. Not something that would necessarily bring two people together. But I was attracted to you anyway.

‘You see, I saw myself in you. We were both desperately trying to escape our past lives, but we were both still stuck in a rut of doing only what we knew best. It happened to be the wetwork profession. I think you must have seen the same thing in me, though you never gave me any indication that you did. And I didn’t think it mattered at the time.

‘The point was that while we were together, the pasts we were both escaping didn’t matter. I could forget mine – I assume you could as well. We were even able to get away from the assassination business for a while. Eventually the money would have run out, but at the time it didn’t seem to matter.’

‘At the time?’ you whisper. Her every word is like a dagger twisting in your heart.

‘We could have done something else, perhaps, to escape from the present... But that wouldn’t have helped.

‘I felt increasingly uneasy, and eventually I did leave, as you know. I didn’t know why I left, at the time, but I did know that I had to find myself again.

‘What I said on that note was true. I’d been on my own ever since I left the dark elf kingdoms, and I think with you, given how intense our relationship was, and given how much we relied on each other, I was losing my *self*-reliance. I wanted to see the world alone again. Now, I’ve seen it.

‘I travelled because I had always been told the world above was such a rotten place, and the dwellers in the light would try to kill me on sight. True, there were plenty that tried to kill me. But there was more beauty than I could have imagined. I’ve seen the moon, and my first sunrise. Trees... oceans... mountains... all things I could never have dreamed of seeing. You can’t begin to imagine what it meant to me...’

‘No...’ you say, despairing. ‘I can’t.’

‘No,’ she says intensely, pulling her stricken body over to you. Something of her strength seems to have returned. ‘You *really couldn’t*. And that was the problem.

‘You see, while I travelled, I found there were other, more pertinent reasons for leaving. We’d managed to forget our present as assassins, managed to turn our back on the profession even, but our pasts were always going to be there. We might have forgotten them for the moment, but eventually they would have come back to haunt us.

‘You managed to forget your past, Aria; or so it seemed at the time. You managed to forget about your mother and your childhood and think only of me. This was nice, but eventually it became unsettling. I didn’t realise it at the time, but eventually this was why I had to leave.

‘You see, I don’t think you ever did really forget it. You certainly never found anything permanent to replace it with. You could have never seen what I saw in a sunset, or the open sky.

You never found a vision of beauty like that. Deep down, I knew that while you thought you had forgotten your anger, all you ultimately wanted was still revenge for what they did to your mother, and what they did to you. It would have come back to you in the end.

‘And worse than that, I feared you would become the same thing I had been exiled from in my own past, and been glad to leave. I feared that your obsession, your desire for revenge would fester inside you, work on your psychic powers and your fighting skill, turn you into someone whose sole desire was to accumulate power to protect themselves from a world they could never see as anything but hostile.’

‘Like Kandron,’ you murmur, squeezing your eyes shut in pain.

‘Like Kandron, and like all the other black magicians, vampires, warrior chiefs and other power-hungry bastards who blight our world. I began to grow afraid of you, Aria: and that’s no way to be. I had to leave.’

‘But why didn’t you tell me?’

‘I couldn’t! Not at the time. I didn’t have the words, the wisdom, or the understanding. The thing is, I do now, and that’s why I’m telling you this. It’s why I came back.’

Tears spill from your eyes. ‘After all that... and in the end, it doesn’t even matter. That it should turn out like this...’

‘I’m sorry too. I knew when I came back that you would have gone some way along the path I feared you would take; I was just glad there was still some way of reaching you. A shame everything had to turn out this way, but...’ She falls silent, and her eyes closed.

‘But what? Don’t let it end like this!’

‘There’s no option. I’m sorry, Aria. We can meet again in the next world.’

‘There’s not going to *be* any next world!’

‘The Dark Elf sorcerers always said we would go to undeath as favoured servants of the demons in the hells. I never believed them. There has to be something better than that.’

‘There’s not going to be anything at all!’

‘Ah well. You believe what you want to believe.’

‘There is one thing I believe,’ you say, swallowing. ‘After hearing that, and realising where I went wrong, I’m not going out this way. I want to live! I want to set the record straight, with you by my side.’

‘How, exactly?’ says Eddora, regaining some of her old sarcasm. ‘You planning to escape?’

‘Yes! I won’t let it end this way. Not after all this blood and death and horror. Not now I’ve found you again.’

She looks up, her eyes defeated, exhausted. ‘Forget it, Aria. I’ve said what I came back to

Altgarten to say; now I just want to die in peace. I'm drained of blood, and your skull's broken. Escape is impossible.'

If you want to push the idea of escape any further, turn to [587](#).

If you want to just lay down and die, turn to [894](#).

## 486

You reach the top of the stairs and find a doorway. Opening it so slowly anyone would think it was the work of gravity or a mild breeze, you drift out through the door. You find yourself on the top of a flat-roofed factory. From what you can see, still hidden in the doorway, this half of the roof is empty.

Of course, there is the other half, and what lies behind the stairwell...

Cautiously, you draw your weapons and sneak out onto the roof, as quiet as you've ever been in your life. The night seems to have fallen into a hush in sympathy. You become certain that the Phantom is behind the stairwell, and for all his speed, you will be able to take him by surprise and gut him in an instant. You tense your muscles, ready to leap past the stair...

... and you feel a blow in your back.

Eyes wide, you look down. An arrowhead is protruding from your chest. Cold iron and silver... just like the one in your pocket.

You turn your head, feeling a great darkness descending upon you, and see a shadowy figure standing at the crossroads where you found your shiny clue. You always knew the Phantom was a match for you in skill. But tracking him, there was nothing to prevent him doubling back upon himself.

The last thing you think is how good a target you must have made silhouetted against the skyline before your muscles fail and you plummet from the roof. You are not aware of the bone-crushing impact to the ground... nor of anything else, ever.

Your adventure is over.

THE END.

## 487

So this is the end. Your last hope has faded.

Your lover is gone forever, and your mother died telling you you were the village idiot's son. It is, of course, the first that steals the sun from your heart. Once, you were cold; now you were arctic. After the initial flood of pain, pain you cannot imagine surviving, you feel nothing more



after that. Not for anything.

You return to the assassination profession, slaughter hordes of the most difficult targets, and acquire an incredible reputation and a vast fortune. None of it means anything to you, along with your status as a Warrior of Light. Clearly behaving nothing like you should, your powers eventually fade, and you lose all comprehension of the spiritual truths you saw when you were a Babe of the Abyss. You are merely an assassin once again. You have loved and lost... everything.

You fall one night when a coterie of your rivals ambush you one in a dark alley with a hail of crossbow bolts. You don't even feel them bite. You fall to the floor, and you don't even care about dying.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 489

Roll two dice and multiply the number by 10.

If this number is lower than the money you gave Tyler, turn to [88](#). If this number is equal to or higher, turn to [645](#).

## 491

You trudge on through the valley, your pleasure in your surroundings entirely gone. Eventually, you come to a river at the valley bottom, which has carved out this cut in the land through aeons. The road leads to its widest and shallowest point, then almost immediately forks, one branch heading to von Lowenherz's domain, and becoming much more low-tech in the process.

You have to forge the river. It is still waist deep. You contemplate, bitterly, how much easier it would have been on your horse, but consider that there is nothing you can do about it.

Then, you spy an old woman. She is looking at the still waters in dismay.

'Oh my,' she says. 'I don't think I could cross that unaided.'

'Spare a moment to help a poor old woman across the river?'

Your eyes light up. These old women are always immortals in disguise, and they always reward people with fantastic weapons, powers or secrets!

Then again, she might be an *evil* immortal.

If you want to help her, turn to [986](#).

If not, you merely cross the river on your own. The old woman shrugs and starts to undress. You avert your eyes hastily, then set off along the Austrielsburg road. Turn to [614](#).

## 492

Despite your fractured skull, despite the pain, despite the desperation of your position, you are amazed to find three numbers mounted on circular tumblers, rusted and blooded, float into your mind!

‘I have it!’ you breathe to Eddora in amazement. ‘It’s 014!’

Turn to [14](#).

## 493

The demon engulfs you in a wash of fire, you scream in agony... then suddenly you are back in your usual body. Though you are not wounded, you feel about as bad as if you had fought the battle for real. Restore your STAMINA to what it was before the battle, minus 2 points.

Turn to [548](#).

## 495

You set out along the road, greeted by a fine sun rising amongst the lush grasslands. You ride along besides Perrereich’s arable farmland, and see nothing apart from cows and the occasional merchant or farmer who greets you enthusiastically. The idyllic surroundings make you think you might almost succeed in your life, if only you had Eddora back, and you knew who your father was...

Your journey is uneventful, and come nightfall, you settle down to rest.

Turn to [373](#).

## 496

‘No,’ you say. ‘To return after all this time, and expect me to take you back as though nothing has happened, is too much for me. I cannot and will not do it.’

There is a kind of dissociation, as though you and Eddora seem to recede from each other. Suddenly, although she is sitting across the table, a living, breathing and beautiful woman, she ceases to have any meaning for you.

She bows her head, swallowing and grimacing as though choking down something unpleasant. 'And that is your decision. I suppose I could have hoped for nothing else.'

'I think you misunderstand but this is the final word. Goodbye.'

With shocking suddenness she draws her dagger from her belt and slashes deeply across the front of her throat. The light goes out of her eyes and blood fountains from the awful wound. You find yourself on your feet, screaming 'No!' to the silent bar. But within seconds, Eddora is dead.

You are standing, and know not why you are standing. Your throat hurts from your involuntary yell. Eddora's blood forms a slowly cooling, slowly growing pool.

You sit down again, slowly. 'Arrange a wet detail of six men,' you declare to no one in particular. 'Have them clear this up.'

The assassins scurry to obey your orders. Your heart is empty.

In the months and years that follow, the Prince and his Watchmen grow ever stronger in power, and your assassins are picked off relentlessly and in ever-increasing numbers. You do your best to reverse this, but for all your power, you can only ultimately defend yourself; and truly, you are past caring. Perhaps something went out of you on that one night when, on a single word from you, Eddora slew herself and removed the last hope from your life. But the relentless self-examination, which has taken place all your life since your mother was burnt, ceased that night too.

Eventually, as your assassins are whittled down to just yourself and a remaining battle-hardened elite, you realise your life is hopeless. Leaving a note to your best subordinate to take over where you left off, you climb to the top of the highest tower in Altgarten. Then you throw yourself off, and the floor rises up to greet you. The end is less painful than your life.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 498

The Stone Golem grates into a slow bow indicating the entrance to the other room. You walk in.

Morrigan is still reclining on the bed. She's now naked, but you don't let that distract you. In fact, she somehow seems less... fascinating than on your previous visit.

'Well? Did you do it?'

You show her the lock of white hair in answer, and her face splits into an evil, repellent grin. She looks positively... ugly.

'Excellent! You have my eternal thanks. And, of course, here is the information you were promised.'

‘To the east of here there’s an apothecary. You’ll notice there’s a number of potions been packaged for transportation. It’s not obvious what they do, but the green ones will be of especial interest to you. If you smear them on your sword, they’ll poison your opponents and make their blood clot.’

You thank her and hastily take your leave. On your way out, you notice that the red mark on your hand has gone, leaving only a mild itch in its place.

You think of the beautiful, intelligent Kiasyd and the repulsive, lewd Succubus, and for the first time in your long history as an assassin you wonder whether or not you have done the right thing. Still, there’s nothing you can do about it now. Turn to [304](#).

## 499

The Ring-Wraith’s psychic power has been honed for centuries, all the time it spent clinging onto life to serve its beloved master.

Still, it is no match for yours.

With a final psionic blast, you wipe out the ring-wraith’s last reserves of willpower and with a piercing ‘Noooo!’ it is transported to the next cycle of existence. The room is suddenly dark without the blinding light of its ring.

You shake your head to clear it, blink your eyes to recover their dark adaption and are soon ready to be on your way.

There is only one exit to this room, and it leads to [886](#).

## 504

You smile in triumph as the lock clicks open. You may keep the lockpicks if you were using them; you silently ease the door open and sneak inside with all your skill.

Inside the house, away from the bright lights of Lampenstrasse, your eyes struggle to adjust. You are in a sumptuous lounge, hung about with gold and silver ornaments in which you would be most interested if you didn’t command several thousand GP per hit. (You leave these for the thieves, who are much lower paid.) Your eyes flick over rapidly to the only source of light in the room, a fireplace in which glowing coals are slowly dying.

Huddled close to the fire are two enormous mastiff dogs. They look over to you immediately, eyes gleaming. They pull their lips back from their teeth and rise to face you. Your heart sinks. Why couldn’t the damn things have gone to sleep?

If you possess a crust of bread and wish to throw it to the dogs, turn to [474](#). Otherwise, you must go to [699](#) and fight.

## 510

The Rathaus of Altgarten is a huge edifice of intricately carved wood, dwarfing an enormous square where merchants, rigidly patrolled and taxed by the Watchmen, ply their wares. It is here where the officials of the city – the Burgomaster, the Grand Councillor, the Prince – carry out their day to day business.

It goes without saying that the dregs of the docks and slums never reach this area. The Watchmen do not allow them to jeopardise the trade with their smells and rags, or trouble the Prince or the Burgomaster with their petty complaints.

You, however, pretty much resemble any other aristocrat apart from the dark colour of your clothing, and there are not many in these wealthy quarters who would have heard of any assassins by name, no matter how famous. So you are able to pick your way through the innumerable market stalls and make your way to the entrance hall of the Rathaus, where you announce your intention to see the Burgomaster.

Presumably due to your natural authority and your fine clothing, there is no argument and you are ushered into his waiting room. It is somewhat more austere than the rest of the building – the hand-carved wooden seats have rather fewer thicknesses of upholstery, and the tapestries showing the fine textile designs of Altgarten upon the walls seem to stick to martial depictions of the Prince and his armies spearing hell out of his enemies.

You're the only visitor; hunched over a desk at the far end of the room, in front of a pair of huge oaken doors, is a little old man. He's writing busily and does not look up as you approach.

'Excuse me,' you inquire politely – though the whiteness of your knuckles would betray your true feelings to those who noticed them. 'I'd like to see the Grand Councillor some time today.'

'Oh, I'm sorry,' says the little man, looking up at you owlishly. 'The Grand Councillor isn't here during the day. His normal working hours are at night.'

'Really?' you reply.

'Yes, he hasn't got here yet. You can either come back later or wait.'

You stare out of the window, and imagine the Nightshade Phantom combing the city for you. 'I'll wait,' you reply.

You have not sat staring glumly out of the window for long when the clerk calls out, 'Would you like some refreshments brought up to you while you wait?'

'Why yes, that would be very nice,' you say, surprised at such treatment. 'Perhaps some parchment and ink as well?'

'Certainly, sir,' and before long, the familiar black bread, sauerkraut and sausage is brought to you, along with quill, parchment and ink. You munch away at the food (add 4 STAMINA points) write down some fantastic flights of your imagination and almost forget why you are there.

You are reminded, though, when the sun begins to set outside, and you put the parchment and ink away. Before long, another little old man (almost identical to the first) makes his way up to the desk and exchanges a few friendly words with his opposite number, who puts on his coat and leaves. The new little old man sits behind the desk and starts writing away at what seems to be the same task.

After a while you clear your throat.

‘Yes?’

‘I’m here to see the Grand Councillor. I was wondering if he had arrived yet.’

The man turns around and stares at the huge oaken doors. ‘Yes, the Grand Councillor is here.’ He hunches over his writing once again, and resumes.

You cough, rather more forcefully this time. ‘Can you let me know when I can see him?’

He turns around and stares at the door again. ‘I’m sorry, the Councillor is currently busy.’

‘Any idea when he will *cease* to be busy?’ you grate.

‘I’m afraid not.’

You sit and twitch in your chair, fuming. You stare out of the window and watch as the moon makes its way across the sky, casting silvery light across the sharp wooden roofs of the bourgeois quarter.

Eventually you can stand it no longer and rise from your chair. Your hands held as fists by your sides, you stalk up to the desk.

‘I fail to see what the Grand Councillor can be doing which means he is too busy to see someone who has waited half the day and half the night,’ you growl down at the clerk. ‘I also fail to see how you know he’s here or what he’s doing when you haven’t even opened those damn doors!’

‘I am perfectly cognisant of the Grand Councillor’s whereabouts and activities,’ gulps the clerk, looking up at you with some trepidation. ‘He communicates with me by means not known to mortal men.’

‘Magician, is he?’ you snarl. ‘Well, Altgarten gnome, know this: magical powers cut no ice with *Black Aria!*’

‘I am afraid I do not recognise that name, nor has it been given to me as a priority guest,’ swallows the clerk, looking very afraid. ‘If you will just please be seated...’

You grab the clerk by his collar and lift him effortlessly from the floor. You hiss into his face from inches away:

‘Let me into that office or it will be the worse for you!’

‘I don’t have the authority to do that!’ sobs the clerk.

‘Right! I’ve had enough of this!’ and putting the sum total of your whole body weight and your telekinesis behind the throw, you hurl the clerk at the door. He hurtles through the air and smashes into the huge oak doors, which smash like matchwood. The clerk’s broken body collapses, impaled on the shattered remains of the thick wood, and blood begins to pool beneath him. You draw your weapons and stride over the body without a second glance, a fixed snarl locked on your face, teeth bared.

Turn to [468](#).

## 515

‘Fine. Go on fighting the world all your life. I hope you’re happy when, in two or fifty years, you end up in Hell.’

You have little option now but to attack Defender by turning to [35](#), or simply leave by going to [628](#).

## 516

As one, yourself and the Nightshade Phantom strike the cloudy glass of the window, shattering it outward in a thousand points of light. For one nameless moment, you are flying along on your back, staring up at the stars, and the pieces of glass, refracting the white light of the lamps along the street in a million colours like a prism, are floating along with you as fellow travellers. You remember with a flash – this is how it was, after you died for the last time, and before you were born.

Then you realise that you are three stories above the ground and about to crash into a very hard floor. You twist and flail desperately, trying to right yourself. Besides you, the Nightshade Phantom seems in his very element, righting himself gracefully like a crane in flight. He alights delicately on the cobbled street and starts to saunter leisurely away.

*Arrogant bastard*, you think.

Cursing, sweating and thrashing, and probably using your telekinesis more than your fair share, you somehow manage to twist yourself around so you merely fall flat on your face rather than directly on your head. Lose 2 STAMINA points. You push the thought of your laundry bill from your mind, however, and throw yourself bodily to your feet, weapons still in hand.

‘Come get some, Phantom!’ you growl out to the empty street.

Empty because the exact moment it was clear you had not been killed in the fall, the Phantom vanished with superhuman speed, leaving only a rush of air behind him. You swear loudly and inventively at the empty alley, then abruptly remember the horde of Watchmen and indeed the Phantom who might still be out to get you. You light out for the Pied Cow at a dead run.

You get back there scratched and bloodied, covered in mess from the street, and chest heaving as though you were going to have a heart attack; but for one thing, you are still alive; and for another, nobody bats an eyelid at you, so your pride is unharmed.

You must now consider your next move:

Do you pursue the Phantom directly: [773](#)

Do you approach the thieves: [100](#)

Do you sit around and do nothing: [375](#)

## 517

The two of you abandon the Pied Cow post haste, certain that – as seems to so often happen – you will be hunted down there by inimical forces. For reasons best known to herself, Eddora elects not to wear any disguise whatsoever, and so as you walk through the streets you are met by many horrified stares. Considering how much good telling her to hide her black skin and white hair will do, you merely stare down anyone who looks at you with excessive hostility.

By now, day has dawned. Eddora is fairly confident that the other dark elves will be unable to face the sunlight, more than likely never having seen it. She is more accustomed to the glare and can get by with only the occasional squint. Something you *do* notice is that any uniformed law enforcement officers you pass – and there are now many, many of them – studiously ignore the pair of you, even though one is a Dark Elf and one is at least unusually dressed and armed. This, more than anything else, tells you something is wrong.

‘None of these flatfoots will know anything of any plot,’ you whisper out of the side of your mouth, still reluctant to use telepathy on the dark elf. ‘At this rank, they only follow orders. We need to find one of the Prince’s secret agents.’

‘Secret agents. The world above is no better than the world below.’

‘So... your exile.’

‘I was exiled from the Dark Elf lands. Get *over* it.’

You pause in the middle of the street. Miserable peasants, carrying their goods to market bent double, hurry past the two unusual figures with their eyes safely downcast.

‘That’s no answer. I progress no further till you tell me *why*.’

She sighs. ‘All right then, if it will give you peace of mind. Knowing you, I do not think it will.’

‘The dark elf society, ever since it was banished from the surface world, has been ruled by its sorcerers. These sorcerers become patriarchs and matriarchs of so-called noble houses. To ensure the continual rule of themselves and their progeny, society was divided into rigid castes – sorcerers, warriors, artisans and so forth. To leave, or attempt to leave, one’s caste is to face



death or worse.

‘Secondly, each ruling sorcerer wanted the greatest success for their house, and none of them had any scruples in achieving this. However, to keep the dark elf society from destroying itself from within, very rigid protocols for dealing between the houses came into place. Overt aggression is punished by annihilation of *every* member of the aggressor’s family and the destruction of their property. Aggression is supposed to be directed without, against the surface peoples, the humans and the light elves. Of course, it doesn’t work that way.

‘I was born to a warrior caste, was segregated at birth and trained constantly with the serrated knife and short bow. I was far more talented and intelligent than those in my chapter and earned great praise. My life was planned out for me – I would rise to a high field officer position in the dark elf armies, marry another member of the warrior caste within my own noble house and produce more warriors for the cause.

‘But my talent and intellect worked against me. I *knew* there was more to life than this. Why were the sorcerer caste placed above us? Why did we obey their orders without question?

‘I knew better than to confess my misgivings to anyone else, as it was clear that the others neither would share them nor be sympathetic to them. I did diverge from my ordained path early on though, as it was clear I preferred to be alone. Thus I became a scout, then an assassin. I became trusted with the most deadly and dangerous of missions – firstly, walking amongst the surface dwellers to strike against them covertly; and secondly, and worse, attacking the other noble houses.

‘This proved eventually to be my downfall. In my times upon the surface world, I achieved all my mission objectives, but I was able to see much I should not have seen. First of all I learned the Florentine fighting technique, which is even more unusual below than it is above. This in itself set me apart, made me superior. I saw that there were other forms of society above, ones without rigid castes and hierarchies. Ones in which people could be what they chose.

‘Finally, I read books. Training as a warrior and assassin had included reading, but only to understand mission briefings, and eventually to give them. I invaded many hidden libraries in my times as an assassin and scout, and learned to read and speak many languages. Thus did I learn all that I am telling you now.

‘I managed to keep this knowledge with me. Debriefings were traditionally carried out by telepathic sorcerers, anxious to erase any knowledge obtained by the likes of me that might have gone against their status quo. I learned to resist them, to guard my thoughts... aren’t you glad you never tried it, Aria...?

‘But finally I saw too deep and too much. My most prestigious mission yet, the one that would have made me Chief Assassin of my noble house should I have succeeded, was to slay the first born son of a rival house, who was destined to inherit. By then I had come to despise the sorcerers and wish them ill at any opportunity, so this mission, and the promise of advancement, was an absolute blessing for me.

‘I shadowed this young man for weeks. I watched him attend his classes, and argue with his teachers at every opportunity. I watched him read obsessively through the giant sorcerers’ library

of his noble house, searching for an answer I myself did not know. I watched him rail and curse the books when he was alone. I watched him cast spells in desperation, which he hoped would prevent him being railroaded into a life he never chose.

‘It was only when I watched him sleep with the serving girls of the house, and felt a blistering jealousy, that I realised I had fallen in love with him.’

You feel an involuntary and blistering jealousy yourself. ‘When was this?’ you say carefully.

‘This was around twenty years ago. I am ninety-three years of age, Aria: while I suspect this makes me equivalent in maturity to the mid-twenties of a human, I have experienced far more.

‘In any case, I found myself unable to go through with the mission. Instead, I approached my target in secret, and found we shared the same views, dissatisfaction with our society being prominent amongst them. We concealed the failure of my mission as far as possible, but it was clear that eventually we would have to escape the dark elf society altogether.

‘That never came to pass. We were found out, and faced the most dire punishment. In the trial that followed it was stated, time and again, that we had each committed the most awful crimes against the dark elf society anyone could conceive of. The one thing that saved us was that we had not yet conspired with any surface dwellers against the dark elves. For this, my lover was *only* executed. For this, I was *only* forever exiled on pain of death from the lands below. This was considered to be the worse punishment, as they were certain down below that the surface dwellers would soon enough execute me themselves just for being what I am.

‘I survived. And here I am.’

In the time it has taken to tell this story the sun has risen higher in the sky, and it is full morning. You blink at Eddora, not knowing what to think or say or feel.

She shrugs. ‘So now you know. Does it honestly make any difference to you?’

You are silent for a while. Finally you say, ‘I am amazed how... detached... you are about it all. If any of that had happened to me, I would be bitter about it still.’

Her eyes narrow; you sense hostility. ‘Well, Aria, you’ve always been about how your mother was burned as a witch, how you’ve been persecuted all your life. It’s like you want people to acknowledge how deep and complex and noble and suffering you are. It’s pathetic, and worse than that, boring.’

You stare back at her, scowling. She stares back, not giving an inch.

Finally you say, ‘Perhaps we should go looking for that secret agent of the Prince after all.’

‘Yes, I think we had better.’

Turn to [238](#).

## 518

You blink. Suddenly you are a small child again, standing with your mother in the main street of Ratzielburg.

‘Mrs Yeats called me a witch, did she?’ your mother is saying. She is stroking your hair absently as she stares across the common land of the village. Numerous small children are laughing and playing in the sun and new flowers of the spring. Your mother is a young woman again, tall, slender and beautiful.

Her voice goes cold and hard. ‘She’ll pay for that.’

In your childish heart you feel a great sadness for your mother.

You blink again, and suddenly a hundred other images stream past your eyes, each a memory, a vision of beauty or optimism you have not seen thought about in years. For just that one moment, you forget your awful position in the Prince’s dungeon, the terrible injuries you have suffered, and the dire fate that awaits you, as suddenly your entire conception of your life changes.

You blink for a final time. You are back in the Prince’s dungeon.

‘Whoa,’ says Eddora in her normal tones. ‘That was... intense!’

Amazed, you touch your hand to the back of your skull. It’s whole! Eddora raises her forearms up to her face; they are intact and unscarred, and her skin has faded to its normal charcoal black. To your further awe, even the clothes of both of you have miraculously become free of dirt, blood and damage. Eddora’s leather tunic and your aristocratic garb is pristine.

‘You are truly a great sorcerer,’ you say to the Healer, your voice shaking.

‘I can see why the vampires did that to you...’ adds Eddora ironically.

He smiles, lowering his head; he is clearly blind once again. ‘I’m nothing... I’m just a man. Really, you both healed yourselves.’

‘Now remember your own part of the bargain, Aria and Eddora; but remember also this. No-one is ever entirely bad, and no-one is ever entirely beyond salvation.’

After that, there is nothing more to say. You retrieve your weapons from the end of the corridor, and Eddora fires one shot into the Healer’s chest. As he dies he says thank you; Eddora cries a single tear as you watch him bleed.

Restore the STAMINA scores of Eddora and yourself to their *Initial* levels.

Turn to [721](#).

## 523

You stride into the room and hear a suppressed gasp. You narrow your eyes and see a couple huddled in the bed. They look very young. You suspect this probably isn't Copper, and curse.

'What's going on? Who are you?' whispers the girl, terrified.

'What do you want? Answer me!' hisses the boy, the fear in his eyes betraying his bravado.

You wonder why they haven't screamed the house down, then smile in satisfaction. Of course – Mr. Copper probably doesn't know that loverboy's here!

You pull your sword and dagger as theatrically as possible. The girl gasps and begins to weep. The boy looks distinctly green.

'I am Death, come for thee.' you hiss with your most evil of grins. 'But get out of the bed, stand back to back and cooperate, and I'll let you live.'

The look in the boy's eyes wavers between hopeless and desperate. *Test your Luck*. If you succeed, turn to [475](#). If you fail, turn to [362](#).

## 524

You try to keep as still and neutral as possible as Eddora scans the street, expecting a stream of invective if you put her off. However, her eyes rapidly grow dull, and her shoulders sag.

'Damn,' she mutters. 'Can't see a damn thing.'

She seems broken by the disappointment.

'It's okay,' you mutter uneasily. 'We can still seek out the Prince directly. We have a good chance of sneaking into the Prince's house to kill him there.'

She heaves a tremulous sigh. 'You're right. But I can't bear the thought that my failure has led us into the most dangerous course of action...'

'Well, it's happened now, and we'll just have to deal with it. We just have to assassinate the Prince. That's all we have to do...'

'By night, or by day?'

You think about the typical foes you have faced, and the race of the Prince's new allies. 'Day,' you decide immediately.

Turn to [525](#).

## 525

With tremulous hearts, realising uneasily that you are only following this course of action because you have already failed, you make your way to the house of the Prince.

Everyone knows where it is – it is in the quarter of the bluest blood and the brightest royalty. It is a huge and ancient mansion overlaid with the finest and most modern architecture of the age. Only to your eyes, though, are the flying buttresses covering all the windows anything other than decoration. You can see through to the iron-reinforced shutters which are bolted closed behind each one. The Prince's house will be as black as night, and as sealed as an egg. Your hearts quail.

You make your way surreptitiously around the house, keeping to every shadow, but it does not take long to ascertain why there are no external guards, nothing to stop a dark elf and her companion assassin sneaking around it in broad daylight. There is no way in other than the front door – not even a drain or coal hole. Nothing to let even a drop of rain or a ray of sunlight into the huge mansion.

In hushed and fearful tones, you decide the only possible way either of you have of getting in is using disguise. But how to disguise a dark elf and her companion assassin? It seems the only possible disguise is as old women, hunched over beneath cloaks, shawls and hoods. You realise the weakness of this plan from the start, but you have no other option.

At sword point some way from the mansion, you relieve two old women of the necessary garments and disguise yourselves as far as you can. You shuffle bent over to the Prince's door, rap upon it and in whining, cracked tones beg to see the Prince for alms.

It is almost too easy. The doorman smiles unpleasantly and lets you in, leaving you in a cavernous hallway – dark as night, lit only by candles – saying that he will bring the Prince to you immediately. Desperately yourself and Eddora throw off the constrictive clothing and draw your weapons. Not soon enough.

You are confronted by the guards. Hordes of them. Spewing from every doorway and alcove. Each is wearing full armour and wielding a mace; each is hugely muscled and with oddly bulging veins. You both fight desperately and full credit to you, you manage to take down many of them. But there are too many, and they do not seem to care how many of them die – and to your renewed horror, it becomes clear that they mean to take you alive.

Yourself and Eddora, back to back, are eventually clubbed into unconsciousness, and your world goes black.

Turn to [953](#).

## 527

‘Do you have anything that might have belonged to Fiorentino,’ you ask carefully.

Joia pulls a face. ‘Weirdness again. Well, no, not me personally. I’ll have to ask the client, and that will take some time, at least until tomorrow. I’ll have to meet you here then.’

You curse. If you want to wait for this, turn to [613](#). If not, go back to [602](#) and try another tactic.

## 528

The blade bites into your hand. Lose 2 STAMINA points.

With a startled burst of invective, you jerk your hand away and the dagger falls to the floor. It does not remain there long. Your eyes can scarcely credit it as the wings of the dagger’s hilt start whirring and it flies at you, tail – or blade – first!

Resolve this battle:

OBSIDIAN BUTTERFLY  
STAMINA 1

SKILL 9

If you win, turn to [226](#).

## 529

Finishing the invocation, you pause, staring into the dancing candle flames, breathing heavily.

You wait... and wait... and then wait some more. Eventually it becomes apparent that no demon is going to turn up, now or ever. Feeling somewhat foolish, you kick over the candles in annoyance.

You do not have it in your heart to try the invocation again; return to [881](#).

## 530

‘Fair enough,’ grins the monstrosity. ‘I was wondering how my new limbs would try out. Let’s find out, shall we!’

METAL FETISHIST  
STAMINA 19

SKILL 11

Magnus has the supernatural strength of all the undead, those whose muscles are no longer troubled by such things as pain thresholds or straining. His soggy, rotting flesh could not get much more damaged than it already is. To make matters worse, not only do his metal limbs inflict fearsome cuts and hideously heavy blows, but they also are very difficult to harm. If you are using your swords, then when rolling for your Attack Strength, if the total of the two dice comes to an odd number, your blades have struck metal instead of flesh, and you must halve any

damage you inflict that round.

