

FIGHTING FANTASY

The Diamond Key

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FIGHTING MONSTERS

Before embarking on your adventure, you must determine your own strengths and weaknesses. You are a warrior by trade and have worked hard to develop your skills and fitness.

To see how effective your preparations have been, you must use dice to determine your initial SKILL and STAMINA scores. On page 5 there is an *Adventure Sheet* that you may use to record the details of your adventure. On it you will find boxes for recording your SKILL and STAMINA scores.

Skill, Stamina and Luck

Roll one die. Add 6 to this number and enter this total in the SKILL box on the Adventure Sheet.

Roll both dice. Add 12 to this number and enter this total in the STAMINA box.

There is also a LUCK box. Roll one die, add 6 to this number and enter this total in the LUCK box.

These give the initial values for these quantities, which will only change on very rare occasions. The current level is likely to change constantly.

STAMINA reflects your general constitution, your will to survive, your determination and overall fitness; the higher your STAMINA score, the longer you will be able to survive.

Your LUCK indicates how lucky a person you are, and could determine your fate at certain pivotal points.

Battles

In the course of your adventure you will encounter situations where you must fight battles. There are various weapons that you may use in combat, each with its own strengths and weaknesses

You may choose any of the following weapons to take with you on your quest:

Weapon	SKILL penalty	Damage Bonus
Axe	-3	14
Mace	-2	10
Longsword	-1	6
Spear	0	2

DAMAGE BONUS will be explained in the next section.

There are various kinds of armour available. You begin your journey equipped with leather armour.

Type	Armour Rating
Leather	1
Studded Leather	2

Scalemail	3
Chainmail	4
Breastplate	5
Full Plate	6

Other pieces of armour, such as helmets will add to your amour rating.

Unless you are able to flee, or wish to fight anyway, the battle should be resolved as follows.

Your opponent will have its' own SKILL, STAMINA, Damage Bonus (DB) and ARMOUR scores, which you should record. If the creature or situation results in some advantage or disadvantage, you will be instructed in the passage how to adjust your SKILL score.

Your weapon will have a damage bonus. Different weapons inflict different degrees of damage. But you and your opponents are likely to wear armour as well. In the combat boxes there are spaces for ADJUSTMENT. This value is the damage bonus minus the armour rating. For yourself, you minus your opponents armour rating from your own damage bonus. This gives you a value that may be positive or negative, or even 0. For your opponent you minus your armour rating from their damage bonus. You are now ready to begin combat.

1. Roll both dice. Add this number to your opponent's SKILL score. This is their Attack Strength.
2. Roll both dice again. Add this number to your SKILL score. This is your Attack strength.
3. Compare the two scores. The difference in the scores means that that amount of damage has been inflicted by whoever has the higher score. The **amount of damage inflicted in the difference in the Attack Strengths**, plus the ADJUSTMENT value of the combatant that wins the round.
4. If both scores are the same, both attack and counter attack has been defended.
5. Repeat the above steps until someone reaches a STAMINA score of 0 (death), or the STAMINA falls to a certain level indicated in the passage. The passage will contain instructions of what happens next if you or your opponent is subdued without being killed.

For example, consider the following battle:

YOU	SKILL 11 Weapon: AXE (14) Adjustment: (14-2) 12	STAMINA 20 Armour: BREASTPLATE (5)
GOBLIN	SKILL 8 Weapon: Scimitar (4) Adjustment: (4-5) -1	STAMINA 18 Armour: STUDED LEATHER(2)

Because you are armed with an axe, you must minus 3 from your Combat SKILL. You opponent's skill scores will already be adjusted for their weaponry.

1. You roll 2 die for yourself (9) and 2 die for the goblin (8). $(11-3) + 9 = 17$, compared to $8 + 8 = 16$. You win with a difference of 1. This means you

- inflict 1 point of damage, plus the adjustment of +12, so you inflict 13 points of damage, and minus this from the goblins STAMINA.
2. Next round you roll 2, and the goblin rolls 12. This gives a difference of 10 in the goblins favour. With the adjustment of -1, it inflicts 9 points of damage on you.
 3. Next round you roll a 12, while the goblin rolls a 2. This gives you a difference of 10. Adding your adjustment, you inflict 22 points of damage. A savage wound indeed...

In general heavy weapons will always be at a disadvantage against a faster weapon like a sword. However, the axe will inflict greater damage when it does hit. In choosing your weapon, you will have to decide which is more important: to make hits, or to do lots of damage when you do.

Using Potions and Poison

Skill potions will increase the *current* level of your SKILL by 1, even above the *initial* level for the duration of one battle. They may be drunk prior to any battle. If your *current* SKILL is below the *initial* level, then the SKILL increase is permanent.

Poison can be used on any weapon to hasten your enemy's defeat. All poisons will come with a number in brackets. This reflects their potency. For example, the number 5 means that 5 rounds *after your first hit*, your enemy will die from the poison. Multiple hits have no effect. All poisons come in single doses

Escaping

You will sometimes be given the opportunity to escape from a battle. If you do run, you will expose yourself to your enemy, who will get a free hit. How much damage they do is 2 points plus their adjustment value. Thus if you are wearing armour, you might escape unscathed.

Fighting More Than One Creature

If you come across multiple opponents, you may be forced to fight them at the same time. When this happens you calculate the Attack Strength of yourself and your opponents as normal. You can only attack one of your opponents, and if your Attack Strength is higher, you wound it in the normal way. If your Attack Strength is higher than the others as well, then you have managed to defend yourself against their blows. If their Attack Strengths are higher, then they wound you in the normal way. Sometimes you will be instructed to fight multiple opponents as a single creature.

Luck

At various times in your adventure, you will be called upon to test you LUCK. To do this, you roll two die. If the result is equal to or less than your current LUCK score, you have been fortunate. If the result is higher, things are unfavourable. Every time you test your LUCK, you must minus one point from your current LUCK score. Thus the more you rely on luck, the riskier this becomes.

EQUIPMENT AND POTIONS

You begin your adventure with your weapon, a dagger, clothes and leather armour, plus a backpack. In addition you may choose one of the following items, or roll a die to determine which you have with you:

1. Rope.
2. Three Healing potions.
3. SKILL potion.
4. LUCK Potion.
5. Restoring Potion.
6. Light Crystal.

In the course of the adventure you will no doubt come across potions. These will mostly be healing potions that restore STAMINA. Unlike many of the Fighting Fantasy books, meals do not restore STAMINA. **Any time you come across a passage describing you going to sleep, you may restore 2 points of STAMINA.** So if the passage tells you that it takes three days to reach the next town, remember that you are entitled to add 6 points to your STAMINA if needed.

Healing potions restore 6 points of STAMINA.

SKILL potions increase your *current* SKILL by 1. If this takes you above your *initial* level, then the effect is temporary and lasts long enough for one battle or one SKILL test.

LUCK potions raise your *initial* LUCK by one and raise your *current* LUCK to that level.

Restoring potions replenish your STAMINA to its *initial* levels.

ADVENTURE SHEET

SKILL ()	STAMINA ()	LUCK ()	COMBAT ENCOUNTER		
			COMBAT SKILL =	ADJUSTMENT:	
			Opponent		
WEAPON (Skill penalty)	ARMOUR: (Rating)		SKILL ()	DB: ARMOUR ADJ'MENT	STAMINA ()
			Opponent		
GOLD =			SKILL ()	DB: ARMOUR ADJ'MENT	STAMINA ()
			Opponent		
BACKPACK			SKILL ()	DB: ARMOUR ADJ'MENT	STAMINA ()
			Opponent		
			SKILL ()	DB: ARMOUR ADJ'MENT	STAMINA ()

MARKET

In the course of your adventure, you will often come upon a town or city and be told that there is a market there. You can visit the market by turning to this page. You can only visit the market when you first arrive in a town or when you are about to leave.

Items can be bought or sold, with the sale price being half of the buying prices listed here.

Alchemist

Healing Potion (+6 to STAMINA)	15 gold
Skill Potion (+1 to SKILL for duration of battle or test)	50 gold
Luck Potion (Raises initial LUCK by 1 and lifts current LUCK to new level)	30 gold
Restoring Potion (Restores STAMINA to initial level)	50 gold
Poison (9)	10 gold
Poison (8)	15 gold
Poison (7)	20 gold
Poison (6)	25 gold
Poison (5)	30 gold
Poison (4)	35 gold
Poison (3)	40 gold
Poison (2)	45 gold
Poison (1)	50 gold
Sleeping Potion	10 gold

Armourer

Breastplate	60 gold
Chainmail	80 gold
Leather Armour	20 gold
Platemail	100 gold
Scalemail Armour	50 gold
Studded Leather Armour	30 gold
Helm (+1 AR)	20 gold
Fine Helm (+2 AR)	40 gold
Small Shield (+1 Combat SKILL, +1 ARMOUR)	20 gold
Large Shield (+2 Combat SKILL, +2 ARMOUR)	40 gold

Cobbler

Riding Boots	9 gold
Shoes	5 gold
Walking Boots	7 gold

General

Blanket	5 gold
Cooking pot	5 gold
Cup	1 gold
Flint	3 gold
Grappling hook	10 gold
Hat	2 gold
Ladle	2 gold
Lantern	3 gold
Lock picks	5 gold
Rope	10 gold
Tent	10 gold
Torch	1 gold

Miscellaneous items bought for 1 gold

Jeweller

Miscellaneous Gems	20 gold
Light Crystal	50 gold
Bejewelled dagger	60 gold
Magical Pearls	100 gold
Magical Gems	100 gold

Merchant House

Hire Merchant Guard	5 gold (+1 gold per day)
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Tailor

Coat	4 gold
Cloak	3 gold
Shirt	2 gold
Socks	1 gold
Pants	3 gold
Bolt of silk	20 gold

Weaponsmith			
Axe	15 gold	Warhammer	20 gold
Battleaxe	30 gold	Shortsword	30 gold
Broadsword	50 gold	Spear	15 gold
Club	3 gold	Staff	5 gold
Hatchet	10 gold	Trident	25 gold
Longsword	40 gold	Fine sword	80 gold
Mace	15 gold	Fine Spear	25 gold

HINTS ON PLAY

The following adventure covers 1000 references. Rather than being long, it simply has numerous paths and side adventures to follow. It is not designed to be difficult, but rather an enjoyable experience, as events develop according to your choices. There is no one way to succeed, and it will take some time for the ultimate purpose of the adventure to emerge.

There are a large number of items available in the book and not all will be useful to you, or even useful anywhere. Some items can only be found in specific places, others can be bought at the market in any town or city.

There are 6 successful endings, all of which are valid. The ending in reference 1000 should be considered the 'true' ending only if readers want a challenge.

Enjoy.



BACKGROUND

The tavern is filled with smoke and song, roaring fires radiating hot amber light onto the merry faces of the dancing men, thumping the floor with their booted feet. Tankards are raised in raucous toasts, before the warm contents are tossed down throats, or just as often spilling onto the floor as men stagger and laugh before falling over.

Watching the celebration from a quiet corner, you smile at the comic display. The men deserve their rest. It was a hard trek across the arid lands of Granborin, called the Sun's Anvil by those who dwell at its withering edge. Only sand moles and the lizards that hunt them live in the desert. The caravan had encountered a few of the giant lizards on this journey, but the warriors had been numerous enough to drive off the beasts. It was the heat that had made the going difficult, and the sand that seemed to slide from under the feet at every step. Your own legs still felt the weariness of the journey; only the copious amounts of beer give your companions the strength to dance.

One hand drifting to your belt, you grasp once more the small purse hanging there. 50 pieces of gold, paid in full by the merchant Frellan for the safe passage of his goods. A fair wage for three week's work. But being a merchant's guard was often more dangerous than being a soldier. When there was no war, soldiers grew fat and obnoxious. Better to be a merchant's guard, you reflect. Dangerous, perhaps, but predictable. And if it went badly you could always flee. Bandits never pursued you if you ran away.

Reflecting on your fortunes, you look up as the door opens, letting on a gust of cool air that is a relief against the hot interior. Most of the revellers do not notice the figure who steps inside, but the sight is unusual enough to make the Keeper hastily put down a half-full tankard in front of the man lolling at the bar and scurry forward, ignoring the protests that come after him. You also sit up a little straighter.

The woman standing inside the doorway is dressed in a long cloak of deepest blue, embroidered around the base with white and golden thread. A cowl hides her features, but it is not difficult to see her distaste as she looks over the drunken louts before her. The Keeper has scrambled over the bodies and dodged the dancing revellers to bow to the lady, welcoming her to his establishment. By this time some more of the drunken men have noticed her, and the room is starting to quieten.

The cowl moves from side to side as the woman shakes her head at the Keeper's invitation, then she thrusts a gloved hand in your direction before turning around and leaving. The Keeper turns and looks straight at you before turning back to bow, but the lady is already gone. You stand as the Keeper makes his way back across the common room, waving away those who try to accost him, either to ask who the lady was, or to order more beer.

Giving you a brief nod, the keeper shouts above the song and laughter.

"The lady wants to see you outside!"

"About what?" you ask.

The keeper shrugs, and goes back to the bar. Picking up your weapons and pack you start to make your way across the room. The room is almost as hot as the Sun's Anvil! It is a relief to walk out into the night, embraced by the cool air. Closing the door behind you, you inhale deeply the fresh air.

The lady is standing nearby, and you are startled to see with her four armoured men. They carry no signs or symbols, but each has the look of a professional guard. Curious, now, you approach, stopping many feet away. One of the guards

significantly takes a step, placing himself to intercept you if you were to try and attack the lady. The lady hastily steps past the guard, waving him back with irritation.

Placing her hands on her hips, her form clothed now in shadow, she looks you over, eyes sparkling in the depths of her cowl. "You are the captain of these men?" She asks in a low, melodic voice. A beautiful voice, but her tone is impatient.

"No," you reply. "The captain is under one of the tables inside."

Although you can't see her face, you sense she is frustrated. "You are not drinking tonight?" she asks, probingly.

"I can't afford to get drunk and spend all my money," you reply.

"I see," she replies curtly. Stepping away from you, she paces to one side, then turns. "I need guards for a journey. I will pay you well. How many others can you gather? Men who will be fit to leave at dawn tomorrow?"

You shrug. "I'm not sure."

The woman seems displeased. "Very well. Get lots of rest. We will leave at first light tomorrow."

As she turns to leave, your words halt her. "I haven't agreed to your terms. In fact, I haven't heard your terms at all. Where are we going? What is the rate of pay?"

The lady looks back at you over her shoulder. "One gold coin per day. Our destination is...not for you to know at this time."

"What about an initial sum? And a bonus for safe delivery?"

The lady turns to face you, planting her hands on her hips. "Five gold now, and another five when we arrive."

Folding your arms, you pretend to consider the offer. It is a generous amount, but some journeys were more dangerous than others. Frellan paid 10 gold for safe delivery, and two gold per day to cross the perilous wastelands. "It is difficult to know how much I deserve, if you will not tell me where we are going. What are you carrying?"

"I have made my offer," the lady snaps. "If you accept it, be at the Northern Gate at dawn! Don't presume to bargain with me while you are unproven!"

Stalking angrily away, the four guards hasten to follow her.

Standing alone in the night you contemplate the offer, your hand wandering once more to the purse on your belt. You would have preferred to rest a while before your next job. But you would never refuse a job lightly. The lady's journey smells dangerous, but you are curious as well. For many moments you stand as the breeze cools you, turning things over in your mind. At least she will be heading north, away from the arid lands. Wandering up the street in search of an inn, you contemplate the idea of sleeping in, perhaps in the arms of a perfumed lady. Yet adventure is calling...

Now turn to **1**

1

At dawn the Guard at the Northern Gate changes. A stubble-cheeked lieutenant, still scrubbing sleep from his eyes glares at you as he comes to take his post.

“Are you coming in or out?” he asks in a harsh tone.

“Out,” you reply. “Waiting for my companions.”

He grunts and goes into the guardhouse. The morning chill is actually pleasant, the memory of the Sun’s Anvil still in your body. It will get much colder further North. As you ponder the strange lady and her mysterious destination, the slow clomp of steel-shod hooves on stone grows near. Within moments a group of five horsemen appear around a corner, surrounding a plain, but finely made carriage.

The guards are all dressed in identical undyed woven cloaks, covering chainmail. Each has a sheathed longsword hung on the pommel of their saddle and a long spear in hand. Their helms are pointed and open-faced, looking a bit like a bell. Looking at them, you shake your head. They look like they have something to hide. The men are obviously used to marching under banners and proudly bearing some noble symbol emblazoned on their chests. The plain issue they have concealed themselves in is nondescript enough, but the fact they all wear exactly the same attire can only draw attention to the unmarked carriage they escort.

The group does not pause as they pass through the gate, watched with amusement by the City Guard; no doubt the guardsmen’s thoughts are similar to your own. Falling in behind the last guard, you wonder if you should try to speak to the lady. Deciding to wait until you are clear of the city you settle in at a comfortable pace.

The city of Targaren sits in the middle of steamy swamps, the bloated river of Yategan its lifeblood. Wide stone roads have been built above the stagnant waters, and your party moves steadily through the swamps. Few people are approaching the city at this hour, and you are content to watch the herons and other water birds that fish in the dawn light, treading through pools of reeds and lilies. The land eventually rises, once the city is a grey smudge in the distance, and the stone-paved roadway abruptly ends on a dusty mound. As soon as the carriage wheels hit the dirt, the horsemen and carriage wordlessly start to move more quickly. Dust is stirred up, forcing you to move off to the side as billowing clouds of dust are kicked up by the trotting hooves.

The trot is unsustainable for a day’s travel, but you get the sense that the lady is trying to move onwards as quickly as possible. Is she running from something? You are forced to jog, and it is not long before your legs start to ache. It really was too soon to start another job. As you contemplate going back to Targaren, you see a cowed head poke itself out of the carriage window.

“You there!” the woman calls haughtily. “Come here!”

Merchants have addressed you far more rudely in the past, although they normally wait until they have paid you before treating you like their property. Even so, you keep your cool as you hurry up to the side of the carriage.

“Get in,” the lady instructs and pulls her head back inside.

It is left to you to open the door and leap inside. You manage to do this with a fair degree of elegance and close the door behind you. The carriage is small and you have to bend over as you stagger towards a seat in the rocking carriage and fall into a cushioned seat.

Looking at the lady opposite, you see her wrapped in the same embroidered cloak. She lifts her hands and draws the cowl back from her head. She is beautiful, with bright green eyes and auburn hair. A pair of ivory combs holds her hair away from a face that is surprisingly expressive. You can see exactly what she is thinking as she

looks at you; uncertain if she has done the right thing, very much trying to make a measure of you. All of which tells you her need is great.

“I’m glad you decided to join us,” she says. You see that she is grateful, but her gratitude is far outweighed by her mistrust. She extends a small cloth bag to you. “Here is your initial pay.”

You take the purse, feeling the coin inside. You don’t open the bag to count it. You have a lot of experience in handling bags of coin and can tell by the weight that it contains the agreed 5 gold coins. Besides, the woman’s face is not the face of a swindler. On the contrary, she looks like she has spent her whole life in a temple, naïve to the ways of the outside world.

“Where are we going?” you ask.

She bits her lip, pausing for several moments. “North,” she says at last. “It should only take a couple of weeks. If all goes well.”

You can see the worry in her face. “Are you in danger?” you ask.

She hesitates again, her gaze softening as she perceives your concern. “No. Not I, but...” The mistrust surfaces again. “We will be heading North for now. My previous...guide has...left us. Are you familiar with the Northern routes?”

The woman is an appalling liar, and you can see the guilt she feels. Yet the strength of her purpose does not make her waver. “I am,” you reply. You are a skilful and shameless liar.

“Good.” She pulls out a map and holds it out towards you. “We will pass through the Rocky Hills. My map shows three routes. Which should we take?”

You take the map. You actually remember well your last trip north. The north-eastern path takes you through some jungle. It is longer, but skirts around the Rocky Hills, which can be dangerous as they are prone to rock falls. The direct Northern route is an ancient highway built by long-forgotten kings. It is wide and straight, and will get you to the next town most quickly. But it is also the route any pursuers would expect you to take. The north-west road is not as direct as the ancient highway, and takes you through more perilous parts of the Rocky Hills, but might be safer in the end.

Considering the options, you give your advice. The lady nods and tells you to inform captain Penmark who leads her Guard. She then thanks you and indicates for you to leave the carriage.

You pause. “Lady, I don’t have a horse.”

“Ask one of my men to let you double up,” she replies.

Deciding not to argue with your new employer at this early stage, you exit the carriage and jump down onto the road once again. Trotting up to the head of the column, you call out to the guard who rides on a white stallion.

“Are you Captain Penmark?”

Turning to look at you, the man’s bright blue eyes stab into you. There is nobility about him that does not come from titles and wealth. This is a man sworn to a high purpose in life. “I am,” he replies, stroking his thick, long moustaches. “Has Lady Kianmay consulted you about our route?”

You answer that she has.

Which route do you advise?

The direct route along the ancient highway? Turn to **30**

The long route through the jungle? Turn to **112**

The alternative route through the Rocky Hills? Turn to **224**

2

Uncorking the phial of green liquid, you sniff at it, then carefully taste it. It tingles on your tongue, and encouraged, you toss the lot down your throat. It is a LUCK potion. Raise your initial luck by one point and restore your current LUCK to this new level.

Return now to 7

3

The bandits set only one sentry, and it is a simple matter to wait for him to wander off to relieve himself and quietly stab him in the lung. You nod to Penmark and move into the camp. Most of the men are in their tents, but a couple are wrapped in blankets near the fire. You approach them first and trying to keep calm sink you dagger into their throats one by one, clamping a hand over their mouths to prevent them from crying out. You can see bottles lying about and guess that most have drunk at least some alcohol.

You begin to move towards the first tent when suddenly there is a shout behind you. You have been discovered. The still-living bandits stagger to their feet and several rush at you. You run for the forest. Trying to fight so many in the open would be suicide.

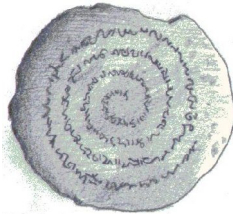
You move into the darkness of the forest and turn around to face the bandits, who have armed themselves with torches. If the paladin have crossbows with them, roll one die. If not, roll two. The resulting number is how many of the bandits you will personally have to face in the forest. You can fight them one at a time by hiding in the shadows and fighting them in the thick undergrowth.

Use the following statistics for each bandit that you face, and be thankful some of them are drunk:

BANDIT SKILL 7 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 0

If you die, turn to **309**

If you win, turn to **185**



4

You go back to the edge of the tent, and carefully peek under the cloth. You see nothing and crawl out. Casually you walk across the camp and into the undergrowth, all the while your stomach clenched with cold apprehension. With relief you make it into the forest and hurry to report back to Kianmay.

Turn to **61**

5

The first watch is yours. You walk around as the others settle to sleep, checking that all is well. You keep the fire burning bright, and your watch passes uneventfully. You wake one of the paladin to take his watch, then head for your blankets.

Turn to **207**

6

Not knowing whether the bandit is wearing armour or not, you creep up behind him and slide your dagger around his neck, drawing it swiftly across his throat. It is poorly done, and the bandit scrambles to his feet, snatching up his sword. He opens his mouth, but can only gargle as blood spills from his throat over his chest and drips onto the ground. He looks at you with utter hatred and the sword falls from his hand, before he falls to his knees, still watching you. The look in his eyes changes to fear, and a moment later he falls onto his face.

You remain still for a moment, uncertain feelings filling your heart. You have never watched a man die so slowly. You have never had to watch the suffering of death at your hands before, and you find it does not sit well with you. You clean your dagger on the grass rather than on the dead bandit's cloak and drag him into a small hollow in the shade of a large rock. You flip him onto his back and arrange his limbs neatly before pausing. You know no prayers, so you simply apologise to the spirit of the slain, and wish it well.

You try to conceal the blood on the hilltop by digging up the soil there. Even though there is no more sign of blood, the soil is all churned up and still looks suspicious. Leaving the hilltop you hurry back to your horse. Hopefully now the wagon should be able to pass through safely.

Turn to **329**

7

The lock clicks open and you lift the lid. Inside you find a bottle of poison(5), a small box containing eleven phials of red healing potion and a phial of green potion, a map case containing a scroll covered in an arcane script, and a shortsword with a silver hilt set with sapphires, sheathed in a snakeskin scabbard.

You are free to drink any number of potions now, but can only take five with you if you also take the arcane scroll. Alternatively you can leave the scroll behind and take 10 phials of healing potions. If you drink the green potion, turn to **2**. Once you are finished here, you close the chest and leave the secret room, heading back to the main hall.

Turn to **233**



8

Hoping the wand will give you some advantage, you seize it and turn to face your opponent. Seeing the wand in your hand, the warrior stops, then turns away in apparent disinterest. The clerk calls out and three soldiers march into the room. They are carrying bows.

“You are to be executed as a necromancer.” The clerk announces.

The warriors raise their bows and fire, as Kianmay screams out in protest. You dodge one arrow, but the others strike you in the neck and face. You feel searing pain, then fall and the darkness claims you.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



9

You reach out and grasp the hilt, ignoring the prickling in your hand. You gasp as a pain starts to travel up your arm, burning in your bones. The crystal amulet around your neck suddenly glows and a warmth fills your chest, travelling down your arm. The two sensations meet at your elbow and the pain there sharpens. You grit your teeth, and try to release the blade. Your hand seems numb and frozen, despite the sharp pain. You urge the energy from the amulet to triumph, and with agonising slowness it pushes the harmful energy from the sword back down to your hand.

Finally your hand is able to release the sword, and it tumbles loudly back into the box. You collapse in relief, but it only lasts a moment as the curtain is torn aside and you see Gilmore the Groat looking down at you with his wild eyes.

He sneers and opens his mouth to speak. You don't wait to hear what he has to say. Rolling across the rug, you throw yourself under the wall of the tent and climb to your feet. Dashing across the camp you hear shouts, and a crossbow bolt whizzes past you. You make it to the undergrowth and run all the way back to your horse.