Also, he is dead and has no circulation. He is immune to blood coagulation venom.

If your STAMINA is reduced to 2 or below turn to [707](#).

If you win turn to [92](#).

## 531

You stress and strain, and add your mental might to your muscular, but the door merely creaks as though in pain. All you have succeeded in is to strain your back and arms – deduct 1 STAMINA point, and 1 SKILL point temporarily for the duration of this mission.

You can keep trying by returning to [127](#), or you can return to Joia and give up the entire mission. After slinking through the Pied Cow in embarrassment, turn to [877](#).

## 532

This room is bare stone like any other, but you notice one important difference: There is only one blue jewel, much brighter, in the middle of the ceiling.

Pausing, you stare up at it and eye it carefully. It is not immediately obvious why this room should be different, but you've seen enough to know that it probably implies that some super-weapon is going to reduce you to ashes if you put a foot wrong.

Then again, maybe the lamp designer was out on the lash the night before.

You decide on a compromise, and start walking carefully out into the room. You go to great pains to ensure that you do not walk directly under the lamp, or anywhere near it. You edge carefully around the outer reaches of the room.

Your shadow, cast by the oblique light, looms high against the wall, so black it is like a complete absence of light. Your shadow seems to move in ways not prompted by your actions. Your shadow's alive...

The moment you realise that your shadow is moving independently of yourself you leap about a foot, and rush to put yourself as directly beneath the lamp as possible. It is of no use. Your shadow remains exactly where it is, a man-sized doorway into darkness.

Out of that doorway strides a figure.

Your eyes widen as he strides seemingly out of the blackness of the wall, and the shadow vanishes. He is wearing aristocratic clothes which are yet black, a colour not ostentatious enough for any aristocrat. He wears sword and dagger in the Florentine style, a style known to few not assassins. He wears a hat and cloak. He is of average height and build, but is lithe and athletic.

He has blonde hair in a ponytail and a goatee beard.

He's you.

'Well met, sharer of consciousness,' speaks the apparition, grinning in a particularly wild-eyed and deranged fashion. You wonder if this is the same grin you use to frighten the likes of Joia. You suspect it probably makes you look like an idiot. Compared to the fact that you're being talked to by your mirror image, it's not particularly intimidating.

'Who the hell are you?' you snap.

'I'm your shadow. The dark side of your soul.'

'I see,' you say. 'I have read of such things in the philosophers.'

'Of course you have. I know it too.'

'So what are you doing here.'

'Interesting you should ask that question,' your shadow smiles. He begins to stride up and down like an arrogant pansy. *That's another habit I'm gonna knock on the head pretty damn sharpish,* you think. 'I imagine that Sir Svendas designed this room so that those seeking after his treasure would have to face their own dark sides. The spiritually advanced – those who were actually worthy of the treasure – would have come to terms with their dark sides so would be able to pass unharmed. Foolish tomb raiders, whose thoughts would be chaos, would be destroyed.

'However Sir Svendas didn't consider the idea that someone might be quite disciplined internally and yet live out their dark desires in the course of their lives. Someone like you or I.'

'I just ended up with myself,' you breathe.

'Exactly. I think you know what happens next...'

'Crystal clear,' you acknowledge as you draw your steel.

Your Shadow has exactly the same SKILL, STAMINA and PSYCHIC as yourself and will fight with all the same weapons and special abilities. He will not, however, use LUCK.

If you lose, your shadow dies too. But if you win, your shadow simply shrugs and evaporates back into your real shadow, which now moves normally. For a moment, you pause to consider the philosophical concepts he raised. Then you move on.

There is only one exit to this room. You may follow it to [560](#).

## 536

You twist round, faster than the eye can follow or indeed faster than you knew you could react, and pluck a crossbow bolt from the air that was aimed directly at your face. Your conscious mind had no idea it was there.



You are staggered at the enormity of what you just did, but the only reaction you offer is to frown and yell out:

‘Who fired that?’

None of the thieves dare move. Their eyes are all as wide as saucers. You are also exceedingly gratified to see that no longer are they grinning. The only look they have now is fear.

‘Well?’

You consider using your psychic powers to scan the crowd, but to your amazement a figure steps from the shadows. He holds an empty crossbow. He is terrified. He is a frail youth barely old enough to grow a beard.

‘It was me,’ he whispers. Tears spill from his eyes, squeezed tight in terror. ‘Please forgive me, lord.’

You spin on your heel and turn to the king, hard-faced. ‘Well?’ you sneer. ‘Are you going to discipline your subordinate for shooting out of turn?’

The king looks shocked beyond recognition. He shows little sign that he knows where he is or what he is doing. You determine to shock him back.

‘Well?’ you yell out to the roof of the cavern. ‘I’m *laughing* at your *superior organisation*.’

You would previously have expected the thieves to pepper you into oblivion for this kind of talk, but you gauged the psychological effect of your stunt correctly. You now appear superhuman, and you hold them in the palm of your hand.

And by God are you going to make them pay for *that*.

‘Discipline your subordinate before I do it myself!’ you scream at the king. By now, the boy who fired has collapsed to his knees, hugging himself with one hand and holding the other out to you. He is weeping and wailing wordlessly.

‘All right,’ whispers the king. Somehow it carries. ‘Marshall, make it quick.’

Slowly, reluctantly, and unable to meet anyone’s eyes, a grey-cloaked, elderly man steps from behind the boy. He pulls a long-bladed dagger from his belt. He leans down over the boy, placing a hand upon his back and murmuring words you are unable to hear. Slowly, the boy’s weeping dies down, dwindling to occasional hiccups.

‘Get on with it,’ is all you say.

Marshall looks up to the king, who inclines his head the barest fraction. He reaches down below the boy’s throat and with an obviously practised move, slices his throat open from ear to ear. His blood pours out onto the floor below him, and he expires with a gurgle.

You nod, grimly.

‘Justice is served!’

You spin on your heel and stalk out of the cavern. You do not look back – there is no need. Not only are there no more crossbow bolts, but neither dare any of the thieves approach you to blindfold you on the way back. Thus you are the only man to learn the route to the thieves' hideout and live.

However, you do not reveal it. You are sure the thieves' awe of you will not extend indefinitely.

You will now have to try out one of the other ways of finding the Nightshade Phantom, one you have not already tried:

Trying to backtrack him from the Pied Cow; [773](#).

Setting up a fake contract; [800](#).

Sitting in the inn and waiting; [375](#).

## 539

You send out your probe, and almost immediately you feel that you have contacted a mind of great power. A Master magician's thoughts should be closed to you, but Defender's mind is open nonetheless. You briefly share his consciousness.

Sitting across from you Defender first thought you were his father miraculously grown young again. But soon he realised the truth – that you were his son – and his heart leapt. You have a brief feeling of a search coming to an end before he starts speaking again, and breaks your concentration. Turn to [299](#).

## 540

You try to muster the concentration necessary to mount your psychic probe, but almost immediately realise that in your previous life your focus for this has been your *rage*, and to summon that again would be to lose the calm you have felt today almost uniquely. You realise with sorrow that you will have to find different ways to master your powers if you are ever to know inner peace. Turn to [299](#).

## 543

'I accept your bargain,' you say to Defender.

'Excellent. With all your powers, I have no doubt that you will succeed. The crypt of Sir Svendas is to be found in the Mutti Kursch Cemetery of Altgarten. It has remained undisturbed for many hundreds of years, but it bears a statue of a noble knight.'

Turn to [374](#).

## 544

You find yourself in a new region of the tunnel. There is a door to your north and one to your south. To the east there's a right angle bend; in the west, the tunnel carries on straight.

Will you take the north door (turn to [279](#))

Or the south door ([219](#))

Carry on round the eastern bend ([966](#))

Or go west down the tunnel ([443](#))

## 545

And so, you take up the title of Defender. You become the number one force for good in this world.

Ironic that you started your career as an assassin.

The magic you have learned has altered your viewpoint sufficiently that you now see that those who have harmed others must not be allowed to go on harming anyone else. Thus, you slaughter your way, first, through the assassin population of the city. Many recognise you in horror, but such is your power now that they can do nothing about it. Even the Nightshade Phantom falls before you. You are still unable to wield the enormous swords of your predecessors, but you soon enchant or find Florentine weapons of holy might for you to use.

Defender has long since retired from the position, and spends his final days sitting tiredly in his hut and listening to your war stories. He dies peacefully soon after that, seeming to give up the ghost at last. His last words are 'Fight proud, my son.'

There is no stopping you after that. You take out vampires, warlocks, dark spirits, legion upon legion of evil scum who are ites on humanity. You are a hero to the human population, a hated, feared and reviled figure amongst the Others. But with your tireless energy and awesome powers, a new reign of peace and prosperity spreads across the land. Even corrupt and grasping rulers and politicians are... persuaded... by the new Defender, and the people love you all the more.

The last thing of note is that eventually Eddora returns to the city; but so immersed you are by now in the Defender philosophy that you see her for what she is – an evil murderess who deserves to die. The fact that she's your ex-lover is irrelevant; you confront her nonetheless.

To her credit, she does not grovel or beg for mercy, but fights you as courageously as anyone. It makes no difference – she still dies upon your blade.

You are the greatest hero in the land, the unparalleled scourge of evil. You are loved throughout

society, and people line up and clamour to be your successor. Some are useless peasants, but some again are the best and brightest men and women in the land. Already you are looking to the future, and thinking that there should not be one but many Defenders, whomsoever can make the grade. But as for your previous adventure, it ends here.

THE END

## 546

With a hideous groan, Gladiatrix falls, blood spouting from a severed artery. Regain 2 LUCK points.

‘Give it up, lady,’ you say wearily, collapsing on the curb. ‘We had no real beef anyhow.’

‘Curse you! I’ll not let you rape me while I die!’ and with her dying strength, she holds her sword beneath her stomach as she falls. Her gut is pierced, and she expires.

*What a mess, you think.*

You notice that Gladiatrix is wearing steel sheaths around her forearms. You recall she used to use them to block attacks, making herself utterly lethal. You decide they would be better served... *liberated*... to Black Aria’s cause. Wearing them, you may add 1 to your Attack Strength. And with them beneath your sleeves, no one can tell the difference.

Return to [602](#) and try another tactic... you have lost your stomach for trying to find contacts.

## 547

Unfortunately, the death of the loser pimp is nowhere near enough by far to get you back into the assassination business on its own. Turn to [462](#).

## 548

You come to the realisation that the whole pub is staring at you. You glare back murderously, and they rapidly go about their business.

‘Having another one of your funny turns again?’ sneers Joia.

You advise him as to his genetic origins.

‘How rude,’ smirks the fence. ‘Still, will you be accepting the contract or not?’

Well, indeed? You can only wonder whether your unknowing host won the battle for real, or not. Yet the meaning is clear. The last person who could have been your father was a crusader, and it

seems from your vision that this is the next stage of your search.

Will you take it? Turn to [881](#).

Or is it better not to face Defender? Turn to [877](#).

## 549

Almost before the first blow has been struck the Grey Tiger rips the mask from her face.

‘Aria!’ she shrieks. ‘Stop!’

You stare at her in shock.

‘Eddora?’

Turn to [683](#).

## 550

Suddenly, you are startled by the noise of riders and men-at-arms. A small army seems to be riding towards you. You stare up at them, eyes cold.

‘What do you want?’ you say emptily. Eddora cools in your arms.

A knight steps forward, leaping down off his horse. You notice the sign on his shield; a boar rampant. He kneels before you and bows his head in profound respect. He holds out to you a rolled parchment sealed with the boar emblem.

You seize the parchment and tear it open.

My friend,

I’m afraid I haven’t long left to live. The doctors tell me this wasting disease is incurable, and that I cannot hope to last the night. My people wail and tear their hair, but I don’t mind. This is because I have an heir.

You know of the circumstances that prevented me having children of my own; but I find in you someone who I would have had as my son above all else. Only you reacted with vision and power on that hunting trip. You saved my life, my friend; but even without that I would do what I now do.

My friend, I have named you my heir. All that I have – including my title, lands and fortune – now belong to you. Rule wisely – but I know that you will.

Your father,

Alfred von Lowenherz

For a minute, you just stare at the letter.

Then, you begin to laugh.

You throw back your head and scream your laughter up to the heavens. The men at arms are unsure what this means... you disturb them... but only you know what this truly means.

This is the utter definition of hollow victory.

You become count of one of the most prosperous territories of the Old World. Few, if any, lords can bring to their calling the same depth of spirituality and power of magic that you have from being a Master of the Right-Hand Path, and you use them to the fullest extent, becoming the greatest ruler that the country has ever known. Few, if any, know of your past profession, and it never comes back to haunt you. By the end of your reign, you have the most advanced and prosperous region in the land, and your death is mourned for miles around.

But you are alone. You never look again at another woman, and perhaps your land suffers for the lack of a strong alliance. You order portraits of Eddora to be made and hung throughout the land; you make her face the new emblem. And yet this does not make you happy, and it does not provide an heir. You know that when you die the land will be torn apart by petty nobles, and there is nothing you can do about it. Perhaps you should have nominated an heir like your benefactor; but you never find it in you to take that much interest in another human being.

You die with your heart filled with emptiness.

THE END

## 551

Clearly deciding that he is low on blood, the Prince curses, hurls his spear to the floor and throws himself through the air towards you, his fangs aimed directly for your femoral artery. You are so shocked by this manoeuvre that you cannot defend yourself in time.

What is more unfortunate is that the Prince misses. What is most unfortunate of all is exactly where he *hits*.

His fangs clamp down on a very uncomfortable place.

‘AARGH!’ you scream in unbelievable agony – and a very high voice. ‘I’M NO LONGER A MAN!’

Even the Prince’s eyes wince in sympathy – as he backs hurriedly away, spitting something out into the corner of the corridor.

‘Bastard!’ yells Eddora in fury, getting in a nasty hit on the Prince (reduce his STAMINA by 2 points).

If it's any consolation, the Prince is too disconcerted to attack next round. However, note down on your Adventure Sheet that you have been bitten by a Ventrue vampire – and suffered injuries of such... ahem... severity that you are no longer able to sire children.

Return to [118](#).

## 554

The demon frowns.

'I'm sorry,' it says, grinning, the spaces between its (your!) teeth showing right through to the endless abyss. 'Out in the Outer Circle, the mortal plane was concealed from me, and I had no concept of time.'

You let fly a long series of curses. The demon smiles at you unpleasantly.

'My, you must be terribly disappointed to let loose all that blasphemy. But blasphemy by any name is always music in my ears.'

'Whatever, demon,' you grate. 'Now I'm going to send you back where you belong.'

'That may be so,' says the demon, its voice abruptly cold. 'But not if this error here in the pentagram is what I think it is...'

You feel the fear of death and know that you face it there.

Roll three dice. If the number is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [413](#). If equal to or higher than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [81](#).

## 560

You find yourself in a room which has no exits, suggesting it is the last; but it is not so much this that captures your attention first. Firstly, you notice mounted upon the wall an enormous Templar sword, with a foot-long handle, its blade scabbard five feet long and six inches wide. This can only be the sword for which you search!

Unfortunately – and entirely predictably – below it is a sarcophagus. It appears to have no lid, and you make a weary and well-informed guess as to why this might be.

Your guess was true.

A head suddenly appears peering over the sarcophagus, staring at you with wide eyes. It is the head of an old man, past seventy. He is wearing a chain mail hood, but from below it long white hair escapes to fall around his leathery, wind-beaten face.

He looks quite alive – in fact he looks just as though he was sleeping and was roused from

slumber. However, from all you've seen in the catacombs thus far, you severely doubt it.

'At last,' says the old man. He puts a hand clad in a chain mail gauntlet on the rim of the sarcophagus and heaves himself out. You observe with dismay (but no real surprise) that he is fully armoured in chain mail and bearing a longsword. 'At last one worthy of the sword has made it through this far.

'Know that I am Simeon, Sir Svendas's most trusted lieutenant. He asked that I sleep beneath his sword to give it to he who was worthy enough to make it through all the other tests. You have become that person, by virtue of your courage and good character.' (You mentally question the latter... but not too loudly.)

'I will now give to you the sword, so that you may use it to help the helpless ones, as Sir Svendas did in his day. But I must ask of you one final question before hand.

'Who or what is God?'

You blink, and consider asking the guardian to repeat the question or to ask him what the hell he means, but then again you consider how powerful the guardian is likely to be.

You have three options:

You may simply attack the man. Turn to [133](#).

You may answer his question. To do this, write down your answer and then turn to [562](#).

You may *not* answer his question by standing still and saying nothing. In this case, turn to [638](#).

## 561

You stare off into the sky, brow furrowed. Eddora merely glares at you.

After awhile you blink. 'Ah yes. It was easy enough to locate the character I had in mind. He has a secret library in the clerks' ward. Let's go.'

As you walk through the streets you tell Eddora about the person you're about to meet.

'The secret agent I have located calls himself Dr. Gosseyn Gee. He's very peculiar – into weird magic, odd philosophy and all such things. He tries to keep all his different activities secret from the rest but it's all pretty much common knowledge. The Prince employs him for all sorts of dirty work – murder, kidnapping, gathering blackmail material on his political enemies and so forth. If my vision is correct, he'll be doing some kind of ritual in his secret library right now.'

'Of course, he would be doing some kind of ritual right now, wouldn't he?' Eddora mutters bitterly. 'Probably the sort of thing designed to summon up a vengeful spirit to kill any assassins who might come sniffing around to get him!'

You hide a smile. 'I don't honestly think he's that effective a sorcerer. But it will be interesting to find out.'



‘What joy.’

The two of you make your way to the clerks’ ward. This proves to be something of a misnomer, as it is chiefly an area of high-class brothels and other places of ill repute. In the basement of one of the brothels, you understand that Dr. Gee has a ‘secret’ cellar. Guided by your vision, yourself and Eddora find the entrance, a coal hole. Studiously ignored by the courtesans plying their wares, you open up the grill and lower yourselves down.

You find yourselves in quite a reasonably stocked library, though some of the bookshelves and books have been damaged by damp. There is no sign of the sorcerer.

‘My vision showed a bare room with the four walls painted four different colours,’ you whisper to the dark elf.

‘There’s only one door,’ she whispers back.

The conclusion is obvious.

As you let yourself into the room – precisely as you had envisioned it – Dr. Gee is standing with his back to you. He is sonorously declaring words in some unknown language whilst gesturing with a ritual knife.

You clear your throat. He wheels round.

‘Typical sorcery of the bourgeois classes,’ you sneer. ‘Trading on an accountants’ attention to detail, the ability to memorise a horde of meaningless words and looking good in a silk robe.’

‘Define “looking good”,’ Eddora gibes, as though on cue.

Dr. Gee is indeed wearing a silk robe. His chief physical attributes are a corpulent stomach and an enormous beard. Neither of which go well with the attire.

He takes it all quite well, though.

‘Black Aria and Eddora,’ he booms. ‘A pleasure to meet you both. The two finest assassins in the city. I am honoured.’

‘Well, it must be pretty obvious why we’re here,’ you snarl back.

‘The Prince is stepping up his campaign to wipe out the assassins, and inviting dark elves into the city to do it,’ Eddora hisses. ‘We want to know why.’

‘That comes as no surprise,’ rumbles Dr. Gee. ‘It will probably come as no surprise that you will have to take the information from me by force.’

‘You should know that I am a witch’s son,’

‘Of course, and I have long been interested in the full extent of your powers. Let’s find out, shall we?’

## STAMINA 12

Dr. Gee will fight telepathically, meaning that he uses his PSYCHIC score rather than his SKILL score to calculate his Attack Strength. He will attack you exclusively using mental bolt techniques. Eddora can also roll for Attack Strength; if hers is higher than Gee's, she will be able to land a blow; if it is lower, he will have been able to block her attacks telekinetically. You have the choice of whether to attack him physically or psychically, if you can.

When he has been reduced to 4 STAMINA points or below, turn to [481](#).

## 562

Hesitantly, you speak out your answer. Your voice breaks – the first time you can remember it doing that since you paralysed your last schoolyard bully from the neck down – but you cough the answer back, and speak it again in a clear, cold voice.

Slowly, the knight nods.

‘A good answer,’ he speaks. ‘You are indeed worthy to bear the sword. The bane of evil is yours.’

Amazed that you got the right answer, you start forward, eyes widening; but the knight does not appear to have noticed you. Turning away, he lies back again in the sarcophagus, and his eyes close... forever.

Hardly daring to look in case he leaps forward and grabs you by the throat, you lean over the sarcophagus and lift the sword from its mounting. It is incredibly heavy – your back strains under the weight, and you realise grimly that you could never hope to wield it. Panting, you manhandle it to waist level, the only height at which you can reasonably carry it, gripped by the middle.

The blade feels oddly uncomfortable to the touch, despite the weight, but all you think of are the practicalities of carrying it through the city. Fumbling, you take off your cloak and wrap it around the blade. It feels even heavier, if anything, and more awkward; but you soldier on.

You manhandle the sword back through the catacombs, but this time, nothing moves against you, or moves at all. The blue lights are growing dim as that which they served so long goes away... supposedly, to the rightful owner. You walk out of the door of the crypt and stagger past the weed-smoking bourgeois children; they scarcely notice you in their hadive haze. Behind you, the sun is setting in the west, as you drag the sword all the way back to Checkpoint 847 and Defender's hideaway.

Turn to [57](#).

## 563

You recognise one another.

‘Morrigan,’ you acknowledge. You do not go for your weapons. You suspect they will be worse than useless.

‘Assassin,’ she says with an evil smile. ‘I take it, then, that you are that assassin that has been rumoured to have been hired by the other kingpins to take out my new employer.’

‘That is correct,’ you say. ‘And you are the one who will give me the information I need to get to him.’

‘Think you so?’ she sneers.

If your PSYCHIC score is 13 or above, turn immediately to [478](#).

If it is 12 or below, turn instead to [359](#).

## 569

‘Mmm... hmm... mmm... hmm... mmm.’ says Fiorentino, staring into space, chin in hand, face deep in thought. Suddenly he snaps round in his chair and flicks his eyes to you.

‘I believe what you say is true. I was indeed with your mother nine months before you were born and I am sure she had no other lovers in that time. It seems that I am, in fact, your father.’

There is a silence in the room.

‘So... er,’ says Fiorentino. ‘What do you want from me?’

You are a little taken aback. What is your answer?

‘Money.’ [686](#).

‘A personal zombie servant.’ [104](#).

‘REVENGE.’ [627](#).

Or if you make no answer, turn to [379](#).

## 571

You find yourself in an armoury. The walls are covered in racks of swords, knives, halberds, bows and the like. Presumably these are the arms for Fiorentino’s armies of conquest... you assume. Assuming, of course, he can create zombies smart enough to wield them.

Well, you know what happens when you ass-u-me.

You wander through the armoury, inspecting the weapons with a practised eye. None of the rank and file seem any better than the sword and dagger you're currently using, but on a table are some weapons that look markedly different to the rest. You look them over. There is an ornate-looking dagger, an enormous sword of some strange black metal with a leaf-shaped blade, and what seems to be an extremely small mace.

Would you be interested in a closer look?

The ornate dagger (turn to [836](#))

The black sword (turn to [249](#))

The small mace (turn to [477](#))

Or if you simply want to return to the corridor, go to [91](#).

## 572

'Really,' hisses the creature, with new and considerable menace. 'Whoever you are, you're obviously not aware that Fiorentino never employs the living.'

'I think you had better leave.'

If you wish to obey the monstrosity, turn to [443](#) to return to the corridor. If you would rather prefer to draw steel, turn to [646](#).

## 576

You look over at Eddora. 'By this point, we have absolutely nothing to lose. I think we should allow him to try.'

Eddora shrugs weakly. 'I feel like I'm exchanging one sorcerer for another one, but I'll go with your judgement, Aria. We're gonna die anyway.'

'We are all born to die, Aria and Eddora,' croaks the Healer, 'but this time, I think I can at least increase your chances. This shall not hurt.'

The Healer raises his filthy, mutilated head, and his empty eye sockets gaze at you. You have the odd sensation that he is staring into your soul, despite his blindness. Eddora stiffens beside you; you have the feeling that she is thinking the same thing.

Turn to [518](#).

## 577

The Kiasyd pulls an antique dagger from her shirt and slashes at you. She is tougher than a human, but not particularly skilled.

KIASYD  
STAMINA 19

SKILL 8

If at any time she rolls a double whilst computing her *Attack Strength*, she activates her power of *Riddle Fantastique*. Convert that double into a double-figured digit. (a 2 and a 2 becomes 22, for instance.) Turn immediately to that paragraph.

If she reduces your stamina to 2 or below, turn immediately to [311](#). If you kill her, turn to [32](#).

## 584

You head out onto the streets and begin the search for someone you know and trust. It is a rainy night, and very few people are about. You pull your hood down low over your head, but the rain still trickles down your neck anyway.

Roll one die. If 1-2, go to [386](#). If 3-4, go to [978](#). If 5-6, go to [844](#).

## 585

As you pull the Black Sword from its sheath your mother's look of vicious confidence fades... to be replaced by absolute terror.

'No!' she shrieks. 'God, No! Anything but that! Aria! I didn't mean any of it! I was just fooling!'

'Like THAT'S believable!' you roar. It seems that Black Sword knows exactly what to do. Moving practically of its own volition, it flies through the air (dragging your hand behind it) and buries itself in your mother's insubstantial midriff, two inches beneath her navel.

She lets out an agonised scream, then starts to wail and moan in agony as her wraith form starts to compress down into the blade. The Black Sword is drinking her soul.

'No... Aria... Make it stop... I loved you when you were born...' she whimpers.

'You get what you deserve!' you bellow at the accursed wraith.

With one final whimper, she is drawn into the blade and her aura of cold disappears forever – to be replaced by a thundering wave of exultation and power that floods through you. You hold the blade in one hand and scream your triumph up to the heavens.

Eddora is plucking nervously at your sleeve.

‘Eh, Aria?’ she says diffidently. ‘Good work killing your mother and all, but I really think you should get rid of that sword. I know legends about it you wouldn’t like...’

You don’t have ears for her. You hold the sword high aloft.

‘I AM BLACK ARIA, THE GREATEST WARRIOR-WIZARD WHO EVER LIVED! I SLEW KANDRON, THE PRINCE AND THE WRAITH OF MY MOTHER IN ONE NIGHT! I-urgh.’

The Black Sword has twisted in your grip, and fallen upon you. It has pierced down from your collarbone through every one of your major organs.

As Eddora lets out a wail of despair your sight is already dimming, as the Black Sword drinks your soul. Now you know what true agony means, and why your mother feared it so much. It makes the fracturing of your skull seem as nothing.

As you are sucked into a hellish pocket universe, your power condemned to serve the sword’s agenda forever, you hear one last tiny voice, the last you’ll ever hear. The voice of the blade itself.

‘Farewell, brother! I was far more evil than you!’

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 587

Your head sags, bringing the inevitable pain. Should you give up, as Eddora advises?

No! You’re not going to just lay down and die!

‘I’m not giving up that easily!’ you whisper. You struggle to your knees, unable to stop various parts of your body from twitching spastically. ‘Are you going to help me, Eddora, or not?’

Her eyes open again. You see what you thought never to see again – a smile.

‘All right, Aria, I’ll help you,’ she says. ‘Better to die with you than without you... what’s the plan?’

‘Can you get to the lock? Can it be picked?’

She drags herself over to the lock on the cage bars. You hear her sigh. ‘It’s a combination lock. Sealed.’

‘Is there a guard?’

She hauls herself up against the bars, pushing her face against them, trying to see out. ‘One. At the end of the corridor. At least he still looks human...’

‘What then?’

‘We could pretend to be sick,’ says Eddora with some irony.

‘I could use my powers... if they’re still working... try to guess the combination of the lock...’

Do you wish to pretend to be sick? Turn to [360](#).

Or do you wish to try to guess the combination of the lock? Turn to [606](#).

## 590

Joia’s face widens into a grin... a rictus grin. One composed half of terror, half of relief.

‘Yes?’ he says. ‘Oh yes, yes! That’s marvellous! I’m sure before long the 20,000 will be yours!’

Jerking to his feet like a marionette manipulated by a madman, he turns and runs headlong from the room. Exiting, he trips and falls flat on his face, but somehow manages to keep running.

Despite yourself, you smile unpleasantly at the pathetic fixer, shake your head, drink your wine and glance at the ceiling for a moment...

... when you glance back, the Nightshade Phantom is sitting opposite you.

It takes all the power and control you have learned in your long years as a psionist to not show your shock. Instead you merely raise one eyebrow, and lower your glass to the table. You do not let go, however. You fear your hand might shake.

‘Nightshade Phantom,’ you murmur cordially. ‘How nice to make your acquaintance after all these years.’

‘Black Aria,’ rumbles the Phantom deep in his cavernous chest. ‘The pleasure is all mine.’

The Phantom is huge, bigger than any man you’ve seen from Perrereich or its surrounding lands. His skin is also shades darker than anyone here, and you recall the rumours never stated, exactly, where he was from. He is massively muscled, and his head is shaven entirely. Like you, he dresses in the black garb of an aristocrat, but on his back and beneath his cloak is a bastard sword which, unlike anyone else could, he wields one-handed. You know for a fact that he wields also a longbow, though it is not in evidence today. Evidently this is a social call.

You can only wonder how he managed to appear before you like that. Perhaps his psychically-enhanced speed has now advanced to the point where he can move faster than sight. Perhaps he has learned the trick some vampires are said to have, of clouding the minds of those who might see him. Perhaps the answer is all or none of the above. You only know the Phantom is unlikely to answer the question.

‘To what do I owe this pleasure?’ you say, but cannot resist the sarcasm from creeping into your voice. You congratulate yourself for your bravery under dire threat.

‘As if it wasn’t obvious, Aria,’ booms the deep bass voice of the Phantom. ‘I have heard that a contract has been put out on me, and that you are the assassin that has accepted it.’

You smile, maniacally as ever. ‘Now you should know that we assassins never talk about our contracts with one another.’

‘Which means yes,’ growls the Phantom. ‘Know, that this means little to me. It is a contest long anticipated.’

‘But *know* that this contract is not all it seems. *Know* that there are hidden agendas here of which you, Aria, for all your powers as a witch, know nothing.’

‘Yeah, right,’ you sneer. ‘Like you wouldn’t tell me anything that wouldn’t stop me from taking you out.’

‘Why should I?’ counters the Phantom equably. ‘I am of course perfectly confident of winning this contest.’

‘You think so, huh?’ you hiss, bravado replacing fear. ‘Why don’t we settle this right now, man to man, if you’re so sure?’

‘Heh,’ grins the Phantom. He stands up to leave, perfectly slowly. ‘As though assassins have ever solved anything the honourable way. Well, Aria, I have told you that this contract is not all it seems, and that is all that I wanted to say. Goodbye, Aria.’

He stands up and leaves, nodding to the barman on the way out. You contemplate catcalling after him, but think better of it, and merely shrug and stare into your wine.

Turn to [135](#).

## 591

Returning to the library, you find that the body of the Kiasyd has turned into a pile of ashes, though her clothes remain. You feel a pang of sorrow at the loss of the strange and beautiful creature; somehow, she reminded you of Eddora...

You shake your head to clear it. You see no point in remaining here; return to the tunnel by turning to [479](#).

## 594

You find yourself in an apothecary. The walls are festooned with innumerable bottles, vessels and tubes of glass beneath which candles burn and receptacles smoke. Odd-coloured liquids flow from one end of the room to the other through the bewildering tangle. Sealed bottles of chemicals are shelved behind it all, labelled in atrocious writing if they’re labelled at all.



After you've goggled at the Heath Robinson contraptions for long enough, you realise there's nothing here you can use... it'd be more likely to blow up on you than do any good. But wait... what's that on the table?

What a stroke of luck! Someone has been thoughtful enough to package some of the chemicals into Altgarten hip flasks for easy transportation. The flat flasks of copper are sheathed in leather, and can be clipped to the belt or placed in the pocket. There are sixteen of them, arranged in a neat 4 X 4 square.

You investigate them briefly and find there are four sets of four colours. However, they are not labelled. There is only one way to tell what they do, and that's the time honoured tradition of tasting them.

If you wish to do this, turn to a reference you haven't tried already:

Red ([450](#))

Yellow ([261](#))

Blue ([896](#))

Green ([842](#))

Or if you think the whole idea is too dodgy for words, return to the corridor at [893](#).

## 597

You pull with all your might, and add the power of your mind to your strength, and slowly the door begins to move with a colossal groan and squealing of ancient, rusty hinges. You let out a protracted yell of effort as you heave the door open with all your physical and mental force. Finally, there's a gap big enough to squeeze through.