Climbing into the saddle, you gallop back to the rest of your party.

Turn to 161

10

As soon as you take out the necromancer's wand, Kianmay shudders and recoils. "Cast it away!" she commands.

"I know it is a bit gristly-" you begin.

Kianmay points at the wand and a white flame bursts upon it. You toss it aside in alarm. The flames burn hot and the limb writhes and clutches at the air before finally going still. The flames then become orange and burn normally.

"Leave it," Kianmay says, and rides onwards. You have no choice but to follow.

Return now to **373**

11

Carefully planting one foot in the tree you lift yourself up, climbing slowly and as quietly as you can. The snores above you do not cease and after ten minutes you pull yourself up next to a man slumped against the trunk of the tree. The man has a crossbow and you take it from where he has propped it and balance it on another branch. Taking a breath, you make sure you are secure, then reach out and clamp a hand over the sentry's mouth and nose. The man jerks and gives a muffled cry. You grip him tighter and plunge your dagger into his back. He stiffens, then slumps against you.

Settling the sentry back in his seat, you gather up his cloak and use it to tie him to the trunk, making sure to cover the wound to stop any blood dripping down to the ground below.

The man has a belt pouch, which you take, as well as his own dagger and the crossbow. Climbing back down the tree, you move away to a secure spot. You carry both daggers at your belt, and open the pouch. Feeling the contents you find a pipe and tobacco, a purse of 10 gold coins, and a small glass phial of liquid.

Apart from the phial, there is nothing unordinary in the pouch. Once again you consider your options.

Return and report to Lady Kianmay? Turn to **356**

Sneak into the camp? Turn to **304**

12

You decide that Kianmay knows best and lay out your blankets in the sitting room. You fall asleep and start to dream. You have not slept long when something jerks you away. You stare at the ceiling, the fire having died down to glowing embers. You lie still, not even breathing, and listen.

The door swings slowly open, a gust of cold air chilling you. You look under the couch and see several pairs of boots starting to creep into the room. You know that there are too many for you to fight, so you carefully slid out of the blankets and across the floor, slipping under the couch. You quietly drag your pack and your weapons with you.

The men move in, and fan out through the room. A pair come to your blankets, then move away again. You see most of the booted feet gather near the bedroom

door, then quickly and quietly they move inside. You hear Kianmay give a stifled cry. Low muffled voices come from within, then you see Kianmay's bare feet as the men rush her out of the room. You hear the leader give a gruff command.

"Wait here in case he comes back. Kill him and search him. Bring everything he is wearing to the palace."

The boots leave; all except two pairs. After the door is shut, the two soldiers begin to complain, but then make themselves comfortable in the shadows and fall silent.

Hiding under the couch, you wonder what to do. It is unlikely you can dress in your armour silently, so if you choose to attack the men, you will have to do it unprotected. Even though you have the Diamond Key, if you are slain it will be taken from your body and it cannot revive you. Alternatively you can wait and hope they fall asleep.

To attack them, turn to **152**

If you would prefer to wait, turn to **306**

13

Thankfully leaving the orc settlement behind, your party proceeds into the icy mountains. The well-travelled road is wide, but rough and pitted. You notice with surprise that the orcs have actually filled in some of the larger holes, trying to improve the condition of the road.

Eventually the road comes to an intersection. The road continues on straight, but there are two other roads, one leading left, the other right. There are signs written in some crude runic script that you cannot read. Kianmay also confesses ignorance of the script. Surely orcs do not have a written language...?

Which way will you go?

Straight on? Turn to **351**

The right-hand road? Turn to **316**

The left? Turn to **241**



14

The two soldiers start in alarm as you appear, a furious shadowy figure framed by the dull red light of the hearth. You slay one as his sword is halfway out of its scabbard, and turn to face the other.

KING'S SOLDIER SKILL 8 STAMINA 18 DB 6 ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **332**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

15

Looking at the riches on the ground you see all of your dreams coming true. Why risk a fight when you can take all of this for yourself now? Dropping your weapon, you fall to your knees and gather up first the coins, then the rest of the riches. The soldiers jeer at you loudly, and clumps of dirt and food and miscellaneous items are thrown at you as you crawl about.

“Someone give him a sack!” calls out the Wolf.

A few sacks are thrown into the compound, and the Wolf and the sorcerer help you to load the sacks with the riches. Once the sacks are full, the Wolf calls for a horse to be brought. A mare is led into the compound, nervously tossing her head at the loud noise. The sorcerer calms her while guards come forward to tie the sacks to the horn of the saddle. The Wolf keeps away from the horse, and once the guards have finished securing the sacks, he points at you. “Strip him of his weapons and armour. We cannot have a thief impersonating a warrior!”

The guards seize you and take away your armour and weapons. They then throw you onto the horse and lead it through the crowd of warriors. You keep your head down, feeling their contempt and ridicule buffeting you like a physical force.

Eventually you reach the edge of the camp and are sent on your way. You take the reins and urge your mount to a canter. After a time you drop to a walk. You have lost all of your possessions, and are now wearing nothing but your clothing. The two sacks contain coins and valuables worth 1000 gold. You may list all of the valuables as coin.

You pause within sight of the camp, wondering what to do. Kianmay is still somewhere in the camp. You make and discard a hundred plans, before you see a single rider moving along the road towards you. As the figure draws nearer, you are sure it is a woman, then recognise Kianmay as she pulls back her hood.

“Hello.” She says as she stops her horse next to you. “The Wolf told me he let you go.”

“What happened to you?” You ask her.

“I was brought before the Wolf. He wanted to know what I was going to do with the Diamond Key. I told him and he let me go. With the Key.”

She pulls out the cloth bag and smiles.

“He didn’t know what it was?” You ask.

“He knew,” she replies. “He has a sorcerer with him who discerned its function. The Wolf is a noble and just man. You know this, for you have your life. What is in the sacks? And where are your weapons?”

You briefly tell her what happened.

Kianmay smiles and nods. “A great man. You see how he has shown his men, and shown you, that nobility is worth more than riches. The North will be a better land under his rule.”

“He kills one of every ten men who swear to him!” You say.

“Yes, that isn’t good,” Kianmay replies. “No one is perfect.”

She heels her horse onwards. You have no choice but to follow.

Turn to 293



16

The Kilandar mountains mark the border between the Kingdoms of Zarantar and Tuin Mor. The ancient peaks are not high, but still present difficulties. Numerous passes lead through the range, but can often be blocked by avalanches of snow and rock. However, you are less concerned about the dangers of the environment than you are about King Grutnegot

“Who is King Grutna-what?” Kianmay asks.

You explain that orcs live in the mountains, where they have been driven by humans. Although it is possible that the orcs will attack you, it is more likely that you will have to suffer their bureaucracy. An orc chieftain, Grutnegot, united the warring orc tribes of the Kilandar Mountains, and forged a kingdom of sorts. Rather than launch a conquest of the surrounding human villages, Grutnegot established a veneer of legitimacy to his new-born state by imitating human infrastructure.

You will now have to deal with orcish customs clerks and be wary of countless laws imposed by the orcs while you travel through their lands. While the orcish kingdom doesn't officially exist, humouring the orcs prevents them from reverting to raiding. The orcs try to glean as much as they can from the merchants that pass through; but have to be careful not to raise ire too much, lest one of the human kings orders an attack on them.

So it is that passing through the Kilandar Mountains can be a trying time, but not necessarily unsafe.

It takes five days to make your way through the hills until you are in the mountains proper. (Pay your men 5 gold each). In the hills you pass through a few human villages and are surprised to notice that they have orcish garrisons. Evidently, Grutnegot has expanded his services to include protection. Finally you reach the town of Rutangol, an orcish settlement that is the gateway to the various passes that lead through the mountains. You settle in for the night at an inn run by a jolly human couple, who give you the latest news.

Grutnegot is in some trouble. Not all of the orcs are happy to be living lives of peace and relative prosperity. A rival chieftain has founded a movement to try and topple Grutnegot, wanting to return to the old ways of raiding and conquest. So far he has gathered many followers, but is still in the minority. Every day more orcs arrive from distant lands to join Grutnegot's paradise.

With his swelling numbers, Grutnegot was able to approach villages and towns and offer to protect them in return for a fee. Distant human settlements are often prey to wolves, bandits and...well, orcs; and other creatures of chaos. But slowly trust was established and Grutnegot's garrisons protect most of the villages in the foothills of the Kilandar Mountains.

King Grutnegot has also apparently dug a tunnel through the mountains, which will speed the journey and protect travellers from the elements. However, the charge is high and the innkeeper knows of no traveller who was willing to trust the orcs and take the darkened passage.

The innkeeper also gives you a list of the latest taxes you can expect to pay.

The next morning you set out and join the line of travellers waiting to get through the gate that seals the way to the passages through the mountains. A palisade seals off the gap between two cliffs, a large wooden gate in the centre. Two watchtowers have also been built, in which fur-clad orcs sit with crossbows, eyeing the travellers below.

The travellers before you are all on foot, and are waved through with little delay. When your turn comes, the self-important orc official grins, his mouth full of pointed teeth. The orcs here are almost seven feet tall, wiry of built and dark bluish of skin.

Their eyes are small and black beneath heavy brows. The official is wrapped in a fine white bear skin, a steel cap with a golden eagle on top apparently the mark of his office.

Rubbing his hands together, he looks over you wagon, nodding his head slightly as he counts something. Finally he turns to you and tells you the fee.

“What?!” You exclaim. “How can it be so high?”

“Well, there be da hoof tax, then da wheel tax. Plus da weapon tax.”

The wagon has four wheels, and the oxen have eight hooves. The tax collector explains that the hoof-tax is one gold per hoof, and the wheel tax is one gold per wheel. The wagon and oxen alone will cost you 12 gold. Each of the paladin and merchant guards with you has a horse and is armed. The weapon tax, which is apparently for a fund to support the widows and children of orcs killed by armed travellers, is 5 gold.

You argue with the orc for several minutes. You promise that your party will not attack any orcs. The orc considers this and agrees to accept your promise, and do away with the weapon-tax, if you kneel down and apologise for every orc that has been killed by humans, ever. This means you only have to pay the hoof tax and the wheel tax (12 gold plus 4 gold per paladin and merchant guard with you.) You can choose to fire some or all of your merchant guards.

If you want to pay this, turn to **156**

If you can't or don't wish to pay this much, turn to **107**

If you want to risk offering the Tax-collector a bribe, turn to **359**



17

You slay the last guard and he falls down next to his friend. You clean your weapon and put it away. The Diamond Key heals any wounds you may have received.

“Why did you attack them?” Kianmay asks. “They would have left peacefully.”

She is probably right. Laremidan's servant has disappeared, so you haven't kept things quiet by killing them. Unable to answer, you drag both bodies into the bathroom and dump them in the tub. You can take their longswords or studded leather armour for yourself. In addition you find on them a total of 14 gold coins, a pair of dice, and a dagger with a silver blade.

You lock the door to your quarters and go back to drag out the corpse of Laremidan. Kianmay is crouched in her bed, wrapped in the covers.

“Why did you kill him?” she asks sadly as you man handle his body.

“He was going to rape you!” you say. “Anyway, it is better this way. He cannot chase after us now.”

“I was to be his victim, and I have forgiven him. Why can’t you?” Kianmay asks.

You are not in the mood for a discussion so you tell her to get some rest and drag his body into the bathroom. You move your bedroll into the bedroom and closing the door, lie down against it. The priestess does not question you further, and you fall asleep.

Turn to **373**

18

You follow the undertaker out of the inn and up the street. He turns often and motions you urgently to follow. Your reluctant step never keeps you up with him, and eventually you arrive at a small gate in the palisade that surrounds the town.

The undertaker proudly produces a key and unlocks the gate, inviting you to enter with a sweeping gesture. You walk through and find yourself in a small compound attached to the town wall. A fence that would not keep out wolves or marauders surrounds a small graveyard and a surprisingly large house made of wood. There is a small iron chimney, out of which smoke is gently rising. The graveyard is quite small for a town of this size, and you recall that northerners are more in favour of cremation, due to their nomadic roots.

The undertaker leads you up to the door, which is flanked by a couple of kennels. “It is just I,” he says to the kennels. “And a friend!”

You peer into the dark interiors and can see furry flanks in the dark shadows. But only silence and the smell of strong chemicals comes from the kennels. As the door to the undertaker’s home opens a wave of even stronger-smelling chemicals washes over you, and you hesitate. The undertaker smiles broadly and gestures for you to enter. Although the man seems more than a little insane, he doesn’t seem dangerous, so you push aside your reservations and enter.

You find yourself in a large room filled with coffins and headstones on display. The undertaker closes the door behind him and hurries across the hall, calling for you to follow. He leads you through a door and past private rooms into a large kitchen at the back. Here you see a woman at the stove. Already on the table are several dishes.

“My wife!” the undertaker says proudly and greets her, giving her an embrace and a kiss on the cheek. She does not react at all, and remains stiffly doing her tasks.

The undertaker sits down at the table and invites you to partake of the food. It smells good, but you refrain. The aroma of the food can’t disguise the smell of chemicals that appears to come from the woman at the stove.

The undertaker helps himself, tearing into a bread roll. “You asked me about the Wolf. In under a year he has become ruler of all of these lands. He is feared and respected wherever you go upon the tundra. But, ah, if only they knew what I knew.” The undertaker grins. “You see, I am an expert in the study of death. I know what kills a man. Wolves are always a danger on the tundra. If the locals find a man covered in scratches with his throat torn out, they think it is a wolf and if the deceased is unknown, they deliver the corpse to me. Mostly it is wolves; mostly.” The undertaker lowers his voice. “But sometimes it was something else, and always on a full moon, and always when the Wolf was near. He even tells you his secret with his name!” The undertaker laughs.

“He is a werewolf?” you ask.

“He is!” the undertaker grins. “That is why he cannot be matched in battle. He is swifter and stronger than any man, and cannot be wounded with steel.”

As you ponder this, the woman at the stove turns, carrying a pot from the stove to a bench, and you start in shock. The woman’s eyes are dull and lifeless, and her jaw hangs loosely. She shuffles over to the bench and you realise that she is dead, preserved with chemicals and reanimated with dark magic. The undertaker is a necromancer!

The undertaker does not notice your reaction, looking at his ‘wife’ fondly. “In my work I deal with many crafts. If you have a dagger I can plate the blade in silver. It will not be useful for much except wounding werewolves!”

Do you want to accept this offer? Turn to **116**

If you want to attack and kill this freak, turn to **270**

If you want to leave and go back to your room at the ‘Inn’, turn to **371**

19

You pull aside your cloak to show Kianmay the silver-studded leather armour. She tells you that in battle it will protect you no better than leather armour (AR = 1), but it will absorb all but the most powerful of spells cast on you.

Return now to **293**

20

After an hour, a shaved headed man with a short black beard steps into the tent. He is dressed in a black robe that ends at his knee an enamelled breastplate worn over the top. It is enamelled dark blue with red and gold serpents upon it. Tooled brown leather riding boots covering him from knee to tow. He wears an ivory hilted dagger at his belt and carries a large, slim wooden case like a clerk, and you groan. But the case remains closed and he asks you to follow him.

You and Kianmay rise and follow after him as he leads you through the compound. You pass through rows of tents and come suddenly upon a wooden structure. It is simple and has a canvas roof, but is as large as any house. You suspect that it can be dismantled. The guards on the doors open them to let the clerk enter, eyeing you and Kianmay as you pass.

Inside, you see that the floor is the grass of the tundra, laid over with thick rugs decorated with intricate patterns in earthy tones. The small antechamber you are in is empty except for a small desk and a stool and the clerk opens the next set of doors himself. Beyond, there is a large chamber, containing a long table to one side, on which you see all of your possessions laid out. At the far end there is a group of men sitting in a circle on the floor. Behind them is a dais with a large, thick wooden chair intricately carved into flowing forms. The room is warmed by braziers filled with coals that stand in the corners.

The men who sit on the floor are various ages, all northern warriors with long beards, usually braided. Their heads are shaved, which is unusual for the unruly

northmen. Rather than breastplates, they wear chainmail or leather armour. They are smoking and talking quietly in a language you do not understand.

Are you wearing a winged helm? If so, turn to **155**

If you are not wearing a winged helm, but were carrying a necromancer's wand when you were captured, turn to **54**

If none of these apply to you, turn to **302**



21

As the wagon heads off, you move towards the side tunnel. Apart from what you are wearing, you take only your weapon and a shuttered lantern. You don't know if orcs can see in the dark, but guess their eyes are better than yours.

For a long time you head down the descending vault. Less care has been taken here, as if the orcs wanted to get through the stone as quickly as possible. You see a faint light up ahead and open your lantern long enough to extinguish it. With your weapon at the ready, you move forward. The digging sound is very loud now, and you expect to catch sight of the workers as you approach a rough opening.

Instead, the space you enter is empty and still. But what you do see surprises you. The tunnel breaks out into a fine hall, rectangular with a tiled floor and pillars lining the walls. The rubble from the tunnel is strewn over the floor. The light comes from above, and you look up, seeing chandeliers made of a thousand glowing crystals lining the vaulted ceiling.

It looks as fine as any subterranean Dwarven palace, but the scale of it is human-sized. You hide your lantern behind some rubble and look for some sign of where to go. The sounds of digging come from the right, but the hall has an opening to the left as well.

Which way will you go?

Investigate the digging? Turn to **368**

Go to the left? Turn to **87**

22

Laremidan talks more about the Wolf, but it seems he only knows rumours. While he talks, you feel the golden armband grow warm. You glance down at it and see that the diamonds are black. They are trying to poison you.

You continue talking to Laremidan, accepting refills from the servant until the bottle is empty. You see his well-concealed frustration and confusion. Once the bottle is empty, you thank him for the wine and his company.

He stands with you and extends his hand.

Do you want to shake his hand and say goodnight? Turn to **334**

If you would rather kill him and his servant for trying to poison you, turn to **220**

23

Gripping your weapon, you head into Darken Wood, shivering as the cold closes around you. You move towards the fire, which you see flickering between the creaking trunks. You realise that the sound is coming from the trees themselves as they writhe as much as a tree can. What can torment a tree so?

You move deep into the Wood, the fire seeming to always be just ahead. Finally you stumble into a clearing. The fire you have seen is dancing on top of a large flat black rock. A slender woman sits in a large, heavy chair carved of dark wood. She is beautiful with creamy white skin, long black silken hair and bright blue eyes. She wears a long robe of white that sparkles in the light of the fire.

As you enter the clearing, the woman stops singing and stands. She peers at you, then holds out her hands. "Free me," she begs.

You can see no restraints. "From what?" you ask.

"I am imprisoned here," she says. "I have been imprisoned here for many ages."

"You don't look imprisoned," you say.

Silently the woman starts to walk towards you. The fire flares and starts to take the form of a thrashing humanoid figure. She steps back hastily. "If I leave here, this demon will be released."

You frown. "How did this happen?"

She sits down in the chair once more. You approach the fire, finding it warm. The woman tells you her story. "I am...a servant of good. I fancied myself a champion of the light. So I came here to destroy this place. This Wood is ancient, and existed even in my time. But the ruler of this place saw the arrogance in my heart, and so devised this to test me. To be a champion of the light I must not destroy evil, I must simply wait. I can leave at any time, if I am willing to unleash this demon upon the world. So every day I sit and I sing hymns of love, hoping someone will come to aid me. Are you willing to be a champion of the Light?"

"What do I have to do?" you ask.

She points at the fire. "I can send you into hell, to the dominion of this demon. Then you must fight and destroy it. But beware, I have been here for thousands of years, and I have sent a thousand men to their deaths."

Do you want to accept the challenge? Turn to **119**

If you would rather leave, turn to **318**

If you think she is an agent of evil and want to attack her, turn to **225**

24

The Wolf is a fierce opponent, but you prove to be stronger. Your silver weapon hisses in his flesh, making it smoke, and finally he falls dead at your feet. The assembled soldiers are silent. You glance with uncertainty towards the sorcerer, and see that he is watching the body of the Wolf, as if he expects something to happen. You look back at the body. Suddenly the corpse inhales and sits up with a gasp. The soldiers watching stare in awe and uncertainty. The Wolf stands and stretches, then sheaths his sword. He looks at the men around him.

"Do you not know that your King is immortal? How else can I lead you to greatness? Return now to your duties."

The men hurry away and the Wolf turns and leaves the compound. You follow the Wolf back into the house. You are led to the throne room once more. This time you find a long table on which are all of your belongings. Kianmay is waiting there apprehensively.

The Wolf gestures to the table. "You are free to go. All of your belongings are returned to you." He turns to Kianmay and from around his neck pulls out a cloth bag on a cord. "This I return to you."

Kianmay takes it eagerly and opens it. You see from her expression of relief and delight that the Diamond Key is inside. That is how he came back to life. You gather up all of your things from the table. Everything you had is returned to you, and you may keep anything else you have gained, including the weapon you used in the fight.

The Wolf goes over to the cabinet and opens it with a key. He takes a box from inside and comes over to you. The box is lacquered black wood inlaid with ivory and jade in the form of two fish swimming around each other, forming a circle. "Since you have killed me, these riches are yours."

You take the box and lift the lid. Inside there is a single crystal that is filled with rainbow-coloured light, shifting as you tilt the box. You take out the crystal and Kianmay gasps when she sees it.

"What is it?" you ask her.

"A Primordial Crystal," she says. "It is priceless to be sure."

"What do I do with it?" you ask.

Kianmay shakes her head. "The nature of such things is...mysterious. I know of many ways in which they have been used. Sometimes for great good, sometimes for great evil."

You put the crystal back into the box and close the lid. You thank the Wolf politely, and the sorcerer leads you through the house once more, this time out through the front doors. You find there two horses saddled and loaded with supplies.

You are free to go. One of the Wolf's guards escorts you through the camp. You see the soldiers all talking urgently together, as news of what has happened spreads. One soldier recognises you, and soon the way is lined by soldiers staring silently at you. You feel hostility from some, but mostly confusion.

Eventually you make it through the camp and are soon hurrying away along the road towards Arantator.

Turn to **293**



25

Slowly you creep forward and reach out towards the hilt of the sword...

Test your LUCK. Roll two die. If the total is the same as or less than your current LUCK score, turn to **372**. If the total is higher than your LUCK, turn to **274**

26

You fight against the Wolf. He moves with inhuman speed.

WOLF KING SKILL 16 STAMINA 18 DB 6 ARMOUR 4

If you win, turn to **275**

If you lose, turn to **134**

27

With a final shudder, Count Raul dies. You are exhausted after two battles, but have no time to rest. You can hear pounding on the door. Having no time to search the place, you hurry to the back door, hoping the Griffon Soldiers haven't reached the stable yard yet.

You open the door and peer out, seeing the coast is clear. But as you run across the stable yard, the other door of the inn opens and a shout follows you as you jerk open the stable gate and flee into the street.

You run for your life, taking a few random turns, then hiding yourself amidst some garbage. You hear the soldiers searching for you, but none enters the alley. They swear and eventually give up. You wait for a long time, just to make sure they are gone, then take the long way around to the barman's apartment.

The barman is relieved to see you, and greets you like a long lost friend. You toss him his gold coin and you and your man leave. You take another circular route, making sure you are not followed, and return to your inn.

You then go to see Kianmay.

Turn to **123**

28

Reaching the door, you listen carefully, and hearing nothing, ease the door open. There is a lamp inside, and you can see that you are in a water closet. Being a patron of outhouses you spend a few moments studying the device with interest. You are most impressed with the absence of smell.

There are two more doors here, one leading further in towards the quarters. Listening, you can hear quiet chatting amidst the sounds of porcelain and cutlery, as if servants are setting a table. The other door opens into the hall once more, and you quietly slip through it to search another room.

Turn to **233**

29

Making your way over to the black-robed man, you stop by his table, aware that many of the drinkers are watching you, the chatter in the room decreasing. You feel like you have an audience as you introduce yourself to the thin old man.

He looks up and blinks, but then beams. “Sit down, friend! A bottle of wine is a thing to be shared!”

You set down your mug as you sit and the old man lifts the bottle as if to pour wine into your beer. You pull your mug away. “I’m all right,” you tell him.

He happily refills his own glass, then raises it in a toast to you. “My name is Grinbot the Undertaker. I take care of the poor sods in this town after they die. But a corpse is never appreciative. Silent and still, that’s the way I prefer them!” He peers around the room as if challenging anyone to dispute his preference for avoiding the undead. He grins at you. “What is your craft, friend?”

“Merchant guard. But now I am travelling to Arantator with my wife.”

“Ah, I have a wife,” the man says, lowering his voice and glancing around the room. “Don’t let anyone tell you anything different!”

You are beginning to think the man might be insane as well as drunk. “Know you anything of the Wolf?” You ask.

“I know what he leaves behind!” The undertaker chuckles. “And not everything is the way it should be!” His voice falls to a whisper. “I know the Wolf’s secret!”

You lean forward. “What is it?” You ask.

The undertaker looks around the room uneasily. “This is not a good place to talk about this kind of thing. Come with me to my parlour. We can talk freely there.” He gets up, downing the wine. He sets down the glass and picks up the bottle. “Let’s go!” He says, and staggers towards the door. You stand as well, but do not move.

If you want to follow him, turn to **18**

If you prefer to let him go and talk to someone else, you can go over to the fat man, turn to **276**, or approach the merchant guards by turning to **122**

30

Deciding not to double up with one of the riders, you instead climb up beside the driver of the carriage. The cool-eyed guard gives you a suspicious look, but responds to your nod before turning his eyes back to the road ahead.

The road soon branches, but Captain Penmark keeps to the main road. By midday the road starts to rise, the hills on the horizon starting to loom around you. The ancient highway is worn, two depressions in the cracked flagstones showing the passage of a thousand years of wagons. Milestones mark the length of the highway, giving you a good idea of your progress.

It is mid-afternoon, and many miles into the hills before Captain Penmark allows the party to stop. As the others prepare to start a fire, you see Captain Penmark staring back down the road. Someone is obviously after them. You pretend not to notice and take a place by the fire.

The guards sit in silence as one of their number prepares a stew, another carefully tending the fire so it does not smoke. Lady Kianmay emerges, once again concealed in her cowl. She approaches the fire, but does not sit, instead pacing restlessly.

The silence is the quiet discipline of well-trained soldiers, not making unnecessary sounds. Any group of merchant’s guards would be laughing and joking. You watch Lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark as they step aside to speak together quietly. Aching with curiosity, you turn to the guard seated on the stone next to you.

“Do you play cards?” you ask softly.

The guard looks up, then exchanges glances with the other four. A couple look towards Captain Penmark, who is still talking with the lady, before one reaches into a pocket and takes out a stack of cards. As the pot bubbles, the guards gather around and the cards are dealt. You play a few hands with the men, still in silence. Even so, you feel like they have accepted you.

Once the meal is ready, Lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark join the circle and the stew is dished up into wooden bowls. You eagerly take yours and tearing a hunk of bread from the loaf that is passed around, you hungrily begin to eat. The stillness and silence around you makes you look up and you see the lady and the five guards paused in prayer. You stop chewing, and moments later the guards begin to eat.

The stew is good, but contains no meat. It is obvious now that the lady is a priestess, and the guards are all paladin. But which god do they serve? Is this a holy mission of some sort? You wonder what forces of evil are lined up against you.

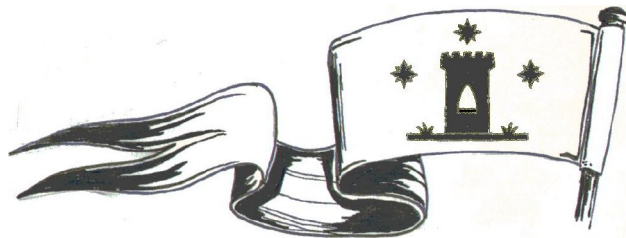
Once the meal is done, everything is packed up and the journey resumes along the highway. It takes two uneventful days to cross the Rocky Hills, and another day travelling through thick forest before you approach a town on the trade route. It is a large sprawling town that some would call a city; but it is swelled with those who seek to make coin from travellers.

Turn to **90**

31

The giant orc sweeps in for the killing blow. It is too big, too strong, and you see death coming for you, and are paralysed with fear. At the last moment, the orc twists the axe in his hands and the flat of the head smashes into the side of your skull. Your vision explodes into a thousand stars, and you slump unconscious.

Turn to **176**



32

“Diamond is considered by most to be the most precious thing in this world,” you say. “Thus the Diamond Key is the key to that which is most precious in life. And that is life itself.”

The crow is silent for a time. “You have spoken well. But I see that your heart is false. You do not believe this that you say.”

“I do not,” you admit.

“Since you travel with a holy lady and do not seek this prize for yourself, I shall give it to you.”

The lid to the chest flies open and you step forward eagerly. Inside on top of a pile of rings and amulets and other items, you see the slim wooden box. You pick it

up and open it. Inside is the Diamond Key. You quickly close the box and put it in your pack. Any other magical items you were carrying which the goblins stole are also in the chest and you can take them back. You decide not to take anything that is not yours.

You step back and the lid closes once more. You bow to the crow. “Thank you your majesty!”

You turn to leave, but the crow speaks, halting you. “Do you wish to become a Champion of the Light?”

If you would rather not, turn to **186**

If you do, turn to **99**

33

You slip a coin through the slot in the strongbox, and take a few sticks of incense from the basket. You light the fragrant sticks with the candle flame and kneeling down before the alcove, you pray to the spirit of the Dragon-slayer and ask him to protect the Key.

You insert the base of the incense sticks into the sand in the jade basin. You feel something hard under the sand as you try to push the sticks in. You move your hands and insert the incense at a different point. Reaching into the sand, your finger close on the hard object and you draw it out, shaking the sand loose. You are shocked to see the object sparkling on your palm in the candlelight. It is a ring with a t-shaped protrusion extending from the edge, looking vaguely like a key. It sparkles because it is made from diamond, with hundreds of small facets. It is a diamond key!

You slip the fake key into the cloth pouch and hide it under your clothes once more. You silently thank Aringarator.

Turn to **338**

34

With the elderly man’s back turned, you quickly stand and snatching up a vase from another side table smash it on the back of his head. The man falls to the ground, the cup and jug clattering loudly to the floor. You wince at the sound. You should probably leave now to avoid someone coming to see what the noise was.

If you want to leave now, turn to **401**

If you want to search the room for proof that the man was not Zarim or for any valuables, turn to **454**



35

Leaping forward you attack the first orc as it stumbles to get out of its chair. One stroke finishes it off and you move on the second, who opens its mouth to scream. They are both armed, but the orc staggers back in fear as you approach. It tries to parry your attack, but fails miserably and you spill its life-blood onto the floor.

You feel a pang of guilt and uncertainty. Surely they were fighters? Are not all orcs fighters? It is too late now. You look at the papers on the desk and see that they are pages ripped from a small tome. The text is indecipherable to you. You look into the sarcophagi, finding each empty. A search of the supplies reveals something more useful: a crate of healing potions. Unfortunately you do not have your pack with you. You can fit five phials into one pocket. You also take the tome and the notes with you in your other pocket to show Kianmay. You can take one of the orcs' short swords to use if you are willing to leave your own weapon behind.

Moving back out into the small hall, you consider what to do now.

Open the closed door? Turn to **277**

Go back to the main hall and investigate the sound of the digging? Turn to **368**

Try to pry free one of the light crystals from the wall? Turn to **349**

36

You step into the path of the warrior. "Leave it," you instruct.

The warrior looks up at you in surprise, then scrambles to his feet, drawing his discoloured blade. You ready your own weapon, but do not attack him.

"You have done enough here. Go and seek your treasure elsewhere."

The warrior looks at you with narrowed eyes, glancing down at the armband. Deciding he is too exhausted to match you, he spits at your feet and leaves the room, pausing to take the valuables from one of the bodies of his companions.

You hear a flutter of wings and turn to see the crow land on the floor next to the pile that was the head of the vampire. The crow looks up at you. Its disembodied voice is sad. "Why did you aid in her destruction?"

"She was a vampire." You say.

The crow looks up towards the top of the tower. "And yet, she did not burn, though she was bathed in sunlight."

"You mean she wasn't a vampire?"

"She was," the crow replies. "But she was becoming so much more. It took her 500 years to win the grace of the Sun, so that it would not punish her. Now in moments you have destroyed her."

"I'm sorry," you say, regretting your actions.

"How can you be a Champion of the Light if you cannot see who is your enemy and who is not? In truth a Champion of the Light has but three enemies: fear, hatred and greed. And he finds these enemies within his own heart. At least you did not compound your error by killing the human as well. Take the Golden Armband." You look down at the armband and slowly pick it up. It is set with opals and diamonds. "Farewell, merchant guard!" Cries the crow.

An invisible force slams into you and carries you away so quickly whatever is around you is a blur. You are dumped on the floor of the Darken Wood. Shaken, you stand up and check your pack. The Key is still there, so you make your way back

towards Tappin. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. “Do you have it?” Her eyes are wild.

“Yes.” You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

37

Making your way to the Elegant Peacock, you put the note in your pocket and then go to the clerk at the reception desk.

“I have a message for Count Raul of Erinharn,” you announce.

The clerk points you down a hallway. “Room 1.”

You thank the clerk and hurry down the hall. The rooms on the ground floor are large, the doorframes thick and ornately carved. Room 1 is at the rear and the doorframe is the largest of all, supporting double doors. You use the brass knocker and pound urgently.

After half a minute the door is pulled ajar, and a scowling Griffon Soldier peers out. “What do you want?” he asks harshly.

“I have a message for Count Raul of Erinharn.”

You hear a voice from within. “Who is it?”

The soldier calls back over his shoulder. “A messenger.”

“Send him in, then,” says the voice from within.

The soldier’s scowl deepens, but he opens the door and gestures curtly for you to enter. You bow your head to him and scurry in. Inside the apartment there are actual several rooms. You look around the opulent entrance hall in uncertainty. The soldier steps past you and orders you to follow him. He takes to you a sitting room.

You find two men sitting on either side of a game board. You pick out Raul immediately. He is a tall, thin man of middle years, with longish black hair and a hooked nose. He is dressed in a fine black coat embroidered with gold. Even his knee-high boots are black velvet embroidered with gold. Only his breeches are plain.

The other man is a non-descript manservant type, so you ignore him. Raul glances up at you, giving you a long look. After all, you don’t really look like a messenger.

“Who is the message from?” he asks.

“Alyn Mei,” you reply, and hold out the letter.

You get the response you are hoping for, and Raul bounds out of the chair in shock, coming across to snatch the letter from your hands. He unfolds it eagerly and his wide eyes devour the words. He is so engrossed he doesn’t react to your dagger until after it is buried in his ribcage.

He looks at you in shock, but you have no time to watch him die. You grab him and spin about, throwing him off your blade and into the scowling soldier who is rushing at you. The soldier staggers, and throws his master aside a little more roughly

that you would have expected. But you use the time to close with him and get inside his guard. You thrust at his neck, and he grabs your wrist. The two of you fall to the ground and wrestle. You manage to get on top and start to push the dagger towards his throat...

If your *initial* STAMINA is 18 or less, turn to **92**

If it is greater than 18, turn to **283**

38

You realise you are facing a test of some kind, and with a sneer refuse to take part in it. The bald-headed warrior walks up to you and slashes at you with his sword. You flinch back, but the tip cuts you across the side of your head (lose 4 STAMINA). You fall back against the table.

If you have been killed, turn to **309**

Otherwise you grab one of the weapons:

The sword? Turn to **213**

The wand? Turn to **8**

39

The sense of menace rises to a peak, then slowly fades away. Soon the birds start singing again, and whatever danger was present seems to have passed.

To continue your journey, turn to **234**

40

Your pack is on the floor next to the table and you quickly load it with your belongings and rearm yourself. You put the Diamond Key back in its bag and replace the cord around your neck. Fully equipped once more, you hurry from the room and leave the house. Walking with a purposeful but unhurried step, you make your way back to the tent. You step inside and find Kianmay is still there waiting.

She looks at you and asks: "What is happening?"

"I have the Key, we are leaving."

You pull her along before she can argue and leave the tent. You let her go and she hurries along at your side. You make your way to the edge of the camp where there is a fenced yard, in which are many horses. Your own horses were left here. There is a guard here, and no way to sneak away with the horses.

You go up to the guard and smile. "Hello. We have been released. Our horses please."

The guard looks at you suspiciously. "Where's your escort?"

You look behind you, then turn back and shrug. "He led us here, then just pointed at you and left."

The guard frowns. “That’s not the protocol. He’s supposed to give me your pass. Did he give it to you?”

Do you have a pass? If you do, turn to **128**
If you do not, turn to **280**

41

You lie back, trying to get comfortable and regain your energy. It seems like hours before you hear footsteps approaching. The door is unlatched and you see the silhouette of the orc woman who drank your blood.

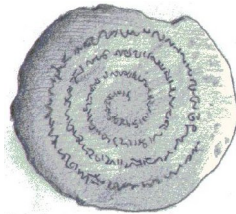
She enters and kneels by you as you pretend to be weaker than you are. You notice she is now wearing only a robe. She kisses you once more, this time lingeringly. She then moves back and starts to take off her robe. She unfastens it and draws it from her shoulders. Although her skin is dark blue, she looks as good as any woman you have seen as she reveals her naked form to you.

But this isn’t what you are here for. As she pulls the robe down her back, her arms are momentarily trapped and you lash out suddenly, striking her in the jaw. She falls back with a cry. You stagger to your feet and as she sprawls groggily, you kick her in the head, laying her out cold. You fall to your knees, still weak from the effort.

You grab the light crystal then pull the orc woman’s robe back over her exposed body; your way of thanking her, and stumble from the cell. You find yourself in a kitchen. She had imprisoned you in a pantry! You close the door but leave the latch off and move out of the kitchen into a narrow hall. You hurry down it towards a door and open it cautiously. You find yourself behind a pillar in the first hall you came to.

Looking at the door, you see it is painted the same grey as the stone around it. Leaving what must be the servants’ area, you hurry over to the tunnel and begin the slow climb back to the top. It seems to take hours, but eventually you reach the top, and pass by the still sleeping orc sentry. Hurrying into the main tunnel you slow to a walk and go to meet up with the rest of the party.

Turn to **101**



42

You turn and walk from the hall, Kianmay following you. The guards open the doors for you and you are soon outside, finding your horses there, loaded with supplies.

A guard leads you through the camp and you eventually come to the edge. The guard farewells you and you start along the road towards Arantator.

Turn to **293**

43

You desperately push against the thick fog in your mind. You stumble against the cart and squeeze your hand on the corner of the seat. You squeeze hard enough to hurt yourself, and focus on the pain. Slowly the fog in your mind fades, and you become aware of chattering sounds. You also feel something pulling at your clothes.

Looking down you see a goblin with his hand in your pocket. It is a small creature only about four feet tall, with dark blue skin and bright red eyes and a hairless head. It is dressed in a grey smock with a large belt, on which is a pouch into which it is piling your possessions!

The creature looks up at you and squeals in alarm. You grab it before it can flee and swing its head against the side of the wagon. Retrieving your possessions, you hurry back to the camp and see goblins everywhere. They are searching through the sleeping men's pockets and packs.

You draw your weapon and shout loudly. You leap on a goblin and kill it. The goblins cry out in alarm and flee back into the Wood. None of the men have stirred, and you shout again, even kicking one of your men. But they are fast asleep.

You have saved your possessions, but the others have lost many of theirs. You check the wagon and find that the boxes are safe. Determined not to fall asleep again, you keep watch for the rest of the night, but the goblins do not return.

As dawn nears Kianmay emerges from the inn and sits by the fire. "He is dead." She announces sadly. You refrain from mentioning the goblins yet, and soon the men begin to stir. Soon they are all awake and preparing breakfast.

The men who were supposed to take the last two watches ask what happened, and you stand up. "Last night during the Fourth watch there was some kind of sleeping spell cast over us. I managed to resist it, and found the camp full of goblins. They were stealing from our pockets and packs. I drove them off." You lift your blanket up, revealing the dead goblin. The men all check their pockets and packs and you hear expletives from all around you.

You look to Kianmay and see that she is deathly pale, clutching at her side. You step over to her. "What is it?"

"The Diamond Key!" She whispers. "It is gone!"

Turn to **188**

44

Returning to where Kianmay and the wagon were hidden, you find her safe. She is very relieved, and pleased to hear of your success. Penmark describes the raid to her, and she looks at you sadly. You refuse to meet her eye. The strategy was sound.

Hearing about the sword, she asks for it to be brought to her. The paladin lay it before her and unwrap it from its bindings. She looks at the sword, shuddering at some sensation you cannot feel. She closes her eyes and clasps her hands in prayer. Her expression becomes peaceful and after several minutes she reaches out and touches the sword with one fingertip. There is a cracking sound, and lines appear in the sword, branching out over the whole weapon until it is broken into a thousand pieces.

Kianmay smiles and the canvas is gathered up once more with the pieces inside. One of the paladin carries it away to bury. Everyone is eager for their blankets this night and you fall into a deep sleep.

The next morning you set out once more. The next two days are uneventful and you arrive in the next town.

Pay each of your surviving men three gold coins.

Turn to **147**

45

You slay the avatar and it breaks into a thick white mist that floats up and away, dispersing into the air above. Looking up at Darm, you see him smiling and watching you from the throne. “Well done. You are a true warrior. I am pleased that I did not meet you in my younger days! Fortunately now I have other powers. I am a sorcerer, and you will not best me without magic!” He stands. “Let us have a contest. Or will you be wise and give me the Diamond Key? Dare you match your pitiful skills against me?”

“I will not give you the Diamond Key,” you say firmly.

“Many a fool is used for entertainment!” Darm snarls, but then calms himself. “Very well! I shall let you go first. Do what magic you will to attack me!”

What magic will you perform?

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **725**

Fireball, turn to **814**

Lightning, turn to **832**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Fungus, turn to **938**

Revelation, turn to **861**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **903**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

46

The sorcerer falls to the floor, the fiery weapon disappearing. The battle was oddly silent, no clash of steel between the blades of fire and metal. Even so, you don't want to hang around. But you make time to quickly search the room, finding ten gold coins, and a small box in which you find a crystal full of glowing rainbow-coloured light. It looks like a Primordial Crystal; an object you know only from childhood stories.

You also quickly search the sorcerer and find a Pass with the wax seal of the Wolf on it and the sentence: "The Wolf fears not fire..." Another slip of paper folded inside the Pass reads WEAKNESS.

Turn to **40**

47

Unable to climb the pipe, you rest for a few minutes, then duck under the water once more. You let the flow of the water carry you, and move with it through another pipe. You come to another chamber and jump upwards towards a glimmer of light. Gripping the rough sides of the stone pipe, you find yourself in the bottom of another drain, this one wider, and through the grill above you see the stars shining in the deep blue sky.

You guess that you are getting further away from the palace, but you no longer care. You just want to get out of here. You duck under the water again and follow the flow. You are washed into a large pipe, which is only half-full of water and you are able to breath.

You follow the winding pipe for some time until it washes out into a canal. Warily you move to the side and pull yourself out of the water. Finally free, you collapse on the street and rest.

After many minutes you pull yourself to your feet and wring out your clothes as best as you can until you are at least no longer dripping. You shiver in the chill of the night and consider your next course.

If you had to abandon your armour, pack and weapons to investigate the submerged pipe, turn to **191**

If you still have all of your gear with you, turn to **105**

48

Diving under the cart, you crawl out of danger and crouch next to Kianmay. Looking out on the battle, you see it is going very badly. There are over twenty of the Raiders. Looking at the scrubless land you wonder how they managed to sneak up on you. Suddenly Penmark falls to the ground in front of you, blood pouring out of him. Kianmay screams in horror.

The raiders peer under the cart and laugh at you, jabbing towards you with their swords. The rest of the raiders are finishing off the paladin, your merchant guards having being all killed or more likely fled. The raiders surround you and start to taunt you. Their fun soon ends as the horseman rides up. The commands them to stand clear and jumps down from his saddle. You see his tooled leather boots approach, then he crouches and looks at the two of you with a smile. He is a proud looking man, with long, thin black moustaches that reach his chest. He is wearing a golden helm and a dark blue cloak lined with black fur. You see through the cloak that he is wearing a silver breastplate, inlaid with a tower and three stars in gold. It is the symbol of Arantator.

"Greetings, Alyn Mei. Would you and your companion please come out from there? I promise you that you will come to no harm."

Kianmay hesitates, but then crawls out from under the cart, the nobleman giving her his hand and helping her to her feet. You follow, and the raiders roughly strip you of your weapons.

The nobleman issues orders. Your party's horses are gathered together and whatever valuables the cart and your dead have are loaded onto them. Another raider leading a line of horses appears in the distance and approaches as the raiders load the dead into the wagon and set it on fire. They set the oxen free, but the beasts do not wander far from the wagon and you wonder what will become of them.

You and Kianmay are put on horses, the reigns held by a raider, and you set off as captives, the flames behind you sending smoke into the sky.

Turn to **398**

49

The golem is cracked in two by your final blow and falls to the ground. You turn back to the crow, and see it with its head bowed. It is asleep!

“Wake up!” you shout, making the bird jump.

It squawks in alarm, then looks at you. “Oh, you are still alive?”

“It takes more than a stone golem to kill me,” you boast.

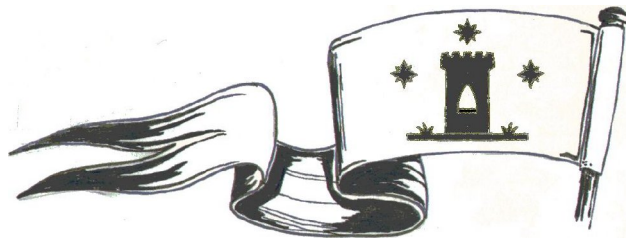
“Oh. Are you a Champion of the Light?” the bird asks.

Something in the tone of its disembodied voice makes you pause. You remember that you are facing a creature that can summon stone golems out of the floor. Perhaps you had better take this question seriously.

Are you a Champion of the Light?

Yes, turn to **391**

No, turn to **289**



50

Returning to the paladin's camp, you discover they have lit no fire. Penmark and Kianmay sit close together, wrapped in their cloaks, talking quietly. They stand as you return.

“What did you see? Describe them to me!”

“There are 20 soldiers and a few servants, marching under the symbol of a Griffin.”

Kianmay nods grimly, sharing a look with Penmark. She thanks you for your assistance. Leaving the two of them to discuss matters, you go to your bedroll and get a good night's sleep.

The next morning your party moves cautiously onwards. You scout the way ahead, but find no sign of the Griffin Soldiers, even visiting their now abandoned camp-site. Knowing the enemy is ahead now, the party moves slowly and camps again as night falls.

The next day after travelling through thick forest, you approach a town on the trade route. It is a large sprawling town that some would call a city; but it is swelled with those who seek to make coin from travellers.

Turn to **90**

51

A young girl pokes her head into the room. She looks at you, then looks at the man on the floor. She seems unconcerned about him, but gives you a disapproving look. She steps into the room and folds her arms, trying to appear brave.

“What are you doing here?” she demands.

She wears a plain white robe and appears to be a novice of some type. You smile at her and step around the desk. “The High Priest and I had an argument,” you explain.

“Is he dead?” she asks.

“No,” you reply.

She looks disappointed, and glares at the corpse with hatred. “Where is Zarim?” you ask.

She looks at you, her mouth twisting. “He made us swear not to say anything...but I don’t care! They took Zarim away to the palace, to capture the courier who...” Suddenly her eyes widen. “Do you have the Diamond Key?”

“It is in a safe place,” you tell her. “A priestess named Kianmay is also held captive in the palace. She was my companion. I must rescue her and Zarim. I need your help, if you feel brave enough.”

He girl pulls herself upright and glares at you. “I am brave!”

“Good. Then tell me everything I need to know about getting into the palace.”

The novice doesn’t know much. But tells you about a stairway that leads to the uppermost level of the palace. Anyone who ascends it without holding aloft a special token is shot with crossbows. She does not know what the token looks like.

She also gives you three phials of healing potion, and escorts you to the back door once more. You bid her thanks and farewell, and hurry away from the temple. Now you must find a way to get into the palace. Before you head into the lion’s den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key, and can think of no better place than the shrine of your childhood hero Aringarator the Dragon-slayer.

The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

52

Deciding that you can trust Zarim, you take the cloth bag from around your neck and take out the Diamond Key, you stand and place it on the desk.

“I believe you have been expecting this.”

Zarim looks at the Key and his eyes widen with recognition, and he looks up at you in shock and smiles. With a trembling hand he reaches out and takes it. He gazes at it greedily.

“I was indeed. But I did not expect it to come to me so easily.” He looks at you and laughs.

Realising that you have made a mistake, you bring your weapons to hand and charge around the desk at him. The old man waves his hand. He is casting a spell!

Are you wearing a gold armband or silver-studded leather armour? If so, turn to **151**
If you are not, turn to **363**

53

“These are our guards?” Kianmay asks.

“Yes,” you reply.

She nods in approval. “Get them on their horses, we have a long way to go.”

You call the men together and tell them to form up. They encircle the wagon, keeping their distance from the paladin, looking at them with the same curiosity and apprehension that you once felt. Kianmay climbs up onto the wagon seat next to you.

The road rolls under the wheels of the creaking wagon, and your party travels for several hours before Penmark calls for a halt at midday. You park the wagon under a large oak near the road and the paladin begin to set up a cooking fire. You notice that the paladin and the merchant guards keep to themselves, and even though the merchant guards talk, they do so in a whisper, influenced by the quiet peace of the paladin.

Knowing this will not do, you clap your hands. “All right everyone, listen up!” Everyone looks at you. “We have a long journey to make and we need to be work as one. So I want everyone to stand up one by one. Tell us your name and where you are from. And then something else about you if you think it’ll amuse us all to hear. You there! You are first.”

You point to one of the merchant guards. Slowly he stands up. “My name is Tyren. I’m from Fang. Err...I can balance a dagger on my nose.”

This claim demands a demonstration, so Tyren draws his dagger and tilts his head back with the pommel on his broad nose. With a bit of dancing, he is able to balance the dagger for thirty seconds, drawing applause and cheers from the merchant guards.

The rest of the merchant guards stand up one by one and introduce themselves, then either perform a trick or tell an amusing story. Then comes the turn of the first paladin. The light mood becomes slightly heavier, and you wait with some nervousness. This will be the test. The paladin stands up. You recognise him as the carriage driver. He glances at Penmark, but does not wait for permission before speaking.

“I am Harteran,” he says in a quiet voice. “I am from Southern Atera. I can play the tin flute.” He takes out a slender pipe of tin and positioning his fingers on the holes plays a short merry tune. The merchant guards cheer and clap when he is done.

Harteran looks a bit embarrassed and avoids looking at Penmark and lady Kianmay. The priestess is grinning broadly, and her eyes dance with light. The other paladin introduce themselves, some warmth breaking through their discipline. Paladin come from somewhere as well, you reflect.

By the time the meal is ready, all are talking, and Harteran is taking requests on his flute. Penmark, who avoided having to introduce himself by keeping away from the fire gives you a smile and a nod of approval. Lady Kianmay beckons you over and hands you a small pendant.

“What is this?” You ask, examining the small crystal in the form of a robed woman.

“A protective charm from our goddess.” She replies. “To thank you for your assistance. It will bring you luck and protection.”

The holy pendant lets you add 1 to your initial LUCK, 1 to your initial SKILL score and 2 to your STAMINA for as long as you wear it.