You collapse for a while, exhausted, but eventually rouse yourself and push through the crack.

You descend a darkened flight of stone stairs, lit only by a shaft of sunlight above. You go down at least two stories, and realise uneasily that this level is far, far below anything the gravediggers might reach. This is a tomb designed to be difficult to reach.

At the bottom you find yourself in a small, square room. Blue jewels mounted in the walls have flared into dim light at your approach, making you feel only more uneasy. Are these intended for visitors, or was Svendas not expecting to rest easy in his grave?

Still you must press on. There are two exits from this square chamber – straight on and left.

Straight on ([839](#)) or left ([428](#))

## 598

Defender is a Master of the Right-handed Path. But you have learnt much from your experiences, and your focus for your psychic powers is your endless rage against humanity. You break down his psychic block with unstoppable force, and you are inside.

When he first saw you, Defender thought it was his grandfather magically grown young again standing before him. Since he buried the old man with his own hands, though, he was forced to conclude that you must instead be his son. The thought brought back with it a surge of guilt. Whatever he is saying to you now, you get the overwhelming impression that Defender lives with tremendous shame for his more promiscuous and immoral days.

However this all only makes you angrier. Turn to [927](#).

## 600

You catch your breath – but it seems everyone is still sound asleep. Regain 1 LUCK point. You tiptoe over the cooling bodies of the dogs and head for the stairs. The stairs lead up to a balcony enclosing the lower floor; there is room enough beneath the stairs and balcony for a narrow, right-angled corridor. You glower at a closed door in this area just beneath the stairs. You suspect that that is where the servants are living – ideally placed to hear any miscreants creeping up the stairs.

Fortunately for you, the staircase is plushly carpeted; but still roll one die and add six to the result as you ascend. If this is equal to or lower than your SKILL score, all is quiet; go to [5](#). If this is greater than your SKILL score, a stair creaks; put your head in your hands and go to [42](#).

## 601

Her eyes narrow.

‘*Really,*’ she says. ‘So *that’s* why you’re wearing that sword. And that dagger. And those fine clothes. You must take me for a fool.’

‘Even if you weren’t, anyone here on legitimate business would have known that all the work here is done by the undead.’

‘How fortunate that it was just about time for lunch.’

You curse. Turn to [577](#).

## 602

The next weeks and nights seem to pass as though in a dream. The scene at the Copper household is repeated many times, till they all become a blur. One kill after another, it makes no difference.

You murder your way back into the hierarchy of assassination, and before long the jobs are coming thick and fast. You have the luxury to pick and choose, and only pick the best – the most challenging, the most well paid. Once again, your name is one to fear.

This continues for weeks, but one night your meeting with Joia is slightly different. By this time, you have carried out many kills, but had many outgoings as well; bribes, poisons, weapons and the like. You have made a profit of 3452 GP.

‘Have I got a hit for *you*,’ says Joia breezily as he eases into his seat.

‘Tell me,’ you whisper as he settles himself.

‘Get this. The target is a *necromancer*. Seems a necromancer needs another necromancer’s body to make a certain type of thing. Mad, huh?’

You accept the comment at face value, but suddenly the Pied Cow swims out of focus.

You are transported to another body in another time. You see your mother, young and beautiful again, a smile on her lips as she reclines in a light summer frock. You lie with her beside a crystal clear lake on a summer’s day. You lean over and kiss her...

Suddenly the tavern swims back into being. ‘You okay?’ Joia says with very fake concern. You gasp, and sway in your seat.

‘Yeah... fine... you know,’ you mutter, mind on other things.

‘Just having one of your funny turns again, huh? Well, let me know if you’re interested.’

Just for once you forget to rebuke Joia for his attitude. Your vision was brief, but your meaning was clear. You *know*: this necromancer is the man mentioned in your mother’s diary.

Do you accept the contract (turn to [759](#)) or not (turn to [955](#)). You are aware that accepting is the only way to get Joia to release any further information. Even telepathy does not work on the freak.

## 603

Smiling unpleasantly, you draw your sword in a swift, fluid movement that would put the samurai of Hachiman to shame and sink the steel in his throat. He gurgles, eyes filling over with horror, and then those eyes go blank forever.

You wipe the blood from your sword and stroll out nonchalantly, sure that now you have at last

got to the count, you will be well able to make your escape. Unfortunately, the six guards who were dismissed march straight back into the room again as soon as you leave. Realising what will happen, you break into a desperate run; but it is no use. Yells of horror come from the room behind, and you are immediately pursued by six enraged juggernauts hell-bent on revenge for the loss of their beloved count. The fanatically loyal guards at the end of the corridor realise immediately what has occurred; they cut the legs out from under you.

Count von Lowenherz earned the love and sympathy of his people all the more for his horrific injury. By the time the guards are finished with you, there is not enough mincemeat left for a dog's dinner. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 604

Already aged years older than you should be, you strike your last blow with a gasp of exertion. The strange woman cries out and collapses. 'Why didn't you help me?' are her last words.

As she dies, you feel a rush of vitality. You are exceedingly relieved to see the skin on your hands tighten and return to its natural age (restore all points lost in the battle). You can only wonder about the strange plane of origin of the lost being.

You return to the Pied Cow, get your 850 GP from Joia, and gain the requisite 6 STAMINA points and lose the requisite 20 GP for bed and board.

Turn to [366](#).

## 606

You stare at the combination lock on the cell door, a huge, rusted, sealed and impregnable device, and try to reawaken your psychic powers for one last effort.

The pain this creates is phenomenal, but you do your best to struggle on. Something seems to be tearing itself up at the back of your skull, but you try to concentrate.

Roll four dice. If the total is less than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [492](#). If not, you fail to get anywhere, the agony in your head rising to a new unbelievable height.

You may always try to guess the combination of the lock anyway. To do this, turn to the paragraph you think it might be. If you are wrong, you are of course bound to return here.

Turn to [177](#).

## 611

You crash enthusiastically through the woods like a juggernaut, but do not get chance to mess up your fine clothes too much, for within yards you burst into a sheltered copse and behold a strange site.

Crouched on the ground with her legs wide open is a rather ugly young woman, dressed only in a brief white tunic; behind her stands a rather fat and equally unblest-by-looks businessman. Going into a whinnying frenzy before them, rearing up and thrashing out with its front legs, is a pure white horse with a horn emerging from its forehead.

Your jaw drops.

The mythical UNICORN!

‘Oh thank god!’ cries the businessman. ‘An armed aristocrat! He’ll save us!’

*If only you knew my true profession, you think.*

‘Oh, please, don’t let it get me!’ cries the girl, her tunic hiked up *most* obscenely.

It does not seem that you will be allowed any choice in the matter, for the Unicorn turns toward you immediately you appear. Its eyes dilate with rage, and it paws the ground menacingly before rushing to the attack. You must fight.

UNICORN

SKILL 11

STAMINA 14

If the Unicorn rolls a double 6, it has blinded you magically with its horn and you must deduct 3 from your SKILL until the Unicorn dies.

If you win, turn to [344](#).

## 612

With a shock you realise what the flick of the eyes means. His colleague is about to stab you in the back!

You twist, trying to dodge and kick out, but you are not fast enough. You feel a sickening, freezing pain as cold steel slides into your left kidney. Lose 4 STAMINA points.

The distraction gives the thief you are holding chance to break free and run for it, followed closely by his friend, both no doubt aware that a kidney wound isn’t going to stop you for long. It does, however, hurt like the blazes. You press your hand against the wound, gasping in agony. The thieves are long since gone.

Your options are now more limited than they would be else... You may only try these avenues of exploration if you haven’t tried them before.

If you have been double-crossed by the heir to a biscuit fortune, you have the option of turning to [649](#).

If neither is the case, your only remaining option is to turn to [7](#).

## 613

You sit around in the Pied Cow, offering to tell the fortunes of the other assassins and the occasional rebel-rebel merchants' children, but your boredom remains unparalleled. Still, gain 6 STAMINA points for the enforced rest.

Finally, in the evening of the next day, Joia comes in. 'Finally,' you grate as he comes over to your cubicle.

'Don't say I didn't warn you,' he mutters. 'Here,'

He reaches into his wallet and pulls out a hideous, half-decayed humanoid arm, hurling it onto the table before you. Even the most hardened assassins look over in shock.

'Ere! Get that out of here before it puts off my customers!'

'Half your customers have these things for breakfast!' you sneer back. 'What is the meaning of this?' you hiss at Joia.

'I got this from the rival necromancer that's paying for the job,' he sneers. 'Turns out it's a corpse personally animated by Fiorentino himself. It's the best I can get. Take it or leave it.'

You glare at everyone.

If you want to try this, turn to [376](#). If not, go back to [602](#) and attempt another strategy.

## 614

At long last, you pass a sign saying that you are leaving the Perrereich sector. Gain 1 LUCK point for making it this far to your destination.

You are almost immediately accosted by a guard sitting in a hut by the road, who aggressively demands to know your business. Considering it would be unwise to offer that you're going to kill the count, you reply instead that you're here to visit an aristocrat whose name you make up on the spot. He seems to accept it though, and lets you pass.

You make your way along dirt roads through arable farmland. You cannot help but be struck by how much poorer this nation is than your own. The land is lush enough, but the peasants live in mud huts, poorly clothed and under nourished. Even the aristocrats – who seem to be feudal, military lords rather than landed bourgeoisie as in Perrereich – live in dwellings no better than motte and bailey castles. You can only wonder whether or not this poverty is due to the

continued hostility with Perrereich bleeding the land dry, or whether it points to something more fundamental.

You head for the count's castle – signposted all the way – and rest that night in a tavern. You pay only 10 GP for room and (very basic) board – restore 5 STAMINA points. You keep yourself to yourself. Occasionally you hear the peasants muttering about Perrereich aristocrat scum, but the calm application of your thousand yard stare and the casual drop of your hand to your dagger hilt soon puts a stop to it.

That morning, you set out on your journey once again, and arrive at the count's castle by noon. It is the only building you have seen made out of stone in this nation, and is certainly very imposing. Your own Prince lives merely in an ordinary mansion. Then again, his city has walls, and an overwhelmingly superior military force...

You must now consider how to get to the count.

You could ask for an audience with him through the normal channels. Turn to [451](#).

Or you could try to break into the castle. Turn to [644](#).

## 615

You return to the assassin's life, and you gain some measure of satisfaction from it (and 2934 GP) but you cannot shake the feeling that events are coming to a head. Your life seems rushing to some conclusion of which you are not fully aware.

Part of it is clear. You have already exhausted two out of the three possibilities for your father, and only one remains. You are afraid of finding this person even though you know it is your unavoidable destiny. And you are no closer to Eddora now than you were at the start – and every time you think of her and your time together, your face twists with pain as you behold an endless sorrow.

You have not made any attempt to find her, and in truth you would not know where to begin. As a member of a race which has been hated and persecuted by the elves, master trackers of Titan, since time immemorial, Eddora is incredibly good at disappearing. If only your more passive powers worked on command; but they don't, and more to the point you need a trigger. You could use a personal effect of Eddora's, but possibly because she was aware of your abilities, she did not leave you with any.

You grow quietly desperate, and thus you jump at the chance to relieve it when Joia breezes up to you in the bar one night.

'Okay, I know you don't usually work for these kind of wages but I think this is the kind of thing you'll be interested in,' he haemorrhages without any preamble.

'Take a seat,' you mutter sarcastically some time after he has done so.

'The prostitutes of the town have got together and offered me a 1000 GP contract. Now I know

this is a bit low for you,' he says hurriedly as you get up in disgust. 'The point is that the person they want killed has black skin and white hair.'

Black skin and white hair! A dark elf! *Eddora!*

You slam back down into your chair, eyes wide.

'I thought that'd get your attention,' smirks the fencing bastard. 'Basically, this girl appeared on the prostitution scene a while back and started soliciting for men. She got lots of offers due to her looks, but the men that went with her were all found dead, incredibly aged. If anyone tried to approach her, prostitute or pimp, she would kill them and then flee. The girls want rid of her before she ruins their business.'

'How about it? Standard cut.'

You frown. It doesn't sound like Eddora – why would she sink so low? But then again, there are very few Dark Elves in the neutral human lands.

If you want to investigate, turn to [632](#).

If you are not interested, turn to [366](#).

## 616

You throw wide the door of the wizard's emporium, and hear a sound as of copper bells clanging. You spare only a glance for the wonders that line the walls – your interest is only on the one who has materialised, seemingly instantaneously, behind the counter.

He's quite a young man, barely out of adolescence. He's wearing a robe embroidered with blue stars.

If you have a burn scar in the shape of a blue star on the back of your neck, rue the day you ever gazed upon this wizard and turn immediately to [445](#).

If not, you are free to turn to [388](#).

## 618

Unfortunately, you find yourself in the ideal position for one of Gladiatrix's cruelest techniques. She hurls herself to a crouch in front of you, and brings her gladius around in a vicious underarm chop.

You scream in agony as you feel it slice into the back of your ankle. Your tendons have been severed.

Later on, you may have them repaired by a dark cleric (deduct 1500 GP!) but you will forever



after walk with a limp. Reduce your SKILL by 1 point... permanently.

For the remainder of the fight, thanks to your hampered movement, you may not *Escape*. Return to [844](#)... Morituri, te salutant!

## 623

You stand still, as though paralysed, staring at the blood in the bright sunlight. Before long, the flow slows to a trickle, and stops altogether. The count shudders, ceases to breathe, and dies.

Soon after a veritable horde of armed men crashes into the clearing, led by the injured bearer. They look at the tableau – yourself standing over the body of the boar, the count dead – and see all they need to know.

They carry the body back to the castle and send it to be prepared for lying in state. You are numb as you follow them back, but when you return to the castle, you notice something disturbing.

None of the citizens will speak to you, or even acknowledge your presence. Even when challenged they will look down, mutter and try to avoid you.

This disturbs you not a little, and you realise you ultimately have no option but to return to Altgarten. You are given a horse and five provisions – the only time they do notice you is when they want to see the back of you – and you are able to return. Back at the Pied Cow, you pay for bed and board (deduct 20 GP and restore 6 STAMINA points.) Before long you are approached by Joia, and questioned about the mission. If you wish to tell him the truth, you may do so, or you may lie and say you killed the count. There is plenty of his blood all over you to act as proof. Either way, if you choose you may gain 8500 GP, or you may pass.

Life goes on.

Turn to [615](#).

## 624

The next night, you ghost through the prostitutes' districts once again. You see Baggy Anne and all her vile brood, dressed in almost indecently short tunics, but even those few who are young and attractive give you no pleasure to look upon.

You wish you could use your powers to make the search quicker, but naturally, no trigger has been provided, as all who have got close to the dark-skinned whore have died.

*Test your Luck.* If successful, turn to [368](#). If not, turn to [991](#).

## 625

The wizard collapses with a gasp behind the counter, his defences crushed. Grinning unpleasantly, you make a beckoning motion with your hand. The wizard floats back up into view, eyes bulging with horror – his body held in the iron grip of your telekinesis.

‘I shall now take the location of Defender from your still-living brain,’ you gloat.

‘Never!’ he shrieks. ‘I am an Adeptus Minor! My mind is too strong for any human to break!’

‘Think you so?’ you sneer. You transfix him with a freezing glance, and send a blistering rod of psychic force into his brain – he can only gurgle. You race past pathetic adolescent masturbatory fantasies to the memory you desire. A ruined hut, a magic lesson... Defender is ensconced in Checkpoint [847](#).

You look around, but see nothing you can use without severe personal danger. As an afterthought, you burn out every synapse in the wizard’s brain, and drop him to the floor, before stalking out of the shop and towards your destiny.

## 627

Fiorentino’s eyes go wide in alarm. ‘My dear boy,’ he says, stammering, ‘the only way you have of achieving that is to kill me.’

If this is exactly what you wish to do, go to [68](#).

If it is not, go back to [569](#) and choose something else.

## 628

‘Good riddance,’ mutters the old crusader as you storm from his hut.

You go back and inform Joia at the top of your voice that you wouldn’t dirty your blades with that old imbecile’s blood, and he grins unpleasantly and withdraws the contract. You drink heavily and stalk the prostitutes’ districts, glowering, but going with none of them.

Only later on do you realise that Defender’s voice when you left showed not the sneering contempt of the rest of the conversation, but a towering sorrow and loss.

You never hear word of him in Altgarten again.

Turn to [877](#).

## 630

The two look at each other with eyes of mute horror, and burst into a babbling frenzy.

‘All right, all right! Just don’t tell our fathers about this.

‘We were seen entering and leaving the Pied Cow several times, and our fathers demanded we explain why. We told him we’d been speaking with an assassin and they were appalled. They were friends with the Grand Councillor, and he said he’d been working on a plot to have the assassins wipe each other out, and that we would have nothing to fear from Black Aria in future. So we only got punished slightly – our allowances were stopped, we were forbidden to go out, and of course, we were forced to hinder the assassin as much as possible.’

‘Right,’ you mutter, a muscle in your jaw twitching with anger. You turn on your heel and stalk from the room.

‘So you’re going to leave us alone?’ comes a frantic whisper from behind you.

‘Oh, sorry,’ you hiss back, spinning abruptly on your heel. ‘I forgot I was supposed to be sneaking out of this house.’

As you climb out of the window your mind is seething. So the Grand Councillor is behind a plot to have the assassins wipe each other out? In that case, it’s time to pay that worthy a visit.

Turn to [766](#).

## 632

That night, you head for the prostitutes’ haunts, the worst places in Altgarten at the worst times. They live amongst the slums and shanty towns, selling their bodies lying amongst their own filth. You glide through these dens of iniquities, holding a pomade to your mouth like any slumming aristocrat. But no aristocrat walks as you do, making no sound, your feet barely touching the ground.

You make sure nobody sees you, but even so, a few low-level thieves manage to manage it, cutpurses and the like. Still, none dare attack you now, for your name has become a dark legend. You cast your mind back to when you first came back to the city, and how footpads dared to rush you in a group back then. Nobody would dare attack you now – you are, with the exception of the mighty Nightshade Phantom himself, the most feared person in the city. And yet your victory is hollow, and you are no closer to achieving your heart’s desire.

*Test your Luck.* If successful, turn to [368](#). If not, turn to [991](#).

## 633

You insert the lockpicks into the lock and start moving them about, trying to figure out what they're doing to its internal workings. You curse – this isn't half as easy as those thieves always make it look. You've always relied on your psychic powers, and don't really know how to do this.

For this purposes of this paragraph only, deduct 2 points from your SKILL.

Roll one die and add 6 to the result. If this is equal to or lower than your (adjusted) SKILL score, go to [504](#). If this is greater than your (adjusted) SKILL score, go to [944](#).

## 634

You draw your weapons and advance threateningly on the creature. She spies you immediately, and gives out a pathetic wail of distress.

'Not again!' she cries. 'Why do you keep attacking me?'

'The prostitutes of this city don't like themselves or their clientele killed,' you hiss, your voice like your sword being drawn from its scabbard, 'and they've hired me to put you out of business permanently!'

'But I never wanted to hurt them!' she wails. 'All I want is to return to my own world! Is this too much to ask?'

She rushes you, flailing her arms and screaming.

SHADOW ELF  
STAMINA 8

SKILL 7

Her fighting skills and fortitude are no better than any unfit prostitute, but all she needs is the merest touch to drain your life to the tune of 1 SKILL, 1 LUCK, 1 PSYCHIC and 2 STAMINA per hit!

If you lose, you are aged ninety years in the space of a few seconds, and your adventure ends here. If you win, turn to [604](#).

## 635

The Wraith has been kept alive for all these centuries by loyalty to its master, loyalty that has kept it gripping this mortal world and loyalty that has strengthened its psychic powers to those of a powerful magician.

But your powers are still superior.

One final wave of telepathic energy that blisters the air between you is enough to quash the last shreds of its raw anger and anguish, and with a final wail it is transported to the next cycle of existence. You blink as it collapses out of existence in our mortal world.

You shake your head to clear it, turn from side to side to remove the cricks in your neck and are soon ready to be on your way.

The single exit to this room leads to [532](#).

## 636

You feel like crying out with desperation.

‘You,’ you whisper. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘I followed you,’ he says, quite matter-of-factly. ‘I see you found out what I wanted you to find out.’

‘You knew all along,’ you murmur.

‘True. My sorcery told me.’

‘And yet you left it to me to kill the Grand Councillor.’

‘Had to know. Know if you were a worthy opponent.’

‘By hunting down the Grand Councillor, you’ve proven you could have done the same to me. Congratulations, Aria. I guess this means you’ve won.’ He gives a long, slow, mocking bow.

‘So we both get to go home after this?’ you inquire with some desperation.

‘Absolutely not. All this means is that you’ve bought yourself a fair fight.’

You are barely able to bite back a wail of anguish. ‘But if you knew what he wanted to achieve, why do you want to fight?’ you cry. ‘That’s exactly what he wanted – to see one of us killed.’

‘That may be so,’ replies the Nightshade Phantom, shrugging, ‘but I also want to know something you presumably do too. Which one of us is the deadliest in the end.’

‘What are you waiting for? Let’s go!’

NIGHTSHADE PHANTOM  
STAMINA 23

SKILL 13

PSYCHIC 13

The Nightshade Phantom is a formidable adversary. His sorcerous powers have boosted his strength and speed to superhuman levels. However, this is by no means the extent of his abilities.

If at any time he rolls a double for his Attack Strength, he will not make a normal attack. Instead, he will roll three dice and compare the total with his PSYCHIC score. If it is equal to or higher

than his PSYCHIC score, then you have nothing to fear; he cannot attack you that round, and if your attack strength is higher than his own, then you have wounded him in the normal way.

If, however, the total of those three dice is lower than his PSYCHIC score, then he will launch a psychic attack. If the original double was two odd numbers, then he will hurl a piece of debris at you. It is too fast and heavy to deflect with your own psychic powers; you must yourself then roll three dice. If the total of these is lower than your SKILL score, you have dodged the debris. If not, it has struck you for 4 STAMINA points of damage. You may not attack this round as you are using all your energy dodging.

If the original double was two even numbers, then he will launch a telepathic bolt; you must then roll three dice. If the total of these is lower than your PSYCHIC score, you have deflected the bolt. If not, it has shocked your mind for 4 STAMINA points of damage.

If you manage to win despite all that, turn to [480](#).

## 638

You wait, staring at the knight, not speaking. He simply stares back at you. Time drags, and eventually passes the point when anyone not a congenital moron would have answered, if they were going to.

‘So,’ says the knight. ‘You’re one of *those*. Well, it goes without saying that I cannot surrender the sword to you. Neither can I allow you to leave. You might describe the traps to someone even more unworthy.’

The knight draws his longsword, and advances on you in the classic stance of a fencer. You must fight.

REVENANT  
STAMINA 13

SKILL 10

The knight was clearly once a fine swordsman, but he is showing his age. However, he is true to his word; you may not *Escape*. He is (worryingly) immune to telepathy. When you have inflicted three wounds on him, turn to [315](#).

## 641

The monster gurgles and dies. You immediately rush over to your horse, but can do nothing for it save to put it out of its misery. Meanwhile, the flesh on its killer seems to bubble and re-form; the hair moults, and the body somehow rearranges itself, until it becomes a naked, blonde young woman, her face twisted in pain, her body marked with hideous wounds. Still, you have seen such bizarre monsters of late that you have become jaded.

Kicking and cursing her silent body, you settle down to sleep once again.

Turn to [491](#).

## 644

You sit down on a grassy knoll facing the castle and scowl at it in a black abstraction. You cannot help but feel that castles are made precisely for the purpose of keeping out the likes of you. There are not even any windows – only arrow slits.

After racking your brains for most of the afternoon, you can come up with only one plan – and it stinks. You will swim across the moat in the dead of night, then climb the castle walls to get over the battlements. You will then have to use your initiative to gain entry. The number of things that could go wrong here doesn't bear thinking about.

If you think this plan is doomed to failure and want to gain entry through normal means, turn to [451](#).

If you want to go ahead with it, [797](#).

## 645

'Sure I know,' smiles Tyler. 'Go to the manhole on the corner of Sonnenstrasse and Frühstückstrasse.'

*That was easy*, you think. You find the manhole and climb down a long ladder to the bottom.

Turn to [952](#).

## 646

'Humans...' sneers the hideous monstrosity. 'Tracherous as ever... Good. My creatures always need vim and vigour.'

Eichlan, master bodycrafter of the Tzimisce, has a wide range of tentacles and appendages equipped with weaponry such as claws, strikers and spines. Its mass and volume are huge, and its organs are by no means in their original places.

EICHLAN

SKILL 14

STAMINA 27

Any time Eichlan gets a double for its *Attack Strength*, a blast of flame issues from one of its unidentifiable orifices and burns you severely. Lose 3 STAMINA points. You must also deal with his standard attack for that round!

Eichlan's tentacles are very long and very swift, and very able to catch hold of you; you may not *Escape*.

If you win, turn to [71](#). If your STAMINA ever falls to 2 or below, turn to [96](#).

## 647

Hesitating at last, you put up your weapons. ‘You don’t know what it costs me to do this, lady,’ you snarl at the creature.

She looks at you steadily. ‘I think I do... more than you know,’ she says.

You have nothing to say.

‘What’s inside love that could go so wrong,’ she murmurs, and turns away from you.

‘What indeed,’ you mutter.

‘Please... no offence. But I want to be alone,’ she mutters. You stare at her hunched, white-shirted back.

Having nothing further to say, you leave. ‘I should stay away from Morrigan from now on,’ she calls after you. ‘She has great power over males.’

‘And... I hope you find Eddora.’

The red mark on the back of your hand burns with alternate hot and cold.

Turn to [479](#).

## 648

‘Flee like the dog you are, graverobber!’ yells the Ring-Wraith, hurling a parting blast after you as you dash through the exit. Fortunately for you, though, it does not appear to wish to pursue you, no doubt assuming you will hightail it out of the necro-complex.

If this is what you want to do, in fact considering that this whole sword lark is too dangerous to countenance, you may return to the Pied Cow and resign the commission. Turn to [877](#).

If not, you pause once again in the room containing the Skeletons. Their shattered bones lie upon the floor, but fortunately for you do not appear to have resurrected themselves. Not wishing to encounter the Ring-Wraith again, your only option then is to take the other door and go to [664](#).

## 649

Thinking back on your encounter with the rebellious upper-class children, you wonder if there is not more to this than meets the eye. You know of no particular reason why they should have



double-crossed you like they did, even out of sheer viciousness. You feel certain they were more than scared enough of you to do whatever you said; therefore something must have made them *more* scared. What makes upper-class youths more scared than the (alleged) deadliest assassin in Altgarten?

*Daddy.*

Thus it is that you find yourself sneaking into the house of the heir to the biscuit fortune in the middle of the night. They seem to have recently doubled the guard upon their house and its security measures – however, against you, all their money must seem as nothing. You flit into the child’s bedroom like a shadow.

You glide towards the bundled shape under the bedclothes in the darkened room, quietly draw your sword, and prod the bundle with the sharp end, only to have hove into view... two shocked male faces.

‘Oh ho!’ you declare quietly. ‘My two friends from some time ago, the ones who were going to pretend to assassinate one another. Obviously assassination wasn’t quite what you really intended!’

The two look at each other, eyes wide, then back at you in speechless horror.

‘Oh, don’t worry, I’m not prejudiced,’ you whisper, pulling out your dagger too and pointing one weapon at each boy. ‘I’m just concerned about my survival. Answer my questions, and I may let you survive, too. I may not even tip Daddy off about your love that dare not speak its name.

‘I assume you *knew* that if you broke our *gentlemens’ agreement*, I would be sneaking into your house late at night looking for answers – precisely like I am currently doing. So, why’d you do it? What could be worse than having *me* seeking *revenge*, eh? Because make no mistake – that’s what we’re talking about.

*‘Speak.’*

*Test your Luck.* If you are successful, turn to [930](#). If you are not, turn to [106](#).

## 653

You duly pay the serving-girl, and she takes you by the arm and gracefully leads you to a room on the fourth floor. She pushes the door open slightly and gestures for you to go in.

Inside, it’s lit by candles, and hung by black drapes. The room is dominated by an enormous four poster bed with black silk sheets, and reclining on it is a beautiful brunette. She’s voluptuous with heavy features and is dressed only in tattered leather undergarments.

If you have or have ever had a red kiss mark on your hand, turn immediately to [563](#).

Otherwise, the woman smiles lewdly at you. ‘Well hello,’ she says. ‘You’re a pretty boy.’ She starts undoing her upper garment.

‘Save it, lady,’ you reply. ‘I want to know the location of Lasombra, otherwise it will be the worse for you.’

‘I see,’ she says coldly, upper garment falling away unheeded. ‘I take it, then, that you are the assassin whom the other kingpins have sent to slay him.’

If your PSYCHIC score is 13 or above, turn immediately to [478](#).

If it is 12 or below, turn instead to [359](#).

## 663

You have learnt much from your experiences, enough that you are now as powerful as the most powerful wizards. You’ve seen enough to know that there are depths to the human mind that most never imagine, and certainly never use.

By listening down into yourself, you are sure, you can come up with a method for finding Defender, and all thanks to your remarkable mind.

You seek out a sublieutenant of the prince’s army, and bribe him into giving you one of his army maps (deduct 250 GP) of the town. You take out a diamond ring from your fanatically-guarded package of your mother’s belongings, and tie to it one of her long blonde hairs. You dangle the ring over the map, feeling a sense of great portent.

Roll three dice. If the number is equal to or lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [863](#).

If it is not...

Nothing whatsoever happens. You move the ring on its pendant gingerly around the map, but there is no reaction anywhere. You dare not blame the artefacts of your revered and beloved mother – you only feel a crushing sense of inadequacy for your own weakling powers. Return to [881](#), and ignore the enhanced power options.

## 664

You walk in the room – with bare stone walls, blue glowing jewels, and so on and so forth – and are immediately hit by such a stink that your eyes water. You gag. It is the hideous, sickly-sweet stench of rotting meat.

The room is an absolute tip, utterly desecrated and ruined. Piles of broken and destroyed items are all around – chairs, tapestries, weapons. The only things that *seem* to be intact are bizarre hybrids of furniture – a bed made of two bedsteads fixed together, a chair with about five different legs, a sword with three blades, and so on.

Lounging back against a pile of rubbish is a hideous travesty of a figure. On spying you its one organic, dried up eye opens wide and it leaps to its... feet.

One rotting flesh, one rusted metal.

‘Ah, greetings!’ it issues in rasping, metallic tones from its throat. You stare at it in wide-eyed incredulity, unable to believe that such a creature can be standing, let alone speaking. Half of it appears to be a hideously decayed, animated human being. But you can handle that. You have seen many ghosts and zombies in your time.

What is new is the way its left arm has been replaced with a grotesque lobster claw of rusted steel, which thrashes at the air. Its right leg is a gantry made of sword blades and shards of daggers, which the monster yet flexes continually at the ‘knee’ as though in joy to be alive. Half the flesh of its skull has been flensed away, and an orb of melted, whorled and alloyed gold and silver has been rammed with cruel force into the empty eye socket. As though intelligent itself, the precious metal eye seems to turn and study you.

Ribs stick through the creature’s rotted sides, some of bone and some of steel. Breath hisses through its lungs to make speech, reeking with the foulness of all things dead. The lungs are part alveolae and part chain mail. The creature – apparently once male – wears only a ragged loincloth, but for what it conceals, you are *profoundly* grateful.

‘Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Magnus, master of metal-flesh unification, and these are rooms I have taken for myself under the graveyard.’

You may reply:

‘I’ve a blade with your name on it.’ Turn to [530](#).

‘Hello.’ Turn to [837](#).

## 666

Over the weeks and months that follow, Fiorentino teaches you what being a necromancer is all about. However, his first act is to tell you what lies behind each of the doors of his tunnel complex and how to avoid all of the many lethal traps that lie behind the doors, set to slay any more inept assassins that come wanting a piece of him. (He also shows you the pantry, where you may eat at any time – restore your STAMINA to its *Initial* level.) He tells you of the other inhabitants he allows to live here and who help with his research – Salome of the Kiasyd, Eichlan of the Tzimisce and Morrigan of the Succubi. You politely introduce yourself to those you haven’t already met or killed, and they respond in kind.

But after that it’s to work, and hard work it is. You are kept busy from dawn till dusk. Mainly you help Fiorentino in the preparation of corpses for animation, and do much dirty, drudge or dangerous work that obviously he doesn’t want to sully his hands with. However, he explains carefully what he’s doing, and you learn much about the nature of life and death, the animating principle of flesh and how it can be restored, and the decomposition and decay of corpses with particular reference to their brain tissue. (You learn, for instance, that Elite Zombies are made by injecting precisely the right amount of formaldehyde into the brain – which is extremely difficult and explains their rarity.)

Some of the time, in spare moments, Fiorentino teaches you more directly in the ways of magic – for such is required for the real work of animating the dead. You learn techniques of meditation, abstract characteristics of astrology, strange cards that foretell the future. You find it extremely frustrating, as initially there is little return, and it is many weeks before you are able to animate even a small cube of dead flesh. You learn nothing that will be directly useful to you in combat (or possibly, anywhere else) but the extensive mental training does raise your PSYCHIC score by 2 points.

One day Fiorentino turns to you and speaks.

‘My son, you have been doing very well; you’re a real credit. You’re making excellent progress with your magic, and soon you will be an Adept.’

‘I thank you for your kind words,’ you reply, pleased at the rare praise.

‘I must go on a journey. I seek to go and bargain with a fellow necromancer, to swap spells and techniques. We may not get on so well, so I may not return; but I would consider this outcome unlikely, however.

‘It would be unwise for us both to go though, so I am entrusting the care of my tunnels to you in my absence.’

‘I can handle it,’ you say.

‘Excellent. I have every confidence in you. Well then, my favourite son, goodbye. I shall return and continue your training as soon as I am able.’

With that, Fiorentino leaves.

Without chores to do or corpses to help animate, you become bored extremely rapidly. You try talking to the other (surviving) tunnel inhabitants, but find that Salome is mainly interested in her books, Eichlan in his war ghouls, Morrigan in sex – which you ignore as sleeping with a succubus tends to be rather more fatal than you prefer – and the Theatre of Pain in torture – which you ignore as it doesn’t float your boat.

You try to pass the time by looking desultorily through the many books. You now know how to bypass the wards on the lower-level and mundane books, but higher ones would still burn your fingers and drive you insane. However, you don’t much feel like reading any of them; it’s too much like work.

One does interest you, however. It’s called *Resurrection Dreams*, and details how people, even those long-dead (which is usually a barrier to necromancy) can be summoned back to the earthly plane as wraiths.

Do you want to know more?

To read further, turn to [965](#).

To put the book down, turn to [827](#).

You draw your weapons with a low hiss. The Kiasyd’s eyes go wide with shock.

‘What are you doing?’ she gasps.

‘I’m going to kill you,’ you answer. ‘Your life is worth a lot to me.’ You advance on her.

She backs up, brow clouding. ‘I know you,’ she murmurs. You feel an itch at the back of your mind... like delving fingers. ‘I know you... Black Aria... *assassin*. It was Morrigan that put you up to this, wasn’t it?’

You are discomfited by encountering another psionicist, but you don’t let it stop you advancing on her. ‘Draw steel or I’ll cut you down in cold blood.’ you whisper.

‘I ask you, please, to reconsider. You are working for an evil, evil woman. That... was why I left her. I can’t believe she would do this to me, after all we had together...’

If you wish to spare her, turn to [647](#).

If you feel relentless, you see a single tear fall from her eye before the pair of you clash. Turn to [577](#).

## 668

Shoulder to shoulder, yourself and Eddora crash through the rude door of the hut. You burst forward into absolute pitch darkness as a spring slams the door shut immediately afterwards. You stop immediately, disorientated, unable to see a thing in the sudden gloom.

Eddora, however, is in her element. She rushed forward into the middle of the room and screams at three figures slumped against the wall whom you can only barely make out. ‘Rise, underworld cretins! It is the exile Eddora, come to send your souls to your infernal masters!’

‘Nice entrance,’ you mutter as you hurry by her side, drawing your weapons, wishing for your eyes to adjust.

The three figures scramble to their feet, rising quite rapidly despite that they were obviously asleep. All that you can see at first is the intense green of their eyes. As one, they hurl their black cloaks to the floor behind them and drop their hands to their serrated knives. You can just make out that the centre figure is female, but Eddora stiffens in recognition.

‘Eddora,’ growls the other dark elf woman. ‘We meet again.’

‘Nadria...’ smiles Eddora unpleasantly. ‘You’ve come up in the world since last we met.’

‘You’ll live to regret stealing the assassins’ favour from me, Eddora...’

‘I think not. There was always one clear difference between us – talent!’

Nadria screams out a curse in the dark elf tongue and the two women throw themselves at each other in fatal fury.

‘I don’t even want to know,’ you mutter as the other two dark elves, lacking other orders, hurl

themselves at you. You must fight. Deduct 1 point from your Attack Strength for this battle only due to the dark elves' penchant for the pitch black.

DARK ELF CHAPTER LEADER  
STAMINA 11

SKILL 10

DARK ELF POINT GUARD  
STAMINA 8

SKILL 9

DARK ELF SIDE ARM  
STAMINA 9

SKILL 8

Eddora will fight the chapter leader exclusively; you must fight the point guard and the side arm using multiple rules. If you defeat your opponents you may help Eddora against her opponent; if Eddora is reduced below 4 STAMINA she will retreat and leave you to fight all remaining opponents.

If the Chapter Leader is reduced below 4 STAMINA, regardless of the outcome of the rest of the battle, turn immediately to [101](#).

## 670

'My son!' the count gasps, tears standing in his eyes. He rises painfully from his chair, and staggers towards you like a man made stupid by drink. He hugs you crushingly, almost falling into your arms. You feel uncomfortable at this display.

If you wish to read his mind to determine the likelihood of his being your father, roll one die and add 6 to the result. If it is equal to or lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [453](#). If not, or you do not wish to, you do not succeed in reading his mind at this time. Go to [346](#).

## 671

You finally come to the realisation that the your usual contacts are unlikely to know the location of Defender. They are the kind of people whom he usually *kills*, and thus they would be inclined to avoid him.

Therefore, it seems that you must find some people who are Defender's allies and contacts as Anne, Tyler and Adora are yours. As an assassin, your associates are likely to be madams, gangsters and thieves. But with whom would a crusader, a great knight with all the powers of a white magician, associate?

There are few noble knights in Altgarten – the new bourgeoisie class has priced out most of those – but there are others who might associate with a holy crusader. A white cleric would have the same religious viewpoints and agendas, and a magician following the right-handed path would be interested in exploring the same sorts of powers.

Will you try a cleric of the light ([365](#)) or a right-handed wizard ([706](#))?

## 675

Sure of your own abilities, you take yourself to a deserted warehouse, draw the pentagram, arrange the candles and speak the words, which now come to you naturally. You feel your awesome powers flow through you, and feel on top of the world.

Roll three dice and compare it to your PSYCHIC score. If the dice roll is lower, turn to [157](#). If it is not, turn to [529](#).

## 676

At the back of the factory is a flight of stairs, which leads to an office just off it. It's barely decorated, and the only furniture is a desk, one chair and a cupboard.

How the manager didn't hear the commotion is beyond you, as he is seated right behind his desk writing. A huge bruiser is standing behind him, arms folded.

The manager, a tall, arrogant looking man with a dark complexion which is somehow pale beneath, looks up.

'How the hell did you get here?' he snaps. 'Get out at once.'

'Not before you tell me Lasombra's location,' you order, and draw your weapons.

'Like that, is it?' he growls, and the two of them move out from behind the desk and come at you, hands ready to maim and maul.

Resolve this battle with multiple rules. The bodyguard is stronger and tougher than normal, the manager even more so!

GHOUL BODYGUARD                      SKILL 11              STAMINA 13

NEONATE LASOMBRA                      SKILL 12              STAMINA 16

If at any time the Neonate Lasombra rolls a double, he gestures and a cloud of inky blackness appears around your head. You automatically miss that round, but you may still defend yourself. The Shroud of Night lasts one round.

If you win, turn to [882](#).

## 680

The subterfuge begins as you had planned. One teenager turns over to Joia the Fixer 3500 GP which you have given him (deduct it) for a down payment on the Nightshade Phantom's time (he always manages to collect half before, half after – the benefit of status). The target – the teenager's friend, heir to a biscuit fortune. The agreed story (after revisions by yourself to make it even halfway plausible) is that one is acting on behalf of his father to send a stern message to the *other's* father. Of course they are both really acting on behalf of *you*.

The target has agreed to wait at home in his bedroom as though asleep, though you seriously doubt he will be able to. You know that above all else the Nightshade Phantom acts with immediacy – you thus leave the tavern even before the two have finished doing the deal, hoping you will be safe while the Phantom attends to paying business. You make your way to the target's house without incident.

He has bribed a servant to let you in, and so before long you find yourself sneaking into his bedroom like a ghost. It is very dark, but you can just make out the curve of a body in the bedclothes. You smirk – if the teenager isn't even woken by you sneaking into his room, he certainly isn't going to be woken by the Phantom.

*First mistake.*

You wonder how he can sleep at all. You drift silently over to the closet and conceal yourself within. In the dark, you can still just barely see out of the closet slats. Your eyes stare out the night for what seems like hours, but you know can only be minutes.

Indeed it *is* only minutes later when the Nightshade Phantom arrives. One minute he is not in the room – the next he is, and the door and window never open. You can barely choke back a gasp of horror at the enormity of the powers of your foe, but you manage it. He drifts over to the bed, and stances still for a moment, staring down at the slumbering body of the teenager. You tense, ready to leap out and plunge your sword into his back. He pulls out his enormous bastard sword, and raises it high over the body...

NOW, WHEN HIS CONCENTRATION IS TOTAL!

Suddenly he stops and lets out a startled curse. You are already half out of the cupboard, sword in hand by this point! He reaches down and jerks the blanket off the 'body'. You both let out a simultaneous foul curse at what you see. This is no target, but a bunch of cushions! And the little bastard had promised you he would be physically present to deceive the Phantom's powers! And you did not use your own powers to check this!

*Last mistake.*

Even while this is happening, the Phantom is growling 'Aria!' and he is changing the direction of his stroke, swinging the sword horizontally at your neck with shocking speed. It is all you can do to try and duck.

Roll two dice and compare the total with your SKILL. If it is lower, turn to [949](#). If it is not, turn to [322](#).



## 682

If you have slain a STONE GOLEM, turn immediately to [884](#).

If you have a red kiss mark on your hand and a lock of white hair, turn immediately to [498](#).

If you have a red kiss mark on your hand, but *no* lock of white hair, immediately turn instead to [735](#).

If your hand itches (but has no red mark) turn to [460](#).

Otherwise, you find yourself in a bare room. It is empty except for a single decoration.

On a plinth in the centre stands a stone statue of a man, a big, bald six-footer with muscles on his muscles. He wears an odd mode of dress; a short tunic leaving his torso bare, and high-greaved boots.

You look around curiously, but are slightly alarmed when the statue starts to move with a grating groan. It ponderously turns its head to face you, and its mouth opens and closes, but no sound issues forth. It gets down slowly from its pedestal; its foot hits the floor with an almighty clash.

You have encountered STONE GOLEMS before, and are preparing to leave, when a brassy woman's voice rings out:

'Hey, there! Who's activated my stone golem?'

You can still leave by going to [304](#). Otherwise it seems prudent to respond.

'Black Aria, the assassin.' Go to [776](#).

'King Adora, the thief.' Go to [435](#)

'Bob. Tunnel maintenance.' Go to [176](#).

'Fezzy the Stoat. Pimp.' Go to [951](#).

'Andreas Blake, necromancer.' Go to [400](#).

## 683

Around a table in the middle of the Pied Cow there is an island of silence. The kind of island created by people studiously trying to ignore the area. To you, the motivation is transparent. You can only wonder whether it is to them... or to your companion.

On the other side of the round tabletop is Eddora, outcast of the dark elf society. Your only love. She has discarded her disguise of grey cloth wrappings, and resumed the black leather tunic, hand-tooled with flesh-crawling abstract designs, of her people. Lush white hair tumbles to her

shoulders, hiding much of her face. Her intense green eyes can hardly be seen, as she glowers at the table with a sullen, petulant, angry expression that is all too familiar. Her delicate fingers grip a goblet of wine. Her skin is the light-draining black of charcoal. In a tavern full of human assassins, she stands out. And no one pays her the slightest attention.

The sight of her is like a dagger through your heart. Her beauty makes you feel utterly alone. You look down and notice your hands gripping the table so hard they are entirely white. You withdraw them as slowly and calmly as possible and fold them upon your lap.

‘So you’re the Master of Assassins now, Aria,’ she says finally. Her eyes still don’t meet yours.

‘I am.’ Silence. ‘All assassins in here owe allegiance only to me.’ More silence. ‘All that you see in here, is mine alone.’

Nothing.

‘How wonderful for you,’ she sneers eventually.

You growl with frustration and anger, leaning forward, barely able to restrain yourself from flying over the table at her. ‘What?’

‘How wonderful for you. I always knew you’d go far.’

‘Is that why you abandoned me?’ you hiss through clenched teeth.

She looks up from the table at you for the first time. You think you see tears standing in her eyes, but she brushes her forearm across her face angrily.

‘Believe me, I have no more desire to tell you that now than when I left!’ she hisses.

‘Oh really?’ you growl, unable to prevent yourself leaning forward over the table at her, hands clenching the sides. ‘And what’s to stop me tearing the information from your mind?’

‘Did you ever do so in the past?’ she says, looking up at you neutrally.

You stare down in rage at her intense green eyes in her fine-boned face. You can’t stop your gaze tracking over her limbs, so slender and delicate yet belying such speed and power.

You blink, forgetting what you were supposed to be doing. You were meant to be launching your telepathic probe, but looking at Eddora again, it just feels... wrong.

You give up.

‘Fine,’ you mutter. ‘So why are you here in Altgarten in any case?’

She sighs. She reaches for her glass, drains it in one draught, then leans back and stares away from you.

‘I am here for one reason and one reason only,’ she says slowly. ‘My disguise was a necessity, as I did not know how I would find you when I returned. You might have been a lone assassin again, you might have become a dark witch, or worse. Finding you the Master of Assassins was

not what I might have hoped for, but it was a lot better than many things I feared. It was necessary to... distract... you long enough to confront and surprise you. How was I to know you wouldn't be sufficiently embittered to want to kill me on sight?

Silence. The question is obvious, but you pointedly ignore it.

'I'm listening,' you say coldly.

'Well, I think I'm lucky to have made it this far, knowing what I do about you. Knowing you well as I do, I also think it's better to be direct as possible.

'One question, Aria. Do you want to start up again where we left off or not?'

The bluntness of the question floors you completely, as Eddora had no doubt intended.

'What-' you start to say, but Eddora interjects with:

'No questions, Aria. Make your decision now. Do you go with me now, or do we go our separate ways?'

The choice is obvious:

'Yes,' [58](#).

'No,' [496](#).

## 684

You blithely walk into the factory through the front door, and almost immediately regret it.

As soon as the coveralled workers see you they instantly down tools and stand still, staring at you with hostile, suspicious expressions. A man at the limits of the human size ranges, wearing a coverall marked FOREMAN, walks up to you and stands there looking menacing.

'This is a private plant. Beat it, fella,' he advises.

'I'd like to see the manager?' you say – a trifle tremulously, if the truth be told.

'People don't see Mr. Coates,' intones the bruiser ponderously. 'He sees People. Scram, and stay scrambled.'

If you want to stay, you realise they are going to attack you. If you want to do this, turn to [354](#).

If you feel glad to still have hold of your life and don't want to push it, go back to [348](#) and try something else.

## 686

‘Very well,’ he says, sounding a trifle disappointed. ‘How does 10,000 GP sound?’

If it sounds okay, turn to [353](#).

If not, go back to [569](#) and select another choice.

## 688

As the count lies stricken and bleeding to death, you coolly push the length of your sword through his neck. A few bubbles of blood gurgle from his severed trachea, and then cease. The count is dead.

You have no option now but to return to Altgarten. *Test your Luck*. If you are Lucky, you are able to find someone who can sell you a horse and five provisions (for 550 GP) before you flee the country. If you are Unlucky, the hue and cry has already started before you reach anywhere. You dare not approach anyone and thus must flee unhorsed and unprovisioned. Lose 2 STAMINA points for walking all the way, and cross off all your remaining Provisions. If by this point you have no Provisions left at all, you lose 4 STAMINA points from malnutrition – no living off the fat of the land for a city-bound assassin.

Eventually you reach Altgarten regardless, and tiredly hurl some of the count’s hair down in front of Joia. He congratulates you on completing your mission, and gives you the correct 8500 GP. Spending 20 of it on bed and board, you regain 6 STAMINA points.

You may congratulate yourself on completing the hardest mission of your career, but it still involved the cold-blooded murder of an innocent man. Worst of all, if not for the boar, you could not have managed it at all!

Turn to [615](#).

## 689

With a final blast of dragon’s breath, Eichlan engulfs the creature, and it staggers around in pain, roaring. It waves its arms around its head in agony, the spark of twisted life leaves it, and it collapses with a horrible slowness.

It hits the floor with an almighty crash and sinks a foot deep.

Turn to [329](#).

## 691

Your body is not your own.

Your thoughts are not your own.

Your powers are not your own.

Your memories...

In your mind, you know that you became aware of a titanic force of evil being summoned to our plane by a cabal of truly nihilistic sorcerers. You sought them out and slew them, but the damage had already been done, for one had escaped, and riding his body was a *Spiral Architect*. No simple demon this, this is one of the very beings responsible for extending the boundaries of Hell. Insubstantial though it is, its psychic powers were immense, and if it is not checked, soon its infernal spiral cities will cover our world.

You tracked the cultist to Altgarten, and right now are pursuing him through the sewers.

Your body feels bigger and more powerful, but somehow more frail. The air doesn't move through your lungs as well as it should, and your joints are alive with aches and pains. Your body is sheathed in massive, heavy knight's armour that in your own life you would never wear, and you have an enormous Templar sword on your back that in your own life you could not hope to wield. But you know you won't be using it in the upcoming fight.

There he is!

'Hold!' you call out through aged, withered vocal chords – in your mind, you can feel many more years of experience than you can usually lay claim to. 'Hold, lest I call out the true name of the One!'

The fleeing cultist, clad in dark hooded robes, halts and turns.

'Curse you, Defender!' he growls far too loudly in an unearthly timber. 'You'll regret the day you crossed me.'

'You don't belong on this world, Spiral Architect,' you call out confidently, advancing on the possessed man. 'Return to Hell at once, or it will be the worse for you.'

'Hah! You dare challenge me?' laughs the beast. As you close, you can see rents and tears on the cultist's body, where the hellfires within burst forth.

'It is the force of Good which confronts you,' you speak confidently. You hold your hands out in front of you, and a mystic, flaming blade materialises in your hands, and ghostly, fiery armour covers your body.

The demon's laughter dies.

In this battle, you must use your PSYCHIC score rather than SKILL. Your flaming sword does double damage. You may use none of your own potions, poisons etc., as you are experiencing someone else's fight.

If you lose, do not stop playing but turn instead to [493](#). If you win, turn to [1000](#).

## 695

The butler, hands held fast at his sides, rolls his eyes up into his head and topples like a felled tree. He collapses into a heap of decorative plates with an almighty crash.

You tense, waiting for Lasombra to appear. You do not need to wait long.

At the balcony above you appears a furious face. 'You kill-a my butler!' screams the face in heavily accented Reichstongue. 'I crush-a your bones!' He leaps full over the balcony and lands on two feet, like a cat.

He is a large man with a dark complexion, though his skin is oddly much paler than you'd expect.

'Your weapons are useless against me!' he spits, and to your horror, a grotesque transformation takes place. Darkness seems to spew from his every orifice, and forms a writhing network of bands about his body. Meanwhile four huge tentacles of the dark burst from his sides and lunge at you.

You must fight them in two pairs, using multiple rules.

First pair:

FIRST TENTACLE	SKILL 6	STAMINA 8
SECOND TENTACLE	SKILL 6	STAMINA 8

Second pair:

FIRST TENTACLE	SKILL 6	STAMINA 8
SECOND TENTACLE	SKILL 6	STAMINA 8

If you win, turn to [787](#).

## 699

Fight the dogs using the standard rules for two opponents simultaneously.

First MASTIFF	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6
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If you win, you wince as the dogs expire with a whine. You really hope that nobody has heard what's been going on. *Test your Luck*. If you succeed, go to [600](#). If not, go to [42](#).

## 700

If you have a lock of white hair, turn immediately to [591](#).

If you do not, but have spoken with a Kiasyd, turn to [371](#).

Otherwise, go to [384](#).

## 701

You have committed yourself.

Fiorentino returns before long and you have a lengthy chat. He informs you that you have now passed a 'hump', a psychological reluctancy which must be overcome during training. He tells you he is glad you weren't disheartened and quit, as advancement is rapid from here on in.

He is true to his word. Before long you are able to master powerful spells easily, and you become an Adept. Now you are a truly puissant necromancer; you make a squad of zombie warriors of your own and make many advances in the field of corpse animation. Fiorentino is well pleased; the two of you depopulate much of the lowlife of Altgarten merely acquiring raw material.

Eventually you become spiritually advanced (debased?) enough to pass the Abyss, and you become a Brother of the Left-hand Path. Unlike a Babe of the Abyss, you are stripped of neither your accomplishments nor yourself. But what remains after you have reached Magister Templi rank is not only a Master, but a monster.

Now all you care about is creating an undead army to serve your dreams of power. Eddora, your mother, your true father, all are long forgotten. Yourself and Fiorentino decide to rule the world together as father and son, and whether or not you achieve that end and your adventures therein could be made a book in itself. But as for the tale of Aria and Eddora, outsider lovers, your adventure is over.

THE END

## 703

You open up the book and can scarcely believe your eyes. It is exactly what it says on the cover – a Knife Manual. What this means is, it is a compendium of every fighting technique to do with knives!

You devour the book in delight, and eventually secrete it away in your shirt. From what you've learned on this brief perusal, you may add 1 to your *Initial* and current SKILL. However, when you next get the chance to rest, you may read the rest and add another 1 point to your *Initial* and current SKILL!

Turn to [700](#).

## 704

The thieves are much greater in number than the assassins, but typically much less skilled, much more likely to be slain by irate burglars or by the Watch, and much less well paid. For these reasons, they have formed themselves into a Guild for their mutual aggrandisement, whilst the only alliance of assassins of which you have ever known is that of Eddora and yourself...

You are led in a dizzying variety of routes by the thieves – you suspect they are constantly doubling back. Before long you hear the rough scrape of a manhole cover, and are directed to a ladder, which you descend... and descend... and descend. Reaching the bottom, you curse as you feel your boots land in smelly water up to the ankles.

'Quiet!' hisses one thief, and you are led off again.

The route is much shorter this time and much more direct. Before long, you are stood still and the blindfold is ripped from your eyes.

You find yourself in a vast cavern, so much so that the walls and ceiling can barely be seen. You stare around in awe. Down here is what can only be described as a thief village – with shanty houses, training grounds, climbing walls, lamps at regular intervals, and so forth.

'Here for business?' grates a voice.

You wrench your gaze back, and find yourself staring at a swarthy, unfriendly face.

The usual title for the leader of the thieves is the Prince, but this one calls himself King – King Adora. His throne room is a rather laughable enclosure made up of a circle, ten feet in diameter, whose perimeter has been demarcated by six-inch walls of piled stones. However, the thieves clustered all around, showing yourself varying degrees of hostility, treat it, and him, with the very epitome of respect.

'Black Aria,' he hisses. 'Assassin. What do *you* want?'

'I'm looking for a necromancer named Fiorentino,' you reply. 'I need information on how to find his base.'

'I'm listening,' he spits, face twisted in hatred.

There is no love lost between the thieves and assassins. Indeed the thieves often find themselves targets, as nobles and merchants seek revenge and deterrence for apartments burglarised.



How will you convince them to help you?

You could simply ask them politely for the information. Turn to [372](#).

You could offer them a cut of your fee. Turn to [720](#).

You could threaten them. Turn to [86](#).

You could say with the underground cleared of necromancers and animated corpses, there'll be more room for them. Turn to [291](#).

You will have to do one or the other, though; the thieves aren't likely to like having their time wasted.

## 705

You succeed in activating your telepathy and suddenly Fiorentino's mind becomes like an open book to you. You scan it channel by channel.

It rapidly transpires that he's lying, and knows it. He did not see your mother after three years before you were born!

If you want to kill him, go to [68](#).

If you want to play along with what he's saying, go to [569](#).

## 706

White wizards are not usually remotely difficult to find. Sufficiently arrogant to believe themselves invulnerable to all possible stealing, abuse or *assassination*, many have shops within the merchant streets where they ply their magical wares. Thus it is that you take yourself off to the merchant quarter in the height of day, and walk into the nearest wizard's shop you find.

The fact that the shop has outside it, a horizontal standard bearing three copper balls, is not noticed by you at the time.

Turn to [616](#).

## 707

With a single well-placed blow, Magnus manages to catch your wrist in his iron claw. He shows no hesitation as he snips the claw closed with the irresistible strength of steel. Your hand flies across the room followed by a fountain of blood. You scream out in agony and fall to your knees, clutching the slump.

Already your vision is fading through blood loss, but you realise there is much more to terror as Magnus strides towards you.

‘What are you shouting so much about your hand for?’ asks the creature in genuine surprise. ‘You don’t want a hand. I can give you something much better. Hmm... How about this – and this – and this – and this –’

The metal fetishist has found a new companion, because before not very long has passed you will expire from agony and join him. Life as a metal fetishist will no doubt be novel, but for now your previous adventure is over.

THE END

## 708

The boy turns towards you more as you finish speaking, and his eyes narrow; his crying ceases.

‘*Really.*’ he says. ‘You think so,’

‘I am certain.’ you respond.

‘I shall take your advice,’ he says, starting to smile unpleasantly. His eyes have taken on an odd gleam. Somehow, he doesn’t seem to talk or act like a boy anymore.

He turns away abruptly, examining his hands. Bruises are blossoming red across the knuckles at an unnatural rate. ‘Leave me. I must consider my best plan of action.’

Feeling increasingly afraid, you head for the door. As you place your hand on the handle, you cannot resist looking back. The boy has gone.

As you leave, you feel a shadow descend upon your soul, and it will never lift. Maybe, one day, you will come to a realisation of what kind of existence you have condemned an innocent child to. For now, lose 4 LUCK points.

Turn to [560](#).

## 710

During this battle, the slowness of the STONE GOLEM means that you can *Escape* at any time without a STAMINA penalty, by going to [304](#). What you *can't* do is go in the other room; for a creature of stone, the statue is quite adept at positioning itself in front of you. Otherwise, the statue may be slow, but it is *damned* difficult to injure.

STONE GOLEM  
STAMINA 20

SKILL 7

If you win, turn to [884](#).

## 711

Hesitantly, you approach the mutilated prisoner, despite Eddora's feeble plucking at your sleeve.

'Who are you? Who did this to you?' you ask cautiously.

The wretch coughs; then you realise he is laughing.

'Better to ask who I *was*. Who I was, was a Healer.'

You stare at him, mesmerised.

'I can sense that neither of you know much about the calling of a Healer. Well, my martial arts and my faith led me to an understanding of the universe. This understanding told me that my calling was to travel to the world, ministering to the pain of others. My experiences had given me the power to do it.'

'This is all difficult to believe,' mutters Eddora.

'If only it was. Unfortunately, when I came to Altgarten to carry on my life's work, I encountered the vampires, and they had no such problems with belief – at least not the same problem as yourself. My faith in life was too much for them. They couldn't bear my gaze, so they put out my eyes. My touch burned them, so they cut off my hands. They didn't want me to teach my ideals to other people, so they cut off my legs. Finally, they imprisoned me here forever.'

'I'm sorry,' you say, 'but we can't help you.'

'You may be wrong. I think I can help you. I sense your pain and I believe I can put it right, despite the loss of my touch and sight.'

Eddora snorts in exasperation. 'You wouldn't help us, not if you knew who we were. Besides, we can't exactly do anything for you in return.'

'I honestly don't care who you are, though I have an idea. I'll help anyone. And there is only one thing I want in return... to be put out of my misery. Please, allow me to help you. I can't unless it's of your own free will.'

Do you wish to allow the Healer to help you? Turn to [576](#).

Or do you wish to forget him and head over to the weapon racks? Turn to [391](#).

## 714

The two of you return to the Pied Cow for only so long as you are recovered well enough to

travel – which takes place rapidly – and then you buy a single horse and plenty of provisions. The two of you ride off into the sunset, and never look back.

‘Where will we go?’ murmurs Eddora dreamily, nestled against your back as the sun sets slowly in the west. Behind you, the parched land surrounding Altgarten lights up with flame as the sun catches it at the right angle. *A fitting end to my wasted youth*, you think.

‘Mauristatia. Bricia. It doesn’t matter. Wherever we go, nobody’s going to mess with *us*.’

‘True enough,’ she murmurs, giggling into your cloak. ‘We are, after all, the finest assassins in the land.’

‘That may be so,’ you frown, pulling the horse to a stop. She looks up at you in puzzlement as you twist round in the saddle. ‘But we aren’t going to be assassins anymore.’

‘Whatever you say, Aria. For you, anything,’ she says. ‘But what will we do?’

You lean over and kiss her.

‘Does it matter?’ you say.

‘I know only one thing... we can be ourselves. And, at last, I look forward to finding out who that is.’

THE END

## 715

You walk in and a heavy hand drops down on the back of your neck. The door slams shut behind you.

‘Well now, what have we here?’ says a glottal, croaking voice.

With widening eyes, you look around and see all the accoutrements of a torture chamber. There are racks, Iron Maidens, spiked cages, thumbscrews, whips, gougers and many more. Around are bodies – living and dead, whole and separated. Their terrified and lacerated faces stare at you, often without eyes, noses or tongues. The floor is running with blood.

You jerk your gaze round to the man who has grabbed you and you see he is the biggest man you have ever seen. He must have some Ogre blood. His face is flat, yellowish and ugly, he’s spattered with blood, brains and body parts, and he’s dressed only in a leather apron.

‘My,’ says another. ‘He looks pretty.’ It’s a woman, with her hair emerging in a huge train down her back from a tight pipe on top of her skull. She’s dressed in form-fitting, skimpy leather garments.

‘Welcome to the Theatre of Pain,’ says a muffled voice. It comes from a man dressed entirely in black leather from crown to toe. Only his eyes are uncovered.

They are all carrying a selection of very sharp knives.

The performance artists of the Theatre of Pain excel at their calling, and their speciality is keeping their victims alive so that the show lasts as long as possible. You, an assassin with considerable stamina and a fine understanding of death, last the longest yet, and their latest work, *Aria*, gets rave reviews in the Altgarten satanic underground. It goes without saying though, that you are unable to complete your mission... or anything else.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 716

You wheel round, horribly certain that one of the thieves has let his prejudice get the better of him, and let fly with his crossbow bolt. You think that by twisting fast enough, you can dodge the bolt and subsequently show the thieves what for.

You are indeed correct that one of the thieves – whose brother, incidentally, was killed by Eddora long ago – has let fly with his bolt. You are not, however, correct that twisting round will enable you to dodge. All it means is that the bolt hits you directly through the nasal membranes, through your skull and into your brain. You scream, claw at your face, drowning in your own blood, consumed in agony as you die, and all the thieves do is laugh. The Nightshade Phantom falls not long afterwards, but by then you are not involved in his demise. Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 719

‘Excellent,’ he says. ‘I hope you know better than to renege on your agreement.’

‘I am Aria,’ you say coldly. ‘I always keep my agreements.’

‘True enough. Well, anyway. You can find him down a manhole at the corner of Fruhstickstrasse and Sonnenstrasse. Stay away from the corner of Drossenstrasse and Lieberstrasse; that entrance is guarded by a ghost.’

You thank the thief king and are escorted out. You soon find the manhole and step down the ladder; turn to [952](#).

## 720

‘A cut of your fee?’ he smiles. ‘A GOOD idea. How does 10% sound?’

If it sounds okay, turn to [719](#).

If not, go back to [704](#) and choose something else.

## 721

Far, far above you, many storeys high in the Prince's mansion, Kandron and the Prince are discussing their takedown of the city -- sealed, of course, from direct sunlight.

'Well, I see no problem with creating jobs for fifty engineers and factory managers in the city below,' states Kandron. The Prince's seneschal is taking notes industriously.

'And certainly my own Watchmen could do with two hundred dark elf enforcers on exchange programs,' agrees the Prince. Scritch, scratch goes the pen of the seneschal.

The Prince and Kandron smile at each other. Kandron raises a goblet of red wine, the Prince a goblet of... something else.

'I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.'

They both drink deep.