If you are carrying a Holy Broadsword, you can show it now to Kianmay to ask her about it (turn to **394**, then return to this passage).

To continue your journey, turn to **126**



54

The clerk invites you alone to come and stand next to the wall opposite the large table with your belongings on it.

You go to the indicated position. After a moment, one of the warriors rises from the circle holding a curved sword. The clerk looks at you. “You are to be killed,” he informs you.

The warrior advances on you with cold professionalism. You look about for a weapon, and see on a small table in the corner beneath one of braziers two items. One is the necromancer’s wand, the other is a longsword. You retreat to the table.

Which weapon will you take?

The sword? Turn to **213**

The wand? Turn to **8**

If you want to remain empty-handed, turn to **38**

55

The dye-maker has a small shopfront, strong odours coming from the large workshop out the back. A small man with spectacles emerges from behind a curtain, rubbing hands speckled with spots of red, blue, purple and green. He gives you a startled look, and nervously asks what you want.

His face brightens when you explain that you want to buy a large quantity of dye. He gives you a description of what he has available and the price.

10 jars; 10 gold coins
 100 jars; 25 gold coins
 300 jars; 50 gold coins
 500 jars; 80 gold coins
 1000 jars; 100 gold coins

Your wagon only has enough space for 1000 jars, or 10 boxes of weapons or ivory (1 box = 100 jars). You may only purchase enough goods to fill the wagon.

Once you have bought all the dye you want, you may either:

Visit the ivory-carver, turn to **100**

Visit the weaponsmith, turn to **312**

Or go to hire merchant guards, turn to **200**

56

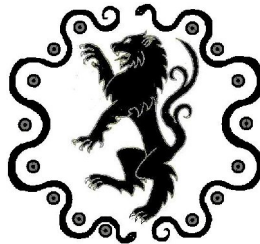
The demon growls and slashes at you with its claws once more. Lose 5 more STAMINA points.

You see no sign of it changing its ways.

If you have changed your mind and want to attack, turn to **184**

If you wish to keep on giving the creature a chance, turn to **223**

If you are dead, turn to **301**



57

You press every rose in the gilded frames, and finally one sinks in with a click. The panel swings open and reveals a dark interior. You go inside and close the panel behind you. It is completely dark inside, so you take out your light crystal. There is another desk here against a sidewall, as well as a large chest against the opposite wall.

Going to the desk, you examine the papers on top and are shocked to find a lifelike sketch of Kianmay there, labelled with the name Alyn Mei. There is a description of her original party, which you see was twice as many when they left Erinharn as when you met them. Count Raul's first attack must have been savage indeed. You look through the other papers, and find descriptions of the party and reports from spies in many cities, including some you passed through. You find a few descriptions of your party in disguise.

They know what Kianmay looks like, which means the owner might discover that she is here. You are reluctant to leave the inn now, as that will arouse suspicion. But you have best keep a watch tonight.

Leaving the table, you go across to the chest. It is locked. You take out your lock picks once more.

Test your luck. If you are lucky, turn to **7**

If you are unlucky, you can't open the lock and give up. You return to the hall to search elsewhere. Turn to **233**

58

Are you wearing a holy amulet? If so, turn to **9**. If not, turn to **345**

59

You take out the crystal ball and show it to Kianmay. She holds it in her hands, rolling it from one to the other. "This is a mind-sphere. It is used to read the thoughts of simple creatures. You might even be able to control the mind of some animals if your own mind is disciplined enough."

You take back the sphere.

Return now to **373**

60

The clerk invites you alone to come and stand next to the wall opposite the large table with your belongings on it.

You go to the indicated position. After a moment, one of the warriors rises from the circle holding a curved sword. The clerk looks at you. "You are to be killed," he informs you.

The warrior advances on you with cold professionalism. You look about for a weapon, and see on a small table in the corner beneath one of braziers two items. One is the necromancer's wand, the other is a longsword. You dash over to the table.

Which weapon will you take?

The sword? Turn to **209**

The wand? Turn to **8**

61

Returning to the rest of your party, you tell Kianmay and Penmark about Gilmore the Groat and his camp. Kianmay has not heard of Gilmore the Groat. You tell her what you know of his past. Penmark mentions some extra details that he has heard. Almost every member of the party chips in with some story, and by the end

Kianmay's lips are pressed together in a tight line, and her eyes are filled with determination.

"We must destroy this man!" She says.

"He has about 50 men," you repeat.

"Don't we have the element of surprise?" She asks.

"Yes," you say slowly.

"Then we will destroy him." Kianmay says. "This man is evil and must not be left to pray upon travellers."

"Why should we seek out a fight?" You asked, surprised at her vehemence. "Aren't you—"

Kianmay points at your weapons. "Why do you carry those?"

Taken aback, you pause, then say: "To protect you and your shipment."

"To protect." Kianmay nods, her eyes softening. "It is a grave sacrifice that some must make, to become killers. Yet in this world of evil, such sacrifice is the only way to keep safe the weak and innocent. Tell me, do you truly hire your self out solely for gold? Is this way no sacrifice at all to you? Is it a path of riches for you?"

You don't know what to say. "It certainly isn't a path of riches." You reply.

"Then you kill, just so you may survive?" Kianmay asks.

You spread your hands. "Merchants need guards."

"They do." Kianmay replies. "Because of the evil that would prey on them. Evil that hungers for wealth. I sense that you have a good heart, and I hope that deep within you it is the noble wish to make the sacrifice that has led you to this path. How then can you turn away when we can strike at one who threatens so many? Must you collect payment from every merchant who uses this road before you will act?"

"No, of course not," you say. "But this is dangerous. What about your mission?"

"It is my mission to serve the world with goodness." Kianmay answers. "I would give my life to strike down this man. I would give my life to try! What good is my safety, my comfort when others suffer? I too will make the sacrifice if I must."

"Fine, we will find a way!" You say at last, and start to turn away.

"When you kill others, is it a sacrifice?" Kianmay asks.

You look at her. "A sacrifice? To who?"

Kianmay shakes her head slightly. "That's not what I mean. Do you give up anything of yourself?"

You shrug. "I suppose so."

Kianmay looks at you sadly. "Then stay here. My...men will go and do this. I cannot allow you to kill if you do not understand what you are doing to yourself."

"They will need all the help they can get!" You say. "If we are going to attack Gilmore, then we all must go!"

It takes many minutes to convince Kianmay that you should go. Eventually you take the wagon off the road to conceal it and Kianmay. The rest of you set out to scout the encampment before night falls. Making your way back to the encampment, you lead your group close to the camp through the thickest cover. Penmark sends his men out to look around for themselves. They soon return and describe the camp in the same way as you remember it. The paladin describe sensing some evil in the camp.

You discuss plans with Penmark as night falls. From your position you can hear the bandits laughing and talking. You are in favour of waiting until they all fall asleep, then sneaking in and killing them in their sleep. Penmark refuses to do this.

"Why not?" You hiss. "It is our best chance against such numbers!"

“We will not kill any man while he is asleep,” Penmark replies. “It only takes a moment for a man to repent his ways. We will only kill a man in the moment that he chooses evil. To make this choice he must be awake.”

The man’s conviction makes you feel low and dirty, but you can see no other practical option. Eventually it is decided that you and any merchant guards remaining with you will sneak into the camp, take out the sentries and then sneak in and try and kill the bandits in their sleep. When or if the alarm is raised, the paladin will then attack to defend you.

If your party has already been attacked already by bandits, then you have a large number of crossbows and bolts with you. The paladin will be armed with these. For every merchant guard you have with you (including yourself), roll one die and add up these numbers.

If the total is 10 or less, turn to **3**

If the total is 11 to 20, turn to **158**

If the total is 21 to 30, turn to **263**

If the total is 31 to 40, turn to **294**

If the total is over 40, turn to **389**

62

You thrust the spear into the creature’s chest, blue fire flaring from the blade. The creature gives a final cry, then falls to the ground, writhing as the flames consume its body. Soon it is over, and nothing is left except a pile of ashes, in which are squirming maggots.

Using the tip of the spear, you search through the ashes.

Test your LUCK. If you are lucky, turn to **360**

If you are unlucky, turn to **255**

63

Seeing your interest, the necromancer continues. He points out the zombie soldier you were fighting. A tireless warrior that does away with the tragedies of war, his armour sewn into his skin. He shows you servant zombies that can do all the menial tasks of the world. He is enthusiastic as he describes his vision for the world, but then he laments some of the obstacles.

“Many people fear death. I tried to convince the Mayor of my vision. He couldn’t overcome his fear. He wanted to burn down my laboratory and have me burnt at the stake. I had to kill him, and his corpse wasn’t even useful.” The necromancer seems more upset about the waste of the corpse than of the murder. “You see, what the person does in life determines what their corpse can do in death. Sometimes they get fixated on one task. Like my wife. She cooks all day unless I lock her in the cupboard. Of course when she was alive she did more than cook, but it is hard to predict what a corpse will do. I did reanimate the Mayor, but he kept just talking about fire, so I buried him. Maybe I will find a use for him one day. But it is not just humans who can be animated.” He hurries over to a cabinet and takes out a jar, inside is a rat. “It is my plan to go to the King in Arantator and show him this. A

king must have many enemies! This rat will creep into any place, as the perfect spy. You can see what it sees, using this crystal.” He points to a round crystal ball on the top of the jar. “You can also control the rat by focusing your thoughts on the crystal. If the King accepts this, then he might be ready to see the zombie soldier. Surely he will not burn me over a reanimated rat!” Suddenly, the necromancer brightens. “Maybe you could take the rate to the King for me! I can’t leave here yet. Would you do that for me?”

If you want to agree to take the rat, turn to **71**

If you think that this evil freak must die after all, turn to **216**

64

The second watch is yours. You sleep fitfully until you are woken to take your watch. The Wood has filled your dreams with strange and disturbing images. You walk around checking that all is well, then take a position near the fire. You keep it burning bright, and your watch passes uneventfully. You wake one of the paladin to take his watch, then head back to your blankets.

Turn to **207**

65

As the priestess is about to pass you, you speak to her. “Blessed One, may I have a word?”

She stops and faces you with a warmth that seems to reach out and embrace you. Her hair beneath the white cloth is black, and her skin is pale. She has a few large moles scattered across her face, but she is beautiful. “Good evening,” she greets. “Are you hungry?” She asks, glancing at your travel-stained clothing and reaching into her bag. She takes out a bread roll and hands it to you.

For the sake of anyone watching, you take it. “Those men at the front of the temple are not paladin,” you say.

The priestess’ smile vanishes, and a look of consternation settles onto her face. Something in her eyes tells you she is more worldly than Kianmay. She looks at you keenly, assessing you anew. “No, they are not. Does this concern you?”

“Very much,” you reply. “I have come to see Zarim. Perhaps he has been replaced as well.”

“I am forbidden by an oath to say that is so.” The priestess says with an amused smile.

Realising she may be limited in what she can say, you continue. “The King is looking for someone, so he has laid a trap with false paladin and a false High Priest?”

The priestess says nothing, but smiles, her eyes sparkling. “You will not find what you seek in this temple,” the priestess tells you. “You will find it in the dungeons of the palace.”

You thank her and she continues on her way. You eat the bread roll thoughtfully, finding the centre filled with vegetables and a tangy sauce. It is delicious and blessed, so you may restore 2 STAMINA and 2 LUCK points.

You go back to the Shrine of Aringarator to think. You need to get into the palace and be able to move around freely. A servant disguise would be best for that, but servants don't usually carry weapons. What you need is a guardsman's uniform. That decided, you formulate a plan. Deciding it is too risky to take the Diamond Key with you, you look for a place to hide it. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

66

Taking out the lockpicks, you try them in the lock. You have never done this before...

Test your LUCK. If you are lucky, turn to **157**.

If you are unlucky, you cannot open the lock and give up. Turn to **308**

67

As the last Griffin Soldier collapses at your feet, you look up to see that the paladin have also finished off their opponents. None of the soldiers carried anything of value, but you can strip one corpse of its scalemail armour. You can also take one of their longswords.

Penmark stares into the darkness in frustration. The nine are unlikely to be the entire party, and he is no doubt wondering if it is best to move back up the trail right away. However, doing so could lead them into the jaws of the rest of the pursuers.

Deciding it is best to move, Penmark orders you to scout ahead. Packing up your gear, you move off into the darkness. Finding no sign of the pursuers, you wait at the intersection of the trail. The carriage soon arrives, and Penmark decides to go back to the Ancient Highway.

By dawn the party has made it back to the highway. Warily you continue on your way. It takes two uneventful days to cross the Rocky Hills, and another day travelling through thick forest before you approach a town on the trade route. It is a large sprawling town that some would call a city; but it is swelled with those who seek to make coin from travellers.

Turn to **90**

68

You pull aside your cloak to show Kianmay the steel breastplate with the octagonal crystal set in the middle of the chest. She tells you that it is the armour of a

devotee of fire-worshippers. The crystal can be charged with your own lifeforce to generate light or a bolt of fire.

If at anytime you need light, you can make the crystal glow at the cost of 1 point of STAMINA. You can also fire a bolt of flame in normal combat. The cost and damage is as follows:

STAMINA cost	Damage
5	5
6	7
7	9
8	11
9	13
10	15

Unless specified, your opponent will not be able to resist the attack. When you are in combat, you can choose to attack with a bolt of flame rather than your weapon in a particular round. To do this, you determine Attack Strengths in the normal way. If your Attack Strength is higher, then the bolt is fired successfully and wounds or kills your opponent. If your opponent's Attack strength is higher, then they manage to break your concentration and they wound you in the normal way.

Return now to **293**

69

Leaving the inn, you wander back to your own inn and climb the steps up to Kianmay's room. You knock on the door and enter. Kianmay is reading by the window.

"Hello," you say.

"Hello," she replies, looking at you expectedly.

"I saw a soldier in the markets wearing the symbol of a griffon." You see Kianmay's face fill with dread. "I followed him back to his inn. I know where they are staying."

Kianmay becomes thoughtful. "And he does not know we are here," she muses. "We could wait for him to leave, watch which way he goes, then go the opposite way."

"Why not deal with him once and for all?" You ask.

Kianmay looks at you coldly. "You want to kill him?"

You shrug. "It would solve the problem."

"I have a better solution," Kianmay replies, and picks up a pen from the desk, pushing the cork from a bottle of ink.

"What are you going to do?" You ask.

"Write a letter to him. His name is Count Raul of Erinharn. You will deliver the letter."

"Saying what?" You ask in concern.

"I will ask him to meet with me."

"What?" You exclaim. "This is the man you are trying to get away from!"

"He is not after me." Kianmay replies, then closes her mouth firmly.

"Meet you where? Not here." You say.

"No, I suppose not." She agrees thoughtfully.

Apprehensively, you wait as begins to write on a sheet of parchment. She folds the sheet and hands it to you.

“Here, deliver this.”

You take the note. “What did you say?”

“I asked him to meet me in the market square in two hours.”

“Two hours? There will still be people around then.”

“What of it?” She asks.

“It...what if we have to fight him?”

“That will not happen. I have sworn there will be no conflict on my part. My vow covers you as well.” She gives you a cold, hard stare. “Do not break by vow, else I shall be damned.”

With that dire advice, she dismisses you, and you leave the inn. As you walk towards the Elegant Peacock, you look at the letter in your hand. What is she doing? Does she really know what the consequences of this action could be?

Do you want to read the letter? Turn to **305**

To do as you have been instructed, turn to **346**

70

You pull out the tome and hand it to Kianmay. She takes it and begins to read. You see her eyes widen and expressions of incredulity and wonder pass over her face. Finally a look of determination settles on her features.

“A thousand years ago there was a cult here, a dragon-worshipping cult! They worshipped a dragon named Maragandalar. Eventually a group of Paladin fought their way into the lair and killed the cultists. They laid a trap for the dragon when it returned from one of its rampages and buried it in its own den. They then sealed the temple, with themselves inside, binding their bodies with magic to lie in an eternal sleep unless they were disturbed by those who came to worship the dragon once more. The orcs must have sensed the dragon when they were digging the tunnel, and now seek to worship it once more! This must be stopped.”

“How can the dragon be alive after 1000 years without food?” You ask.

“A dragon is a magical beast, and 1000 years is but a small part of its life. Even a serpent must eat only once a year. But the paladin knew the dragon would die eventually, so they set up an orb in the temple that was magically bound to the dragon. As long as the dragon lived, its dark energy would be visible in the sphere.”

“What will you do?” You ask.

“Once we finish our mission, we will come back here with an army and destroy these orcs.” She stands. “But for now, we had best resume our journey. It seems you created a disturbance and we cannot have those orcs coming after us.”

You agree and rouse the men. Soon you are on your way again. Resuming your journey, you soon break out into the sunshine and fresh air once more. You feel the joy of freedom and shout out loudly, not caring who hears you.

You descend into the hills and soon come to the town of Yorman.

The journey has only taken 4 days. Pay your men four gold each and turn to **135**



71

You agree to take the rat and the necromancer instructs you in its use so that you can demonstrate it to the King. You learn that the rat can even grasp small objects and bring them back to you.

You leave the necromancer and head back through the small gate into the town. If you are having second thoughts about the rat, you can throw it away. Otherwise you carry it safely under your cloak and return to the Inn.

Turn to **313**

72

Taking on a slow gait, you walk into the bedroom. What you see almost breaks your act. The guards are holding Kianmay down, while Laremidan has ripped her nightgown away, and threatens to rape her if she does not tell him where the key is.

The anger burns in you as you step into the room and raise one hand, pointing it at Laremidan's back.

"You!" you say, drawing the attention of all. The guards go pale and release Kianmay, gripping their sword hilts. The servant staggers back against the wall. Your shirt is bloodstained and you must look the part. Laremidan swings his head around and his mouth gapes. Kianmay kicks and struggles now that she is free and pushes Laremidan off her. He falls onto the floor without his gaze on you breaking.

"You killed me!" you accuse him, and start advancing.

This is enough for the servant, who edges past you and runs off as fast as he can.

"Attack it!" Laremidan screeches at the two town guards.

The two guards look at each other, then one says: "It's you he's after!"

Laremidan's sword is lying on the dresser, and you step over and pick it up, turning back to him with a grin. "I shall kill you with the sword that killed me!"

The guard on the opposite side of the bed to you moves across and walks quickly out of the room. After a moment the other guard leaps up onto the bed, jumps over Kianmay and follows his friend. Soon they are gone, the door to your quarters slamming shut.

"Don't kill him!" Kianmay commands you, but you stride forward and sink the blade into his chest. Laremidan's death grimace looks little different to his face of terror and he dies on the end of his own sword.

You leave the weapon in his body and drag the corpse into the bathroom, dumping it in the tub. You lock the door to your quarters and go back to see Kianmay. She is crouched in her bed, wrapped in the covers.

"Why did you kill him?" she asks sadly.

"He was going to rape you!" you say. "Anyway, it is better this way. He cannot chase after us now."

"I was to be his victim, and I have forgiven him. Why can't you?" Kianmay asks.

You are not in the mood for a discussion so you tell her to get some rest. You move your bedroll into her room and closing the door, lie down against it. She does not question you further, and you fall asleep.

Turn to **373**

73

Concentrating, you channel your lifeforce into the crystal on your breast. The sorcerer does not notice until too late as the crystal glows brightly and fires a bolt at him. In your desperation you invest as much of your life as you can (reduce your STAMINA to 1) and a massive bolt of flame shoots out and engulfs the sorcerer in flame. He staggers back with a horrifying scream, and the spell holding you disappears. You continue your charge and slay him, breathing large gulps of hot air.

The burning corpse falls to the floor and you do not wait around, taking only a moment to pick up the Diamond Key. Fleeing the study, you dash through the temple, making for the back door and out across the lawns. No one seems to be following you, so your circle back around to the Shrine of Aringarator. Standing in the shadowed entrance, you watch the temple for many minutes, but nothing stirs. You relax, and realise it is now time to go to the palace and try and rescue Kianmay. But before you go into the Lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key.

The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**



74

The dye-maker has a small shopfront, strong odours coming from the large workshop out the back. A small man with spectacles emerges from behind a curtain, rubbing hands speckled with spots of red and blue and purple and green. He gives you a startled look, and nervously asks what you want.

His face brightens when you explain that you want to buy a large quantity of dye. He gives you a description of what he has available and the price.

- 10 jars; 10 gold coins
- 100 jars; 25 gold coins
- 300 jars; 50 gold coins
- 500 jars; 80 gold coins
- 1000 jars; 100 gold coins

Your wagon only has enough space for 1000 jars, or 10 boxes of weapons or ivory (1 box = 100 jars). You may only purchase enough goods to fill the wagon.

Once you have bought all the dye you want, you may either:

Visit the ivory-carver, turn to **199**

Visit the weapon smith, turn to **256**

Or go to hire merchant guards, turn to **300**

75

You point at the door. "Get out."

The two guards look at each other, then as one leave, eyeing you cautiously. You follow after them, and lock the door to your quarters behind them. Going back to see Kianmay, you find her crouched in her bed, wrapped in the covers.

"Why did you kill him?" she asks sadly.

"He was going to rape you!" you say. "Anyway, it is better this way. He cannot chase after us now."

"I was to be his victim, and I have forgiven him. Why can't you?" Kianmay asks.

You are not in the mood for a discussion so you tell her to get some rest and drag the corpse into the bathroom, dumping it in the tub. You move your bedroll into her room and closing the door, lie down against it. She does not question you further, and you fall asleep.

Turn to **373**

76

The wine tastes fine to you, although you are no connoisseur. You compliment the wine to be polite. You have a pleasant talk with Laremidan, telling him what you know of news in the South, then you ask him about what is of interest to you

"I hear there is a new King in these lands," you say. "A man calling himself the Wolf. Is he likely to present any danger to us as we travel North?"

Laremidan is thoughtful. "I'm not to sure what to make of this so-called king yet. He seems harmless to peaceful folks like myself. If I was a king I would be worried!" He chuckles. "He is apparently a skilled warrior and tactician. You are heading to Arantator?"

"Yes."

"It is said he is very interested in the great city. He wants to conquer it! He will never succeed at that fool's errand. There is a reason the city has only ever fallen by treachery! Still it will be interesting to hear news of what happens."

Are you wearing a golden armband? If you are, turn to **22**

If you are not, turn to **231**

77

You expect the door to be locked, but the handle turns and you step inside a corridor. The floor is the grass of the tundra laid over with thick rugs woven with ornate patterns in earthy tones. The corridor leads to a door at the far end. There is also a door in each wall to your right and your left.

What do you want to do?

Try the door on the right? Turn to **169**

The door of the left? Turn to **197**

The door at the end of the corridor? Turn to **319**

78

“There is something else I can do,” Kianmay says thoughtfully. “If I use your crystal ball and the magical pearl, then perhaps I can enhance the crystal ball’s properties and spy in the temple myself.”

This sounds like a much better idea. A minute later Kianmay sits in a comfortable chair, holding the pearl in one hand, the crystal ball in the other. She closes her eyes and concentrates. You sit opposite her and watch her expressive face. You see her smile and know that it is working. You see her searching about, slightly worried by what she sees. Suddenly she gasps and her eyes open.

“That is not Zarim! It is sorcerer. I think he sensed me looking.”

“Who are you talking about?” you ask.

“In the temple, wearing the High Priest’s robe! It is not Zarim. I wonder what they have done with him?”

Before you can answer, she closes her eyes and concentrates once more. You see her searching, and then a look of joy appears on her face. She soon concentrates again and appears to be talking to herself. You watch her full lips making words and bend close to try and hear her whispers.

After a few minutes she smiles and opens her eyes. “He is well. He is imprisoned in the palace, but is unharmed. He has told me that we must not rescue him. Instead we are to put the Key in place. It need not go into the temple. There is another place we may put it. Tomorrow I shall take it and put it in the earth. Then I shall surrender to the King and tell him it is futile to hold Zarim any further.”

“What if he tortures you until you tell him?” you protest.

Kianmay smiles. “I shall not tell him. I will suffer; then he will spare me or I shall die.”

It sounds like a very poor plan to you, but Kianmay seems happy and heads off to bed. Once she has retired, you pace about restlessly. Her plan seems utterly foolish. You still have the Diamond Key with you.

Do you want to accept her plan and go to bed? Turn to **12**

If you want to go out and do something drastic, turn to **120**

79

Creeping closer to the open door, you listen carefully. You can hear occasional sounds, but have no idea how many people are inside. Looking through the gap, you can see another square chamber, smaller than the hall you are in now. It is also domed, but lit with a single chandelier. You freeze as you hear an orc speak again. This time another one answers.

Carefully laying your weapon down, you lie down and try to peek under the door. The gap is small, but you see some furniture, and the lower parts of two orcs seated at a large table. You stand carefully, and pick up your weapon. Taking a deep breath you casually walk into the room.

The chamber is centred with three sarcophagi set in a triangle around an empty pedestal. A roughly made wooden table has been dragged into the room, and two orcs sit at it, studying pages of parchment, and scribbling notes with pens on vellum. They are so intent on their work that they do not notice you right away, giving you the chance to look around more. The tiled floor is blackened with what you suspect is blood. A great slaughter took place here. Most of the room is filled with sacks,

barrels and crates, like a storeroom. The three sarcophagi are open, the carved lids lying broken on the floor. The lids depict human warriors wearing winged helms and carr-

“Human!” screeches one of the orcs.

You look back at them as they gape at you.

What do you want to do?

Attack them? Turn to **35**

Talk to them? Turn to **232**

80

Going up to the near door, you listen carefully, but can hear nothing. Slowly you try the handle. It is unlocked, and you swing the door to the lighted interior open. Inside is a study, the back wall lined with bookshelves. A large polished oak wood desk sits in the centre of the room on a round intricately patterned rug in dark blue and white and green. Behind the desk is a high-backed chair of the same dark polished wood as the desk. In the chair is an elderly man with piercing blue eyes and a long beard. He is dressed in a plain white robe with a crystal amulet around his neck.

“Can I help you?” he asks mildly.

“I am looking for the High Priest,” you say.