Suddenly Kandron splutters, and hurls his goblet to the floor. He cocks his head to the side, slanted, luminescent green eyes widening in alarm.

'What? What's wrong?' says the Prince in alarm.

'What's *wrong*? I have just felt the burning out of a power I have not felt since... And it was directly below us!'

'Below us? The dungeons? It can't be... Aria was never that strong, and neither of them are in any state to do anything!'

'Who else have you got down in those dungeons, Prince?'

'Nobody of any consequence... just...' the Prince's eyes go wide as he realises what might just have been a fatal flaw in his plan!

Kandron leaps on the error at once.

'You fool!' the dark elf shouts. 'You put them in the cell next to some great white magician or cleric, didn't you?'

'Not magician or cleric, exactly...'

'You necrotic, blood-crazed moron! Everyone knows prisoners are bound to escape if there's someone who can help them conveniently located in the next cell! I bet you left their weapons right at the end of the corridor as well, didn't you?'

‘Don’t talk to me like that!’ yells the Prince in rage. ‘Take us down there at once and stop complaining about it, you arrogant mole!’

‘I will do what you ask,’ hisses Kandron, already preparing the formulae for psionic teleportation in his mind. ‘But I refuse to have dealings with anyone stupid enough to create this kind of situation any longer. All negotiations are cancelled!’

‘Let’s deal with this situation,’ hisses the Prince venomously, grabbing a spear from a rack at the side of the room, ‘and then let’s see where the negotiations stand, dark elf.’

The Prince rushes to Kandron’s side, and then the two of them vanish.

The Prince’s seneschal, needless to say, has copied all of this down verbatim. His one reaction is to look up quizzically after they are gone.

Turn to [832](#).

## 725

You walk up to the monster, sword drawn. Where is the best place to strike?

You finally settle on a gap in the armour between its shoulder and its chest. You lay the point of your blade there, and lean your total weight on it. Meeting surprisingly little resistance, it passes through the creature’s body and scrapes on the stone table below.

The creature’s eyes flick open and it gives an eardrum-bursting roar of pain. It sits up on the table and rips its hands and feet free with no more effort than you would use to brush away a spider web. Unfortunately, Eichlan, the beast’s creator, chiefly controls it using the mystic power of the blood bond, not these feeble straps. Lose 2 LUCK points.

The creature looks over at you, roars in rage and flicks its limb at you like a man might a fly. You barely dodge the viciously flung organ, thick with spines and blades. It gets up off the table and advances on you. You must fight...

The TZIMISCE WAR GHOUL’s SKILL and STAMINA have been lowered by your strike, but unfortunately, not by much.

TZIMISCE WAR GHOUL  
STAMINA 23

SKILL 13

After one round, a spiny, murderous horror appears in the doorway to the other room and watches the desperate battle with interest. It doesn’t lift a tentacle to help either one of you.

The War Ghoul has far greater reach than you. You may not *Escape*.

In the highly unlikely event that you win, turn to [245](#).

In the event your STAMINA is reduced to 2 or below, turn to [96](#).

## 732

‘I’m not doing that!’ you protest. ‘What, go trawling through some crypt that’s probably full of undead on the off chance that you might teach me how to breathe right and sit cross-legged? Forget it.’

Defender frowns.

‘You are far too flippant about the potentialities of the Right-handed Path, and I am sure you know it. Meanwhile, even a White Master does not do something for nothing. If you do not bring me this precious artefact, I shall have nothing more to do with you.’

You think of pointing out that a White Master *could* and *should* do something for nothing – why else would he wander the world protecting the innocent? – but look into the calm, determined eyes and think better of it. You try to get a psychic impression of why he should be making this request, but his mind is locked down tight, beyond any possible efforts of yours to read it.

You have only three options:

You can relent and agree to go and get the sword: turn to [543](#).

You can refuse and go your separate ways: turn to [172](#).

You can attack him. Turn to [792](#).

## 734

The Zombie collapses, having virtually fallen apart inside its armour. However, to your dismay Fiorentino has completed smearing the green liquid over his scimitar and just has time to gulp down a flask of red liquid before hurling himself at you in a berserk rage! You groan.

FIorentINO  
STAMINA 8

SKILL 9

Fiorentino is much stronger than a human due to the potion he’s just downed. The green venom he’s smeared on his scimitar causes your blood to clot agonisingly in the area surrounding wounds; it does double damage!

If Fiorentino’s STAMINA is ever reduced to 2 or below, turn to [273](#).

If yours is, turn to [383](#).



## 735

Morrigan appears in the doorway. She is now naked. Your eyes bulge.

‘Well?’ she says. ‘Have you killed her?’

You can only stare.

‘You haven’t, have you? You... pathetic... *male!*’

Before your eyes, the woman’s body is sloughed off like a snakeskin. Beneath is an enormous beast, a monolith on goat legs, with a horse’s rotting head and ram’s horns. This is the true face of the SUCCUBUS, a Satanic monster of enormous power, and as it steps forward and strikes your head from your shoulders you are powerless to resist.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 736

You plod on through the forest, finding the journey exceedingly dull. How you are to regret this sentiment later.

When night falls, you move off the road a short way and lie down to sleep, tethering your horse to a tree.

You awake to an utter darkness.

Your eyes struggle to adjust, but you sit bolt upright, heart pounding with fear as you hear all around you... the sound of children, laughing and crying.

Your horse is going mad with terror, rearing and screaming. It rears with such force that it snaps off its tether and runs wildly into the forest. Lose 1 LUCK point.

You curse the stupid beast even as the blood is turning to ice within your veins.

The noise is coming from no discernable source.

Do you wish to get up and go chasing after your horse? Turn to [885](#).

Or do you wish to sit very tight indeed? Go instead to [181](#).

## 739

His snuffles cease. He almost turns towards you.

‘My mother loved me?’ he says.

‘All mothers love their children,’ you say.

He bows his head in pain, but does not cry again. ‘My mother is dead,’ he says.

‘Everyone dies,’ you say, ‘but the way to keep them alive is to never stop loving them.’

‘Yes...’ he says. ‘As long as I remember my mother, she will live on in my heart.’

‘Eddora, too,’ you whisper.

‘Ah, but the time for girls is a long way off,’ he says. ‘And that will not run smooth. Still, as you say, the way to keep people with you is never stop loving them.’

‘I didn’t say...’ you start to answer, but fall silent. The boy is now staring into the corner. His face seems calm.

You tiptoe away, feeling you should not interrupt him, but something about him suggests that the aura of calm will stay. It stays with you, too, and somehow you realise that despite that both Eddora and your mother are gone, you can always remember them. Restore your LUCK to its *Initial* level.

Leave by turning to [560](#).

## 742

The eyes sway and dance hypnotically on their stalks. They are lidless and unblinking, but you could swear they were *narrowing*.

‘Really,’ says Eichlan in its opera-singer voice. ‘Is that so?’

*Test your Luck.* If you succeed, turn to [117](#). If you fail, turn to [572](#).

## 748

The Grand Councillor fought like a true knight, and his fortitude was beyond the human. But ultimately, your skill, experience and *desperation* got the better of him. He falls, virtually separated into his component bits of flesh – and there’ll be no regenerating from that.

You stand over the body, breathing heavily. To your amazement, no guards have appeared throughout this battle. Evidently either nobody is around in the Rathaus at night, or those who are are as confident in their ability to defend themselves as the Councillor was.

At last this is over. You can go home to the Pied Cow and forget all this cloak and dagger business of hiring assassins out to kill each other. Home to the Pied Cow to be an assassin once again... your face falls. For a moment you wonder just what you’ve saved your life for.

Then you turn, and see the Nightshade Phantom standing in the doorway.

‘Let’s finish this,’ he says.

Turn to [636](#).

## 754

Keeping your hood pulled well over your face, you hail a cab and mumbling indistinctly, ask to be taken to Lampenstrasse. The hooded and cloaked driver looks almost indistinguishable from you; you cannot see his face either, and figure that you are probably safe.

Being a child of your time, you do not notice the hideously bumpy ride from the appalling and unsprung suspension; to you, the journey passes uneventfully, and you alight at Lampenstrasse not far from your goal. Pay the driver 10 GP and turn to [122](#).

## 755

“‘Oh Conan,’ gasped the naked, big-titted wench clinging to his mighty thew. ‘You saved me from that ginormous monster... without sustaining a scratch in return.’

“‘Crom count the dead!’ bellowed Conan, looking very pleased with himself.

With a noise sounding not unlike a fart, Crom himself appeared. ‘Why don’t you count the dead yourself for a change,’ squeaked the tiny dwarf, and farted away again.

“‘Ooga,’ said Conan.

*Hmm*, you think.

A note scribbled in the margin says: Very few people know that before starting the destined-never-to-end *Wheel of Time* series, Robert Jordan used to write shite Conan adventures like this one!

Turn to [700](#).

## 759

‘I’ll take it,’ you say.

‘Excellent. The guy’s name is Fiorentino, and he lives in the tunnels beneath the city. I’m afraid I can’t tell you any more than that, or where he is exactly. You’ll have to find that out for yourself.’

How do you intend to go about this?

You could use your powers of psychometry. If so, turn to [527](#).

You could find out the word on the streets. If so, turn to [584](#).

Or, you could approach the Thieves' Guild, for they have an unparalleled knowledge of the tunnels. However, they may not like the idea of your having knowledge of the tunnels, or even approaching them. But if you want to risk it, turn to [195](#).

## 760

'What's wrong, boy?' you say as gently as you can manage. 'Why are you hiding down here in the corner?'

He snuffles, and turns his face half toward you. His eyes are half red from crying, half blue from punched bruises; but somehow they look a little too familiar.

'The other boys,' he mumbles. 'They hurt me. They won't leave me alone. They all hate me. I wish I could die!'

Your heart constricts with pain, as much for yourself as for him, and though you begin to have an inkling what trap Svendas has set here you still feel compelled to ask.

'Why do they hurt you, boy?'

The answer is as spoken by yourself...

'My mother was a witch. She was burned alive.'

Your eyes water in uncontrollable fear, even as they crease shut in sorrow and pain as you realise what this boy is, and whom he must be.

Do you answer:

'Fight them. Fight them back and never stop fighting. Suffering destroys the weak, but the strong only grow stronger. You are strong and you will grow stronger, I can see it in your eyes. Fight back and you will grow stronger than all your adversaries and you will smash them to the ground and none will ever stand against you again. And one day, at last, you will be an assassin. At last you will have your revenge.'

If you choose this answer, turn to [708](#).

'Forget them. Find a peaceful place within yourself and never forget that you loved and were once loved. Your mother loved you, and you her. No matter what the others do to you, they cannot take that away from you. Because one day, you will find love again, with a woman named Eddora, and it will be the best thing that ever happened to you. Love is the key, love over hate.'

If you choose this answer, turn to [739](#).

## 762

One of the most basic things you learned whilst studying under Fiorentino is the primary skill of a necromancer – the ability to summon and question the spirits of the dead.

An idea comes to you, but you quail at the danger. You imagine Defender killed that Spiral Architect; would not the demon be *exceedingly* interested in *revenge*?

You are aware that the dangers involved make the prospect almost suicidal. Fiorentino drummed into you, over and over again, the dangers of letting even the weakest spirit get out of hand. And even the smallest imperfection in the pentagram, the tiniest mispronunciation of the words, can let it do just that. And this is no mere mewling human ghost – this is one of the very Architects of Hell.

Then again, you *are* one of the most feared beings alive, yourself.

If you're sure you want to go ahead with this, arrange candles at the compass's cardinal points and go to [675](#).

If you'd really rather not, pack away your chalk and return to [881](#).

## 766

Now that you know who it is that's set up the heinous plot to have the assassins turn against one another, it's fairly obvious what you have to do about it. Even the Nightshade Phantom is almost forgotten, and you have a sneaking suspicion that he wanted you to come to a conclusion he himself had already reached.

You are determined to wipe out this upstart Grand Councillor, but will you do so by:

Sneaking into his house in the dead of night to murder him like a proper assassin (turn to [938](#))

Barging into his office and taking it out of him like a MAN (turn to [510](#))

## 769

The secretary leads you through a filthy courtyard packed with peasant workers, animals, drilling guards, yelling sergeants... the place is chaos.

You cover your ears and follow the butler through a warped door. You hurry along bare stone corridors and are eventually conveyed into a bare waiting room. There is no one else present waiting for the count; you wonder what this signifies. But even here, there are two guards at each

of the two exits from the room. You are sure this signifies very enhanced caution on the part of the count...

‘Now then, sir,’ intones the sepulchral secretary. ‘Perhaps you would like to tell me why you wish to see the count, so that he might have a better anticipation of your business.’

If you answer that you’re his son, turn to [802](#).

If you say (vaguely) that you wish to offer your services as an adviser, turn to [305](#).

If you merely say that your business is for the count’s ears only, turn to [154](#).

## 771

You gather up a handful of Lasombra’s ashes, a strange emptiness and weariness coming over you. You dump it in a pouch and walk out of the house, shoulders slumped.

You return to the Pied Cow and take your usual meal and rest (restore 6 STAMINA points). The following night, you swap the ashes for 5950 GP from Joia, and throw them on the pile without a word.

Life goes on.

Turn to [355](#).

## 772

‘So, I presume your mission is to kill Defender, assassin?’ grins the demon with Black Aria’s form. ‘Then I will help you. It will save me time, I think.’

‘Go to the deserted Checkpoint 847 out past the East Gate of this city. You will find Defender there in his stinking bolt hole. For all his power, the fool lives in poverty and filth.’

‘I thank you for your information, Spiral Architect,’ you say confidently. You pause. You become uncomfortably aware that this is the point that you have to send the demon back to his own plane. You summon the words in your head-

‘And now there is the small matter of my now escaping from this pathetic conjuration,’ grins the demon. Your heart plummets.

Roll three dice. If the number is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [413](#). If equal to or higher than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [81](#).

## 773

You step outside the door, take a deep breath and look around the street.

No arrow in the chest yet. Good.

To the left side are the docks, to the right is the factory part of town. The bourgeoisie who run the factories make sure to keep the lights burning so their indentured workers can find their way to the night shifts on a regular basis to be ground under the iron heel of capitalist oppression. Therefore, the factory area is bright. However, sailors and dockers are a different breed. Their more established industries have no time for modern efficiency, and so every night they are to be found crowding out the taverns getting paralytic. There is no need to light the docks; they are dark.

You have no question about which way you would go; you are a creature of the shadows, hiding from the depredations of your fellow man, and have been all your life. But the Nightshade Phantom is huge and alien in appearance; he never hides, and none dare gainsay him.

You nod, spin on your heel and head right.

At the next crossroads, you stand still and look about. Poor indentured workers are hurrying past with ragged brown clothes and expressions of misery, but you ignore them. You scan the area for the tiniest detail which can help you, and before long you find it.

Your keen eyes pick out a glint in the dirt and you walk over to it. You pick it up and peer at it under the oil lamps. It is no peasant's belt buckle, but an arrowhead. An arrowhead welded of strips of cold iron and silver. Cold iron and silver... the mark of the Nightshade Phantom!

You pocket the arrowhead and march off in the indicated direction.

Before you can go far an itch in your brain brings you to a halt. A hunch suggests to you that you look over to your right, and you see there a doorway leading to a flight of stairs. You have a mental flash of the Phantom climbing these stairs. Your heart leaps. This is far, far easier than you imagined! Before long you will have caught up with your foe!

Silently as a ghost, but with all possible haste you disappear up the stairs.

Turn to [486](#).

## 775

You draw your weapons and you can't quite tell what happens next.

Suddenly the boy and the chair before you seem to disappear, and suddenly there's a warrior before you wearing spiked black armour of unfamiliar design. His face is cold and hard and hateful, but he sports the same blonde pudding bowl haircut.

As soon as he appears, he's attacking, and you know within an instant that he cannot be defeated.

He wields a shortsword and shield with a speed and skill you've never seen before, and you are hopelessly outclassed.

Within seconds he's thrust the entire length of his shortsword up into your ribcage, and your lungs drown in blood and agony. The last thing you see is the warrior's face, and you realise where you've seen it before...

... in the mirror.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 776

'An *assassin*, eh?' calls out the woman's voice with renewed interest. 'In that case, perhaps you'd like to come in here. I would have words with you.'

If this sounds okay, turn to [843](#). Otherwise, your only other option is to leave; go to [304](#).

## 778

'Eh... My father was killed by a, a vampire. I need to seek out Defender so he may put to rest this awful creature.'

On the other side of the grille there is a great silence. You hold your breath, uneasily. You consider using your psychic powers, but realise the priest might notice them, and consider you just such an 'awful creature' yourself.

Eventually, there comes an answer.

'No.'

'No? No what?' you spit impatiently.

'No. I will not tell you the location of Defender. Your words stink of untruth, and you are up to no good. I will not help you... unless at some time in the future you wish to confess your *true* crimes. Which I doubt.'

The grille slams shut, and the priest stalks away down his church, heels clicking. You can hardly believe your ill luck. You consider for a moment killing the priest in retaliation, but think better of it since you are in a Temple of the Light, where the full might of the Right-handed Path can be brought to bear to protect its servants.

You have no option now but to seek out a white wizard. Lose 1 LUCK point and turn to [706](#).



You've seen too much this night to let the fixer win, despite that he is all of an utterly pathetic opponent. All the frustrations and fears of your dance of death with the Nightshade Phantom – of your whole life – come together in one moment, and in that one moment you draw back your sword and slash it through the Fixer's throat. Blood flows; he clutches at his neck, strangling, expression horrified, drowning in his own blood, and collapses to the floor.

You stand over him, breathing heavily.

There is silence. The assassins of the Pied Cow stand utterly still.

'This night, I have slain the Grand Councillor of this city, who set up a plot to have the assassins slay one another. I have slain the Nightshade Phantom, the one assassin in this city who might have bested me. I have slain Joia, the treacherous fixer who made me have to kill the other two. *I don't want to have to kill anyone else.*

'I have seen the future. This city doesn't want us. This city wants to wipe all of us out. The only way I see for us to avoid this is band together. And all bands need a leader.

'I proclaim myself, Black Aria, the Master of Assassins. From now on, my word is law. If we do not stand against this common threat, *none* of us will survive. From now on, no assassin will go against any other assassin. No assassin will consort with any inimical powers. From now on all assassins will pledge allegiance only to me; and I, the Master of Assassins, will watch over you.

'Let all those who would disagree with this step forward to be slain, or leave the city forever. Let all those who think they can challenge me, or have the power and vision we need to win through, step forward and face me in combat. If there is no-one who wants to do either of these things then I will be your leader. And we will win through... no matter the cost.'

The silence lasts, stretches on. You are breathing heavily after your speech, but still stalk around the circle, glaring into the sea of faces around you. None can meet your eye.

Until finally one assassin comes forward. He kneels, baring the back of his neck to you.

'What are your orders, Master of Assassins?' he whispers.

You smile, and look pointedly around at the rest. Swiftly they hurry to kneel before you.

You stare around, the last man standing in the bar, at all the assassins who, from now on, are under your sole orders.

Hail Black Aria, the Master of Assassins.

Turn to [791](#).

## 783

Talking to your contacts, you are soon able to find out the location of one of Lasombra's nitrolabe factories. It's in a warehouse down by the docks.

In the dead of night, you stealthily make your way down to the factory and peer in through a window. Inside, many men in coveralls and gloves are picking up small objects and moving them into and out of packing crates and water baths. You have no idea why.

Your initial plan was to wait until the action died down, then sneak into the manager's office and hide until he appears. However, it appears that this will be harder than you imagined, as the action *never* dies down. Indeed, from the movement of the workers (whom you avoid) the factory seems to be on a three-shift system.

Given this, you can think of only three courses of action:

Walk in and ask to see the manager ([684](#))

Charge in weapons drawn and take on all comers ([993](#))

Steal one of the worker's uniforms and sneak in ([301](#)).

Or if you think this is too dangerous, go back to [348](#) and choose again.

## 787

Lasombra is apoplectic with fury as his last tentacle fades out of existence, taking the darkness around him with it. 'Now you die, assassin scum!' he shrieks, and hurls himself at you.

He fights with bare hands, but is skilled with boxing, and stronger and tougher than any human.

LASOMBRA ELDER  
STAMINA 19

SKILL 13

If at any time, you roll a 6 and a 1 when calculating your Attack Strength, turn at once to [960](#). Otherwise, if you win, turn to [876](#).

## 790

Her eyes light up. 'Hey, you're the guy who killed that rotten pimp I used to have!' she gasps. 'You can't believe how happy I am to see you!' She pumps your hand vigorously.

'Perhaps your gratitude might make itself felt with the information...?' you prompt.

'Absolutely. I did the guy quite a few times. I make him pay double 'cause he wants me to pretend to be dead. Anyway, there's several entrances he takes me down. The manhole on the

corner of Fruhstuckstrasse and Sonnenstrasse's the safest. I happen to know the one on Drossenstrasse and Lieberstrasse's guarded by a ghaist, which only answers to Fiorentino. Look, just don't let on I told you, all right?'

'Certainly,' you say. 'Thank you very much.' You take your leave.

'Hey, if you ever want a freebie I'm yours, okay?'

'I seriously doubt it,' you mutter under your breath.

You soon find the safe entrance and descend the ladder beneath the manhole; turn to [952](#).

## 791

If a warrior or a wizard or an assassin should ask with bitterness why some amongst their number should start off with great power and lose it, or some should start off at the bottom rung and end up at the top of the ladder, let them instead consider a deeper question... what is power, and what leads to it?

The answer is that power gained without adversity crumbles when faced with it. Power gained as a *result* of adversity cannot be shaken by anything.

Thus it is that you, Black Aria, having risen to the position of Master of Assassins now rule with absolute and unquestionable authority. Knowing that your organisation faces being wiped out by the city's ruling hierarchy if it puts a foot wrong, you are perfectly happy to wipe out any of your *own* assassins if they make the slightest mistake. You also do not allow anyone to muddy the playing field for the rest of you – you ruthlessly destroy any assassins who still dare to operate within the city and do not submit to you.

Soon you have a tight, lean and ultra-competent league who manage to survive, and have a monopoly on the assassination business within the city. Yet the Watchmen – ever bolstered by new and far younger and more intelligent blood – are forever picking off your bottom-feeders, and you are aware by now that you have as much to fear from your own men as you do from the Prince. You shield yourself by rigid layers of hierarchy, and you keep your back to the wall.

One day, much like any other, you sit and stare unblinking across the expanse of the Pied Cow. Your hard chair rests upon the highest dais in the tavern, and the place is quiet and peaceful save for the odd murmur. You contemplate, lord of all you survey.

One of your subordinates detaches himself from a low table and drifts over to you. He approaches you with eyes downcast, as you prefer.

'Forgive me, Master of Assassins,' he murmurs, 'but there have been events which we feel that you should be made aware of.'

You incline your head slightly. 'Speak,' you growl.

'A new assassin has entered the city and been operating independently of our protocols.'

Your eyes narrow. ‘This is an offence that cannot be borne. Who is this assassin?’

‘She is apparently called Grey Tiger. She seems to approach clients directly, without the aid of a go-between. It seems that to avoid being identified by them, she dresses entirely in grey clothing wound around her body and face.’

Something twitches uneasily in your head. ‘No one has approached her with the terms of operating within this city,’ you state rhetorically.

‘The normal overtures were made by our normal agents. They were refused.’

‘The reason given?’

‘None except that she works for no-one but herself.’

Something kicks inside your head insistently. You frown, half hoping, and half dreading, one of your visions coming now. Now that you are Master, you rarely have them.

Nothing comes over you today.

‘What are your orders, Master of Assassins?’ murmurs your subordinate respectfully.

You rise abruptly from your chair. ‘I know exactly how to deal with this. Send the Fixer over to me at once.’

‘Yes, sir.’ He bows out of your presence, and hurries to another table, where an assassin and the new fixer are making a deal.

It came as no surprise that the traitorous Fixer you slew was rapidly replaced by another. It does not even come as that much of a surprise that the new fixer is even younger and even more annoying. He struts insolently over to you, dressed in a motley of coloured rags, like a jester (apparently his former profession).

‘Greetings, Sire!’ he says jocularly. ‘What can I do you for?’

‘How’d you like me to cut you to see how much it bleeds?’ you snap.

‘Yes, sir,’ he mutters, sagging his shoulders and lowering his gaze to the floor. The new fixer knows his place.

‘I have a task for you. You may be aware that a new assassin has entered town, an upstart called the Grey Tiger. An anarch who does not acknowledge the rules we must follow to survive.’

‘I understand, Master of Assassins. How do you intend to remove the upstart?’

‘Despatch Waldo and Ajax. Waldo’s task is to hire out this Grey Tiger to kill Ajax. Ajax’s movements will be dictated by myself, and Waldo will stay with me as I shadow Ajax. With luck, I shall be able to neutralise the Grey Tiger before she neutralises Ajax.’

The fixer’s eyes open wide. He gulps. ‘Sir, you must be aware that Ajax is being put in a very difficult position here. The Grey Tiger is apparently better than anyone barring yourself, and-’

‘You have your orders. If Ajax has a problem with these orders then he can come to me and discuss his misgivings with me himself!’

‘Yes, sir,’ mumbles the fixer, face pale.

‘Now send Waldo to me. It’s time he learned something.’

‘Yes, Master of Assassins,’ and the fixer departs to carry out your orders.

Waldo is the young assassin of low rank who brought you the news of the Grey Tiger in the first place. He approaches your table again, obviously afraid.

‘Waldo,’ you say, cracking your lips in a cold, empty smile. ‘I have set in motion events that will neutralise the threat of the Grey Tiger. When the time comes for me to take her down I would like you to shadow me. I consider this a golden opportunity for you in terms of training and mentoring. Congratulations.’

Waldo goes paler, which you hadn’t thought possible. It’s obvious, even without the benefit of telepathy, that he *doesn’t* consider this a golden opportunity. But he says:

‘Thank you for this opportunity, Master of Assassins. I look forward to it.’

Turn to [141](#),

## 792

Abandoning the conversation, you draw steel on Defender.

‘Enough chatter, old man,’ you declare. ‘Your life is worth a lot to me.’

‘Well then, let it be thus so,’ he hisses, eyes going abruptly cold, and then boiling over with rage. ‘Perhaps ye who live by the sword will die by my sword this day!’

You leap to the attack:

DEFENDER

SKILL 12

STAMINA 19

Defender was once the greatest knight of his generation, and represents the absolute ultimate in the human fighting capability of this aeon. He is also a Master of the Right-handed Path – your telepathy is not strong enough to affect him. His plate armour and magical potency also mean that telekinetic attacks will only do 1 STAMINA point of damage. Your one hope is that he is past sixty, and his body is more frail than once it was.

If you win turn to [961](#).

## 797

When night falls, you put your plan into action. You plunge into the moat, mud ruining your fine clothes, vines tangling your feet, sword and dagger weighing you down, cold threatening to stop your heart. You are regretting this already, but at least there aren't any monsters.

You get to the wall and haul yourself out with a gasp. The air, if anything, is even colder; you fear your health will sustain irretrievable damage. Fortunately, as you had expected, the stones are poorly fitted and have large gaps between. You stick your hands and feet into them and begin, slowly and painfully, to climb up.

After what seems like hours later, you haul yourself over the battlements and cannot prevent yourself from collapsing to the floor, gasping. You are almost too weak to move. But you have to try. You drag yourself to your knees, and look up.

It is then that you notice the shocked guard standing over you.

von Lowenherz is evidently more than paranoid enough to guard his battlements round the clock. You throw yourself to your feet and do desperate battle. But it is no use. A yell from the guard is all it takes to bring swarms of his mates up from below, and only the most phenomenal martial artists can handle more than twenty opponents.

You are hacked to bits. Your adventure ends here.

THE END

## 798

You find yourself in a library. No more are the grey walls of the tunnels visible; instead they've been covered with the red leather spines of row upon row of books. It is a greater collection than you have ever seen; you stare around, overawed. In an age before the printing press, books have to be copied out by hand; this makes the collection before your eyes beyond price.

Still, you've got a job to do, and one which possibly will bring you more revenue than book thief (after all, the thieves would probably discover the idea of demarcation.) You cannot tarry overlong, but four books left out upon the table catch your eye. Evidently someone has been looking at them recently.

You look them over. If this is your first visit, you have time to look through one of them:

*Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter In: Hallelujah It's Raining Men* by Laurell K. Hamilton (turn to [186](#)).

*Starcraft Ulysses* by Gavin Mitchell (turn to [457](#))

*Knife Manual* by Gas Huffer (turn to [703](#))

*Conan's Adventure* by Robert Jordan (turn to [755](#))

If you have been here before, you cannot spare any more time to read. Go to [700](#).

## 799

You return to the rooms of Eichlan and its uncontrollable creation to find Eichlan pottering around its slab. It is taking limbs from the profusion strewn around the room and arranging them on the slab in arbitrary patterns. You watch in awe as it moulds two of them together with its tentacles, leaving no sign. Then, with a human-sounding sigh sounding almost obscene coming from that mass of unrelated flesh, it slices casually through the join with its tentacles and moves the limbs apart once more.

You seem to have been spotted... several weirdly-stalked eyes swivel and light upon you.

‘Yes?’ says Eichlan, sounding harassed and irritated. ‘You already got your compensation, what do you want now? I happen to be busy if you can see worth a tinker’s damn with that woefully inadequate number of eyes.’

If you kill him, turn to [840](#).

If you return to the corridor, turn to [443](#).

## 800

You anticipate that it will be quite difficult to set up a fake contract without leaving the Pied Cow, but in reality it proves to be quite easy. One night, as they often do, a rebellious group of teenage children of the bourgeoisie come in and throw their weight about. They flaunt their pocket money – which is still laughable compared to the amount an elite assassin earns – make snide comments and request the resident bard to play some of the modern discordant music of the day. This is of course, until the assassins glower at them and make them stop.

Seeing your opportunity, you go over to the group and make their acquaintance. At the start they are terrified and overawed to have such a famous assassin sit down at table, but you try to be as charming as possible. You can be surprisingly charismatic when it suits you and before long you have them eating out of your hand with your knowledge of the fashionable philosophies, actresses and bards of the hour.

You also buy them all several rounds of drinks, and before long they are all fairly tipsy (you, of course, know how to hold your liquor.) It is at this point that you mention the assassination business for the first time, and they are by now all drunk enough to laugh hysterically and crack jokes about it. It is then but a small matter to persuade them to set up the fake hit for you. You contrive a story in which one teenager wants the girlfriend of another, or something, and the one guy’s dad disapproves of this other guy because he doesn’t want him to inherit his biscuit factory. It makes no sense to you either, but it will suffice.

Having got what you wanted out of them, their naivety, narrow-mindedness and prejudice begin

to bore you, and you get up to leave. One girl offers to spend the night with you, but you consider it for about a second before thoughts of Eddora intrude upon you, and you decline.

The next day they reappear, as agreed, hungover and bleary eyed. You are now a *lot* more menacing than you were, and make quite clear what the consequences of renegeing on the agreement will be. You can see the thoughts pass over their faces even without the benefit of telepathy. Tell their fathers? Use their wealth and status to have you taken in? Trust that they can do all this before one of the best assassins in the city can get them?

It is clear that they do not wish to risk it and heads bowed, they agree to go ahead with the deal.

Turn to [680](#).

## 802

The moment the words are out of your mouth, the butler's face goes white with fury.

'How DARE you!' he splutters in rage. 'How DARE you march into our castle and insult our beloved count this way!' For a moment it seems as though the secretary will physically attack you – and the guards do not look likely to stop him. They're glaring at you in hatred and disgust.

The butler restrains himself with a visible effort.

'You must be insane if you think I would let you near the count,' he hisses. 'Go, and never return to this castle again, or I won't be held responsible for my actions. Guards!' They snap to attention. 'Escort this man off the premises.'

You look at the four heavily armed, towering men and know it would be suicide for even an assassin to argue. You are escorted out of the castle in a painful frog-march and hurled into a pile of dung. And all without knowing what you did to cause offence.

Rumour travels fast; nobody will sell you a horse or food, and it is only due to your obvious skill with blades and your Florentine arms – obviously unheard of here – that you evade attack. You are forced to trudge all the way back to Altgarten (deduct 3 STAMINA points) and then confess your failure to Joia – lose 3 LUCK points.

It goes without saying that you don't get any money. Hang your head in shame and turn to [615](#).

## 804

Her eyes narrow. 'Really? Fiorentino said you could study here, did he?'

'Oh, yes,' you reply hastily.

'Hmm. Well, I suppose he is letting me use his place, so I guess you have to. Oh well. What is it that you're interested in, exactly?'