“I am Zarim,” he says, rising from his seat with a smile. “Please come in.”

Can you trust this man?

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **348**

If you are not, you must turn to **417**

81

You quickly lunge at Raul, drawing your dagger and thrusting at his throat. Raul flinches back, but it is the manservant who moves faster. In fact, he begins to move a fraction of a second before you do. The silver tray deflects your blade, and the wine is hurled into your eyes. You stagger backwards, dropping the dagger and drawing your favoured weapon. Wiping wine from your eyes, you see the manservant draw from his sleeves two slim bladed knives. You notice that the blades are discoloured with poison. Raul stands back, smiling.

The manservant is Raul’s personal assassin. Because of the poison, if you are wounded by him, the fight will only last for another five rounds. At that time the poison will reach your heart and you will be dead. Even if you win within 5 rounds you will still die unless you have a healing phial with you.

GRIFFON ASSASSIN SKILL 12 STAMINA 15 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

Unfortunately you cannot flee this battle. If you win, turn to **187**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

If you win but do not have a healing potion to drink, turn to **928**



82

Taking the slim wooden box from your pack, you open it and show the vampire the dark stone. She obviously does not recognise it, and reaches to take it out of the box. She holds the stone on her palm and her eyes follow the script. She is reading it! When she finishes, a look of wonder comes onto her face.

“Do you know what this is?” she asks you.

“The Diamond Key,” you reply.

She smiles. “A suitable name.” She places the stone against her chest, and closes her eyes. A moment later she stiffens and begins to shudder as her skin starts to glow. Suddenly she falls to her knees, dropping the Key and beginning to vomit blood. You step back, dodging around the pool of blood. You snatch up the Diamond Key and retreat to the wall as she continues to vomit blood. It pours from her body; many, many times more than is possible for her slender frame to contain. When she finally collapses in exhaustion the whole chamber is filled an inch deep with blood.

You step forward to aid her, red ripples extending out from your footfalls. But her body suddenly turns to dust, leaving nothing but her gown and slippers and golden armband. You pick up the armband. It is gold set with diamonds and opals, and as you touch it you feel powerful magic in it. You put it in your pack and look for a way out of the tower. Going back into the antechamber, you eventually see a suspiciously blank section of wall. Pushing upon it makes it move back and then swing open, revealing a tunnel. You make your way into the tunnel, making for the sunlit exit about 100 feet away.

You emerge into Darken Wood, turning around to see the white marble tower rising above the treetops. You see other structures all around you scattered through the trees, some whole, others in ruins. There is an entire ancient city here in the middle of Darken Wood. Looking for the palace, you find it once more and enter the throne room. The crow is there, perched on the candelabra.

“What happened to her?” you ask without preamble.

“The Diamond Key purified her,” the crow replies. “She was no longer a vampire, thus she perished. But her soul will not now fall down to a lower place. You have proven yourself worthy to be a Champion of the Light.”

“What now, then?” you ask.

“You have a long way to go before you are ready to swear an oath to a God of Light. But you have taken the first step. With compassion alone may you truly see

what is before you. Before you go, I will allow you to take one item from the King to aid you in your journey.”

You look at the enthroned skeleton. “You mean one of his things?”

“I do,” the crow says.

What do you choose?

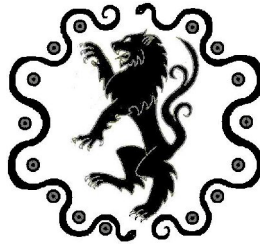
The winged helm? Turn to **103**

The broadsword? Turn to **153**

The emerald ring? Turn to **203**

The sapphire ring? Turn to **253**

The ruby ring? Turn to **303**



83

The guards are interviewing another traveller, and as you approach, one of the guards orders him to move his donkey out of your path. Emboldened, you continue forward, and nod to the guards as you pass through with Kianmay at your side. Pleasantly surprised, you continue on into the city as the traveller behind you sputters and tries to explain the large quantity of illegal substances in his saddlebags.

Kianmay takes the lead and takes you through the wide streets. Here in the outer city the wide streets are surrounded by often rickety structures, small and made of wood more often than stone, and painted in a variety of colours. Only the dark slate roofs are uniform. Shops and residences as well as taverns and brothels sit side by side in the outer city, the chaos of human existence filling the gaps between the well-planned, well-laid streets.

Another, less imposing wall seals off the inner city. There are guards here too, resplendent in dark blue cloaks and bright breastplates emblazoned with the tower and stars of the city's banner. You sense the vigilant air of the guards and suspect that they are looking for you. Kianmay is well-concealed in her hooded cloak, and you try to look the part of a caring husband with a new bride by putting your arm around her and beaming at the guards as you pass.

They look at you, but do not react and you proceed through into the inner city. Here there is greater order. The streets are narrower, but all the buildings are stone and the inner city is divided into sections. You are currently in the market quarter. Here there is a market and you can buy and sell any items you wish. You decide to sell the horses and get 80 gold for both plus the saddles and other equipment.

Once you are done, Kianmay leads you through another gate, this one unguarded, and enter an expanse of gardens. Well-cared for lawns are scattered with lone trees and groves of exotic and beautiful flowering bushes. Carefully tended flower beds are filled with blooms of all colours and shapes, filling the cold air with perfume. There

are also lamp posts which men dressed in the livery of the city are busy lighting, filling the gardens with a soft, warm glow.

At various locations around the gardens are temples and shrines of all sizes and styles, dedicated to a plethora of deities. The Kings of Arantator have always prided themselves on the diversity of the gods that dwell in their city. Kianmay leads you down a path and you see ahead a large marble temple surrounded by oaks. A wide stone staircase leads into a trio of decorated arches. A plinth rises from the centre of the stairway, upon which stands a life-sized statue of a woman in a flowing robe. Her hands are empty, held out as if to bless or embrace the world.

Your attention is soon drawn to something else. There are paladin guarding the front of the temple, standing watch beneath the arches while an officer strolls back and forth. Something about their manner arouses your suspicion, and you see Kianmay start to slow her steps.

“Keep walking!” You hiss at her.

She matches your step. “They are not paladin.”

“I know,” you reply. “Keep on the path, we’ll take the turn to the left.”

As you draw near, you see the officer step forward and look down at you intently. You let him see you glance at him with disinterest as you and Kianmay turn to the left and make your way along the path to the shrine next door.

Stepping into the dim interior, you look around at gilded statues of a warrior bearing a huge scimitar in one hand, and a dragon’s head in the other. A marble sarcophagus fills the shine, and a sign written in several languages tells you that you have entered the shine of Aringarator the Dragon-Slayer. You are momentarily distracted as you realise you are standing near the hero of many of your childhood stories. Aringarator himself!

“What are we going to do?” Kianmay asks in a worried tone.

You see a large alcove filled with a fine statue of the Dragon-slayer, a jade basin at its feet for inserting incense. There is a basket on incense to one side, along with a strongbox with a slot in the top. Perhaps you should prey for a blessing.

Kianmay notices your excitement and you tell her about Aringarator. Kianmay does not look impressed. “I know of at least five cities that claim to have the body of Aringarator entombed within their walls. We need to speak to the High priest Zarim. It is too dangerous for me to go there. You must go.”

“They might recognise me, too.” You protest.

“Then you will need a disguise.” Kianmay muses. “Let us find an inn.”

Leaving the shrine, you make your way back through the gardens and out another gate into the traveller’s quarter. It is a small section of the city with many inns, taverns and merchant houses. You find a small but fine-looking inn called the White Garden. It has a number of small rooms opening out into a garden filled with white-flowering bushes surrounding a pond filled with white lilies and a pair of swans.

The inn costs one gold per night, and each room has a bathroom. The water comes through pipes and you are able to fill the bath yourself by turning a valve. You are not required to pay up front, and are handed the key by an apple-cheeked woman who promptly leaves you alone. The main room is a sitting room, with the bathroom to one side, a bedroom to the other, and a small dining room and kitchen out the back.

Once you are settled in, Kianmay tells you her plan. “You must go and disguise yourself as a wealthy man. Go and buy a fine robe and a hat. Then buy an offering for the temple. Either lamp oil or incense, then go to make an offering. Once you are inside, ask to see the High Priest. When you speak to him, be careful. Don’t give

everything away. Zarim himself can be trusted, but there could be spies there, or some magic.”

“The markets are probably closed now,” you say. “We will have to wait until tomorrow.”

“Probably?” Kianmay raises one eyebrow. “So there is a chance we can do this tonight.”

She is clearly impatient, but you are tired and don’t fancy wandering around the city at night on the slim chance a vendor is still open.

If you want to go anyway, turn to **227**

If you want to argue with her, turn to **347**

84

You patiently answer all his questions, often rolling your eyes. After it is all done, he gives you a curt ‘thank you’ and leaves. You make some jokes with the others travellers about custom clerks, then head upstairs for sleep.

You knock gently on Kianmay’s door before entering. She is not asleep yet. She is reading by the light of a candle. As you close the door behind you, you see Penmark in his bedroll on the floor. Well, you weren’t planning anything anyway. Laying out your own bedroll, you settle in for an uncomfortable night’s sleep.

Turn to **366**

85

You show Kianmay the jade ring. She examines it for a few minutes, then tells you it is a Lock of Truth. As long as you wear it you will be able to tell if someone is lying to you or not. But as long as it is on your finger you will not be able to lie. She hands it back to you. Whether you wear it or not is up to you, but you may not have the chance to put it on if you suddenly decide you need it.

Return now to **240**

86

Opening the lid, you sniff the white liquid. The smell is faint and pleasant. You are fairly sure it is not a poison and wonder what powers it will bestow. You take a sip. It has little flavour. You feel nothing, so you sip a bit more. Still noticing no effect, you take a mouthful.

You put the lid back on and wait for something to happen. After about a minute your eyelids start to get heavy. You shake yourself and stand up. Rather than shaking off the drowsiness, you start to feel very heavy. You realise that you have taken a sleeping potion!

You struggle against the tiredness, desperately trying to find a place to hide and sleep off the potion. You collapse on the floor and slip into a deep sleep. You float for a long time on fluffy pink clouds, losing all sense of time.

Eventually you awake to a strange rocking sensation. As your mind clears, you gradually become aware that you are tied to a horse. You lift your head, seeing a cloaked figure on a horse ahead of you, holding the reins of your mount. You look around, and see nothing but the road, winding across the tundra.

“Where am I?” you ask.

The figure turns, and you see that it is Kianmay. She grins at you and draws the horses to a stop. “Awake at last!” She dismounts and begins to untie your hands.

“What happened?” you ask.

Kianmay is smiling. “You drank a sleeping potion! Serves you right for sneaking about and thieving!”

Her eyes sparkle with amusement. You rub your wrists and sit up. Your whole body is aching and you get down from the saddle, and look back down the road. “The Wolf let us go?”

“Oh, yes,” Kianmay says happily. She pulls a cord from around her neck, revealing the cloth bag. “He returned to me the Diamond Key.”

“So he didn’t know what it was?” you ask.

“Oh, he knew,” Kianmay replies. “At least he knew it could make him immortal. He has a sorcerer with him you discerned its nature. The Wolf stopped us because he knew that King Darm was looking for us. He just wanted to know why. I told him what I wanted to do with the Key and he let us go! He is a noble and just man.”

She still seems amused at something. “What is so funny?” you ask her.

Kianmay grins. “He judged you to be a thief, so he kept all of your things, but equipped you for the rest of the journey.”

Looking down you see that you are dressed in plain leather armour with an undyed woollen cloak. At your belt is a purse, which contains only 20 gold coins, and a plain, but serviceable dagger. On the saddle of your horse hangs a similarly plain but serviceable longsword in a leather scabbard. All of your other belongings are gone.

“What is so funny about this?” You want to know, lamenting the loss of your magical items.

“Oh, it is not so funny as fitting, I think.”

She climbs back into the saddle and you have no choice but to follow.

Turn to **293**

87

Turning to the left, you enter a decorated arch and walk along a short passage to another, smaller hall. Even before you enter the smaller hall you can see the opposite entrance is blocked by rubble, as if the corridor beyond collapsed. The small hall is square, and as you peer inside, you see a dome above. It appears to be gold, reflecting brightly the light from the blue-white crystals that this time are set in the walls. Almost all of the glowing crystals are gone, gouge marks next to the holes indicated that they all been prised out. You are tempted to do the same, when you suddenly here a voice and freeze.

Spoken in orcish, you don’t know what was said, but it sounded like a casual comment. There are two doorways, one in each of the side walls. The door to the left is ajar; the voice came from there. The door to the right is closed.

Where do you want to go?

The open door to the left? Turn to **79**

The closed door to the right? Turn to **277**

Back into the main hall to investigate the digging sounds? Turn to **368**

88

The last raider slides off your weapon, and you and Penmark hurry to help finish off the last of the Raiders. You look around to see the horseman still sitting in the distance. He raises his hand to you in some kind of salute, then gallops away.

Going to the nearest corpse, you tear open the man's tunic. To your surprise instead of a wolf's head there is a tower surrounded by three stars. It is the sign of Arantator. You quickly check the other raiders and find it is the same. You wonder if there is some deception afoot. The raiders were able to sneak up on you without being seen on the treeless tundra. The land is not perfectly flat, but 25 men should not have been able to sneak up on you unless they were born and bred on the tundra. Arantator might be located in the tundra, but it is a great city full of soft princes, city-bound craftsmen and women who keep homes.

The men do seem to be relatively clean, as if they had bathed recently. Arantator is famous for its hot springs, and bathing in the city is a custom. A custom that is noticeably absent for the folk who live on the tundra. But why would men from Arantator attack you?

"They are after the Diamond Key," Kianmay announces. "I feared this would happen."

"What do you mean?" you ask.

She looks at you. "Arantator is our final destination. The Diamond Key is to go to the temple there. The High Priest in Erinharn was convinced it was appropriate to inform King Darm of our mission, since his land will benefit from the blessing of the Key. But he is an old and ambitious man. He wishes the Key for himself."

"Why does everyone want this Key," you ask.

Kianmay looks at you with disappointment. "Have you not figured it out yet?"

"The Diamond Key is the key to life," you reply. "But I know not its particular powers."

Kianmay pauses. "The Key, when set into the earth, fills the surrounding land with the essence of life. Plants will flourish on barren ground. Those who eat of the growth of the land will grow strong. No famine or natural disaster will strike the land that bears the Diamond Key. You know well the fortune that Erinharn has received over the last 500 years. That was because of the Diamond Key. But the Diamond Key can also be used selfishly. He who carries it upon his body is filled with the essence of life and is immortal. This is why Count Raul wanted it. That is why King Darm wants it. We needed to move the Key because too many people in Erinharn had learned of it. It was foolish to inform King Darm. But our High Priest imagined he would become a guardian of the Key." She shakes her head.

You frown. "If King Darm is hunting us, we cannot go to Arantator like this. The horseman who escaped will reveal our identity."

Penmark looks around. "We cannot pass undetected through these lands."

A worried expression fills Kianmay's face. "What can we do, then?"

Penmark looks at you, his eyes piercing deep into you. “There is only one plan that may succeed. We shall continue on to Arantator with the cart, while the two of you go your own way alone.”

“But you might be attacked again!” Kianmay says to Penmark.

The paladin nods. “I hope so, Blessed One. For then you and the Key will be safe.”

Kianmay does not like the drastic plan, but the strength of her mission makes her agree. So it is that you and Kianmay prepare your belongings and taking a horse each set off across the land, making for another town you know to the east. You may take one of the raiders breastplates, but only if you wear it. The paladin and the remaining guards take the cart and remain on the main road. You take all of the money in the strongbox.

You ride across the tundra, often looking over your shoulder. Soon the cart is gone, and you look to the way ahead.

Turn to **237**

89

“I will not withdraw my challenge,” you announce defiantly.

“Very well. I accept your challenge. If I win, then you must swear an oath of my choosing that you will reveal to no-one of our secret, and then go peacefully on your way. Is this acceptable to you?”

You reply that it is.

The Wolf continues. “As you have challenged me, the choice of weapons is mine.”

He gestures to the clerk, who comes over and bends his ear to the Wolf. The clerk then hurries out of the room. You spend a few minutes glaring at the Wolf, who just watches you as if you are a puzzle.

Eventually the clerk returns, and gives something to the Wolf. He then turns and holds out something to you. You lift your hand, and the clerk drops into it an acorn.

You look at the nut in confusion. “What is this?”

“The weapons for our duel,” the Wolf replies. “I shall plant this acorn. It shall grow into a great tree. I shall cut a branch from the tree and fashion it into a cudgel. It is with this oaken cudgel that I shall kill you; unless you forfeit.”

“That will take years!” You say.

“It is my hope that such time will change your hatred of me,” the Wolf replies.

Gripping the acorn, it seems you have only two realistic choices.

Forfeit, turn to **91**

Attack him with a real weapon, turn to **141**

90

The entrance to the town of Red River is not guarded, but the Town Guard is numerous and aggressively keeps order. Inns and taverns seem to make up half of the buildings in the city, and Penmark asks you to find a good inn, but not too expensive.

There are far too many inns in Red River for you to know them all, but you have an experienced eye and stop when you come across an inn called the Trader's Repose. Taking the carriage into the stableyard, you ask the stableboy who comes hurrying out if there are any vacancies. The boy nods vigorously and you let him take charge of the horses. Kianmay opens the door to the carriage, but instead of getting out, she catches your eye and beckons you to enter.

Walking over to the carriage, you climb inside and close the door. Kianmay has once again lowered her cowl. She has upon her lap a small strongbox. She bits her lip nervously and you wait for her to speak.

"I believe I can trust you...I hope I can...I have little choice in any case." She shakes her head as her eyes fill with distant memories. After a moment they clear and she looks at you as if she can see deep into your being. "I need you to do something very important. It is no longer safe for us to travel like this. We need a better disguise. You have travelled with lots of merchants. I want you to make us look like any other merchant. Here."

She roughly extends to you the strongbox. You take it, and seeing it is unlocked, lift up the lid. Your eyes widen as you see several cloth bags, bulging with coin. You look up at Kianmay.

"This is all the money we have," she says softly. "I need you to go and buy a wagon, and oxen or horses. Then buy something to put in it, something we can trade in...in the Northern lands. Then you must hire merchant guards like yourself. As many as you can; but not too many. Whatever is normal. We can't look suspicious. We have to be ordinary merchants."

"Who is chasing you?" you ask.

The woman smiles and shakes her head. "Please don't ask me any questions. I am trusting you will all our money. Please trust me."

Agreeing, you conceal the strongbox under your cloak.

"One more thing," Kianmay adds. "I want you to stay somewhere else tonight. Tomorrow morning meet us somewhere on the Northern Road." You agree to the demands and begin to exit the carriage. Kianmay touches your arm. "Trust no one who wears the sign of the griffon." You nod and leave the carriage.

As you go you see Penmark watching you with his piercing gaze. You see that he knows what is under your cloak. You are now in charge of the party's finances. You must keep a careful record of how much gold you spend and receive. Whenever you read that you have spent silver or copper coins, you can ignore these amounts, as it is assumed you will always have a few of these coins on you. If at any time you cannot do anything because you have run out of money, you must turn immediately to **177**. Make a note of this passage number. Generally you will only be spending money in places where there are markets. At a market you can sell everything except the clothes on your back. If you run out of cash, then you must sell whatever possessions you have unless you want to give up. It is a good idea to always keep an eye out for things to sell as long as you have room to carry them. As you slay foes, you will usually be given the option to take their weapons and armour. Even if you don't want to use them yourself, you can take them to sell at a later time.

Leaving the Trader's Repose, you walk several streets away to a small inn called the Happy Maid, trying not to appear nervous about the strongbox under your cloak. As you enter, the innkeeper greets you loudly across the common room. You have stayed here many times in your travels and have become good friends with the innkeeper and his family.

Garen and his wife keep a clean and safe establishment. After their first child was born, Garen was concerned about the nature of his clientele, and kept out the riffraff by increasing the price of the alcohol he serves. There was no drunkenness any more in his common room.

Garen shakes your hand and asks if you need a room.

“Just for one night,” you reply, shaking his hand warmly. His young son appears and shows you upstairs, handing you the key to the door. It is a room you have stayed in before, having a small window, a bed, a cabinet, a table and chair. Putting your stuff down you thank Garen’s son and give him a silver coin. He leaves happily and you lock and latch the door behind him. Kneeling next to the bed, you open the strongbox and count the coins. In total you have 500 gold. You take the bags of coin, and tie them to your belt under your shirt and coat. Hopefully any thieves will think that your own purse on the outside of your belt is the total of your treasures.

You have with you a total of 550 gold coins. Going downstairs once more, you ask Garen where you can buy a wagon, and following his directions, set out for the markets.

You can go to the markets on page 6 and buy and sell any goods from the vendors there. Return to this passage when you are done.

The markets are huge, and it takes you half an hour to find a wheelwright. When you walk into the yard, you are pleased to see some horses in an adjacent yard. The wheelwright is busy repairing a broken spoke, but seeing you enter, sets down his tools and approaches you with a broad smile.

“Good afternoon, sir! How may I be of service?”

You tell him you are in need of a wagon, and he invites you to come to the back of his shop. Passing through the workshop, you come to another yard in the back, where there is a single, covered wagon. The wheelwright lets you inspect the wagon. You find it well-made and without rot.

“Just reconditioned last week!” the wheelwright announces. “Yours for just 60 gold!”

You appear unimpressed, and several minutes later shake hands, agreeing on 40 gold. The wheelwright gestures to the adjacent yard. “My brother owns the next allotment. He is a trader in horse and oxen and all manner of beasts of burden. Tell him you have bought the old Drandid wagon and he is sure to give you a good deal!”

You thank him and go to the next yard. A man greets you with a broad smile that is identical to the wheelwright’s, but the man is otherwise completely different, a massive belly straining against a wide leather belt, and a round head with only a few wisps of hair left.

You shake his clammy hand and mention that you have just bought a wagon from his brother. “Ah, excellent! Excellent!” he exclaims. “Come this way, I have just the team for you.”

You follow him and he takes you to a pair of oxen eating from a feedbox. “My finest pair!” he declares. “A special deal for you, sir. Only 50 golds for the pair!”

You have never bought oxen before, but the price seems a little high. Expressing this, the man nods, unfazed. “Look at the girth of these fine beasts!” He says, rubbing a hand over the round sides of one of the oxen. “That kind of strength will have them working all day! These are beasts bred for the yoke, my friend! A bargain at 25 gold pieces each.”

The oxen are very broad, and seem very placid. But you really do not know about oxen. Should you pretend to be offended in case he is trying to trick you? His brother did promise you he would offer you a special deal. He might be offended if

you accuse him of trying to trick you. Should you bargain for these oxen? It is late in the day, and this could your one chance to buy.

Buy these oxen? Turn to **210**

Act offended and start to leave? Turn to **355**

91

“I forfeit!” you say in disgust, throwing down the acorn.

The Wolf nods his head in approval. The clerk moves off to a cabinet to the side, then returns with a medium-sized box. He opens it, revealing a life-sized statue of a crow carved in onyx. He opens it by lifting away the head and neck, revealing a cavity. He pulls out a dagger, and takes your arm, holding it over the cavity.

The Wolf looks at you. “Repeat after me. ‘I swear I shall never reveal the secret of the Wolf or his pack.’”

You grit your teeth, but speak the words. The clerk slices your arm and blood drips down into the cavity. After a few moments, the clerk releases your arm and replaces the lid, making the crow whole once more.

“Your vow is kept here,” the clerk announces.

You are free to go. Kianmay pauses to pick up the acorn you discarded, and puts it in her pocket with a smile. She seems pleased with the way things have gone.

Turn to **42**

92

You heave on the dagger hilt. But the soldier pushes back desperately, and halts the blade. He then kicks his legs and flips you both over. Suddenly the situations have been reversed, and the blade is slowly descending to wards your throat. You push and kick, but to no avail. The soldier is too big and strong. He pushes the blade through your throat with a grunt of satisfaction, and you perish, the last thing you see the soldier’s face, no longer scowling. He looks happy, and you slip off into the darkness of death, plunging down into deep cold.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE.

93

Drawing a deep breath, you walk onto the gully floor. You stop and wait for the celebrating goblins to notice you. One sees you and squeals in alarm. It takes about a minute of squealing for the loud celebration to quieten enough for the goblins to all stop and stare at you.

“Greetings,” you say loudly.

The goblins all kneel down and grovel in the dirt whimpering. You are surprised, but pleased. You stride forward. “Last night you stole from my party! I want everything returned to me now!”

The goblins go into a frenzy, dumping treasures at your feet. You are soon buried to your ankles in gold and gems. You shake your feet free. The goblins grovel once

more. You can see that there are no magical items at all. "I do not want gold and gems!" you say. "Where are the other things you stole?"

"We gave them to the King!" cry several goblins all at once.

"Take me to the King!" you command.

The timid creatures jump to their feet and point the way. You pause to scoop up a handful of gems, and follow the goblins' directions. As you move through the Wood, the goblins accompany you from a safe distance, some running ahead, others following behind.

Eventually you come to a large clearing, in which you see the remains of a ruined palace. It is covered in moss and cracks. The goblins make a final gesture to the ruins and scamper back into the woods. You can feel them watching you as you walk slowly forward. It occurs to you that it might be a trap, so you continue forward with care.

Entering the cool shadows, you find yourself in an antechamber. There is a massive set of doors opposite, the wood inlaid with jade and gold making the sign of a bull on one side, and a lion on the other. Moving forward, you push the on the doors and they swing inwards with a tired groan.

Revealed is a throne room. At the far end you can see a dais of white stone, upon which is a silver throne. In the throne sits a skeleton, still clad in plate armour with a broadsword in hand and a winged helm on its head. Long white hair is still stuck to the skull and flows from under the helm. There are even rings on the skeleton's fingers.

The rest of the room is in ruins, with faded and tattered tapestries hanging on the walls and a rotted carpet on the tiled floor. There is dirt scattered through the room, falling down from cracks in the dome above. Small plants are growing in the dirt on the floor. Light comes from a large round opening at the top of the dome, the edges surrounded by broken glass.

You walk forward, watching the skeleton carefully. You have never fought an undead before, but the stories make it sound challenging.

You stop before the dais. You suspect that the skeleton is unanimated and relax slightly. You look around and start in surprise when you see a crow perched on a silver candelabra next to the throne. You were so concerned with the skeleton that you never noticed it sitting in the shadows.

"Hello," you say.

"What do you want now?" the crow asks in its disembodied voice.

"I was told the King was here," you say.

"Yes," the crow replies.

"You are the King?" you ask.

"I told you so!" snaps the crow.

"What about him?" you ask, pointing at the skeleton.

"Well, he was the King. But then he stopped giving commands, so we just made things up as we went for a while, then I decided to be King."

"King of Darken Wood?" you ask.

The crow sighs. "This is going to be a long conversation isn't it?"

So far your experience of Darken Wood is nothing like the stories. "I thought this place was full of monsters," you say.

"It is!" the crow exclaims. "I thought I was being nice to you. But if you are going to complain, I'll give you monsters!"

You suddenly hear a roar behind you, and spinning about you see one of the broken stones start to swell and change shape. It begins to become humanoid.

If you have a mace-class weapon, you can rush forward and smash it before it grows any bigger. Turn to **192**

If not, you had better apologise to the crow; turn to **287**

94

The second bandit falls at your feet and you quickly survey the battle. It is almost over, and you charge over to hack the head off a bandit from behind. Seeing the tide begin to turn against them, the bandits flee.

Some of the merchant guards cheer and start to loot the corpses. “Leave that!” you command. “Make sure they aren’t reloading their crossbows! But don’t go too far!”

You dash into the undergrowth and find a couple of abandoned crossbows, and catch glimpses of the bandits disappearing into the forest. You hear the clash of steel from the other side of the road and guess that some of the bandits either were too slow or were indeed trying to reload crossbows.

You circle around the wagon through the undergrowth, and are satisfied that the bandits have fled. You hurry back to the wagon with one of the crossbows and a quiver of bolts. Kianmay is directing the paladin to load the bodies of two dead guards onto the wagon. The other guards are happily looting corpses. You take a moment to search the bodies of the two bandits you killed. In addition to their longswords, which you may take, you find 7 gold coins.

You urge everyone to get ready to move, and climbing back onto the wagon seat, grasp the reins. As you move the wagon forward, Kianmay touches your arm.

“Thank you.” You feel something warm rush through you from her touch, and you feel revitalised (Restore 6 STAMINA points.) Smiling at her, you continue the journey through the forest.

Turn to **234**



95

Going to the first chest, you insert the lockpicks and begin to work on the lock. The noise is unavoidable and the sleeper stirs...

If you want to stop now and leave, turn to **378**

If you want to continue, you must test your luck.

If you are lucky, turn to **403**

If you are unlucky, turn to **442**

96

Raising your hands, you feel them tingle as you reach out. You lay your hands on the warm crystal. Suddenly a golden eye emerges from the misty interior and everything else becomes dark. All you can see is the great golden eye, and it sees into you.

FREE ME! Cries a great voice in your head, each word pounding you like a hammer. It shouts at you, your whole body shaking. Finally you sense that the intelligence calms, and it peers at you curiously.

You are no orc, you hear it think. Something bright explodes in your head, and you slip away into darkness.

Turn to **176**

97

The sorcerer leads you over to a rack where there are three weapons. The first is a broadsword with a two-hand hilt bound in snakeskin. The hilt is gold and inlaid with rubies. The long steel blade is two-edged and sharp.

The second is a curved longsword with a black blade and with hilt and sheath carven of ivory. The carvings depict wolves upon the tundra.

The last sword is a scimitar, hilt and blade made of silver, with a long tassel of blue silk hanging from the pommel. The scabbard is skilfully carved of black wood, lacquered and polished into a thin sheath. The sorcerer assures you that the bright silver is decoratively plated on the outside, the core being strong steel.

All the pieces are somewhat decorative; gifts sent to the Wolf. But each is well-made and functional.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Bejewelled Broadsword	Fine sword	10

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Ivory Wolf Blade	Longsword	6

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Silver Scimitar	Longsword	6

If you don't like any of these and want to ask for your own weapons, turn to **295**

Otherwise, you choose your weapon and the Sorcerer leads you through the house to an adjoining compound.

Turn to **258**

98

Putting out all the lights, you sit just inside the sitting room, with the door open. You battle against sleepiness for an hour until you hear something that jerks you into full wakefulness. The lock to your door clicks. The door opens slowly and you hear the careful steps of booted feet.

In the dim light from the window at the far end of the hall you see a portly figure you recognise as Laremidan, creeping in holding a longsword. He is followed by a servant with an unlit lamp in hand, then two more armed men. They approach the door of the bedroom.

Gasping a dagger, you creep out seizing one guard, drag your blade across his throat. As he gasps, you shove him at his companion, who grapples with him in the dark. You skilfully follow up and stab the second guard in the neck as the first guard collapses on him. They both sprawl on the floor spilling blood.

Retreating, you move back to the sitting room door and reach inside for your weapon. The servant lights the lamp at a hissed command from Laremidan, and soon the hall is bathed in warm light, illuminating the two bodies on the floor.

Laremidan looks at you and smiles. "You are very skilled at killing men from behind. Let's see how you fare against a true warrior!"

He rushes forward to attack you, surprisingly swift and nimble.

LAREMIDAN SKILL 10 STAMINA 18 DB 6 ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **218**

If you are killed, turn to **376**



99

You stop and turn back to the crow. "I do."

As soon as you finish speaking, the floor seems to drop out from beneath you, and you are falling. You land heavily, but do not hurt yourself. Smooth white marble is pressed against your cheek. You look up, finding yourself in a palace of white marble with gilded archways. You slowly climb to your feet.

You can hear in the distance the sound of conflict, and cautiously make your way through the chambers, all of which are filled with bright sunlight, cascading down through crystal domes above. Finally you reach the largest, brightest chamber of all. In the centre on the marble floor there is a battle raging between a man and a woman. The man is clad in dirty leather armour and steel helm, wielding a longsword. Several other similarly armed men are lying dead on the floor around the chamber. The man is dirty and unshaven, but he is at least human. The woman he battles is a vampire. She is clad in a long white gown torn and stained in blood from numerous wounds. Her hair is long and golden, her furious blue eyes blazing. Her fangs are long and extended, and the nails on her hands are more like slender claws.

The battle is evenly matched. You notice on the blade of the human is some sort of discolouration, perhaps a poison that is weakening the vampire. She fights by moving swiftly, lunging in to slash with her hands, then retreating. But she moves sluggishly now, and often retreats as the human charges at her. Yet he too bleeds from many wounds.

You cannot sit idle. And you suspect this is the test which the Crow has given to you. Who will you help?

To help the vampire to kill the human, turn to **109**

To help the human against the vampire, turn to **310**

100

You notice it is getting close to dusk, and hurry to find an ivory-carver. You find a shop and enter into the interior. Your gaze is drawn immediately to the massive pair of mammoth tusks hanging on the back wall. The beast must have been a true giant!

Eventually your gaze drops to a young woman who smiles at you and asks you what you are interested in. You look around, seeing numerous fine pieces in glass cases. You announce that you are interested in a large shipment, and the young woman immediately invites you to come through to the back of the shop. She shows you a selection of bowls, cups and statues, all carved in fine detail. Regardless of whether the ivory is carved into something functional or not, the price is determined by the level of intricacy in the designs.

You can choose from the following:

Simple: 10 gold per box.

Fine: 30 gold per box

Intricate: 50 gold per box.

Your wagon only has enough space for 1000 jars, or 10 boxes of weapons or ivory (1 box = 100 jars). You may only purchase enough goods to fill the wagon.

If you buy ivory, the young woman also gives you an ivory ring as a gift. You can keep the ring or sell it at the markets for 1 gold coin. Once you have bought all the ivory you want, you may either:

Visit the Dye-maker, turn to **55**

Visit the weapon smith, turn to **312**

Or go to hire merchant guards, turn to **200**

101

You find the remainder of your party at rest. Most are asleep in their blankets, only Penmark and Kianmay are awake next to the small fire. They both stand as you approach and run over to you. Kianmay reaches out and lays her hands on your face. You feel warmth rushing through you. (Restore 6 STAMINA.)

“What happened?” she asks, drawing you to a seat. Quietly you tell her everything you saw.

If you have a tome with you, turn to **70**

Otherwise, turn to **249**



102

You reach for the cloth bag that is tied around your neck, glancing at Kianmay. She meets your eye, but turns to give Darm a sorrowful look. You untie the cord from around your neck as you walk forward. Darm eagerly walks down the steps to meet you at the foot of the throne.

You are careful not to let Kianmay see the fake key, and slowly open the bag as you approach. Does Darm know what the real key looks like? You are only a few yards away from him when you take the key-shaped diamond from the bag. You see Darm's eyes gleam with greed and ambition. It is obviously everything he has imagined.

He reaches out a trembling hand for it, stepping closer to you, and you lift your hand, presenting the fake Diamond Key to him...

If you have a serpent ring, and want to use it to poison Darm, turn to **794**

If you have a crystal dagger or a rune-marked dagger and want to stab him with it, turn to **842**

Otherwise, you will have to use a normal dagger. Turn to **966**

103

You chose the winged helm and take it gently off the skeleton's head. It is a golden cap with a mail coif and backswept silver wings. It fits you perfectly. While wearing the helm you may add 2 to your armour rating. Whatever magical properties it has you will have to wait and see.

Thanking the crow once more, you leave the ruined palace and make your way back through Darken Wood. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. "Do you have it?" Her eyes are wild.

"Yes." You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

104

You walk across the camp and reach the edge of the tent. Not wanting to risk going around to the front entrance, you lift up the side of the tent and crawl inside. It is relatively dim inside, lit by a silver candelabra, but you see that you are in an unoccupied partition.

Here there is a small writing table and a folding chair, along with three chests of various sizes. On the table there is a half-written letter. Stepping over the patterned rugs that have been laid on the ground, you look at the letter.

Faren,

I am now in position, and expect to receive your dispatches soon. I have made sure your sister is comfortable with us. If there is any hint of betrayal from you, I will give her to my men to play with before I kill her in the most painful way I can imagine.

I want you to know that I have been using her for my pleasures. No doubt that makes you angry; but what she will suffer if you do not do as I wish is much greater. What do you care about more? The wealth of merchants or your sweet sister? And she is sweet I can tell

Your blood boils as you read the letter. Carefully you peek through the curtains that create the partition. You are currently in one quarter of the tent. You find another darkened quarter beside the ‘study’, with the front half of the tent furnished like a sitting room with a couch, chairs and a table, on which is the meal tray. The collared woman you saw is here, hunched on cushions in the corner, looking as if she is trying to shrink herself into non-existence. Two other unhappy looking women also collared with iron stand ready to serve at the table, one next to a stand holding a pitcher and goblet.

You move your head back inside as Gilmore the Groat strides back in. His beard is neatly trimmed, but his eyes are wide and fiery. The man looks insane. He sits down and starts to eat. Withdrawing, you realise you are safe for the moment. Looking at the chests, you wonder if you have time to search through them.

What do you want to do?

Look inside the large chest? Turn to **397**

Look inside the medium-sized chest? Turn to **143**

Look inside the small chest? Turn to **284**

Just leave? Turn to **4**

105

Trudging back to the Palatial Square, you consider the other potential entrances to the palace.

To approach the main gate, turn to **433**

To try the door to the dungeons, turn to **481**

If you have a glass ring, you can go through the stable door by turning to **424**

106

While Kianmay waits outside with the horses, you go into the front room of the King’s Tub. There is a clerk at the desk in the middle of the small room. He looks you up and down and looks unimpressed, but still gives you a smile.

“Welcome, sir. Do you require a room?”

“How much?” You ask, too weary for anything else.

“Ten gold per evening.”

“What!” You exclaim. “That is ridiculous!”

“All our rooms come with bathing privileges, sir,” the clerk says, unfazed.

The town is not built on a hot spring like Arantator, so they have to heat the water the old-fashioned way. “Can I get a room without bathing?” You ask.

The clerk gives you a frosty look. “There is another inn next door, sir.”

You certainly aren’t interested in a bath; though it might do you good. On the other hand, Kianmay might appreciate it. Camping on the tundra has been hard on her.

If you want to pay the gold for a room, turn to **159**

If you want to check out the ‘Inn’, turn to **315**



107

You clench your fists, but there is nothing you can do. The orcs are too numerous and well-armed for you to attack. With no other choice, you turn back and return to the inn.

You spend the day trying to think of a way to get through. There is a market here, so if you can sell your goods and get enough gold, you can return to the gate and pay the fee or the bribe. If you do this, turn to **333**

(Gate Fee is 12 gold for the wagon and oxen, plus 4 gold per paladin and merchant guard with you. The Bribe is ten gold and one of the following items: A holy amulet, a bejewelled dagger, a bejewelled Griffon Sword, a coat of Silver Scalemail, or a luckstone.)

Otherwise night falls, leaving you frustrated. You are unable to sleep, worrying about what can be done. Kianmay is depending on you, and you do not want to fail her. You still do not know what her great mission is, but you feel that it is important.

As you lie awake, you hear someone walking up the hall. They walk softly, but are betrayed by clinking of armour. No light comes under your door. You sit up and listen. The movement stops a little way up the corridor. Outside Kianmay’s room! You get up slowly, hearing another man coming up the hall. With no time to put on your armour, you grab your weapon and pull open your door, jumping out into the hall.

In the dim light you cannot see who is in front of you, but all your instincts tell you they have ill intent. You do not hesitate to attack the man nearest to you, and shove him back down the stairwell. He crashes down noisily. You turn on the other assailant in time to meet his attack.

The corridor is dark, so both of you are disadvantaged. Remember that you are not wearing any armour, so your armour rating is 0 for this battle.

SHADOWY FIGURE SKILL 9 STAMINA 20 DB 4 AR 0

If the battle lasts longer than 5 rounds, then the paladin and any merchant guards that remain to you join in and finish off the man and his companion. If you win, turn to **212**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

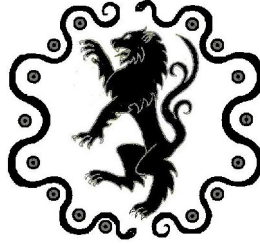
108

You open the map case and take out the scroll. Kianmay reads it with interest. "This is a spell. Anyone who can read it can cast it. It will summon an otherworldly creature to serve you."

"What creature?" You ask.

"There is no name." Kianmay replies. "Probably a demon of some sort." She rolls up the arcane scroll and gives it back to you.

Return now to **373**

**109**

You rush forward and attack the human. He hears you coming and fends off your blow clumsily. He then turns and runs from the chamber. You let him go, turning to face the vampire with your weapon raised. She sinks to the floor, exhausted, and looks up at you.

"Will you kill me now?" she asks.

"Not if I can help it," you reply.

She snorts and after only a few moments stands once more. She is already looking stronger, as her magical flesh heals itself.

"Why are you here?" you ask.

"I am trying to change my fate," she says, and stretches in the sunlight, bathing in the warm light.

Suddenly you see what is in front of you. "Hey! If you're a vampire, how can you stand in the sunlight?" you ask.

"I have won the grace of the Sun, so it will no longer seek to destroy me," she explains

You have never heard of such a thing. "Do you feed on people?"

"At one time I did," she replies. "I cannot do such a thing now. That would break my oath. And I do not wish it. Great pleasure it brings me, but it binds me to serve my desires. I must transcend my desires if I wish to break free of this accursed vessel!" She tears at her breast, her long nails drawing her own blood.

"What do you need to do to be free?" you ask.

"I am a creature of death," she replies. "I must dedicate myself to life. I spend most of my time outside now, tending to the garden. I care for the sick and wounded who come to me. My blood can heal any wound, any sickness. In this way I can hopefully transform the desires within me into compassion."

Rather than a vampire, she claims to be a gardener and healer. You wonder if the Diamond Key can help her.

Do you want to show her the Diamond Key? Turn to **82**

If you think she can't be trusted and you want to leave, turn to **239**

110

The assistant asks to see your gold before he bothers to get a ladder. You shake one of your purses at him and he grunts before disappearing out the back. Moments later he returns with a long ladder, and stands it next to the platform. A minute later the weapon is in your hands. The blade is wide but not too long, and coming to a deadly point. The hilt is plain steel, with a lead pommel to help balance the heavy blade. There is script on each side of the blade, and although you cannot read it, you feel something stirring in you as your eyes pass over the flowing script.

You ask the assistant what it says, but he just shrugs and tells you that this sword will cost you 50 gold pieces.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Holy Broadsword	Fine sword	10

You can buy the sword if you wish, then return to **256**.

111

Drawing your weapon once more, you lunge at the greedy man and strike him down before he has time to react. He falls dead. You survey the death and destruction in the room, blood and dust covering the once white marble.

You hear a flutter of wings and turn to see the crow land on the floor next to the pile that was the head of the vampire. The crow looks up at you. Its disembodied voice is sad. “Why did you aid in her destruction?”

“She was a vampire,” you say.

The crow looks up towards the top of the tower. “And yet, she did not burn, though she was bathed in sunlight.”

“You mean she wasn’t a vampire?”

“She was,” the crow replies. “But she was becoming so much more. It took her 500 years to win the grace of the Sun, so that it would not punish her. Now in moments you have destroyed her.”

“I’m sorry,” you say, regretting your actions.

The crow skips over to the freshly slain human. “Why is he dead?”

“I, um, killed him so he wouldn’t take her armband. It’s the least I could do since I made a mistake.”

“A man must die because you made a mistake?” the crow questions you. “You can only stop a tired, wounded man by killing him?”

“I’m sorry,” you repeat.

“How can you be a Champion of the Light if you cannot see who is your enemy and who is not? In truth a Champion of the Light has but three enemies: fear, hatred and greed. And he finds these enemies within his own heart. Go now, merchant guard!”

An invisible force slams into you and carries you away so quickly whatever is around you is a blur. You are dumped on the floor of the Darken Wood. Shaken, you stand up and check your pack. The Key is still there, so you make your way back towards Tappin. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. "Do you have it?" Her eyes are wild.

"Yes." You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

112

Deciding not to double up with one of the riders, you instead climb up beside the driver of the carriage. The cool-eyed guard gives you a suspicious look, but responds to your nod before turning his eyes back to the road ahead.

The road soon branches, and Captain Penmark leads the party onto the smaller road towards the North-East. The road passes for many miles with the hills to the left, and farmland to the right. The farmland soon ends, and the jungle grows thicker and thicker around you. Soon the road is cutting through the hot, damp shadows. The calls and cries of birds are thick in the air, while a hundred unidentifiable creatures scurry and growl. The horses remain calm, and the journey passes peacefully.

Finally Captain Penmark calls for a stop in a clearing, and the guards set about preparing a meal. The guards sit in silence as one of their number prepares a stew, another carefully tending the fire so it does not smoke. Lady Kianmay emerges, once again concealed in her cowl. She approaches the fire, but does not sit, instead pacing restlessly.

The silence is the quiet discipline of well-trained soldiers, not making unnecessary sounds. Any group of merchant's guards would be laughing and joking. You watch Lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark as they step aside to speak together quietly. As the smell of the food pervades the air, you notice a group of monkeys gathering in the branches, looking down at you. You have heard stories of monkeys stealing things from travellers, so you point to the monkeys.

"See there," you say quietly. "The monkeys are known for stealing. Watch your valuables. Especially anything shiny."

The guards all look around, as does lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark. Lady Kianmay, apparently concerned about something being stolen, hurries back to the carriage; Penmark strolling after her. Before the silence can settle back onto the group, you speak again.

"Anybody have a pack of cards?"

The guards exchanges glances with each other. A couple look towards Captain Penmark, who is still talking with the lady next to the carriage, before one reaches into a pocket and takes out a stack of cards. As the pot bubbles, the guards gather around and the cards are dealt. You play a few hands with the men, still in silence. Even so, you feel like they have accepted you.

Once the meal is ready, Lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark join the circle and the stew is dished up into wooden bowls. You eagerly takes yours and tearing a hunk of bread from the loaf that is passed around, you hungrily begin to eat. The stillness

and silence around you makes you look up and you see the lady and the five guards paused in prayer. You stop chewing, and moments later the guards begin to eat.

The stew is good, but contains no meat. It is obvious now that the lady is a priestess, and the guards are all paladin. But which god do they serve? Is this a holy mission of some sort? You wonder what forces of evil are lined up against you.

It takes five days to move through the jungle. The only excitement comes when a tiger emerges from the growth by the road, making the horses panic. The paladin all dismount and forming a line move towards the together, waving their swords and shouting loudly. The predator hurries off, and the party is able to resume its journey. You reflect on the kind of people you are travelling with. Any merchant would have ordered you to kill the tiger for its skin.

Once free of the jungle, the next town is still one day away, and as you make camp for the night. Captain Penmark approaches you and asks you to follow him. Dropping your bedroll, you follow after him to a small rise, where lady Kianmay stands peering into the northern darkness. Hearing your approach, she turns and points. "Look there," she says quietly.

You can see in the distance a few fires. Another party of perhaps 50 men. You look at lady Kianmay. "Some travellers."

"A large party of travellers. Perhaps...we have reason to believe that not everybody on the road may be friendly to us. Are you able to sneak up to that camp and have a look at who is there?"

She fears that this may be a party of her pursuers, who took one of the more direct routes through the hills and have ended up in front of you. You keep this to yourself, and nod slowly. "I can."

Returning to your gear, you decide to leave your weapons behind, except for a dagger. Being careful to cover anything reflective, you wrap yourself in your cloak and pull the hood over your head, moving off into the darkness. You make a wide circuit, coming towards the encampment from the south-west. You pause to climb a tall tree so you can survey the camp from a safe distance. You cannot see much from this far away, but get a good idea of the size and position on the camp, and make some guesses about the location of any concealed sentries.

Climbing down the tree you move forward slowly, using the starlight and the cover afforded by the scrubby by the roadside. Drawing near, you stop to watch the tree you suspect may have a sentry hidden in it. There are other sentries who patrol in plain sight. Those men have the same professional discipline as the paladin, but the jokes and conversation that comes from the fires indicates that these are no holy men. In the centre of the camp you can see a large tent, but you are still not close enough to be able to identify anything.

After ten minutes, you hear someone in the tree shift uncomfortably, and you catch sight of the man who has wedged himself in the branches to watch. Now that you know where he is, you proceed carefully, and reach the base of the tree undetected.

Unbelievably, you soon hear soft snores coming from above you. Looking towards the camp, you can see now that there are only about twenty warriors. One fire is a cooking fire for a cook and some servants, while the soldiers gather themselves around two smaller fires. On the tent you can now make out the symbol of a rampant griffon in gold on red, clutching an orb in its talons.

If these are the lady's pursuers, you now have enough information to identify them and their numbers. You can slip away undetected. But you are curious, and consider climbing up the tree to subdue the sentry and search him.

What do you want to do?

Return and report to lady Kianmay? Turn to **50**

Climb the tree and search the sentry for more information? Turn to **11**

Sneak further into the camp? Turn to **304**

113

You step forward, but keep your weapon lowered. Some of the soldiers cheer, but as you draw closer to the Wolf, they grow quiet. The Wolf also keeps his weapon down.

You stop before the Wolf. "I have no complaint against you. I will not fight you for gold."

"What will you fight for?" he asks.

"I am a merchant guard. I protect the innocent against those who would kill for greed."

The Wolf nods. "Then only one thing remains to be determined. You claim to be noble, yet perhaps you are a coward. You claim to have no complaint against me; but perhaps you do not have the skill to match me. Let us see what sort of warrior you really are!"

The Wolf attacks you and you quickly raise your weapon to defend yourself.

Are you using a silver weapon? If so, turn to **26**

If not, turn to **327**

114

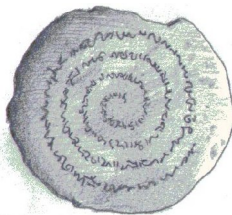
Things are getting desperate. Finally you decide to resort to stealing. You find a jeweller and enter his shop. You ask to see some pearls and the helpful man happily shows you a glass case full of the valuable spheres.

You wait until an opportune moment then knock him out and leave him inside the back of his shop. You leave all the jewels and search through his shop for money. You find 50 gold. You leave the shop and hurry back your inn. Gathering your party together, you once again approach the gate and either pay the Gate Fee or the bribe.

(Gate Fee is 12 gold for the wagon and oxen, plus 4 gold per paladin and merchant guard with you. The Bribe is ten gold and one of the following items: A holy amulet, a bejewelled dagger, a bejewelled Griffon Sword, a coat of Silver Scalemail, or a lifestone.)

Your crime leaves you feeling wretched. Lose half of your current LUCK points.

Turn to **333**



115

Making yourself comfortable, you settle in to watch Kianmay prepare for her bath. She smiles as she dips a toe into the water, finding it to her liking. She takes off her robe, revealing plain white undergarments. She unpins her hair, letting the long auburn locks fall down to her slender waist. She runs her hands through her hair. She removes the undergarments one by one, as you try to get as close to the peephole as possible.

She is a beautiful woman. Her soft creamy skin and shapely body hidden by her modest clothing. Her limbs are long and elegant, her hips wide and her breasts are round if not large. Your desire rises. She folds her undergarments and turns to lay them on a stool. Your desire suddenly goes cold. A short fleshy tail extends from above her soft, round bottom. Folded on her back you also see a small pair of wings. Moments later she stretches them, revealing their bat-like shape. Kianmay is a demon! You watch until she submerges herself in the water, then you move away. What does this mean? Maybe she does not serve the gods of light at all. Maybe the Diamond Key is an artefact of Evil.

Not knowing what else to do, you retreat down the passageway. What do you want to do now?