Fortunately for you, you are quite a well-read assassin, and are able to make a convincing reply about one of the noted philosophers of the period. Far above being convinced, the Kiasyd is delighted, and chatters to you animatedly about the man and his works. You digress to various other philosophers and metaphysicians, and get along famously. You almost wish you weren't here on a mission of assassination... and that you weren't carrying a torch for Eddora...

Finally, though, your delightful companion brings the conversation to a close. 'Thanks for your company, friend,' she says eventually, 'but I really must carry on with my studies. I fear it will take me around 300 years to complete the volumes of this library, and Fiorentino will probably die in – oh, how long do these humans live again? – around 50 years time. Perhaps I should ghoul or Embrace him, but I really can't stand the man.'

You leave feeling oddly revitalised. Gain 1 LUCK point. Go to [479](#).

## 808

And so, you become count of one of the most prosperous territories of the Old World.

There is just one fly in the ointment...

How ironic it is that you should rise to the same position as the Count, but be brought low again by the same injury as himself, and from the same source. For your mutilation comes to be the same thorn in your side as it was to him.

What makes matters even worse is that you went through so much to be with your partner again, and to keep her, and now you can never love her again. You can never bear children, which would be what you would need to secure your throne. Adoption is suggested, but by this point, your mind is fractured.

The people have no problem with letting you on the throne, even with a dark elf for a wife. You acquired too much respect in the time you were there. However, your injury, and its consequences, eventually fractures your mind irretrievably.

You forget all the spiritual advancement that you learned as a Master of the Right-hand Path, and worse, you go over to the dark side. You become a tyrant, and a Black Magician to boot. You delve into all kinds of forbidden lore (chiefly concerning how to live beyond your allotted span; this seems the only way, without children, that you can possibly hang on to the throne) and it blackens your mind still further. Your court becomes a haven for Brothers of the Left-hand Path, Satanists, dark witches, dark clerics, all manner of evil-minded scum, and the people groan under the weight of oppression.

Until one day, one of your subjects decides to take matters into her own hands, and set the record straight.

That day, you are addressing your second in command, a fellow black magician, and you look down to see a serrated knife of dark elf manufacture protruding from your ribs.

'I'm sorry, Aria,' Eddora whispers, caressing your hair for one last time, her face veiled in tears.

‘You aren’t the person I fell in love with anymore. And this is for the best.’

Whether your court of evil flunkies tear Eddora apart afterwards is not known to you. But your adventure is over.

THE END

## 809

Joia is indeed naturally immune to much magic and psychic power – probably to a greater extent than he or even you realise – but you have learnt much since the black day Eddora left. You launch a ravaging blast of psychic energy at the fixer, and though his block is powerful, it is no match for you. You crack his mental wall and the secrets of his mind are yours for the taking.

‘I see,’ you say after a while. ‘So correct me if I’m wrong. You were seized by the First Lensman of the Watch for suspected complicity with the underground assassination business of the city. You were dragged before the Grand Coucillor – three eyes, interesting – who read your mind where the Lensman had failed. There you were dominated into making me kill the Phantom and controlled throughout the transaction... *as part of a plot to turn the assassins of the city against one another?*’

‘Yes...’ murmurs Joia, looking down at the table, his face distinctly green. ‘Curse you telepaths! I still maintain I could have stood up to you, Aria, if that damn Councillor – whatever the hell he is – hadn’t weakened my mind – Nnnnggg!’

The muscles in Joia’s neck abruptly snap rigid – an expression of absolute agony crosses his face, and his eyes glaze over. ‘Everything I just told you has been a lie,’ he says in monotonous tones. ‘The Nightshade Phantom hit was organised by the Witch Queen of the Altgarten Coven Circle.’

‘Nice try, Grand Councillor,’ you sneer at the vacant face. ‘But I have psionic abilities of my own and I know a poor mind control when I see one. We’re going to be having words, you and I. And only one of us is going to walk away from that conversation...’

Turn to [766](#).

## 811

A knowledge of anatomy is de rigeur in your job, and you have made intensive study of the modern painters who dissect bodies to make their art more realistic. You see immediately that the femoral artery is severed, and you know that it is closest to the surface in the hip. Working quickly, you pull out the count’s bootlaces, and use them to tourniquet the artery securely.

The blood flow slows and stops. The count’s countenance is ashen, but his breathing is steady, if shallow. You heave a sigh and wipe your cold-sweat brow, smearing blood all over yourself.

Almost as you have done this, the injured beater comes crashing back into the clearing, bringing what seems like an entire legion of armed men with him. They look at you suspiciously.

‘Be careful moving him!’ you bark authoritatively. ‘Don’t damage that tourniquet, or the count dies.’

Convinced of your honesty, some men carefully pick up the stricken man, and you bear him back to the castle. Surgeons are sent for and the count is laid carefully on his bed.

Turn to [330](#).

## 821

You nervously offer your answer.

‘There *is* no password,’ he says coldly. ‘There never has been one.’

Lose 1 LUCK point.

‘I think I’d better teach you a lesson.’

The workers all crowd around you, chanting and shouting obscenities. You are surrounded, and may not *Escape*.

The foreman is stronger and tougher than an ordinary human:

GHOUL FOREMAN  
STAMINA 14

SKILL 10

If you win, the workers give you one look, and then leg it out of the factory, clearly unwilling to face someone who could take down their foreman. Turn to [296](#).

## 822

You get fed up of pamphlets, of having your money nicked by a seemingly endless stream of messenger boys (you have decided they merely put on disguises to come back to the pub and rip you off again) and even of abusing the other assassins. The only other activity available to you is to sit and drink, stare at the table, think about how rotten your life is and sink into a black depression.

Until one night, a young woman sits down opposite you.

‘Look at you,’ she says. ‘Sitting here drowning in your sorrows like a pathetic fat drunk.’

You raise your head slowly and glare across at her. She is beautiful, with blonde hair tied back in a ponytail, and aristocratic figure-hugging black clothes, but somehow you don’t find her attractive. She looks very familiar somehow – you rack your brain to work out where you’ve

seen her before.

‘Who the hell are you?’ you growl.

‘Ariane will do for now.’

You ignore this odd statement, saying instead ‘You do realise who I am – and what I usually do to people who talk to me that way?’

‘I will talk to you however I wish. Your fighting ability has no relevance here.’

You shrug and pour yourself another glass of wine from the rapidly-emptying carafe. The barman hurries to bring another. ‘At least you know something. You’re obviously aware violence is frowned upon for assassins in the Pied Cow.’

‘Oh, that wasn’t what I meant, but that’s not really relevant. I was wondering what the hell you were doing here.’

‘Waiting.’

‘For whom – or for what – are you waiting?’

‘Inspiration,’ you growl.

‘Well, maybe it’s your lucky day,’ she says with heavy sarcasm. ‘And why would you need that so rare of commodities?’

You explain to her the situation with the Nightshade Phantom. ‘The Nightshade Phantom is too strong,’ you mumble eventually. ‘I can’t hope to defeat him in a face to face battle. Everyone but everyone is hostile to assassins in general and me in particular. I cannot leave this pub and hope to live!’

‘Marvellous,’ she replies. ‘The greatest assassin of his generation, paralysed and blinded by fear of life.’

‘What’s that supposed to mean.’

‘Danger is all around us, Aria. This inn could fall down upon our heads at any moment. And all these people hostile to you – can they really be concentrating on destroying you twenty-four seven, or are they more likely to be preoccupied by their own concerns?’

‘This is all very well,’ you growl, beginning to grow irritated. ‘But what I want to know is, how do I get the Nightshade Phantom?’

‘Is that all you care about, then? Then your life will never change. In the meantime, the Phantom told you that there was more to this case than meets the eye. There’s very few people who you could ask as to why – the Phantom certainly isn’t going to tell you – but one of those people who could tell you is the client.’

‘The client?’

‘The person who hired you to kill the Phantom.’

‘I can’t approach them!’ you protest, shocked. ‘Why do you think we have so many agents and fences and go-betweens? It’s to protect the client and the assassin from the law... and from each other.’

‘Well, this layering and chain of communication has its strengths, but it also has its weaknesses. It may be that someone has decided to exploit the latter, and that is something you should be thinking about very carefully.’

There is a long pause. You stare at the woman. She stares back.

‘Thanks,’ you say eventually. ‘I’ll give that some thought.’

‘Fancy a drink?’

‘I think not,’ she says with a small sneer, as she stands up to leave. ‘I don’t think we’ll be meeting again, Aria.’

‘Suit yourself,’ you mutter as she stalks out. You notice she does not garner any catcalls from the clients of the tavern. You wonder why.

The next morning, head pounding worse than ever, you approach the barman and ask him if he had seen the woman coming to the tavern before.

‘What woman, sir?’ he mumbles, looking down at the ground and cleaning a glass with single-minded concentration.

‘The one who came to my table late last night.’

‘Forgive me sir, but I saw no woman last night. You were... er... forgive me for saying so... talking to yourself.’

‘Fine!’ you mutter, stalking away from the bar. ‘I ought to be used to this kind of thing by now.’

Turn to [331](#).

## 824

You move nervously around the body, unbuckling the leather straps that hold the creature’s limbs to the table. Eventually, all are free.

Somehow, the creature is aware that you have freed it. Its chitinous eyelids flick open, revealing eyes slit open like a cat’s. They’re amber and filled with rage.

The creature’s eyes land on you.

It roars!

It sits up on the slab!

The creature jerks itself off the table and lays into you in a berserk rage with all its unnatural weaponry. You curse yourself for a fool.

You are unlikely to live to regret your actions.

TZIMISCE WAR GHOUL  
STAMINA 29

SKILL 15

After one round, a spiny, murderous horror appears in the doorway to the other room and watches the desperate battle with interest. It doesn't lift a tentacle to help either one of you.

The War Ghoul has far greater reach than you. You may not *Escape*.

In the highly unlikely event that you win, turn to [245](#).

In the event that your STAMINA is reduced to 2 or below, turn to [96](#).

## 827

Seated in Fiorentino's study, for the first time since you became his apprentice you have time to think very hard about where your life is going.

You have always doubted that Fiorentino is truly your father – you have little in common in looks or personality – and if he is not, you are no closer to finding the true man. You are also concerned about your progress as a neophyte necromancer. You are unsure whether it is worse when you aren't learning anything, or whether it is worse when you *are*. In the former case, while the mental training is useful, you have learnt little of any real potency; and in the latter, you are afraid of becoming a powerful Black Magician. It's said that once a person dedicates his soul to attacking heights meant for spiritual advancement for the purposes of power and conquest, the forces of Good abandon all support and see them as an implacable enemy. And eventually you will pass the Abyss and become a Warrior of Darkness. You have little idea what it means, but as an assassin you have always been your own man, and you fear abandoning that.

Ultimately you are faced with a choice. You can stay and throw your lot in with the dark, or you can leave before Fiorentino knows you're gone.

If you stay, turn to [701](#).

If you go, turn to [922](#).

## 828

Heart pounding with fear, you charge through the doorless doorway, psychic senses stretched to

their stark limit. You sense nothing. Within the house, the laughing and crying is not muffled at all.

The lower floor is bare save for hundreds and hundreds of black, children's hands painted on the walls, floor and ceiling. The only other feature is a staircase leading up and down.

You charge up the stairs. Nothing save more hands.

You charge downwards. You find yourself in a basement.

Torches are burning in the walls. You look around – there are no hands on the walls here, and the laughter and crying have finally ceased. However, your eyes bulge with horror as you spy a figure in the corner.

You walk over carefully. The figure is turned into the corner, its head bowed. It seems to be female, wearing a finely tooled leather garment, with midnight black arms and legs and white hair.

Black skin, white hair...

Is that... Eddora?

A heavy blow from behind crushes your skull, and you collapse. You have fallen victim to a force of primal fear from some alien and horribly different plenum.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 832

As the Healer dies yourself and Eddora each heave a sigh.

'Well, back to the escape plan I guess,' you say.

'I think we should finish what we started. Take out the Prince and Kandron too,' replies Eddora.

You both smile at each other and heft your Florentine armaments. Your deadpan statements can't even begin to disguise the exhilaration you both feel.

'I think we should get ourselves a piece of Kandron and the Prince *immediately*.'

'Oh, you'll get your wish,' says a voice tight with anger.

At that moment, your two nemeses materialise out of nowhere halfway down the corridor from you. You both turn, arching your eyebrows in exaggerated surprise.

'Why, this is a stroke of luck,' smiles Eddora.

'Think you so?' growls Kandron. 'It was for you, that this *moronic* Kindred was *fool* enough to

leave you in a cell next to someone who could heal your wounds easily.’

‘Our deal is *definitely* off,’ hisses the Prince venomously from behind him.

‘Fallen out of bed with each other already, chaps?’ you say conversationally. You heft your weapons aggressively. ‘So which of you wants to die first?’

Kandron reaches up and shoves his leather hood back over his head. ‘Stand aside, Prince,’ he declares in booming tones. ‘I’ll deal with these upstarts. Then I’ll deal with *you*.’

‘You do that,’ sneers the Prince, as the cloaked and hooded Kandron advances on you both.

Eddora stalks down the corridor, eyes bright. ‘I’m looking forward to this. You’ll regret the day you ever exiled me.’

‘You’ll regret the day you seduced my son!’

‘Hell,’ you add. ‘I’m just looking forward to this anyway.’

The Prince just stands and sneers, hefting his spear.

DARK ELF RULING SORCERER  
STAMINA 19

PSYCHIC 14

Kandron fights entirely using telepathy and telekinesis, using his PSYCHIC score to calculate his Attack Strength. Yourself and Eddora can fight him normally using multiple rules with whichever fighting method you prefer. For each of Kandron’s attacks, roll one die. On an odd number, he will attack you. On an even, he will attack Eddora.

If Kandron’s stamina is reduced to 4 or below, turn to [118](#).

## 836

The dagger is a very fine piece of work indeed. It is very light, and seems to be made more of black glass than metal. The blade seems amazingly springy, sharp and tough. Meanwhile, the guards are formed in the shape of wings, and the hilt in the form of a snarling, reptilian mouth.

You are still admiring the weapon when it turns and bucks in your grip!

Roll one die and add 6 to the number. If this is less than or equal to your SKILL, turn to [528](#). If this is greater than your SKILL, go to [34](#).

## 837

‘Hello yourself. So what are you doing here?’

‘What a coincidence,’ you answer carefully. ‘I was just about to ask you the same question.’



‘Well, I’m happy to go first,’ begins the creature.

‘Basically I’ve loved metal all my life. I mean *really loved it*. None of my girlfriends used to like it, but eventually they came round to the idea. Funny, they tended to go all still and start leaking red stuff and not say a lot more after that. So I was limited to chiefly sticking it into *myself*. You can see some of my finest designs-‘ proudly indicating his ribs, his claw, his lungs, his leg, ‘-and how much more efficient they are than puny human limbs. I used to leak red stuff myself, but then I didn’t anymore, and then my flesh went a funny colour and started falling off. People started screaming and attacking me then, so I ran away to the graveyard and found my way down here. I’m very happy here.’

‘Marvellous,’ you offer. You are, frankly, bowled over. *The man’s mad*, you think. ‘So... you don’t happen to know anything about these tunnels, do you?’

‘Haven’t the foggiest. I suppose you’re after some treasure or something?’

‘You could say that,’ you say cautiously.

‘You adventurers, always the same. Willing to risk anything for a little bit of money. Not like good old plain iron and steel. You can pick those up anywhere.’

‘Well, different strokes for different folks, or so they say,’ you offer with a shaky laugh. ‘So... time I was leaving...’

‘Well, good luck on your quest,’ the creature says, and your heart leaps. For a moment it seems as though you’re going to actually walk out of here unmolested.

Then it speaks again... and your heart plummets.

‘But you really must allow me to fit you some metal limbs before you go.’

*Test your Luck.* If you are successful, turn to [870](#). If not, turn to [166](#).

## 838

You wait around in the bar until the witching hour, careful not to drink too much and to get a light meal, and subsequently leave. You wish, as you often do, that the business of everyone in the Pied Cow wasn’t quite so obvious; but then again, everyone is far too circumspect for the Watch to find any evidence, even if they were brave enough to raid.

Despite the lateness of the hour, there are still a few hansom cabs about. They’re small, enclosed carriages pulled by a horse and rider. Would you like to hire one to take you to the address, or not? They cost 10 GP and are reliable witnesses, but the streets are dangerous...

For a cab, turn to [754](#); for Shank’s mare, turn to [352](#).

## 839

You walk through into a room much like the last, with identically bare walls and blue glowing jewels. There are two doors. However, standing in the middle of the floor are three SKELETON WARRIORS.

They are armed with shields and shortswords, and stance rising slightly up and down, up and down, up and down almost as if they were... breathing. Your mind reels as you wonder if they have been doing such all the hundreds of years since Sir Svendas's death. As you walk through the door, they seem to 'see' you and immediately take up martial and hostile poses, waving their swords in your direction. You have no option but to face them in combat or be hacked to bits.

First SKELETON SKILL 6  
STAMINA 6

Second SKELETON SKILL 6  
STAMINA 6

Third SKELETON SKILL 6  
STAMINA 6

Fight using multiple rules.

To make matters worse, the skeletons have no minds (or brains, as far as you can see through the eyeholes) and thus they are immune to your telepathic powers. Your sword and dagger rely on slashing and stabbing, and thus cannot do much to creatures who have no internal organs – they do only 1 STAMINA point of damage each. Only telekinesis can help you here; it will do normal damage.

You cannot bring yourself to run from puny skeletons, however armed. If you win, you may go either left to [664](#), or straight on to [841](#).

## 840

Eichlan is shocked as you draw steel upon him. 'Is this what you humans call gratitude?' it cries, snapping its most lethal spines and blades into position. 'I always said those above-ground fools were mistaken to retain *Humanitas*.'

Resolve this battle:

Eichlan, master bodycrafter of the Tzimisce, has a wide range of tentacles and appendages equipped with weaponry such as claws, strikers and spines. Its mass and volume are huge, and its organs are by no means in their original places.

EICHLAN SKILL 14  
STAMINA 27

Any time Eichlan gets a double for its *Attack Strength*, a blast of flame issues from one of its

unidentifiable orifices and burns you severely. Lose 3 STAMINA points. You must also deal with his standard attack for that round!

Eichlan's tentacles are very long and very swift, and very able to catch hold of you; you may not *Escape*.

If you win, turn to [71](#). If your stamina is reduced to 2 or below, turn to [96](#).

## 841

The room, like the rest, is bare stone save for the glowing stone jewels. Unfortunately for you – and wearily similar to the rest – you are not alone.

Facing you with a glare of hatred is a figure. It wears voluminous armour of chain mail, covering almost all its body, with sleeves, gauntlets, greaves and chasuble. Beneath a chainmail hood glowers the face of a dark-complexioned man in the prime of life, with huge moustaches hanging to his chest. From the way he hefts his fists – and from the way he is almost as broad through the shoulders as the length of your sword – you sense that he has fought before. However, this is not what bothers you the most.

You are rather more concerned with the aura of bone-chilling cold emanating from the figure, and its transparency to the floor below.

‘After all these centuries,’ the being declares in sepulchral tones. ‘Tomb raiders come to steal the priceless goods of Sir Svendas, the Defender.

‘Know then that I am Gravis, his batman, and I will not allow you to do it!’

He wades in wielding his massive fists.

But you can already guess that his fists will do not bashing but cold damage, the cold of the freezing abyss of death, and that your weapons will not bite on his ephemeral body. This is a man who has waited out death itself to serve his master!

WRAITH  
STAMINA 14

PSYCHIC 11

If you cannot fight telepathically, you cannot harm this being. You must *Escape* by turning to [75](#).

If you win you may instead turn to [635](#).

## 842

If you have a lock of white hair and the back of your hand itches, turn to [12](#).

You taste the green liquid. It tastes absolutely foul, and you discern no effect upon you. What

can it be for, you wonder?

Concluding that the green potions have no use for you, you decide to leave them behind. Return to [594](#).

## 843

You enter the other room, not without trepidation, and are confronted with the same bare stone walls, ceiling and floor as you've just left. However, the furnishings are much different. In the middle of the room is a huge, luxurious four-poster bed, decked entirely in black silks.

Lounging indecently on the bed is a large, voluptuous woman, with black hair and heavy, smirking features. She is barely dressed in tattered underwear... of black leather. The sight of her makes you distinctly queasy, mixed with overwhelming attraction... but the blistering ache in the back of your brain tells you that she is *definitely* more psychic than the average human.

'So you're an assassin, are you?' she says saucily, wagging her legs back and forth. 'Are you any good?'

'The best,' you answer... your voice oddly cracking.

'That's nice,' she says indifferently. 'Now hear this. I am Morrigan of the Succubi. Within this complex of tunnels I have acquired an enemy, and I would be very interested in having her assassinated. In return I shall give you some information that would be of great interest to *you*, assassin.'

Are you interested in accepting this contract?

If so, turn to [916](#).

If not, go back to the corridor at [304](#).

## 844

You don't find any of your old contacts.

You do, however, find one of your old *enemies*.

Standing on a street corner, raising her head to the rain, is a young woman with sharp features and dark hair. Her dress is extremely unusual for Altgarten; she wears armour of leather covered in vertical metal strips, forming a torso-guard and short skirt. She carries a large, round shield and a short, stabbing sword (called by her a *gladius*.)

Your eyes widen. You start to turn round and walk away.

But in direct contradiction of your hopes and dreams, she notices you.

Her lip curls.

‘Aria,’ she says.

‘Gladiatrix,’ you – reluctantly – acknowledge.

Gladiatrix – or so the rumour goes – was once a slave made to fight in an arena in a barbarian land. She earned her freedom by sheer skill and decided to travel the world. She earned money for the trip via networks – a profession that unfortunately, brought yourself and her into direct competition.

‘You stole the Gabardine contract from right under my nose,’ she hisses venomously.

You shrug helplessly.

‘What can I say Gladiatrix? It’s a dog eat dog business.’

Her eyes glitter with rage.

‘You have mocked me for the last time, Aria,’ she snarls. She draws her gladius. ‘Prepare to meet the gods of Olympus!’

Gladiatrix is one of the deadliest fighters in the world. Her skill was honed in the arenas of a barbarian land and the assassination business across three continents. Say your prayers.

GLADIATRIX

SKILL 10

STAMINA 17

You may *Escape* at the special doubled cost of 4 STAMINA points; Gladiatrix is not a woman you turn your back on, as you tend to find a javelin sticking out of it. Escaping leads you back to [759](#), where you may not look for contacts again. If at any time you roll Snake Eyes (two 1s) for her *Attack Strength* turn to [618](#).

If you win, turn to [546](#).

## 845

Her feathery white eyebrows shoot up almost into her hair. ‘Really! You’re kidding. No... you aren’t. I don’t think I can allow that... not when Fiorentino is letting me shelter here!’

You curse inwardly as you realize you probably said the wrong thing. You draw your weapons with some chagrin... turn to [577](#).

## 846

In direct contradiction of your hopes and dreams, a board creaks titanicly beneath your feet. You give a colossal groan.

Copper's middle aged wife sits bolt upright in bed. She takes one look at you and faints dead away.

No such luck with Copper. 'You're the assassin!' he spits. 'I'll show you!' Moving surprisingly fast for a fat man, he reaches down under the bed and pulls out a cutlass. Your heart sinks. He rushes you in a berserk rage. Resolve this battle:

COPPER  
STAMINA 8

SKILL 6

This is your target; you may not Escape. If you win, turn to [255](#).

## 847

The crude wooden hut of Checkpoint 847 is partially fallen in, and looks all but uninhabitable. It's out practically in the middle of nowhere; the baked scrubland is unfarmable (especially since Perrereich now buys the majority of its food from other lands, and the farmers have all moved to the cities) and Altgarten itself is a dusty mirage in the distance.

You wipe your black-clad arm across your streaming forehead and gaze at irritation at the sweat-soaked dust now marring your fine sleeves. Sneaking up to the hut is impossible – you are the tallest thing for miles around. You have no option to walk up to the partially collapsed doorway.

Peering inside, your eyes take a few seconds to adjust, but one thing is immediately apparent. A huge, elderly man sits cross-legged in the middle of the dirt floor with an enormous Templar sword across his knees.

Defender is wearing full plate armour, even sitting still. Over the gleaming steel he's wearing a white chasuble bearing an enormous red holy symbol. The symbol makes you vaguely uncomfortable and guilty to look upon. You feel hot even sitting across from him, and yet not a bead of sweat is visible on him. Long, sparse white hair hangs to his shoulders; his face is lined and old, dating him at past sixty. Even sitting down, he looks enormous; his shoulders are half as wide across again as yours, and he must be at least a foot taller. His sword is as long as you are, and as wide as your hand.

He is doing nothing but sitting, head bowed with closed eyes.

What would you like to do?

If you attack him and try to take him by surprise, turn to [59](#).

If you wish to sit down opposite him and meditate also, turn to [358](#).

If you want to call out to him and attract his attention, turn to [411](#).

## 853

You send a blistering torrent of telepathic energy against Defender's block, trying to break it down with the endless rage and hatred that defines your every moment.

Roll three dice. If the total is lower than your PSYCHIC score, turn to [598](#). If it is equal to or higher, turn to [967](#).

## 860

The boar expires with a grunt, and you drop your weapons and wheel round. The situation is not good. The remaining bearer is dead with his throat torn out, and bright, arterial blood is fountaining six feet out of the count's upper thigh.

What would you like to do?

You can run through the count and finally complete your original mission. Turn to [688](#).

You can try and staunch the awful wound in his leg. Turn to [811](#).

If neither option appeals, turn to [623](#).

## 863

Almost as soon as you set up your equipment the pendant bucks and jerks in your hand; your heart leaps. The ring is straining with all the force of a rabid animal towards a seemingly blank area of the map. But knowing it must mean something, you squint at the region.

You can just barely make out the legend: *Checkpoint* [847](#).

You sigh with happiness, and say a prayer for your beloved mother's memory. You pack her artefacts away as carefully as you can, and prepare to go visit Defender...

The fact that the ring was spinning furiously counterclockwise at the time does not strike you as particularly important...

## 866

Your informants have come up in the world since you saw them last.

Baggy Anne the one-time fat whore is now a madam in her own right, running a brothel that, apparently, used to be run by someone called Morrigan for someone called Lasombra. With many beautiful girls working for her, it's a far cry from plying her wares at the docks in the rain. And she is rumoured to have joined the secret society of the Hermetic Silver Night, and be

practising their arcane martial and mystic arts. It has certainly allowed her to acquire a body the equal of any warrior; even to you, she actually looks quite attractive.

Tyler the beggar now has a position as adviser to one of the kingpins of the city, and invariably precedes his (entirely accurate) advice with a steady stream of self-deprecatory lamentations. Despite that he now bathes once a day and dresses as sharply as any aristocrat. He seems set to be a real power within the underworld... but at least, assassins will always be needed.

King Adora, the ‘prince’ of the Thieves’ Guild, now sits on a throne melted down from the pure gold ornamentation of half the bourgeoisie of Altgarten. His thieves all look well fed and in the best of health. As soon as they see you, neither he nor they cannot refrain from snickering unpleasantly and muttering behind your back. It seems they know something you don’t, but none of them will tell you, and since you are as always outnumbered, you cannot threaten or probe too much...

One thing they all have in common, though: *none* of them know where Defender is. Lose 2 LUCK points and turn to [671](#).

## 870

You start to panic at the hideous creature’s sight, but just about keep your cool.

‘Oh, I don’t think I’ll be needing any new limbs,’ you say easily.

‘Really?’ says the monster in surprise.

‘Really. You see, I’m Black Aria. You may not have heard of me, but I’m Altgarten’s best assassin, up above.’ *Stretching the point a little*, you think, recalling the Nightshade Phantom.

The creature’s wire eyebrows go up. ‘Really? In that case you probably need to be quiet. And whatever the clash of steel on steel might be, it ain’t necessarily so. Fair enough, you’ve convinced me. Good luck as you go on your way.’

You are now free to leave. Restore 1 LUCK point for getting out of a potentially disastrous situation so easily.

You may leave via the left door (turn to [886](#)) or the right door (turn to [532](#))

## 873

Cursing, you stamp your way out of the castle; lose 1 LUCK point. You spend the night in an inn (restore 5 STAMINA points, and deduct 10 GP) and in the morning buy a horse and another five lots of Provisions (deduct 425 GP). Your journey back to Perrereich is uneventful, and on your return you sell your horse for 100 GP – the only profit you make on this entire venture. Joia nods sympathetically and agrees hypocritically that the mission was impossible, but needless to say he doesn’t give you any money.



Turn to [615](#).

## 874

You open Eichlan's book and squint as you try to read it. The writing is exactly as bad as you would expect for a creature possessed only of tentacles.

It appears to be a lab book, a diary of someone's experiments. Those entries which aren't scrawled to the point of incomprehensibility are obliterated by chemical stains.

You can make out only the following entries:

4/5 Started work on new war ghoul today. Preliminary plans should make it the best one yet.

17/6 Acquired feet, fingers, ear and tongue from prisoner – latest assassin to attack Fiorentino.

(If you have opened a sack in these tunnel complexes, deduct 1 SKILL point temporarily in your next battle, as your blood runs cold at the thought of your fate should you fail.)

1/7 Made up a new batch of yellow sulphur-type acid. Stored it in the apothecary in dose-sized bottles.

9/8 Worked with the irritating necromancer and the delightful Kiasyd on new project. I christened it the 'stick grenade'. Trigger mechanism a bit dodgy – keeps going off at odd times. Fortunately all test work done by zombies. Current design: (You see a crude drawing of what looks like a small mace.)

You find nothing else useful in the book, though there are quite a few blank pages left. Feel free to take it with you if you want paper to start fires, to take the places of leaves when you feel the need for a 'sit down' visit or even, maybe, just maybe, to write with.

Otherwise return to the corridor at [443](#).

## 875

Walking gingerly and keeping your cloak over your face, you advance on the sack. You find the neck; it's been tied shut. You have just managed to untie it when the sack bucks and jumps in your arms!

You shout in horror and leap back. However, the true horror is yet to come.

The sack continues to move, until finally there emerges from it a *man*... or at least something that used to be one. He's dressed in tattered rags, filthy with his own vomit, urine and excrement. He lacks an ear and, from the tortured, pre-vocal sounds he's making, a tongue. His filthy hair is matted and wounds on his body are seething with maggots. It is from him the smell issues.

Somehow, he can still see. On skinned knees he crawls towards you; with feet hacked off at the ankle, he cannot walk. He raises a hand towards you... a hand on which only one finger remains.

The finger curls slowly. It appears to be beckoning...

You can stand it no longer and vomit your last meal (lose 2 STAMINA) onto the floor before the creature. You back out into the corridor as fast as you can. Before you, the creature leans its head down to the floor and, famished, starts eating your puke.

You slam the door behind you, lean against it and breathe deeply, trying to get the memory from your mind.

In your next battle, detect 1 SKILL temporarily due to the twitching awfuls. Due to nausea, you may not eat a meal until you have explored at least two more rooms, and gotten your mind off of the man in the sack.

Turn to [893](#).

## 876

As your blade draws the last drop of a seemingly enormous quantity of blood from Lasombra, he collapses with a gurgle. He staggers, seeming to be trying to struggle to his knees, but falls flat on his face and never moves again.

Lasombra's skin seems to age dramatically, turning almost immediately into the skin of a man seemingly too old to live. It suddenly dessicates and rots, falling into ashes and leaving only bones, which themselves soon turn into ashes and collapse. Nothing remains of Lasombra but dust.

You can only wonder what manner of creature he was.

Turn to [771](#).

## 877

The weeks go by, as they did before and will again. The sun rises and sets upon the land. Yourself, Joia and the assassins of the Pied Cow grow older.

You go through the motions of the assassination business (add 9284 GP) but that is all it is; time and motion. There is no meaning here, not even a dream.

You know now that you have exhausted all possibility of accepting one of the men from your mother's diary as your father, and yet something nags at you to suggest that somehow, all of those directions were wrong in any case. True enough, their wildly different professions and

backgrounds were all very exciting and romantic, but would any of their children really turn out as an assassin? And what does it say for your mother that she slept with such diverse individuals? These are after all, only the ones you know about. You are left with these disquieting thoughts as you murder your way through the population of the city, and with no answer, they form only an arching and frustrating vault – a prison, with no obvious key.

You are not yet self-obsessed not to notice, though, a gradual change in the atmosphere of the Pied Cow. Times are hard. The number of Watchmen has recently doubled, and not just through the traditional method of lowering the entry requirements. No, this time the best and brightest and most intellectual of the rising bourgeoisie class youth are joining up. Philosophers are spouting the virtues of law and order in this best of all possible worlds, and how it will lead to freedom and happiness for all. It goes without saying that these are none of the ones *you* like.

Thus it is that the proprietor of the Pied Cow is tightening his belt, because his clientele are gradually, ever so gradually disappearing. With the flatfoots thicker in their numbers it is difficult for the most inept bottom-feeders to cut the mustard as assassins; they are removed to a place of execution, where rumour has it they are not executed at all but sold to the new natural philosophy schools for real-time dissection exercises. Of course, with your psychic powers, Florentine fighting skills, years of experience and innate living rage you are far above the level where any flatfoot could threaten you. But those very psychic powers mean that you feel the tension.

It is one of those tense autumn evenings that Joia comes to you in your cubicle, looking wildly different from how you have ever seen him. His hair is in disarray, his fine clothes look as though they were put on in the dark, and his eyes are wide with fear.

*Joia afraid?*

‘Have I got a hit for you, Aria,’ he rattles, looking wildly over his shoulder. It is early afternoon – which translates to practically before dawn for most assassins – so the inn is nearly empty.

‘Oh really?’ you inquire mildly. You send out a probe, but are stopped short. You curse as you recall that – despite that Joia is rumoured to be one of the worst sorcerers who ever lived – he is very resistant to your psychic powers.

‘Yeah, you’re not going to believe this,’ he says, talking nineteen to the dozen. ‘Can’t tell you the client, very hush hush, but the hit’s this...’ For the first time, he clams up. His wide eyes look at you, terrified from out of his staring face. They seem to be trying to escape.

You feel rising irritation mixed with rising fear. ‘Spit it out, Joia,’ you hiss. ‘You should know by now that my patience is not unlimited.’

‘Nightshade Phantom. 20,000 GP. There, I’ve said it. Oh God oh God oh God.’

A paralysing blast of fear strikes your heart, and suddenly all Joia’s discomfiture and anxiety are explained.

The contract for the Nightshade Phantom.

There is no psychic flashback on this occasion. There is no need.

Turn to [241](#).

## 878

The hellhound has leaked a fantastic quantity of blood over the floor, shining in the starlight, but still it fights on seemingly without weakening. But you have struggled too long to get to the bottom of this case to succumb to a mere dog, and with one last skilful thrust you impale the beast through its throat and right down to the end of its body. It gurgles in agony past the cold steel, and dies.

Kicking the body in irritation, you stride over to the coffin and fling open the lid. It's empty.

It is now pretty clear that the Councillor is not home. You're going to have to see him in his normal working hours by turning to [510](#) – unless of course you want to wait around for the Nightshade Phantom to get you, instead.

## 881

After Joia has left, you are faced with the usual problem of how to get to your target. This one is going to be more difficult than ever, because unlike your previous targets Defender is not an underworld figure in his own right who your own underworld contacts will know about, nor does he own his own land in which his domicile is an enormous, obvious castle. You've never, in fact, faced a problem of this magnitude before.

If your PSYCHIC score is 13 or above, you may turn to [482](#) for enhanced power options if you wish.

Otherwise, add your PSYCHIC score to your SKILL score and roll four dice. If the dice total is lower than your attribute total, turn to [671](#).

If all else fails (and presumably, all else failed) you could always try your old contacts anyway. Turn to [866](#).

## 882

The manager goes down, blood fountaining from his femoral artery.

You grab his lapel and heave him up. You place your dagger beneath his chin.

'Talk, idiot,' you hiss. 'What is the location of Lasombra?'

'I'll never tell you!' he gasps.

But at the very mention of Lasombra's location, it pops into his mind all unbidden, and you are

able to use your telepathy to pluck it from there.

‘Thank you,’ you whisper, and push your dagger into his brain.

Turn to [914](#).

## 883

Suddenly, you are startled by the noise of riders and men-at-arms. A small army seems to be riding towards you. You stare up at them, amazed. Eddora’s eyes widen at the sight.

‘What do you want?’ you say irritably, collapsed on the floor with your injured lover in your arms.

A knight steps forward, leaping down off his horse. Suddenly, you feel a shock of recognition as you see the sign on his shield; a boar rampant. To your absolute amazement, he kneels before you and bows his head in profound respect.

‘What’s going on?’ breathes Eddora in wonder.

The knight, still with head bowed, holds out to you a rolled parchment sealed with the boar emblem.

‘My Lord,’ he says respectfully. ‘I humbly beseech you to read this.’

Incredulous, you seize the parchment and tear it open.

My friend,

I’m afraid I haven’t long left to live. The doctors tell me this wasting disease is incurable, and that I cannot hope to last the night. My people wail and tear their hair, but I don’t mind. This is because I have an heir.

You know of the circumstances that prevented me having children of my own; but I find in you someone who I would have had as my son above all else. Only you reacted with vision and power on that hunting trip. You saved my life, my friend; but even without that I would do what I now do.

My friend, I have named you my heir. All that I have – including my title, lands and fortune – now belong to you. Rule wisely – but I know that you will.

Your father,

Alfred von Lowenherz

For whole minutes, you can only stare at the letter, amazed. ‘What? What is it?’ You hand the letter to Eddora, and she reads it. She faints dead away.

‘My liege,’ says the knight respectfully, ‘you must come with us. There is much to arrange back

at the castle.’

‘But... my lover... our injuries...’

‘They will be cared for on the journey. We have the finest doctors in the land. Please, lord, you must come with us.’

If you have been bitten by a Ventrue vampire, turn to [808](#). If not, turn to [56](#).

## 884

The Stone Golem is shattered in pieces on the floor. You wince at the notched blade of your sword in sympathy.

If you wish to go into the other room, turn to [277](#); if you wish to return to the tunnel, turn to [304](#).

## 885

You get up and start following the horse. This is not difficult as it has left an enormous horse-shaped hole in most of the vegetation.

The laughing and crying of children seems to follow you as you go. You pull your weapons and keep them there.

Before long the trail leads into a wide-open space. There is no horse to be seen. What there is, however, is a large, derelict house. The noise all around you continues unabated.

Your eyes water with uncontrollable fear.

If you wish to investigate the house, turn to [828](#).

If you would rather go back to your camp, turn to [181](#).

## 886

This room is the same as all the rest, and you are so fed up with getting attacked as soon as you walk through the door that you stride through towards the only exit in irritation. You are almost to the other side when you realise with a shock that *you are not alone*. There is a figure in the corner.

Eyes widening, you look over and can hardly believe your eyes. Sitting in a chair with his back to you, and hunched down into himself, is what seems to be a little boy. You can only ask yourself, what the hell is a small boy doing in a catacomb filled with undead monsters?

If you approach the boy, turn to [250](#).

If you attempt to scan him psychically, turn to [24](#).

If you merely ignore him and carry on to the exit, turn to [560](#).

## 887

Yourself and Eddora enjoy a sumptuous meal, for which you insist on paying the mortified and terrified barman (deduct 20 GP, restore up to 4 lost STAMINA points). The two of you share a certain euphoria at having faced down all the assassins of the city put together, and for a while, you chatter and laugh just as in old times, your tension gone. However, as the sullen barman takes away the scattered bones of your meal, the two of you look around the deserted Pied Cow and fall into an uncomfortable silence. Things are clearly *not* as they were before.

Time passes, as each of you waits for the other to speak.

‘Those men said something about the Prince,’ says Eddora eventually, in very neutral tones.

You feel the weight of the world press down back upon you.

‘That is correct,’ you sigh. You stare away from her, sipping your beer. ‘Before you returned, I was set up by the Grand Councillor and Joia the Fixer in a plot to have either myself or the Nightshade Phantom kill the other. I had to kill them all. This plot had been blowing in the wind for a long time, and it was clear that the rulers of this city were not going to leave the assassins alone. Thus, did I declare myself Master of Assassins. Only with my leadership could the assassins hope to survive.’

Eddora grimaces, and looks upset.

‘This disturbs me, Aria,’ she says. ‘Why, of all the courses of action you could possibly have followed, did you take that one?’

‘What? What are you talking about? It seems entirely logical.’

‘Not to me.’

‘Why the hell not? And, in any case, if we’re on question and answer time, let’s talk about why you left.’

‘Aria, I-‘

But what might have ruined the moment is broken by something else entirely. Three figures appear at the doorway. In a tavern that was busy, this might have gone unnoticed – but in a tavern that’s been deserted by its main clientele, it gets the attention. All three of them are shrouded in huge, black cloaks and hoods.

‘What the blazes can this be,’ you mutter. Eddora’s eyes go wide.

The three stride into the deserted centre of the Pied Cow. ‘Good morning,’ says one in heavily accented Reichstongue. ‘We are three assassins who are interested in joining the Altgarten Assassin’s Guild,’

‘You can’t say those things out loud!’ whimpers the barman, cowering.

Eddora has gone abruptly pale, her skin fading to dark grey. Something about the accent of these men strikes you as familiar. You resolve to react to the situation anyway.

‘There never was any organisation called that,’ you say, rising to your feet and approaching them. ‘And if there was a similar organisation – and that’s not an admission – it has been disbanded.’

The apparent leader seems to look at you only briefly, from the black depths of his hood. Instead, the gazes of all three shift to your companion, and there is a suppressed gasp. Another utters a shocked expression in another language. You make a guess at what it must be.

‘Ah,’ says the leader. ‘A dark elf walking undisguised in the human lands. You must be the exile Eddora.’

‘Aria, step away from these men!’ Eddora hisses at you in horror.

‘What is it you want with us?’ you growl, certain there is going to be a fight.

‘What we might have wanted is of no consequence.’ Abruptly the leader throws back his hood, and his companions follow suit. Each has the cold, arrogant expression, black skin and white hair of a dark elf warrior. ‘Eddora, it may interest you to know that your sentence has been commuted from exile, to *death*.’ They throw back their cloaks to reveal long, serrated knives.

‘You’ll have to go through me to get to her!’ you rail, pulling your own weapons.

‘If you are Black Aria, self styled Master of Assassins, then *both* of our missions will be complete-hurgh!’ The leader’s sneering tirade has been cut off by Eddora’s arrow taking him in the throat. Shocked, the other two fall back, pulling out their knives; and within moments Eddora is by your side.

First DARK ELF WARRIOR SKILL 8  
STAMINA 7

Second DARK ELF WARRIOR SKILL 8  
STAMINA 7

You will fight the first, Eddora will fight the second. If Eddora pulls back while both are alive you will have to fight both using multiple rules; if only one Dark Elf is left, he will have to survive according to multiple rules.

If you both win, turn to [928](#).



## 889

‘Father, I am an assassin,’ you intone. You hear a slight, almost concealed gasp of shock from the other side.

‘I suspect that one of my contracts is my father. I wish you to tell me where he is... so that I may confront him.’

There is a lengthy pause on the other side of the grille... a *very* lengthy pause. You reach out with your psychic powers, but find them nullified by some great power beyond humanity. You feel afraid, if not awed, and for a moment fear for your life... but somehow you sense that the forces of Good do not annihilate their enemies this way, no matter how much you yourself might choose to.

Eventually, you hear a sigh.

‘Your request is preposterous, as I am sure you are aware,’ murmurs the voice on the other side of the grille. ‘However, your very coming here shows trust, and I feel bound to repay it.’

‘I do not think that your intentions are truly evil, whatever you may have done in the past. For a man to not know who his father is, when the One teaches the sanctity of marriage, must tear at his soul. Therefore, your destiny dictates that you *must* find him.’

‘You will find Defender at the deserted wartime checkpoint number [847](#). Now get out of here, before I reconsider my folly.’

The grille slams and you hear the priest shove himself out of the box and go stomping away down his church nave. Hardly able to believe your good fortune, you ghost out of the confession box and out into the daylight, ready to go pay a visit to the man who might be your father in his bolt hole. Restore 1 LUCK point, even if this takes you over your *Initial* level.

It is only later on you realise that the priest mentioned Defender first, last and only.

## 891

You get to the bottom of the ladder and look around, your eyes adjusting to the gloom. Almost immediately, a hissing and a semi-human figure shambling towards you distracts you from all else. A GHASt guardian! You have been set up!

GHASt

STAMINA 8

SKILL 8

If the ghaSt hits you three times, you are paralysed. What happens to you next doesn't bear thinking about, but it's the end of your adventure. If you win, turn to [443](#).

## 893

You wonder to yourself if you shall not be driven mad by the monotony of these tunnels. But then again, as a serial murderer, are you not that which most people would consider mad already. But just who defines mad? Is it society? You've heard tell that in oppressive regimes, those who speak out are labelled mad, even though they're not...

You jerk yourself out from this downward spiral and notice there's a door to the east and another to the west. To the north, the tunnel carries along straight; to the south, it bends.

East ([594](#))

West([340](#))

North ([966](#))

South ([479](#))

## 894

With no other option left, you lie down and succumb to the pain in your head. Unconsciousness comes swiftly and is mercifully free of agony.

An indeterminate time later you are woken by a brutal kicking by the Prince's guards. Besides you, Eddora is being dragged from slumber just as cruelly. The guards hurriedly do their best to make you presentable; they sponge the blood from you both, arrange a hood over the distorted place in your skull, shove a long-sleeved jacket over Eddora's tunic to disguise the wounds in her arms.

Blinded by pain and lack of sleep, you register very little of what happens after that. The two of you are kicked and cajoled out of the dungeons, through the Prince's mansion and out into an enormous public square. It is early morning, but even the weak light from the overcast sky hurts your eyes and head. It seems the entire population of Altgarten is assembled in this square, in a crushing mass. At the sight of you, the townsfolk let out a tremendous roar of hatred, breaking down into an unending wave of screams and yells of abuse. But yourself and Eddora are too demoralised and defeated to care.

Cursing, a solid wall of guards has to keep the townspeople from falling upon you and tearing you both apart. Two struggling cadres of them, arms linked, push back the crowd to form a passageway to the centre of the square. There, is a raised platform, with stairs leading up to it. On the platform are two tall devices you have never seen before.

All you can hear is the solid, continuous yell of hatred of the townspeople. Poked from behind by the halberds of your escort, you walk down the gangway created for you, and stumble up the steps. Eddora is by your side, but this is the last place you would have liked for her to be there.

On top of the platform, is the Prince's seneschal.

‘Aria and Eddora,’ he yells out, barely able to make himself heard against the rage of the crowd, ‘chief assassins of Altgarten, you are hereby accused of crimes against the Prince – the city – and against all humanity. How do you plead?’

Yourself and Eddora see no point in answering. But the renewed roar of the crowd for your blood is all the answer that is needed.

‘You have been found guilty and are sentenced to execution. Guards – make them ready!’

You are both forced to your knees and your heads are shoved through holes in the lower part of the devices. A push against the broken part of your skull fills you with raw pain, but you know it will be over soon. From your constricted position, a basket is all you can see, the opening facing you.

You look out of the corner of your eye as far as you can manage, despite the fresh pain this awakens, and you can just make out Eddora’s face. She is in the same position as yourself.

‘Goodbye, Aria,’ she whispers.

You keep your gaze fixed upon her. It is the last thing you see as from the top of the device, a heavy steel blade swoops down, and strikes your head from your shoulders. The guillotines have been perfectly timed – Eddora does not outlive you by even a second.

Your adventure is over.

THE END

## 895

Unfortunately, you are able to gain nothing from his mind save the thought imprints of what he’s actually saying. Lose 1 LUCK point.

Turn to [569](#).

## 896

As you drink the blue liquid, a couple of scratches on your hand fade. Evidently, this is a healing potion for humans. You may take the four bottles with you, and each one, when drunk, will restore 6 STAMINA points. However, the potion will then be used up.

Return to [594](#).

## 900

You carry on training, spurred on by the knowledge that there are yet ninth and tenth levels and maybe even ones beyond that, but you notice a subtle change in Defender. He seems to have less and less energy for teaching, and he grows tired earlier and earlier in the day. Soon he wants to do nothing but meditate, and for the first time his joints appear stiff as he tries to rise. He also seems to lack motivation; he breaks off in the middle of sentences to stare distractedly at the sun, and sometimes even tells you brusquely to figure things out for yourself.

You wonder if you should ask him about this change, but as it transpires, he pre-empts you.

One day as you ask him a question he starts to fob you off brusquely, but checks himself and sighs. ‘Forget that question, son.’ he says. ‘There is something more important of which we must speak.’

‘I’m getting old.’

*Aren’t we all?* You think of saying, but one of the things you learnt during your elevation to master magician is to not say everything that comes into your mind that’s witty.

‘I always knew I wasn’t immortal – only the Black operators cling onto life beyond their allotted span, for they fear what comes later – but only after training you do I feel truly old.

‘No, it wasn’t your fault...’ he says, even though you’ve been completely silent and neutral. ‘It’s more due to the fact that now I’ve trained a successor, I must fight on no longer.’

Now you start not to like the way the conversation is going.

‘A successor?’ you say with some unease.

‘That’s right. The mantle of Defender has been passed down for hundreds of years. The higher calling to help the helpless ones, who all look up to you, and to defend them. There has always been a Defender. Often, but not always, it has been passed down from father to son.

‘When I first saw you it was as though my father magically grown young again was standing before me. And though there was much evil and rage in your heart, I knew that you would only be the stronger for your experiences. I saw, in short, the potential to become the next Defender.

‘Will you do it, son? Will you live my dream after I have gone? Will you swear an oath to destroy the forces of evil?’

Will you?

If you agree to take up the title of Defender turn to [545](#).

If you refuse, turn to [187](#).

## 914

Lasombra's mansion is not difficult to spot. It is more ostentatious than the Prince's residence (indeed, the kingpins are probably richer) and exuberantly decorated. By the time you get there, dawn has broken.

You enter through the front door – which is unlocked – and are confronted by a darkened lounge with a cold, empty fireplace. You peer through the gloom and can just make out an exceedingly tall, gaunt, saturnine butler in a tail coat sat reading. *In this light.*

He stands and turns to face you, making an almost imperceptible bow. 'Good evening, sir,' he says. 'My master is presently indisposed, but perhaps I may be of some assistance to sir.'

'Get out of the way, or it will be the worse for you,' you utter, drawing your weapons.

'Like that, is it sir? Well, my master will certainly sleep peacefully this day.' He gestures and, from the shadows, two tentacles formed of the very darkness themselves writhe out towards you, poised to strike a blow.

You must fight, using multiple rules:

FIRST TENTACLE	SKILL 5	STAMINA 8
SECOND TENTACLE	SKILL 5	STAMINA 8

If you win, turn to [121](#).

## 916

'So. When you've *done* her, bring back proof to me, and I'll tell you something *very* special. Okay?'

You realise, too late, you are probably standing too close to the bed. Morrigan leads forward – her underwear gaping open *most* indecently – and plants a kiss on the back of your hand. It feels simultaneously hot and cold. 'A little something to remember me by,' she says, and winks.

You leave hurriedly, trying not to stare at your hand. Out in the corridor you jerk it up to your eyes. There's the red mark of lips. You rub at it, but try as you might, it cannot be removed. You feel tainted, but know there is nothing you can do about it. Go to [304](#).

## 921

You send out the sum totality of your psychic abilities, the rod of force blazing and clawing at Joia's natural mental block. You grit your teeth and try to breach the wall; but Joia's block is too strong.

'I permitted that, as a lesson in futility,' hisses Joia as he stands up. You loll forward, exhausted. 'Do not attempt to compromise my confidentiality again!'

As he gets up to leave he has an ugly smile of triumph. As he passes you hear him mutter something to another table; they all smile unpleasantly at you.

You have failed. You may only try alternatives you haven't tried already.

If you have seen a boy's throat cut as an example of cruel justice on your instigation, you have the remaining option of turning to [275](#).

If you have been double-crossed by the heir to a biscuit fortune, you have the remaining option of turning to [649](#).

If you have exhausted all the options you have been offered, then you have no other chance but to turn to [43](#).

## 922

By the time you return wearily to the Pied Cow, months later, everyone seems to have forgotten that you agreed to take the Fiorentino contract. Joia only acknowledges you distractedly as you walk in, without making reference to it. You can only assume that the client gave up on the idea. If you offered the thieves a cut earlier on, they seem to have forgotten as well, as no crossbow bolt finds your back in the dead of night. This is fortunate as you had forgotten the agreement yourself.

Turn to [314](#).

## 925

Some underlying dissatisfaction drives you to leave – perhaps it's the continual embarrassing attention of the count. Perhaps life as a pampered courtier doesn't appeal. Or perhaps, deep down, you'd rather be a villain than a hero. In the dead of night, you sneak into the kitchens and steal enough food for five provisions. You steal a horse from the stables and ride on through the night.

You return to Altgarten and collapse into one of the rooms of the Pied Cow (restore 6 STAMINA, deduct 20 GP). Subsequently, you appear in the common room downstairs, nursing lager. Soon Joia arrives and demands to know how you got on with the contract. You stare at him fixedly until he shuts up and goes away.

You are an assassin once again.

Turn to [615](#).

## 927

By now you have lost all patience with him.

‘You rotten bastard! You filthy, stinking misogynist! You think you can use and discard other people just because you’re a better magician than them? How could you abandon my mother? HOW COULD YOU ABANDON *ME*?’

Pausing to draw breath, you fall silent, breathing heavily.

Defender is staring at you with a snide smile. ‘So it’s abandonment issues our little assassin is dealing with, eh?’

‘Spare me the pathetic language of the New Thinkers, you snivelling do-gooder,’ you snarl back.

‘So angry, so wounded, like carrion! A poor little boy who never grew up.’

You are about to spit back a reply, but Defender leaps to his feet so swiftly you do not notice any transition. You leap back about a foot.

‘I will take you in if you wish. If you wish me to take the place of a father. I will teach you the powers of the Right-handed Path. Perhaps that will satisfy your mewling need for the nipple and suck.’

You are about to hurl back insults at the belittling language, but pause... suddenly you realise that Defender is *offering* you something.

If you reply ‘I’m listening...’ turn to [175](#).

If you reply ‘Forget it!’ turn to [515](#).

## 928

The last Dark Elf slumps to the floor with a groan.

‘Dark Elves in my tavern! Fighting! All my customers gone!’ wails the bartender. ‘You are both permanently *barred!*’

‘Bite me!’ shrieks Eddora at him. He moans and ducks behind the counter, never to emerge.

‘Dark Elves!’ you mutter, crouching down to the bodies. ‘What can dark elves be doing in the human lands?’

‘Haven’t you just resumed your relationship with one?’ growls Eddora. She seems perturbed and not just from the fight. She searches the warriors’ tunics rapidly, coming up with nothing. ‘No rank. No insignia. No lord’s colours. No artefacts. Someone knew to conceal themselves.’

You stare at her. ‘I appreciate you know more than most about the customs and practises of your people, but what was that about an exile?’

She glowers at you. ‘What did you think I was doing in the human lands in the first place? And besides, shouldn’t you be worrying about where this lot came from?’

You abandon the train of thought, confused. ‘They spoke of two missions. They seemed to forget one when they noticed you. That seemed to be to kill the Master of Assassins – me. I wish we’d left them alive to mind scan them...’

‘Have you ever tried to mind scan a dark elf, Aria?’ Eddora says quietly.

From her fixed stare upon you you realise the implicit question involved, but all you do is stare back at her.

‘Forget it. In any case, if they’ve been sent up here by a ruling sorcerer, more than likely they’ve had their minds treated against telepathic intrusion.’

‘And why would they have been sent up here by a sorcerer...?’

‘Shouldn’t we be worrying about your problem? Evidently the city rulers have decided to take you out directly, what are you going to do about it?’

You rack up one more in an ever-increasing list of questions that you and Eddora are going to go through in a long and serious talk when things become less stressful. ‘You evidently didn’t like my previous idea, and thanks to you, my assassin’s hierarchy is disbanded. I suspect our only remaining option is to assassinate the Prince!’

What had been to you a sarcastic sneer is met with Eddora by a delighted smile. ‘Yes, Aria! That’s what I would have done ages ago!’

‘But! The Prince!’

‘All that hierarchy of assassins you put between yourself and him was after all a complete waste of energy. You should have carried on murdering your way through the city rulers after the Councillor.’

‘BUT! THE PRINCE!’

‘But what. Evidently he is now allowing dark elves to enter his domain as well, apparently ones operating under his orders. We’ll have to go through them as well.’

You are lost for words.

‘So, Aria, who do you want to hunt down first? The Prince’s original forces or his dark elf allies?’

‘I give up, Eddora. I wonder what I ever see in you. Life was just so much stable before you came along. Now you want me to throw it all away on a certain death mission.’

She stares at you intensely, her smile gone. ‘Without me you wouldn’t even *know* you’re alive. You need me to save you from yourself. Now hurry up and make a decision so we can sort this thing out.’



Do you seek out the dark elf allies: [996](#).

Or the Prince's own agents? [517](#).

## 932

Eichlan scuttles on weird, tentacle legs into the next room, where you follow it uneasily.

'This war ghou! here is the upshot of many centuries of study,' it burbles as it moves round the table, caressing the other monster obscenely, 'and practise of the discipline of Vicissitude. Today is the day I activate it fully and see how it compares. You, fellow undead, will be the privileged witness of my moment of ascension! Don't you feel honoured?'

'Ecstatic,' you offer.

Evidently Eichlan is too inhuman to comprehend sarcasm. 'Right. You undo that strap there with your puny human arms, and I'll do these three over here with my much more efficient tentacles. If you ask nicely, undead, and sound envious enough, I'll graft you on some, how about that?'

You determine discretion is the better part of valour as regards answering that one and fumble with the strap uneasily. You wonder about the wisdom of this enterprise... however, it seems rather too late to back out now...

'Come on, come on, hurry up,' cajoles Eichlan as you finally get the strap free. You stare in mounting dismay as the yellowish, catlike eyes of the horror flip slowly open.

'War ghou!' snaps Eichlan in the clipped, commanding tones of a drill sergeant. 'Sit up and face me, Eichlan of the Tzimisce, your lord and master.'

The war ghou! gives a hideous, low rumbling deep in its excuse for a chest. It slowly struggles to sit up and faces Eichlan. Its two catlike yellow eyes gaze into his multicoloured, numerous stalked ones. You see what the Tzimisce probably can't... a slow build of hatred.

'Er, Mr. Eichlan, Sir...' you say uneasily.

'Now then, ghou!' continues Eichlan confidently, ignoring you. 'To demonstrate your loyalty, lie back down.'

Precisely as you had feared, the ghou! does nothing of the sort. Instead, it bares its hideous, yellowing, mixed bag of teeth, opens and closes its huge talons and gets slowly off the slab.

'War ghou!' shouts Eichlan, shaken. 'Lie back down this instant.'

'You should have known this would happen,' you mutter inaudibly. 'It always does.'

The war ghou! is now advancing on Eichlan, its already hideous face twisted with barely-recognisable rage.

'Why won't you obey my instructions!' wails Eichlan.

‘Forget it!’ you snap, and pull your weapons with a low hiss.

In the coming cataclysmic conflict, it’s you and Eichlan against the war ghou. Use multiple rules for the war ghou, with the following modifications; for each of its goes, roll one die. If it comes up even, it attacks you. If it comes up odd, it attacks Eichlan.

TZIMISCE WAR GHOUL SKILL 15  
STAMINA 29

The War Ghoul has far greater reach than you. You may not *Escape*.

EICHLAN SKILL 14  
STAMINA 27

Any time Eichlan gets a double for its *Attack Strength*, a blast of flame issues from one of its unidentifiable orifices and burns the war ghou. It loses 3 STAMINA points. It must also deal with his standard attack for that round.

Both yourself and Eichlan concentrate on the war ghou. You may use your LUCK for Eichlan as well as yourself, if you wish.

If Eichlan ever rolls a 6 and a 1, turn immediately to [78](#).

If Eichlan dies, you are faced with the stark prospect of finishing the beast off on your own. In the unlikely event you win, turn to [77](#).

If Eichlan survives, and you slay the beast, turn to [689](#).

## 933

As Copper expires with a groan, you pause only to slash part of his hair away, taking much of his scalp with it. You grab the gruesome prize and run for it.

The wizard pursues you. ‘You killed my father!’ he screams. Blasts of fire pursue you as you practically jump down the stairs. ‘I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you-‘

A blast of fire catches you in the unprotected nape of your neck. It hurts far, far worse than any of his sallies so far. For days afterwards, you notice people looking curiously at your neck; but eventually, you manage to manipulate mirrors cleverly enough to see why. Note down that you have a blue star-shaped burn scar on the back of your neck.

You rush out of the door and run full tilt for the slum district, only stopping when you reach the door of the Pied Cow, chest heaving. The wizard does not appear to have pursued you.

Turn to [356](#).

## 938

In the middle of the night, the bourgeois zone is deserted, but still the stars just sparkle and shine. They mean nothing to you; only a direct blast of wizard light could cast you out when you are sneaking at your best.

The Grand Councillor, for reasons best known to himself, lives at the opposite end of the quarter from the Prince, but his mansion is just as huge. However, you notice one thing about it – it is completely bare of ornamentation. The entire place is just bare, unpainted wood. You marvel at it – you have never seen a rich man’s house without ridiculous finery, cloth of gold, marble statues and the like. What kind of man can this Councillor be?

The doors are huge, oaken, six inches thick, and near-impossible to budge – but you are even more amazed to notice that they are unlocked. Can the man be so certain that no thief would steal his possessions that he leaves his door unlocked? As you enter, though, it becomes clear that there *are* no possessions. There is just room after room of bare wood, huge, cavernous and deserted.

You wander through it, staring around you with wide eyes. Through empty windows the starlight shines, showing you nothing – the domain of a minimalist ascetic. There are not even any fireplaces. You think that the house must be a haven for squatters, and your suspicions are confirmed when through one doorway, you see a hunched, coughing figure huddled in a wad of rags on a bare wooden floor. You glide by without notice or incident.

You are now on the upper story, and still you have seen nothing that remotely resembles a bed or a bedroom. Must you go to the very last room in the entire house? It would appear so.

Finally. There’s something on the sole table you’ve seen, over there. But what can it be?

It looks like a coffin. What can that be doing there?

And what’s that beneath the coffin...

Two pinpricks of red light flick ablaze beneath the table, and you hear a vicious and unearthly growling. By the starlight shining through the open-shuttered window you can see a huge, furry form shake itself and slowly raise itself to face you. It is a dog – but one huger by far than any you have ever seen. Its fangs are inches of cracked and yellowed enamel and its eyes are blazing red pools of rage. It is a HELLHOUND and you must fight it.

HELLHOUND  
STAMINA 13

SKILL 10

You may *Escape* if you wish, as the hellhound will not pursue you beyond the house’s boundaries. If you do so deduct the appropriate STAMINA penalty and turn to [204](#).

If you stay to kill, and are victorious, turn to [878](#).

## 942

To your heart-thumping shock, the restraints upon the slab have been ripped away with incredible force, and the slab is empty. You reel with horror as you realise *Eichlan's creation must have escaped!*

You cannot begin to imagine where it can have gone, and you fervently pray that it doesn't run into you.

Otherwise, the room is as you have left it. The incongruous young male body of the spiny, murderous horror Eichlan has fallen into a pile of ashes. You wonder at its true nature.

There remains nothing of value here. Return to the corridor at [443](#).

## 944

You curse, striking the side of the lock with your fist as your attempt fails. Then your heart nearly shatters as a heavy hand slams down on your shoulder. You gasp and grab it, wheeling around and drawing your dagger.

'Here!' says a cloaked figure carrying a lantern on a pole. 'What do you think you're doing... oh, no.' The WATCHMAN's face falls as he realises he is going to have to fight a truly accomplished criminal. He pulls his sword with a trembling hand as you attack with murderous intent.

WATCHMAN

SKILL 7

STAMINA 7

If you win, go back to [122](#) and try to open the lock again.

## 946

You open the door and are hit by a blast of cold air.

The temperature of this room is considerably below the ambient atmosphere of the tunnels, but you think you can stand it for a while. You walk forward, slowly.

The room has been reduced to a narrow corridor between stone slabs which extend up to the ceiling. Upon these slabs are naked, white objects... corpses. Dead men and women... mostly women.

You realise that this must be where Fiorentino keeps the raw materials for his resurrection dreams. If popular rumour is true, it is also his recreation room.

Unless you share Fiorentino's necromantic urges, there's nothing for you here... return to the corridor at [224](#).

## 949

The huge blade, wide as a hand and as long as you, slashes through the air above your head. It crashes into the brickwork of the wall, sending down a shower of plaster and clay shards and embedding a foot deep.