Explore the other passages? Turn to **262**

Go through the kitchens and return to your room? Turn to **308**

116

You agree to the undertaker's offer and he leads you through a side door down a flight of steps. You find yourself in a subterranean laboratory. There are several slabs with corpses stretched out on them. One corpse is growling. It has metal plates sewn into its skin and instead of fingers it has long, thick blades fixed onto its hands. You are glad it is tied down.

"That one still needs a few adjustments." The necromancer says, seeing your interest. He explains about the other corpses as he prepares equipment on his workbench. Not only soldiers, but zombies for servants, craftsmen, for any menial task. He talks eagerly of a world where all can live as kings, served by zombies.

You are appalled by the evil art, but can see some glimmer of practicality in his plans. As he melts silver in a small furnace, the necromancer laments the obstacles he has faced.

"Many people fear death. I tried to convince the Mayor of my vision. He couldn't overcome his fear. He wanted to burn down my laboratory and have me burnt at the stake. I had to kill him, and his corpse wasn't even useful." The necromancer seems more upset about the waste of the corpse than of the murder. "You see, what the person does in life determine what their corpse can do in death. Sometimes they get fixated on one task. Like my wife. She cooks all day unless I lock her in the cupboard. Of course when she was alive she did more than cook, but it is hard to predict what a corpse will do. I did reanimate the Mayor, but he kept just talking about fire, so I buried him. Maybe I will find a use for him one day. But it is not just humans who can be animated." He hurries over to a cabinet and takes out a jar, inside is a rat. "It is my plan to go to the King in Arantator and show him this. A king must have many enemies! This rat will creep into any place, as the perfect spy. You can see what it sees, using this crystal." He points to a round crystal ball on the

top of the jar. “You can also control the rat by focusing your thoughts on the crystal. If the King accepts this, then he might be ready to see the zombie soldier. Surely he will not burn me over a reanimated rat!” Suddenly, the necromancer brightens. “Maybe you could take the rat to the King for me! I can’t leave here yet. Would you do that for me?”

If you want to agree to take the rat, turn to **382**

If you think that this evil freak must die, turn to **216**

117

You move to the rear of the compound, to an alley shared by the rear of some shops. The alley is clear and clean, and there is nothing to climb up on or with. Still, you could try. You are unlikely to be seen if you try to climb here.

Climb the wall? Turn to **251**

To go back talk to the Warden, turn to **247**

Or if you have already seen the Warden you can just pay the fee by turning to **164**

118

You pull aside your cloak to show Kianmay the gold-inscribed silver scalemail armour. She tells you that it is Sea-Knight’s armour. It is just as protective as normal scale-mail, but when touched by water becomes light enough to allow you to swim in it, and breath underwater.

Return now to **293**

119

“I will free you,” you promise.

The woman doesn’t seem pleased or excited. Perhaps she has heard it said too many times before. “The demon is powerful. Too powerful for me to destroy alone. With our powers combined, we may be able to destroy it. Thus I shall add my power to yours.” She reaches out and touches your face. You feel something rush into you, and you feel a great energy within you. Your body trembles and feels like it will break into pieces, but the feeling passes after a moment.

Withdrawing her hands, she says: “I have given you as much of my power as your physical form can take.” You may restore your SKILL and STAMINA and LUCK to their initial levels, and increase all initial levels by 1 as long as this does not take you over 12. Temporarily adjust you *current* SKILL and STAMINA to three times your initial values. You will be told when to revert back to your initial levels.

The woman waves her hands in a complex gesture, and the fire on the rock rises and flattens out into a sheet. The fire parts and a swirling dark mist appears in a rectangular frame of fire.

“The doorway to hell,” she announces.

Drawing a deep breath, you step up onto the rock and into the doorway. You hold your breath as you plunge through the mist. Eventually it thins and you find yourself in a building like a temple built of blood-red stone. You let your breath out and inhale. The air is metallic and makes you cough. The hall is lined with closely spaced pillars, between which you can see a lake of molten rock. Beyond the lake, is a dark, dead forest beneath a sky of red filled with swirling black clouds.

The pillars are so close that you could barely squeeze between them. They are like the bars on a prison. One end of the hall you are in is filled with the black mist that continues to sit like a ball on the ground. Opposite that there is an archway, beyond which lies a larger hall.

You are about to head towards the arch when you notice a small hut in the distance outside the temple. You have never been to hell before, but intuitively know it is not a good idea to go wandering around. However, whoever is in the hut could tell you something about the demon you are going to face.

Do you want to squeeze through the pillars and go to the hut? Turn to **172**

To get this demon encounter over with, turn to **314**

120

Deciding that Kianmay is a fool, you ready your equipment, and after you are sure she is asleep you go out into the night. The first thing to do is hide the Diamond Key. Since you can't put it in its place in the temple, you return to the Shrine of Aringarator. The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **33**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **338**



121

You destroy the throat of the orc and it collapses in a gurgling heap. You kick it away and see the last of the orcs being finished off. The victory did not come without cost. Reduce by two the number of your merchant guards, and note that one of the paladin has been killed, leaving 5.

You look at the two remaining orcs, holding the savage beasts on chained leashes. Without discussion they turn and hurry away. You really should stop them, but are too weary.

You can take the ten suits of black chainmail from the orcs if you have room on your wagon. 5 suits are equal to one box. You may also keep one for yourself. You can also take the ten barbed spears to sell or use yourself. They also possess horned helms. 5 helms are equal to one box. If you choose to wear one of the helms, you can add 1 to your armour rating.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Barbed Spear	Fine spear	6

You continue on your way. You eventually make your way out of the mountains and reach the hill town of Yorman. The journey has taken ten days, so pay your surviving men ten gold each.

Turn to **135**

122

Approaching the table where the two guards sit, you introduce yourself. They invite you to sit and tell you their names are Brond and Tagenharn. Brond is a Southerner like you, while Tagenharn is a thickset Northerner with an axe and a long beard. You tell them you are going to Arantator, and are concerned about the Wolf.

“The Wolf is no danger to innocent men,” says Tagenharn, eyeing you with sudden suspicion. “He has unified these lands in peace.”

Tagenharn’s eyes almost shine as he describes the Wolf’s achievements. You glance at Brond, whom you see is silent and not going to argue with Tagenharn about the matter of the Wolf.

“Why does he call himself the Wolf?” you ask.

“He is a great warrior,” Tagenharn says proudly. “As swift and strong as a wolf.”

You keep an observation about wolves preying in packs on the weak to yourself. “I’ve heard many stories about the Wolf. It is said he intends to conquer Arantator.”

Tagenharn nods. “He will do it. He is the only man who can. His plan is subtle and sure.”

“What plan is that?” you ask.

Tagenharn looks at you with suspicion. “Why is that of interest to you?”

Brond finally speaks. “You brought up the plan, Tag. What man would not ask about it? And you need not think that King Darm knows any less than you.” Brond looks at you. “For the last month, the Wolf has been making travellers deliver goods to his agents inside the city. You can’t keep a thing like that secret. And it isn’t meant to be. Now if someone receives a delivery from the Wolf, the King doesn’t know if that person is an agent or if that’s just what the Wolf wants him to think.”

“What sort of things does he deliver?” You ask.

“Everything you can imagine. The Wolf is sly. Whatever he really wants delivered is sent along with a lot of other stuff. So the King knows what’s coming in and to who, but it doesn’t leave him any the wiser as to the Wolf’s plan.”

“A brilliant plan,” Tagenharn adds; as if his ignorance is equivalent to the likely success of the Wolf’s plan.

You chat with the merchant guards for a little longer, gleaning some more information about what to expect. All in all it just sounds like more bureaucracy. Brond tells you that there is talk of werewolves in the tundra and offers to sell you a silver bladed dagger for 10 gold. It is a fine piece with an ivory handle. You can buy it if you have your purse with you.

You thank the guards and look over the common room once more. The black-robed man is gone, but you can still talk to the fat man if you haven't done so already.

To talk to Fatty, turn to **276**

To go back upstairs, turn to **313**

123

Knocking on the door to Kianmay's room, you hear her call for you to enter and go in, finding her pacing impatiently. "Where have you been? We must be going."

"There is no need now," you say. "Count Raul is dead."

Kianmay looks at you with narrowed eyes. "You killed him."

You open your mouth, but the words don't come out. You suddenly feel ashamed. You don't need to speak. Kianmay slumps down in a chair. You are shocked to see tears fall down her face. "I could have ended this without death. Now one man is dead, and another has corrupted his soul even further." She looks at you. "Do you not understand why death is wrong?"

"We have to protect ourselves." You say, feeling a powerful need to justify yourself. "Otherwise evil men will rule the world!"

"The most evil thing in the world is to kill." Kianmay replies. "How can being evil save the world from evil?"

You can think of a lot worse things than killing. "Is killing worse than torturing someone for years?"

"Yes," Kianmay replies. "Because life is precious. A life of torture is better than no life at all. There are a million, million souls out there clamouring to be born as mortal beings. Yet so few of us are here. This mortal life is the most precious thing, for only then are we present in all three realms of the universe, and can thus become one with the universe. Even one who lives a life of torture can achieve this. This is the very purpose of life. But if you see life as no more than a brief passage of physical existence; then yes, you are right. Life is not so precious. It just is. You did not ask for it, you have it for no cost that you can see. Why regard it as precious? Thus you kill without thought."

"Then why do you have guards?" you ask.

"Mistake it not!" Kianmay replies. "I would sacrifice my life if it would save another." She stares into your eyes and you do not doubt her. "In truth they do not protect me, they protect what I carry. It must not fall into the hands of a man like Raul. It is a thing of life. With him it would become a thing of death."

"What is it?" you ask.

Kianmay is very unhappy with you, so you are surprised when she says: "Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, of course!" you exclaim.

She sits down at the table and takes out a slim wooden box. You sit down opposite her and she pushes it across the table. "This is the Diamond Key." You take it cautiously.

You look at the plain box and slowly open the lid. You see no glitter or shining jewel. The inside of the box is a cavity carved out of wood, in which sits a round black stone with marks inscribed on the surface. The marks are a delicate script, forming a spiral. The marks are narrow, but very deep. The stone is polished and crossed by fine lines of grey and blue, but apart from the writing looks to be of little value. It isn't diamond, and it isn't a key!

"Is this it?" You ask in a disappointed tone.

Kianmay reaches out and takes the box back, hiding it once more. "It is."

"Why did Raul want it?"

"Man who are obsessed by this mortal world often have foolish pursuits." Kianmay replies, giving you a meaningful look.

"At least tell me why it is called the Diamond Key," you say.

Kianmay looks at you, then nods slowly. "Perhaps this is a good opportunity for you to learn. Contemplate this, and you tell me why it is called this. I will give you this clue: The name in fact describes what it does, but is only clear to those who do not have confused minds. Hate, anger, greed; these things cloud the mind and it is not clear. Think on this name, and you will have your answer."

"Count Raul's mind wasn't clear!" you respond.

"Someone else told him what it does," Kianmay explains.

Knowing that you are not going to get any more information out of her, you leave.

Turn to **299**

124

Ten minutes pass without anything happening. You get up and begin to pace before eventually peeking through the tent door. You see warriors moving about, but no one is standing guard outside. Although most of the warriors wear the wolf's head breastplate, there are a fair portion that do not. As long as you walk like you are going someplace with something to do, you feel sure you could pass for one of the Wolf's men.

Another ten minutes pass, seeming like an eternity. The prospect of going out for a look around becomes more attractive. What do you want to do?

Have a look around? Turn to **269**

Stay where you are and wait patiently? Turn to **20**

125

He is speaking the truth about all that he has said.

If you want to accept his offer, turn to **486**

To decline and leave, turn to **474**

126

After the meal, your party moves on. You are passing now through thick forest. The canopy covers the road overhead, golden beams of sun cast down through the soft green light above. Birds sing, and butterflies often cross your path as they flit from one flowering bush to another. Kianmay is cheered greatly by this, exclaiming at butterflies that come close to her. A few even land on her, delighting her with their beauty. The butterflies avoid you. The journey is peaceful for another hour. But then you begin to sense something is wrong.

The birds are quiet and there is a sense of menace in the air.

Do you have more than 5 merchant guards?

If so, turn to **39**

If not, are you carrying any boxes of ivory or weapons?

If so, turn to **320**

If you have 5 or less merchant guards, but are carrying only dye, also turn to **39**

127

You shove the big man away.

“What’s it to you, fatty? Go roast another pig!” you sneer.

The small eyes widen and the flabby jaw clenches. Without a word he steps forward and swings a fist at your head. You dodge and sock him in the face. It is a solid hit, but he seems not to feel it, seizing you and throwing you against a cart before punching you in the head. You certainly feel that.

You are in a fully-fledged fistfight when a high-ranking soldier intervenes and breaks the fight up. The fat man, who proves to be the Supply Master, accuses you of being a thief.

The officer looks you up and down. “Who are you?”

“I’m a soldier in this army, you-...sir,” you say.

“What legion are you in? Who is your commanding officer?”

“Legion 3, sir. My commanding officer is Brond.”

The officer doesn’t look convinced. One of the onlookers then remembers seeing you brought in by a patrol. You are searched and anything you are carrying is confiscated by the officer. You are then escorted back to the tent where Kianmay still waits.

Turn to **20**

128

You search in your pack and pull out the pass you purchased from the fat man. You hand it to the guard. He unfolds it and reads it. “So what does the Wolf fear?”

“Weakness,” you say confidently.

The guard grunts and hands the pass back to you, then shouts at some young boys playing dice on the other side of the yard. They quickly ready your horses and open the gate, leading them out to you. You thank the boys and flip them copper coins.

You and Kianmay mount your horses and ride out from the camp, circling around to the far side and the road to Arantator. You expect pursuers to appear at any moment, but they do not and eventually the camp disappears over the horizon behind you.

Turn to **293**

129

You attack the giant orc.

GIANT ORC SKILL 12 STAMINA 30 DB 18 ARMOUR 0

Good luck. If you win, turn to **288**. If you lose, turn to **31**

130

You fight against the Wolf.

WOLF KING SKILL 16 STAMINA 18 DB 6 ARMOUR 5

If you kill the Wolf, turn to **24**

If it is you who is killed, turn to **173**

If you reduce the Wolf's STAMINA to 5 or less, while your own stamina is 15 or more, and want to call upon him to surrender, turn to **275**



131

Taking one of the daggers from in the room, you force the lock open as quietly as you can. Opening the cabinet, you find on the top shelf three open boxes, in which are phials of red, blue and green liquid. The 12 red potions are healing potions. The 6 blue phials contain SKILL potions. And the 2 green potions are LUCK potions.

On the bottom shelf you find another three boxes. In the first are two light crystals. The second contains a large bottle of white liquid. The third box contains an ivory amulet carved in the shape of an elephant.

If you want to drink the white liquid, turn to **86**

Otherwise, you can now leave...

...the room and go through another door, turn to **379**

...the wooden house and explore the camp, turn to **179**

132

Moving out into the hall, you leave the bathroom door slightly ajar in case you need to make a quick retreat. As you move quickly and quietly across the hall, you hear relaxed voices coming from the rooms off the other hall. Evidently the owner has guests.

Reaching the door, you listen carefully, and hearing nothing, ease the door open. It is dark inside. You wait for your eyes to adjust, and find that you are in a large bedroom. In the centre against the wall is a large four-posted bed. On the near side where you stand is a tall wardrobe and a cabinet either side of a door that must lead to whatever is behind the second door on the left in the hall. Soft light shines from under this door. In the space between the bed and the other door is a large round rug, a small table in the centre. You see the pale rectangle of a folded sheet of parchment on the table.

Opposite the bed is a set of painted screens partitioning the area. You can see over the top of the screens another wardrobe, long enough to take up the width of the wall.

If you have a light crystal with you and would like to search this room, turn to **328**

If you want to check out the door that has soft light shining underneath, turn to **28**

If you want to go back to the main hall and find another room to search, turn to **233**

133

Thrusting at the bandit, you quickly turn and run. After a few steps, you leap aside, and spin about. The bandit comes charging past you, and you lash out at him. He crashes to the ground and rolls to his feet, but you have run after him, and he rises just in time to receive your killing blow. He stares at you in surprise and resentment before collapsing at your feet.

Turn to **228**

134

You battle against the Wolf desperately. He is swift and strong, and wounds you many times. He is not untouched by your blade, but it seems to have no effect upon him. You draw blood, but it is as if the wounds heal themselves.

Finally you stagger and fall, and the Wolf's blade is at your throat. "Yield to me," he says.

"I yield!" you gasp.

The Wolf stands and sheaths his sword, then extends a hand to you. The assembled soldiers cheer appreciatively. The Wolf claps you on the shoulder and leads you back inside. You are led back into the throne room, where you find Kianmay waiting apprehensively. There is also a table on which you find all of your items.

"You are free to go," the Wolf announces.

You eagerly go to the table and begin to refill your pack. As you re-equip yourself, you hear Kianmay. "We cannot leave here without the one true treasure."

“What treasure do you speak of?” the Wolf asks.

“A black stone inscribed with a spiral of ancient script,” she replies.

“A simple stone such as you describe cannot be of more value than the coin and jewelled items your companion is eagerly reclaiming.”

“The stone of which I speak is more valuable than any jewel and must be returned to me.”

“What will you do with it?” the Wolf asks.

“I shall take it to the temple in Arantator.”

You move to stand next to Kianmay. Wasn't her mission meant to be a secret.

“Do you know that the King of Arantator is my enemy?”

“I do.” Kianmay replies.

“Why should I deliver this great treasure into his hands?” the Wolf asks.

“It is not for him, it is for this land.”

The Wolf raises one eyebrow. “What does that mean?”

Kianmay explains. “The stone must be placed in the earth under the temple of the White Goddess in Arantator. In the hands of any one man the stone is wasted.”

“The stone makes the man who bears it immortal. Why is this a waste?”

How does he know that? Kianmay does not seem surprised and continues. “The power which makes one man immortal can instead flow into the earth. The temple in Arantator is built upon one of the channels of power in the earth, and so the power of the stone shall be multiplied greatly and bring great blessings to this land and all who dwell here.”

“Even beyond Arantator?” the Wolf asks.

“Men build walls and draw lines upon maps. The earth knows not such things.”

“How far shall this blessing extend?”

“I do not know.” Kianmay replies.

The Wolf nods slowly, then gestures to the sorcerer.

The sorcerer reaches into the pouch on his belt and takes out the Diamond Key in its cloth bag. He approaches and hands the bag to Kianmay. She takes it eagerly. She bows. “I thank you, noble Wolf. You are a better man than most.”

“Farewell, and may you succeed on your noble mission,” the Wolf says.

Turn to **42**

135

The town of Yorman is swollen with those who serve travellers on the great trade route. It is the last town before the Mountains, and like Red River seems to be mostly inns and taverns. There is a market here where you can buy and sell goods. You can also hire more merchant guards at the same rate: 5 gold up front, and one gold per day. The unusual feature of the town is the orc garrison. Orcs and other chaotic races have always been more common in the northern lands, so the humans here are more accustomed to them. Even so, you see more than one inn or tavern advertising for humans only.

After you find an inn, you wander the markets in search of useful items. As you are inspecting some rope, you glance at the customer who reaches for a coil of rope next to you. Your heart leaps up into your throat, but you carefully show no outward sign, and continue to examine the rope in your hands. Looking from the corner of your eye, you study the man. He wears scalemail armour under a black cloak, and has

a helm with a rampant griffon on the front. This is one of the men who are pursuing Kianmay. You put down the rope and move away. You watch from the cover of a cobbler's stall as the soldier bargains with the rope-seller for the coil of rope. Eventually they agree and the Griffon Soldier walks off with the rope. You follow him as he continues his shopping.

He eventually leaves the markets and you trail him through the streets. He goes to an up-market inn and disappears inside. Is his master staying here, or is he just after a drink? Deciding there is only one way to find out, you enter the inn and make for the common room. You head straight for the bar, casually looking over the occupants of the room as you do so. You spy a group of Griffon Soldiers in one of the booths, talking and drinking quietly.

Slipping onto a seat at the bar, you order a beer from the barman. He eyes your travel-stained apparel distastefully, but brings your order. You pay him right away, and his mood improves considerably.

"How is business?" You ask him.

"Good, thank you, sir." The bartender says with the disinterest of an employee.

"This is a nice place. Anyone important own it?"

The bartender begins to clean a glass and moves closer. "No. Just wealthy. A retired merchant."

"You must get a lot of important folks staying here," you say as you turn your head, looking towards the Griffon Soldiers. "Except for them," you add, lowering your voice.

The bartender smiles. "Yes, sir. I can tell you all about them, who they serve, what room they are staying in; if you pay me 20 gold!"

The barman is obviously experienced with people trying to get information out of him. It is a hefty price, but the information could be useful.

To pay the barman, turn to **322**

If you would rather go and talk to the soldiers directly, turn to **221**

If you want to leave, now that you know where your pursuers are staying, turn to **69**

136

Staying where you are, you join the slow-moving column. It takes about an hour under the rapidly darkening sky to reach the gate. The frame of the gate is carved from marble into rampant lions, holding the great iron hinges in their polished claws. The gates themselves are the height of three men and a foot thick, banded in riveted iron. You glance nervously at the guards as you enter the cramped gate passage.

Most of the guards are occupied with lighting lamps, which are hung all through the gate passage. Only a lieutenant watches the passing travellers entering the city. You feel his eyes pass over you, as you and Kianmay are almost crushed in the press of people trying to get into the city before dark. As the crush of the crowd releases you onto the wide central avenue of the city, your heart is also released of its tension. You have made it inside! You keep moving away from the gate and do not pause until you feel completely safe.

Kianmay takes the lead and takes you through the wide streets. Here in the outer city the wide streets are surrounded by often rickety structures, small and made of wood more often than stone, and painted in a variety of colours. Only the dark slate rooves are uniform. Shops and residences as well as taverns and brothels sit side by

side in the outer city, the chaos of human existence filling the gaps between the well-planned, well-laid streets.

Another, less imposing wall seals off the inner city. There are guards here too, resplendent in dark blue cloaks and bright breastplates emblazoned with the tower and stars of the city's banner. You sense the vigilant air of the guards and suspect that they are looking for you. Kianmay is well-concealed in her hooded cloak, and you try to look the part of a caring husband with a new bride by putting your arm around her and beaming at the guards as you pass.

They look at you, but do not react and you proceed through into the inner city. Here there is greater order. The streets are narrower, but all the buildings are stone and the inner city is divided into sections. You are currently in the market quarter. Here there is a market and you can buy and sell any items you wish. You decide to sell the horses and get 80 gold for both plus the saddles and other equipment.

Once you are done, Kianmay leads you through another gate, this one unguarded, and you enter an expanse of gardens. Well cared for lawns are scattered with lone trees and groves of exotic and beautiful flowering bushes. Carefully tended flower beds are filled with blooms of all colours and shapes, filling the cold air with perfume. There are also lampposts which men dressed in the livery of the city are busy lighting, filling the gardens with a soft, warm glow.

At various locations around the gardens are temples and shrines of all sizes and styles, dedicated to a plethora of deities. The Kings of Arantator have always prided themselves on the diversity of the gods that dwell in their city. Kianmay leads you down a path and you see ahead a large marble temple surrounded by oaks. A wide stone staircase leads into a trio of decorated arches. A plinth rises from the centre of the stairway, upon which stands a life-sized statue of a woman in a flowing robe. Her hands are empty, held out as if to bless or embrace the world.

Your attention is soon drawn to something else. There are paladin guarding the front of the temple, standing watch beneath the arches while an officer strolls back and forth. Something about their manner arouses your suspicion, and you see Kianmay start to slow her steps.

"Keep walking!" You hiss at her.

She matches your step. "They are not paladin."

"I know," you reply. "Keep on the path, we'll take the turn to the left."

As you draw near, you see the officer step forward and look down at you intently. You let him see you glance at him with disinterest as you and Kianmay turn to the left and make your way along the path to the shrine next door.

Stepping into the dim interior, you look around at gilded statues of a warrior bearing a huge scimitar in one hand, and a dragon's head in the other. A marble sarcophagus fills the shine, and a sign written in several languages tells you that you have entered the shine of Aringarator the Dragon-Slayer. You are momentarily distracted as you realise you are standing near the hero of many of your childhood stories. Aringarator himself!

"What are we going to do?" Kianmay asks in a worried tone.

You see a large alcove filled with a fine statue of the Dragon-slayer, a jade basin at its feet for inserting incense. There is a basket of incense to one side, along with a strongbox with a slot in the top. Perhaps you should prey for a blessing.

Kianmay notices your excitement and you tell her about Aringarator. Kianmay does not look impressed. "I know of at least five cities that claim to have the body of Aringarator entombed within their walls. We need to speak to the High priest Zarim. It is too dangerous for me to go there. You must go."

“They might recognise me, too.” You protest.

“Then you will need a disguise.” Kianmay muses. “Let us find an inn.”

Leaving the shrine, you make your way back through the gardens and out another gate into the traveller’s quarter. It is a small section of the city with many inns, taverns and merchant houses. You find a small but fine-looking inn called the White Garden. It has a number of small rooms opening out into a garden filled with white-flowering bushes surrounding a pond filled with white lilies and a pair of swans.

The inn costs one gold per night, and each room has a bathroom. The water comes through pipes and you are able to fill the bath yourself by turning a valve. You are not required to pay up front, and are handed the key by an apple-cheeked woman who promptly leaves you alone. The main room is a sitting room, with the bathroom to one side, a bedroom to the other, and a small dining room and kitchen out the back.

Once you are settled in, Kianmay tells you her plan. “You must go and disguise yourself as a wealthy man. Go and buy a fine robe and a hat. Then buy an offering for the temple. Either lamp oil or incense, then go to make an offering. Once you are inside, ask to see the High Priest. When you speak to him, be careful. Don’t give everything away. Zarim himself can be trusted, but there could be spies there, or some magic.”

“The markets are probably closed now,” you say. “We will have to wait until tomorrow.”