The Phantom growls down at you crouched beneath him and tenses his muscles for a heave on the sword to pull it out. You grin mirthlessly at the towering figure, as you re-angle your weapons up for one last desperate strike at his soft organs. There's only one thing left to see – who will be first –

At that moment, the door crashes open and a horde of Watchmen pour through like an avalanche. 'Stand still, citizens!' they roar.

Yourself and the Phantom do a double-take that would be comical anywhere else, take a simultaneous look at the blue uniforms rushing through the door, then one at each other. Even if the two of you were to co-operate – which doesn't seem likely – it would be suicide to fight this horde. As one, you leap for the window.

Test your Luck. If successful, turn to [516](#). If not, turn to [390](#).

## 951

'A *pimp*, eh?' calls out the woman's voice – which has gone abruptly cold. 'I think the two of us had better have a chat.'

You feel stone limbs clamp down over yours and you are frogmarched helplessly into the other room. It is useless to resist.

Like this one, the other room is entirely bare stone; it has the one feature of a luxurious, four-poster bed. Lounging indecently on it is a voluptuous woman, wearing very little; however, the expression of rage and hatred on her face is very far from beautiful. Indeed her face seems to flicker out of reality as you look at it...

'Let us talk, Fezzy the Stoat,' she hisses in tones too deep for a woman, or any human. 'Let us talk of feminine exploitation, of masculine domination, of selling meat. Let us talk... of LIFE AND DEATH!'

The image of the beautiful woman falls away, replaced by a hideous creature with ram's horns and goat's legs. The stone golem pushes you forward for a kiss, a kiss from which you shall never escape. Your lips meet the rotting skull of a horse, and blazing orange eyes stare into yours.

Your soul is blasted into oblivion by a truly Satanic power. Your adventure ends here.

THE END

## 952

You find yourself in a tunnel beneath the earth.

You had been expecting a filthy, circular sewer, with muck underfoot; in fact, the square tunnel you are in has its own drainage system, rendering it relatively dry. The tunnel has been respectably hewn out of solid rock, and lights glow blue in the walls providing a modicum of illumination.

It's clear this area was created by a necromancer with hordes of undead at his beck.

You are at a right-angle bend in a tunnel. Will you go left (turn to [479](#)) or right (turn to [893](#))?

## 953

Pain.

A blinding pain that hits you as you swim back to an awful consciousness. From the agony of it, you wish you could sink back to oblivion, but something nags at you to keep awake. You open your eyes, feeling the hard crusty resistance of your eyelids gummed shut with your own blood. The meagre light that filters in through them sends you into worse flashes of blinding agony.

'Hey,'

You hear a dejected, but familiar whisper, and you turn your head to look for its source. Just this movement brings you a fresh wave of agony and a hideous feeling of sickness.

You are in a cell, a filthy, ancient, cramped room of a dungeon, the floor strewn with straw soaked with blood and worse bodily secretions. Eddora is collapsed against one wall. She's been beaten badly; her face is swollen with bruises, and her skin has faded to the colour of charcoal ash.

She seems barely able to keep her eyes open, or move her lips, but she whispers:

'You're awake,'

'What happened?' you croak.

'To you? I don't know. But we were captured.' Eddora can barely speak above a murmur, and her tones are slow and halting. She has the look of someone desperately tired, but something is wrong...

'What did they do to you?'

'Well, obviously one dark elf was too much for them. The Prince's men beat me till I couldn't move.'

Her voice is slurred, like someone who's taken laudanum. You realise with horror that a beating can't do that to a person.

'What *else* did they do to you? Did they-'

'They didn't rape me. I don't think the Prince and his friends are into sex at all. What they did was worse...'

She raises her arms, so slowly and with such obvious effort that they might have been huge halberds. In the dim light from the torches outside, you can just make out the inside of her forearms. They are covered with slashes, punctures and bite marks. Some have not clotted and still flow sluggishly.

'The Prince and his associates... they took my blood. They wanted to leave me just enough to keep me alive.'

'No!' you gasp. 'Then there's no possibility of-'

'Escape? I know. So more to the point, what did they do to you? You've been blacked out for the best part of a day.'

From the fact that you too are collapsed on the cold stone floor of a cell, and from the fact that you cannot feel half your body, and from the facts of your apparent coma and your blinding headache, you think you already know the answer; but you have to be sure.

Tentatively, you raise your hand to your head. Just a touch brings you another blinding wave of agony and nausea. There is a soft place above your ponytail, and when you bring your hand back to before your face, there is a clear fluid on it.

'They fractured my skull,' you say, barely able to believe yourself. 'This is brain casing fluid. I know it well.'

'So that's it,' whisper's Eddora. Her eyes close. 'The witch's son's been relieved of his psychic powers, the dark elf of her fighting ability. We're done for.'

'And that's exactly what we hoped to achieve.'

From out in the corridor you hear a voice. You both turn your heads as far as you can to look for its source, but there is no one there. Just torches blazing on the opposite wall.

Then suddenly, two figures appear.

On the left hand side, is a tall figure sheathed entirely in a huge leather robe. It hangs down to the floor, the sleeves cover its hands, and a huge hood, extending far in front of and behind what you must assume is its head, covers its face entirely. Even with a fractured skull, you feel a wave of overwhelming psychic power from this being. From Eddora's gasp, it is clear she recognises the clothing.

On the right hand side, is a figure apparently human, clad in the subdued yet fine clothing of a professional politician. He is unnaturally handsome, and his skin gleams in the light of the torches, too pale and smooth. He has a physical presence which makes it difficult to take your

eyes from him. He smiles slightly, displaying prominent fangs. It is the Prince.

Beside him, the other figure moves his arms. Hands as black as his robe emerge from his sleeves, and go up to his hood. They push it back carefully, revealing the cold, arrogant face of an ancient Dark Elf. He has eyes only for Eddora, and she only for him.

‘Kandron,’ she whispers, defeated.

‘Oh yes,’ he says, his deep voice backed up by an unmistakeable telepathic reinforcement. ‘Sorcerer Paramount and Prime of the Noble House of Tregonia, and father of Kinnetia. Who, thanks to your seducing him into rebellion, I had to execute myself.’

Eddora’s eyes close slowly. It seems she cannot even bring herself to argue.

‘The Prince,’ you say, turning your gaze to the other figure.

‘Of course,’ he smiles beguilingly. His voice is enchanting, and he is fascinating just to look at. ‘How could it be otherwise?’

‘We’ve got you right where we wanted.’

You look over at Eddora, who seems to be out of it. ‘I can’t argue,’ you mutter. ‘There’s only one thing I want to know, though: why?’

‘Why? Of course, this is why you went up against us in the first place. This is why you walked into our trap. You ask why. Perhaps I’d better begin from the beginning.’

Turn to [979](#).

## 955

‘No thanks.’ you say,

‘Suit yourself,’ says Joia, already losing interest.

Turn to [314](#).

## 960

During the battle you wonder to yourself: since Lasombra and his underlings have such a penchant for darkness, what happens if they are exposed to light? Thus, at an opportune point at the battle, you break off and rush over to the window, which is covered with heavy drapes. Lasombra shrieks and rushes at you, trying to interpose himself before yourself and it.

No luck. Before he can reach you, you reach out and tear down the curtains.

The effect is astounding!



A shaft of light rushes into the room – no doubt weak enough, but like a blaze of glory in the gloom. Lasombra shrieks! Wherever it touches him, his skin bursts immediately into ravening flames!

Almost immediately he becomes a torch, and staggers around wailing in agony. You are forced to stagger back and throw your hands over your eyes at the searing heat. Soon enough it fades, and you tentatively look back.

All that you can see is a pile of ashes in the vague shape of a man.

Turn to [771](#).

## 961

Wounded beyond endurance, Defender collapses with a sigh. In the final throes of death, he reaches out a shaking, liver-spotted hand towards you. ‘My son...’ he whispers, before choking in a final death-rattle.

Before your eyes, his body fades and disappears, leaving his plate armour empty. It rapidly begins to rust to nothing – it must have been magically tuned to accept him only. All that remains is his blood soaked chasuble. You pick it up gingerly.

You have slain Defender, the champion of good, the helper of the helpless ones. Dying without an heir means that his position will remain forever unfilled, and perhaps the forces of darkness will go for their final push... You have slain countless men as an assassin, but this time, you feel vaguely guilty and nauseated. The words ‘My son...’ will haunt your dreams forever afterward.

As you walk into the Pied Cow, a breathless hush greets you. Joia, sitting arrogantly in your usual spot, looks up at you in real fear.

‘Aria,’ he coughs through dry lips. ‘You actually did Defender,’

‘Don’t look for the body,’ you say with more bravado than you feel, ‘he didn’t leave one. All that remains is this.’

As you place the bloody rags on the table there is a gasp from all the assassins and villains of the place – all those who have clustered around you. Some reach out shaking hands to touch the now unholy artifact.

Joia softly speaks words of magic and passes his left hand over it; it glows green.

‘Defender’s robe, all right,’ he whispers. ‘Aria, you are the master.’ (You look around in reflexive alarm for the Nightshade Phantom, but he is nowhere to be seen.) ‘Here’s the 12750 GP, just like we agreed.’

Your eyes flick from left to right. In your peripheral vision, you can see that the other assassins give you a wide berth and look at you with abject fear in their eyes. You never exactly went out of your way to interact with them, but you realise with a certain unease, you are an outsider even

amongst outsiders.

‘Can I hang that up behind the bar?’ asks the barman shakily.

‘Knock yourself out,’ you reply.

The tattered rags hang behind the bar of the Pied Cow to this very day.

Restore 6 STAMINA, deduct 20 GP and turn to [877](#).

## 965

You read through the book thoroughly.

Essentially it describes how to carry out a spell which will bring back the long dead as wraiths. Some personal effects of theirs are required, along with a large quantity of arterial blood from the caster’s left forearm. It suggests there will be a 100% success rate if the spell is carried out correctly. But it includes the caveat that people may have altered their personalities significantly during their time in the next cycle of existence.

Having read it through, you are certain that the spell is well within your capabilities, and you will make sure to have bandages to stop your blood loss. However, there is only one person whose personal effects you have, if you wish to resurrect her...

Your mother.

If you wish to attempt this, turn to [29](#).

If you would rather leave well alone, turn to [827](#).

## 966

You find yourself in a virgin stretch of tunnel. There’s a bend to the north, a straight section to the south, and a door to the east.

Eastern door ([378](#))

Northern bend ([544](#))

Southern straight ([893](#))

## 967

You hurl wave after wave of the endless rage you feel against Defender’s blocks. But he is a Master of the Right-hand Path, and against him, it isn’t enough.

Your energy dissipates itself against his blocks, and then he sends out a psionic blast of his own. Horrified, you attempt to block it, but it breaks through as though your powers were non-existent and burns into your brain. You go blind and deaf, unable to think of anything but that ravaging agony which has blossomed in your mind.

A booming voice sounds in your head.

With all this power, you still use it for selfish and violent purposes. You will pay dearly for your crimes.

The pain increases till it seems you must black out; you cry out in agony. But just as it seems to become unbearable, it stops abruptly. You are left shaking and weak.

It is only when you try to use your powers later on that you realise something was permanently burned out in this mental battle. Deduct 1 PSYCHIC point.

Turn to [927](#).

## 975

‘Good. That should be a start for you, at least.’ You begin to find Joia’s manner condescending. ‘Here’s the address. Bring me the proof in the usual way, and I’ll give you your fee... and start putting your name about again.’ Joia knows a spell allowing him to identify a person by their hair, or other bodily parts.

You look down at the piece of paper and read: *695 Lampenstrasse*.

Turn to [838](#).

## 976

You return to the Pied Cow with the hand in your belt pouches and find Joia in his usual cubicle, smoking a hadive joint.

‘Aria,’ he acknowledges. ‘Any problems with the Fiorentino case?’

‘None whatsoever,’ you grate, hurling the hand across the table, ‘apart from the fact it was goddamn near fatal.’

‘Well, the client did ask for the best, Aria...’ mutters Joia, as he verifies the hand. ‘Okay, this is the real thing. The 2550 GP is yours.’

If you promised the thieves a cut of your fee earlier, you had better give them 300 GP as well, otherwise your life is measured in hours.

Turn to [314](#).

## 977

Hundreds of years later, the Pied Cow is a vastly different place. The assassins are long since gone, eventually wiped out by an elite force of Watchmen known as the Lensmen... but that's hundreds of years in your future. Like the Industrial Revolution in the Old World, and the Pied Cow metamorphosing into a tourist attraction, almost a museum.

One night in the tavern, an old man sits telling stories to a group of eager children as their parents look on.

'Yeah, that's what happens when bad meets evil,' he begins, pausing to knock out his pipe. 'Black Aria and Eddora were two of the deadliest assassins ever seen in these here parts.

'Black Aria's mother was a witch. She was burned alive as he looked on. He inherited strange powers, and he was bullied by other kids. He never knew who his father was, and it haunted him all his life. Eddora was a Dark Elf. She was exiled from her homeland while only a young girl.

'The two of them were assassins, and the only people they ever loved were each other. Killed hordes of people they did, and got more gold than I reckon anyone's ever seen these days. They were the nastiest assassins you've ever laid eyes upon. Nobody else could touch them.

'But one day a bunch of other assassins decided they wanted them out of the way, wanted their business for themselves. Hatched a story – with the aid of an evil wizard who made this total immersion illusion, good enough to fool Aria's powers – saying that Aria's father was being held captive in the tunnels below ground. Those tunnels ain't there no more, but anyways, Aria wouldn't be stopped from goin', and eventually his lady friend went with him – couldn't bear to let him go alone.

'It was a trap, of course. The two of them were shot in the back by a hail of crossbow bolts by the other assassins. Died in the muck at the bottom of the sewers. I guess it was just too bad they had to go out the way they did.

'That's what happens when bad meets evil. But their spirits live on to this day. And if you listen very closely... you can sometimes hear the laughter of Eddora and Black Aria, the greatest assassins who ever lived.'

THE END

## 978

Due to the rain, very few people are about; only those that have to be. For example, the roughest and coarsest prostitutes.

One such is lounging on a street corner. Despite the rain, she is clad only in a brief leather tunic, dampened by the wet. You rather wish less of her saggy body was on display.

You vaguely recognise her; Baggy Anne. She makes a meagre supplement to her regular wages being the worst spy in Altgarten. She sells laughable information, but she's the only option you've found tonight.

You glide up to her.

She looks up with a perpetual sneer. 'Want business luv?' she says in a grating high-pitched voice.

'Information, as it happens,' you intone. 'I'm looking for a necromancer, name of Fiorentino. Any idea where I could find him?'

If you are wearing a black leather hat with a wide brim, turn immediately to [790](#). Otherwise, turn to [220](#).

## 979

'By now, Aria, you know of my Grand Councillor's plan to wipe out the assassins by turning them against one another. You know that he was of my race of Kindred, whom you humans call vampires. You know, obviously, that his plan failed and you were able to lead the assassins back to a modicum of strength, despite my efforts in increasing the numbers of Watchmen and guards.'

'You know, Eddora,' rumbles Kandron, his eyes flicking over the two of you, 'and you have probably told Aria, of how the dark elves live in fear of the world above. How we send occasional assassins and spies up to the human and light elf lands, but this is the extent of our activity.'

'We know,' you whisper.

'What you do *not* know,' says the Prince, smirking, 'is that the ruling class of this city, the rising bourgeoisie and the fading aristocracy, are both being gradually changed over to Kindred. We, of course, want to preserve our race as much as anyone else. And we make far finer rulers for this city. Just consider the numerous disadvantages humans have. All they want is what they can defend, before their time is up. They just want to accumulate wealth and power and then pass it onto their children. Then they die, and their children make the same mistakes all over again.'

'We Kindred don't die save through violence, and we don't procreate save through the Embrace, of which I as Prince, have the sole jurisdiction over. How much more advantageous is it then to have our race watching over you?'

'You cannot be serious!' you whisper, your head pounding with pain. 'You obviously desire wealth and power as much as any human! Why else would you be Prince? Why else are there so many watchmen and guards?'

He smiles, and doesn't even bother replying.

'And what *else* you do not know,' booms Kandron, 'is that there was, amongst the ruling

sorcerers of the dark elf houses, one who had the power and vision to look up above for an opportunity for advancement. Somewhere up above the caves of the dark elves, there had to be a race who could come to an... understanding... with the dark elves for both our mutual benefit.'

'The Kindred,' Eddora whispers, though her eyes are closed, and you had thought her comatose.

'Yes,' replies the Prince. 'Thus, when Kandron sent emissaries up above to me, I was only too happy to begin negotiations. This was some time ago, before my Grand Councillor had put his plan into action to wipe out the assassins. He was a fine warrior and statesman, but he was a trifle narrow-minded. He missed the opportunities he could have taken advantage of...'

'Now,' continues Kandron, 'we have agreed upon an alliance between our two peoples, between the vampires ruling Altgarten Above, and the dark elves ruling Rigellerius Below. Before long there will be exchanges of knowledge and personnel between the two cultures. It will become as common to see dark elf warriors patrolling the streets beneath the sky, as it will be to see human engineers and entrepreneurs building factories beneath the earth.'

'This is ridiculous!' you bluster. 'Humanity will never stand to be ruled over by vampires or to have dealings with the dark elves. You're mad to think you can ever do this to them.'

'What do you care for humanity, Aria?' hisses the Prince. His unearthly charm becomes suddenly threatening – his handsome features start to look hideously demonic, his fangs to look lethal and terrifying. He starts to stalk up and down outside the cell, flicking the rusted bars. Helplessly, you try to strain away from him, but your body is only intermittently obeying your instructions.

'What should you care about human beings, Aria? You've sought revenge against them all of your life. You see, I know all about you. I know all about your origins as a witch's son, what it was like for you growing up in Ratzelburg. I make a point of studying my enemies.'

'And what of dark elves?' growls Kandron. 'How long is it now you've been in bed with one?'

'Not for very much longer,' Eddora whispers.

'Indeed, not for very much longer!' snaps the Prince, his irrationally terrifying aura amplifying and feeding off itself. 'Soon you will both die. I decided to finish – as you had probably gathered – what my Grand Councillor had started, and wipe out the assassins.'

'You see, we have done much for this town. We have brought peace and prosperity through encouraging wealth, industry and commerce. Now that power and money are in the hands of the bourgeoisie class, it is no longer inert, but it is being used to regenerate the city, and bring employment and prosperity for all through the building of factories and lending houses. The people cannot fail to love us for this; but there is just one thing that needs to be done to convince them. For, as you have pointed out, we *are* a ruling class of vampires and dark elves.'

'We will provide the public with another enemy,' continues Kandron. 'We will blame all the ills of the modern world on the assassins. It is they are the true ites, who take money and prey upon men's lives. Not like the dark elves and vampires, who just take as much blood or food or wealth as they need, and no more.'

‘It will be the deaths of you two, the most famous and powerful assassins in the city, which will sell the public on these ideas,’ gloats the Prince. ‘You will be publicly executed on the morrow, and then we will have the humans in the palm of our hand.’

‘You’re mad,’ you whisper.

‘You’re just as bad as the assassins you despise,’ murmurs Eddora, her face lying against the cold stone floor.

‘Enough of this,’ mutters the Prince, abruptly losing interest. ‘Kandron, take us out of here. We have much to finalise.’

‘You would do well to be more polite,’ growls Kandron.

‘Fine. Just do it.’

The two abruptly vanish.

‘How do they do that?’ you whisper to Eddora.

‘Psionic teleportation. The closely guarded secret of the ruling dark elf sorcerers,’ she murmurs back. ‘Now let me sleep. I’m so tired...’

‘No! You can’t go to sleep. You’ll never wake up.’

Her eyes flutter open; a shred of her old fire returns in them. ‘I’ll die, you mean? We’re both dying tomorrow. Didn’t you hear the Prince?’

‘Just don’t die now... This is the last moment we’re ever going to have together...’

She offers up the choking ghost of a laugh. ‘Not much we can do with it. Your skull’s fractured and I’m drained of blood...’

You swallow, something coming up on you that you feel you must say, though you desperately fear it.

‘You can tell me why you left,’ you whisper, a sick feeling in your heart to rival the pain in your head.

Her eyes flutter open again and she looks at you in absolute despondency. ‘All right. If you think you’ll rest in peace because of it. I’ll tell you.’

Turn to [483](#).

## 981

The glowing pentagram on your right palm, which has remained mostly quiescent since you passed the Abyss as a Master of the Right-handed Path, suddenly flames into a warm luminescence. At the sight of it, your mother’s eyes go wide.

You raise it before her, eyes dilating with rage. ‘I learned a thing or two from Defender, whether he was my father or not. Let me remember how that spell went...’

You cast your weapons away – you will not need them. You know exactly how to deal with the creature of evil your mother has become, and as you summon the words in your mind, a flaming blade appears between your palms, and fiery, ghostly armour appears upon your limbs. Your mother gasps.

‘Way to *go!*’ breathes Eddora.

‘I have grown more powerful than any White Magician. This alters nothing,’ your mother growls.

But can her confidence have been shaken somewhat...?

Resolve this battle.

MOTHER  
STAMINA 34

PSYCHIC 16

You must use your PSYCHIC score to calculate your Attack Strength in this battle. For each of your mother’s attacks, you must roll one dice. On a roll of 1-4, she will attack you; 5-6, and she will attack Eddora. Her freezing claws do 4 STAMINA points of damage on each successful attack to Eddora. Mother is immune to all earthly weapons; even if Eddora’s Attack Strength is higher than hers, she will not be able to harm her.

Eddora *cannot* retreat from this battle. If her STAMINA is reduced to zero, note it down and continue.

It is your spell that has given you a chance of surviving this battle. Your cleave blade will cause 4 STAMINA points of damage to Mother on a successful attack, and your fiery ghost armour will reduce your mother’s damage to you to a mere 2 STAMINA points per attack. Both sets of damage are subject to any LUCK rolls you may wish to make.

Luck is what you will need...

In the event that your mother is finally defeated, turn to last to [73](#).

## 986

‘Greetings, old mother,’ you say courteously, slavering in anticipation of your incredible reward. ‘I’ll be happy to carry you across the river.’

‘Oh, thank ‘ee,’ croaks the old lady.

You pick her up and carry her. She is very light, as you might expect for someone shrunken with brittle bones. You expect her to get heavier as you continue, though.

However, she doesn’t. What does happen is that the icy water shrivels your parts. *This reward*



*better be worth it!*

You eventually reach the other side, and set the old lady down gently enough – there's still time.

'Thank 'ee kindly, good sir,' she says, and starts walking off quite athletically.

No reward????

'So, good mother,' you call out, trying not to let your gritted teeth show, 'why did you need to cross the river?'

'Eee, my brother lives on the other side,' she replies. 'If you hadn't of helped me I would of had to swim!'

You grind your teeth and curse. You are forced to conclude that, sometimes, an old woman is just an old woman. You stamp off up the Austrielburg road.

Turn to [614](#).

## 988

You close your eyes and see the tumblers within your mind, willing them to move. You wait for the flex of the muscle within your head, which suggests that your psychic powers are on-line.

Roll one die and add 6 to the result. If this is equal to or lower than your PSYCHIC score, go to [504](#). If this is greater than your PSYCHIC score, go to [944](#).

## 991

You do not find anyone that night. You sleep the day through at the Pied Cow, exhausted (deduct 20 GP, but regain no STAMINA on this occasion).

Do you wish to search for another night (turn to [624](#)) or give up the quest ([366](#))?

## 992

'I thank you for meditating with me, guest,' says Defender. His voice is cracked with age, but clear and surprisingly gentle for a man dressed in plate armour and carrying a sword as large as a man. 'Now, tell me why you have sought me out.'

Though your revelation is slipping away from you, lost, you still feel too peaceful to shatter harmony with a lie. 'Defender, long ago you had a lover from the town of Ratzielburg. She became my mother, and I believe that you are my father.'

‘Ratzielberg... I remember. A woman with psychic gifts. A more beautiful girl, I’ve never laid eyes upon.’

‘Yes...’ you concur, your voice tinged with sadness. Your mother’s face has grown blurred in your mind.

If you wish to read his mind to determine whether he is your father or not, turn to [74](#).

If not, turn to [299](#).

## 993

You resolve yourself to this near-suicidal course with aplomb.

You steel yourself, draw your weapons and rush in, bellowing at the top of your lungs:

‘I am Black Aria, king of assassins! All who stand against me shall die!’

The workers down tools and stare at you in utter incredulity. Then they rush you.

Fight them as one monster. Fortunately for you, they are poor, indentured workers, and not great warriors by any standard. They also have a tendency to run off when wounded. So this isn’t as dangerous as it might have been. But there are still many, many of them:

DRUG WORKERS  
STAMINA 12

SKILL 11

You are surrounded and may not *Escape*.

If you win, turn to [296](#).

## 994

The guard’s twitching lips widen into a highly unpleasant smirk.

‘All right, dark elf,’ he says. ‘You got your wish. I’ll do you.’

He leans down, and manipulates the tumblers of the lock until it clicks open. Pulling the door open into the corridor with Eddora still leaning against it, he bends down to grab her by the arm.

With her last strength, Eddora pulls herself up against the bars of the cell door and lunges up at the guard, fingers outstretched. Completely unable to anticipate this, he is taken entirely by surprise, and Eddora’s fingers stab directly through his eyes and into his brain.

He lets out a hideous scream and jerks his hands up to his face. Gasping with the effort, Eddora drags the door closed behind her, collapsing with her arms wrapped round the bars. The guard makes no effort to get to her however, only staggering around the corridor, setting up

unbelievably loud wails of agony. Eventually he trips over his halberd and collapses in a corner, hideous fluids running from between his fingers, weeping uncontrollably.

Nobody comes to investigate these sounds. Perhaps they are commonplace.

‘Well, that’s him,’ says Eddora. She seems exhausted by the effort, and twice fails to struggle to her feet. She manages to pull her tunic back over her head. ‘Nothing’s to stop us now... except for us.’

Unable to control your movements correctly, you nevertheless manage to struggle to a crawling position.

Turn to [116](#).

## 996

The two of you abandon the Pied Cow post haste, certain that – as seems to so often happen – you will be hunted down there by inimical forces. For reasons best known to herself, Eddora elects not to wear any disguise whatsoever, and so as you walk through the streets you are met by many horrified stares. Considering how much good telling her to hide her black skin and white hair will do, you merely stare down anyone who looks at you with excessive hostility.

‘Day’s dawned,’ says Eddora, squinting up at the morning sun. ‘Good. My countryfolk will be unable to face the sunlight – unless they’ve been up above before, it will be alien to them. Let’s go.’

Something you notice is that any uniformed law enforcement officers you pass – and there are now many, many of them – studiously ignore the pair of you, even though one is a Dark Elf and one is at least unusually dressed and armed. This, more than anything else, tells you something is wrong. You comment as much to Eddora.

‘Well, I imagine that they’d be like the lowest ranks of our own warrior chapters. They are always told the absolute minimum of information on the grounds that the humans and the light elves are more than happy to torture us horribly to death to learn the slightest scrap of knowledge we might know. We need to find a chapter leader. They might have a better idea of the mission parameters.’

‘You seem to know enough about the rules... enough to transgress them, perhaps... is that why you were exiled?’

‘I was exiled from the Dark Elf lands. Get *over* it.’

You pause in the middle of the street. Miserable peasants, carrying their goods to market bent double, hurry past the two unusual figures with their eyes safely downcast.

‘That’s no answer. I progress no further till you tell me *why*.’

She sighs. ‘All right then, if it will give you peace of mind. Knowing you, I do not think it will.’

‘The dark elf society, ever since it was banished from the surface world, has been ruled by its sorcerers. These sorcerers become patriarchs and matriarchs of so-called noble houses. To ensure the continual rule of themselves and their progeny, society was divided into rigid castes – sorcerers, warriors, artisans and so forth. To leave, or attempt to leave, one’s caste is to face death or worse.

‘Secondly, each ruling sorcerer wanted the greatest success for their house, and none of them had any scruples in achieving this. However, to keep the dark elf society from destroying itself from within, very rigid protocols for dealing between the houses came into place. Overt aggression is punished by annihilation of *every* member of the aggressor’s family and the destruction of their property. Aggression is supposed to be directed without, against the surface peoples, the humans and the light elves. Of course, it doesn’t work that way.

‘I was born to a warrior caste, was segregated at birth and trained constantly with the serrated knife and short bow. I was far more talented and intelligent than those in my chapter and earned great praise. My life was planned out for me – I would rise to a high field officer position in the dark elf armies, marry another member of the warrior caste within my own noble house and produce more warriors for the cause.

‘But my talent and intellect worked against me. I *knew* there was more to life than this. Why were the sorcerer caste placed above us? Why did we obey their orders without question?

‘I knew better than to confess my misgivings to anyone else, as it was clear that the others neither would share them nor be sympathetic to them. I did diverge from my ordained path early on though, as it was clear I preferred to be alone. Thus I became a scout, then an assassin. I became trusted with the most deadly and dangerous of missions – firstly, walking amongst the surface dwellers to strike against them covertly; and secondly, and worse, attacking the other noble houses.

‘This proved eventually to be my downfall. In my times upon the surface world, I achieved all my mission objectives, but I was able to see much I should not have seen. First of all I learned the Florentine fighting technique, which is even more unusual below than it is above. This in itself set me apart, made me superior. I saw that there were other forms of society above, ones without rigid castes and hierarchies. Ones in which people could be what they chose.

‘Finally, I read books. Training as a warrior and assassin had included reading, but only to understand mission briefings, and eventually to give them. I invaded many hidden libraries in my times as an assassin and scout, and learned to read and speak many languages. Thus did I learn all that I am telling you now.

‘I managed to keep this knowledge with me. Debriefings were traditionally carried out by telepathic sorcerers, anxious to erase any knowledge obtained by the likes of me that might have gone against their status quo. I learned to resist them, to guard my thoughts... aren’t you glad you never tried it, Aria...?

‘But finally I saw too deep and too much. My most prestigious mission yet, the one that would have made me Chief Assassin of my noble house should I have succeeded, was to slay the first born son of a rival house, who was destined to inherit. By then I had come to despise the sorcerers and wish them ill at any opportunity, so this mission, and the promise of advancement,

was an absolute blessing for me.

‘I shadowed this young man for weeks. I watched him attend his classes, and argue with his teachers at every opportunity. I watched him read obsessively through the giant sorcerers’ library of his noble house, searching for an answer I myself did not know. I watched him rail and curse the books when he was alone. I watched him cast spells in desperation, which he hoped would prevent him being railroaded into a life he never chose.

‘It was only when I watched him sleep with the serving girls of the house, and felt a blistering jealousy, that I realised I had fallen in love with him.’

You feel an involuntary and blistering jealousy yourself. ‘When was this?’ you say carefully.

‘This was around twenty years ago. I am ninety-three years of age, Aria: while I suspect this makes me equivalent in maturity to the mid-twenties of a human, I have experienced far more.

‘In any case, I found myself unable to go through with the mission. Instead, I approached my target in secret, and found we shared the same views, dissatisfaction with our society being prominent amongst them. We concealed the failure of my mission as far as possible, but it was clear that eventually we would have to escape the dark elf society altogether.

‘That never came to pass. We were found out, and faced the most dire punishment. In the trial that followed it was stated, time and again, that we had each committed the most awful crimes against the dark elf society anyone could conceive of. The one thing that saved us was that we had not yet conspired with any surface dwellers against the dark elves. For this, my lover was *only* executed. For this, I was *only* forever exiled on pain of death from the lands below. This was considered to be the worse punishment, as they were certain down below that the surface dwellers would soon enough execute me themselves just for being what I am.

‘I survived. And here I am.’

In the time it has taken to tell this story the sun has risen higher in the sky, and it is full morning. You blink at Eddora, not knowing what to think or say or feel.

She shrugs. ‘So now you know. Does it honestly make any difference to you?’

You are silent for a while. Finally you say, ‘I am amazed how... detached... you are about it all. If any of that had happened to me, I would be bitter about it still.’

Her eyes narrow; you sense hostility. ‘Well, Aria, you’ve always been about how your mother was burned as a witch, how you’ve been persecuted all your life. It’s like you want people to acknowledge how deep and complex and noble and suffering you are. It’s pathetic, and worse than that, boring.’

You stare back at her, scowling. She stares back, not giving an inch.

Finally you say, ‘Perhaps we should go looking for that dark elf chapter leader after all.’

‘Yes, I think we had better.’

Turn to [345](#).

## 1000

You strike the final blow against the demon, and suddenly you are back in your old body. You feel oddly exhilarated – restore 2 LUCK points and your STAMINA to its *Initial* level.

Turn to [548](#).