“Probably?” Kianmay raises one eyebrow. “So there is a chance we can do this tonight.”

She is clearly impatient, but you are tired and don’t fancy wandering around the city at night on the slim chance a vendor is still open.

If you want to go anyway, turn to **227**

If you want to argue with her, turn to **347**

137

You spread your hands. “I don’t have any magical items to give you.”

The priest frowns. “I told you the price before you accepted my services,” the priest says.

“Well, you have done a good deed. Can’t you be happy with that?” you grin.

“I am a priest of order, not of good. Transactions must be orderly. Deceit is an act of chaos! So be it! Go, but know that you are cursed!”

He waves his hands and shouts a word that makes your insides tremble. You stagger away and flee from the room. You run through the temple, losing your balance many times and falling against the walls. When you reach the lawns outside, you stumble through the gardens and into the refuge of the Shrine of Aringarator, where you collapse on the floor.

You have been cursed terribly. Lower your *initial* SKILL and STAMINA by 1, and your *initial* LUCK is now zero. From now on your will always be unlucky. After a few minutes you feel better, but it is late now and the gardens are abandoned. Plus you left your oil behind. You now have no other choice but to try and break into the temple.

Turn to **273**

138

Skolling your beer, you stand up.

“I can’t be bothered answering your questions now. Goodnight.” You flip a copper coin to the barman and go upstairs.

You knock gently on Kianmay’s door before entering. She is not asleep yet. She is reading by the light of a candle. As you close the door behind you, you see Penmark in his bedroll on the floor. Well, you weren’t planning anything anyway. Laying out your own bedroll, you settle in for an uncomfortable night’s sleep.

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **366**

If you are unlucky, turn to **171**

139

You watch in safety as Penmark finishes off the raiders at the cart, then hurries to help finish off the rest of the raiders. You emerge to help with cleanup, stabbing one raider in the back as he stumbles towards you. Once the raiders are all dead, you look around to see the horseman still sitting in the distance. He raises his hand to you in some kind of salute, and gallops away.

Going to the nearest corpse, you tear open the man’s tunic. To your surprise instead of a wolf’s head there is a tower surrounded by three stars. It is the sign of Arantator. You quickly check the other raiders and find it is the same. You wonder if there is some deception afoot. The raiders were able to sneak up on you without being seen on the treeless tundra. The land is not perfectly flat, but 25 men should not have been able to sneak up on you unless they were born and bred on the tundra. Arantator might be located in the tundra, but it is a great city full of soft princes, city-bound craftsmen and women who keep homes.

The men do seem to be relatively clean, as if they had bathed recently. Arantator is famous for its hot springs, and bathing in the city is a custom. A custom that is noticeably absent for the folk who live on the tundra. But why would men from Arantator attack you?

“They are after the Diamond Key.” Kianmay announces. “I feared this would happen.”

“What do you mean?” you ask.

She looks at you. “Arantator is our final destination. The Diamond Key is to go to the temple there. The High Priest in Erinharn was convinced it was appropriate to inform King Darm of our mission, since his land will benefit from the blessing of the Key. But he is an old and ambitious man. He wishes the Key for himself.”

“Why does everyone want this Key,” you ask.

Kianmay looks at you with disappointment. “Have you not figured it out yet?”

“The Diamond Key is the key to life,” you reply. “But I know not its particular powers.”

Kianmay pauses. “The Key, when set into the earth, fills the surrounding land with the essence of life. Plants will flourish on barren ground. Those who eat of the growth of the land will grow strong. No famine or natural disaster will strike the land that bears the Diamond Key. You know well the fortune that Erinharn has received over the last 500 years. That was because of the Diamond Key. But the Diamond Key can also be used selfishly. He who carries it upon his body is filled with the

essence of life and is immortal. This is why Count Raul wanted it. That is why King Darm wants it. We needed to move the Key because too many people in Erinharn had learned of it. It was foolish to inform King Darm. But our High Priest imagined he would become a guardian of the Key.”

She shakes her head. You frown. “If King Darm is hunting us, we cannot go to Arantator like this. The horseman who escaped will reveal our identity.”

Penmark looks around. “We cannot pass undetected through these lands.”

Kianmay looks worried. “What can we do, then?”

Penmark looks at you, his eyes piercing deep into you. “There is only one plan that may succeed. We shall continue on to Arantator with the cart, while the two of you go your own way alone.”

“But you might be attacked again!” Kianmay says to Penmark.

The paladin nods. “I hope so, Blessed One. For then you and the Key will be safe.”

Kianmay does not like the drastic plan, but the strength of her mission makes her agree. So it is that you and Kianmay prepare your belongings and taking a horse each set off across the land, making for another town you know to the east. You may take one of the raiders breastplates, but only if you wear it. The paladin and the remaining guards take the cart and remain on the main road. You take one quarter of the money in the strongbox.

You ride across the tundra, often looking over your shoulder. Soon the cart is gone, and you look to the way ahead.

Turn to **237**



140

You invite the owner in and he thanks you. He and his servant proceed straight to the sitting room and you follow, joining Laremidan by the fireplace. Sitting opposite him, he smiles cheerfully. “I hear that things are not going well down south. Some strange curse is upon the land. Is this so?”

You shrug. “People always complain. They say there is a famine in Erinharn, but in truth the fields are still fuller than other lands can boast in their best years.”

The servant offers you a tray with two goblets of wine on it. You take one and the servant offers the other goblet to Laremidan. The owner sips the wine, then raises his goblet to you. “A fine year! Good wine is truly a rarity in these lands.” He nods for you to try it some. “You are travelling with your wife?”

“No, I am her guide,” you answer.

This could be a good opportunity to find out about the Wolf, if he is a danger to you travels. However, Laremidan might be offended if you do not drink his wine.

Do you want to drink the wine while you talk? If so, turn to **76**
If you don't trust the owner, then avoid drinking by turning to **222**

141

Determined to do away with this beast, you leap forward, bringing your weapon to bear. The Wolf moves quickly, far more quickly than you expect. He also moves in a direction you do not expect: towards you. He steps inside your attack and seizes your arm, hurling you over in the air with terrific strength. You land with a painful thump in the circle of men. They reach out and hold you to the ground, each arm filled with the same great strength as the Wolf.

The Wolf moves to where you can see him. "You seem to believe a werewolf must die, regardless of honour. You have much to learn. Therefore, I shall be your master and teach you." Looking to one of his men, he says: "Bite him."

One of the warriors leans forward. A chill of fear runs through you as the man's dark eyes turn golden, gleaming with a wild power that seems barely contained in the human form. He opens his jaw, revealing teeth that grow long and pointed. Seizing your arm, he brings it to his mouth and bites you on the forearm.

He releases your arm and the rest of the werewolves release you. You scramble away from the circle and stumble to your feet. Apart from the wound in your arm, you feel no different.

As if reading your thoughts, the Wolf says: "With the next full moon, which is in ten days, you will undergo your first transformation. Then you shall be changed. Then you will return to me. Now go."

Turn to **42**

142

You leap over to the table and seize your weapons. You turn on the man and rush at him. The man presses his hands together and speaks a word that makes your insides vibrate. From between his hands a blade of blazing blue-white fire appears. He holds the blade of flame in one hand like a sword, and leaps to meet you.

Because of the glare of the fire, reduce your SKILL by one point for this battle. You have no time to drink any SKILL potions.

SORCERER SKILL 10 STAMINA 20 DB 10 ARMOUR 8

If you win, turn to **46**

If you are losing and want to run, turn to **144**



143

The medium-sized chest is lacquered blood-red, and the top is inlaid with a golden skull, with garnets in the eye sockets. You open it and find inside a bowl. It is a plain wooden bowl, but it makes your hand tingle when you pick it up. The inside is stained black. You can take the bowl with you if you wish.

What now?

Look inside one of the other chests? Turn to **201**

Just leave? Turn to **4**



144

Unable to match the sorcerer and his flaming sword, you make a final attack, then dash for the exit. The sorcerer behind you calls out another magical word. As you reach the door, something slams into you, and your head is smashed against the door. You fall to the ground unconscious and float in painful blackness for what seems like an eternity.

Eventually you awake to a strange rocking sensation. As your mind clears, you gradually become aware that you are tied to a horse. You lift your head, seeing a cloaked figure on a horse ahead of you, holding the reins of your mount. You look around, and see nothing but the road, winding across the tundra.

“Where am I?” you ask.

The figure turns, and you see that it is Kianmay. She grins at you and draws the horses to a stop. “Awake at last!” She dismounts and begins to untie your hands.

“What happened?” you ask.

Kianmay is smiling. “You were hit with a magical javelin! Serves you right for sneaking about and thieving!”

Her eyes sparkle with amusement. You rub your wrists and sit up. Your whole body is aching as you get down from the saddle, and look back down the road. “The Wolf let us go?”

“Oh, yes.” Kianmay says happily. She puts a cord from around her neck, revealing the cloth bag. “He returned to me the Diamond Key.”

“So he didn’t know what it was?” you ask.

“Oh, he knew,” Kianmay replies. “At least he knew it could make him immortal. The sorcerer you met discerned its nature. The Wolf stopped us because he knew that King Darm was looking for us. He just wanted to know why. I told him what I wanted to do with the Key and he let us go! He is a noble and just man.”

She still seems amused at something. “What is so funny?” you ask her.

Kianmay grins. “He judged you to be a thief, so he kept all of your things, but equipped you for the rest of the journey.”

Looking down you see that you are dressed in plain leather armour with an undyed woollen cloak. At your belt is a purse, which contains only 20 gold coins, and a plain, but serviceable dagger. On the saddle of your horse hangs a similarly plain but serviceable longsword in a leather scabbard. All of your other belongings are gone.

“What is so funny about this?” you want to know, lamenting the loss of your magical items.

“Oh, it is not so funny as fitting, I think.”

She climbs back into the saddle and you have no choice but to follow.

Turn to **293**

145

The assassin falls dead and you scoop up the strongbox and quickly leave the apartments. Hurrying across the stable yard, you keep a watch out for Raul’s soldiers, but they all seem to still be upstairs, lying in wait. You make it out into the streets, and concealing the strongbox under your cloak, you try to walk casually.

Returning to the barman’s apartment, you flip the relieved man a gold coin and leave with your merchant guard. You return to your inn and go into the closed common room. Setting the strongbox on a table you break the lock with your dagger.

Inside you find 200 gold coins. Taking the stash back to your room, you store it safely and go to see Kianmay.

Turn to **123**



146

The sorcerer leads you over to a rack where there are three weapons. The first is a long-bladed spear, with a short shaft bound in leather cord. The blade is single edged with a point for chopping and stabbing, inscribed with decorative designs.

The second is a trident with a long central prong, the other two prongs curving outwards. The prongs are silver; but the sorcerer assures you the silver is plated over strong steel. The long shaft is of polished wood with bands of silver at foot intervals along it, and the base is a silver ball.

The last is a pole-axe, the steel head inlaid with gold in the shape of runes of power. Even the wooden shaft is carved with decorative grooves that are inlaid with gold.

All the pieces are somewhat decorative; gifts sent to the Wolf. But each is well-made and functional.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Chopping Spear	Fine Spear	6

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Silver Trident	Trident	4

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Rune Poleaxe	Fine Spear	6

If you don't like any of these and want to ask for your own weapons, turn to **295**

Otherwise, you choose your weapon and the Sorcerer leads you through the house to an adjoining compound.

Turn to **258**

147

The town of Hopenwood is a small waystop on the trade route. But any town is a welcome sight to a weary traveller. Your party finds an inn with vacant rooms, and are charged two gold for three rooms, and another gold for stabling and feed for all of your horses and oxen.

There is a small market here where you can buy and sell any goods. There are also many taverns, and you can hire as many merchant guards as you can afford. The initial pay is 5 gold, with a wage of 1 gold per day. You may also fire guards *after* you have paid them for their work

As night falls, you knock on the door of Kianmay's room. After a few moments, you hear her call for you to enter. Opening the door, you look inside. The priestess is wrapped in a white robe, staring out the small window. It is dark outside and she cannot hope to see anything; except her own face.

Coming inside, you close the door. There is a small table with two chairs and you take a seat, waiting for her. After a minute she comes and takes the other seat. She seems distracted, and asks you how the finances are going. You tell her it is all fine. She asks you some more questions about the way ahead and you tell her what you know.

Eventually she speaks what is on her mind. "Tonight you will sleep in here with me."

You are shocked. "What?"

"A man came to speak to me while you were out. I believe he is an agent of...those who pursue us. He asked me lots of questions, but I said I didn't know anything. I said he would have to speak to my husband. I am pretending that is you."

Some colour comes to her cheeks at last.

"So...I will sleep on the floor?" you enquire.

Her eyes widen. "Of course!"

It would probably be a good idea for you to leave now. If you have a wooden bowl you wish Kianmay to try and identify, turn to **205**. If you have a large emerald for her to identify, turn to **174**. Return to this passage when you are done.

Otherwise you head downstairs to the common room. Ordering a beer from the bar, you take it to a table in the corner and relax. You watch the other inhabitants of the common room for a while, but everyone seems content to keep to themselves.

After a while a man enters the common room. He looks to be an official of some sort, dressed in a long coat with a crest on the breast, and a round cap on his balding head. He looks over the inhabitants, then gazing at you thoughtfully, approaches.

“Good evening, sir,” he says with a small bow. “Are you with the caravan that came in late this afternoon?”

“Why does that interest you?” you ask rudely.

“I spoke with your wife earlier,” the man says. “She said you could answer my questions.”

“It is unlikely that I would bother to do that,” you respond.

The man smiles mirthlessly and takes a seat at your table. “I am the customs clerk. The Royal Chancellor in Armintine has appointed me to keep a watch here for contraband. This is merely a routine check. Of course if I think there is some...irregularity, I can have the Town Warden confiscate your wagon for a thorough search.”

Customs Clerks are the bane of merchants everywhere. Some cities made them inspect every shipment. Others let the clerks use their discretion, which sometimes was even worse.

“If you wanted a bribe, why didn’t you just say so!” you complain, not too quietly, lifting your purse onto the table. “How much to you usually ask for?”

The clerk glances about in embarrassment, actually blushing. “I’m not asking for a bribe!” He grins nervously at the people at the next table. Lowering his voice he hisses at you. “Put that away! Just tell me what you are carrying!”

You tell him, and he pulls out a small ledger and a pouch from which he takes a small inkpot and pen. It looks like he is settling in for a long list of questions.

What do you want to do?

Answer his questions? Turn to **84**

Leave? Turn to **138**

Make fun of him until he goes away? Turn to **268**

148

Passing the first door, you peek around the end of the archway and see beyond a short passage a well-lit worshipping hall. You venture inside the passage. You hear the ever-so soft swishing of skirts and the soft fall of cloth slippers after it is too late.

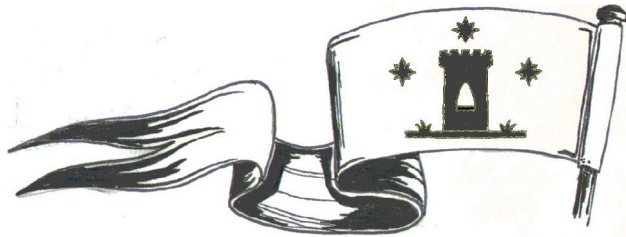
A priestess steps into view in the worship hall, heading towards the corridor you are in. She sees you and starts to smile, but then looks at you with apprehension and suspicion, glancing to the side as if to call for help from someone else in the worship hall. You are out of place, and doubt you can quietly explain away her suspicions. Turning away, you run back down the corridor as the woman calls after you, telling you to stop. You decide to defy her and dash back through the temple, crossing the mess hall and making it out into the gardens. You flee the temple and circle around back to the Shrine of Aringarator. You watch from the shadows in the entrance for many minutes. There is no sign of alarm and you relax.

Cursing your luck, you decide now the only thing to do is to go to the Palace and try to rescue Kianmay. But before you step into the lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key.

The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**



149

Your final attack is so savage that the demon's head is severed and rolls across the floor. The body suddenly turns to dust, thick white worms like giant maggots squirming in its depths. Disgusted you step away wearily. You see something glinting in the dust and you use your weapon to flick it out. Picking it up, you find a small crystal ball on a golden chain. There is a red and black liquid swirling inside.

You can take the hell-orb with you; or you may wish to leave it behind since it was embedded inside the demon's body.

Leaving the hall, you walk back towards the mist and enter it, once more holding your breath. The mist abruptly clears as you step out of the doorway once more. You step down and the woman embraces you. You wearily grasp her back. As you wonder exactly how grateful she is, you feel the strength being drained from your body. (Restore your SKILL and STAMINA to their initial levels.)

You collapse on the ground, feeling weak. The woman smiles at you. "Your weakness will pass. You have won a great victory for good. I am now free."

She waits for you to feel strong enough to stand, then escorts you back to your camp. "I wish to reward you," she says. "So I will tell you this: To regain the Diamond Key, answer 'LIFE'."

"To regain it? What do you mean?"

She turns away, and suddenly a great white horse is there. She climbs onto its back. "Farewell," she says and gallops away.

You spend the rest of your watch in confusion, and when the time comes you wake one of the paladin to take the watch and collapse into your blankets.

Turn to **207**

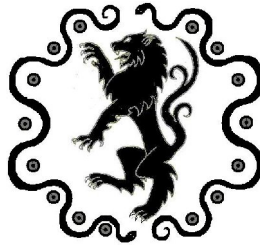
150

The two soldiers start in alarm as you appear, a furious shadowy figure framed by the dull red light of the hearth. You lunge at one as he draws his sword, but manage to only wound him. Now you must fight both at once.

KING'S SOLDIER 1	SKILL 7	STAMINA 10	DB 6	ARMOUR 5
KING'S SOLDIER 2	SKILL 7	STAMINA 18	DB 6	ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **332**

If you die, turn to **309**

**151**

You feel the air start to thicken around you, but suddenly it thins again, and your charge is barely paused as you throw yourself at the old man. He only has time to look startled before you end his life.

He falls forward onto the desk with a thump. Deciding that Zarim must be held in the palace, you take back the Diamond Key and search the study for anything that can aid you. On the man himself you find a golden ring that looks magical. In the drawers of the desk you find a dagger with runes etched on the blade and an ivory disc the size of your palm with an onyx lion inlaid in one side.

There is also a cabinet next to the door and a search of it reveals a box of ten healing potions and a single phial of green luck potion. You also find a foot-high statue of the white goddess that is exquisitely carved from jade..

Leaving the study before the death is discovered, you make your way back through the temple and out into the gardens. Now you must make your assault on the palace. But before you walk into the lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key, so you head back to the Shrine of Aringarator.

The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**



152

You wait a few minutes for the men to settle, then slowly slide out from under the couch. You grip your weapons and ready yourself. You have taken off all your jewellery and other items to sleep and are dressed in only your clothes. You don't want to risk searching through your pack, so you leave it behind.

You take a deep breath, then charge out of the cover of the furniture.

Test your SKILL. If you are skilful, turn to **14**
If you are unskilful, turn to **150**

153

You take the sword from the skeletal fingers and lift it in your hands. Although it is a two handed weapon, it is magically light in your hands. It has a golden hilt set with opals, and the blade has silver words inscribed on both sides.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
King's Broadsword	Fine sword	10

Thanking the crow once more, you leave the ruined palace and make your way back through Darken Wood. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. "Do you have it?" Her eyes are wild.

"Yes." You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

154

As you draw near, the bandit suddenly snatches up his sword and spins about, whipping it from its scabbard. You jump back and bring your own weapon to hand. The bandit grins and advances on you.

"Foolish!" he sneers. "You think I am a common bandit? I am a warrior in the army of Gilmore the Groat!"

You cannot flee from this battle.

BANDIT SKILL 9 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 1

If you win, turn to **228**
If your stamina is reduced to 5 or less, turn to **281**

155

You feel the helm you are wearing tingle around your brow and suddenly the men before you blur. The blurs clear and you find yourself looking at a circle of wolves. You realise that the helm has the power of true sight. It will reveal the true nature of your enemies. The Wolf and his cohorts are all werewolves!

If you were carrying a necromancer's wand when you were captured, turn to **60**
If not, turn to **264**

156

Gritting your teeth, you return to the wagon and count out the gold. You hand the coins over to the grinning orc and he eagerly takes them in his clawed hands. This is one orc who doesn't prefer a life of raiding. You then kneel down as promised and spit out the apology, causing the assembled orcs to laugh uproariously.

Turn to **333**

157

The lock clicks open and you return the picks to your pocket. Carefully you push the door open and see a dark room beyond. You slip inside and close the door behind you. There is light coming under the door, and you wait a few moments for your eyes to adjust. The bathroom is furnished with side tables covered with bottles and vases of flowers. There is also another door in the wall to the right, but it is set in the wall, and there is no gap under it. You proceed around the tub and up to the main door. Listening carefully, you hear nothing and slowly open the door.

You are looking out into a hall. You know immediately that this is not another room for rent. This must be the owner's quarters. The hall has four doors, the bathroom being the fifth door in the end of the hall. At the opposite end there is an archway leading to another hall, in the walls of which you can see more doors. A set of double doors at the far end looks like the entrance to the quarters.

Where do you want to go?

The first door on the left? Turn to **132**

The second door on the left? Turn to **181**

The first door on the right? Turn to **229**

The second door on the right? Turn to **278**

If you would prefer to stop sneaking around and go back to your quarters for dinner, turn to **308**

158

The bandits set only one sentry, and it is a simple matter to wait for him to wander off to relieve himself and quietly stab him in the lung. You nod to Penmark and you and your men move into the camp. Most of the bandits are in their tents, but a couple are wrapped in blankets near the fire. You approach them first and trying to keep

calm, sink your dagger into their throats one by one, clamping a hand over their mouths to prevent them from crying out. You can see bottles lying about and guess that most have drunk at least some alcohol.

You carefully approach the first tent. You can hear soft snores from within, and as your eyes adjust, you crawl over the huddled forms, killing them one by one. The grisly task done, you leave.

You begin to move towards the second tent when suddenly there is a shout behind you. You have been discovered. The bandits scramble for their weapons, then stagger towards you. You run for the forest. Trying to fight so many in the open would be suicide.

You move into the darkness of the forest and turn around to face the bandits, who have armed themselves with torches. If the paladin has crossbows with them, roll one die. If not, roll two. The resulting number is how many of the bandits you will personally have to face in the forest. You can fight them one at a time by hiding in the shadows and fighting them in the thick undergrowth.

Use the following statistics for each bandit that you face, and be thankful some of them are drunk:

BANDIT SKILL 5 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 0

If you die, turn to **309**

If you win, turn to **185**

159

You pay the asking price and the clerk rings a bell. Two boys hurriedly appear through a small door. One hurries outside to take the horses, the other remains to lead you to your room. Kianmay comes in, her face looking grey with fatigue. The boy leads you through a large door and into a long corridor. Your room doesn't have a number, it has a name, called the *Auburn Chambers*. Inside the walls are dark red polished wood panels, and the polished floor boards have a similar hue. The boy takes a taper and quickly lights lamps. There are four doors in the entrance hall, and the boy gives you a quick tour, showing you a sitting room with a writing table, a bedroom, a dining room and finally a bathroom. In the bathroom is a large copper tub set into a raised floor. A small door in the wall must be to let bucket-bearing servants in.

After the boy leaves, Kianmay says to you: "Can we afford this?"

"The other inn didn't look reputable." You say. "All rooms come with free bathing. You should take it."

She looks at you gratefully, but shakes her head. "I'm a priestess, not a princess. I should be able to endure such hardship."

"We have already paid for it," you point out. "And you will need your strength for when we arrive in Arantator. You will face a lot of hardship then. At least relax tonight."

Kianmay allows herself to be convinced. You settle into the rooms, setting up your bedroll in the sitting room. You go to the dining room and pull on the velvet cord that hangs in the corner. A serving girl soon knocks on your door. You tell her to bring any food that does not contain meat. She smiles and bows, quickly retreating to hurry back to the kitchens.

There is another cord in the corner of the bath room, and you pull upon it. Within a minute the small door opens and a youth pokes his head in. "A hot bath for a lady." You say. He disappears once more. That done, you go to see Kianmay, knocking on the bedroom door. She calls for you to come in.

Entering, you find her sitting at a dresser, turned in her chair to face you. She beckons for you to come over. You approach, seeing the Diamond Key on the dresser beside her. She also has a small cloth bag on a woven cord. She slips the Key into the bag, and pulls the cord to close the bag. She hands it to you.

"From now on, I think it is best if you carry this."

"Me? Why?" you ask.

"You are in more danger than I am," she replies. "And you will try to protect me if I am endangered. It is best for you to take this. Furthermore, if we are challenged again, you might need to leave me as we have left the others, and take the Key alone to its destination."

"I don't even know where that is," you protest.

"The Temple of the White Goddess in Arantator," she replies. "The High Priest there is named Zarim."

With nothing else to say, you put the cord around your neck and hide the Diamond Key under your clothes and armour. "I've ordered dinner, and your bath," you tell her.

She smiles and thanks you. You leave the room, and wander in to watch the servants prepare the bath. A precession of servants pass buckets of steaming water up through the small doorway and empty them into the bath, skilfully passing the empty buckets back down again. The bath rapidly fills. The youth you saw earlier has lifted the floorboards to access a chamber under the copper bath. He is stoking hot coals in a cavity beneath the bath to keep the water warm as long as possible.

With practised efficiency, the bath is filled and the servants vanish through the small doorway. Standing in the empty room, you look at the small door with curiosity. Obviously it leads to the kitchens. You also wonder how secure it is. There doesn't seem to be any way to lock the door from within. Going over to the door, you manage to pull it open by its rim. Inside is a small passage. You go inside and close the door behind you. Following the passage, it leads to a junction where there are several other passages and a stairway leading downwards. You go down the stairway and find yourself in a boiler room. A huge cast iron tank sits over a fire pit, stocked by the youth you saw earlier. Against one wall is a line of bells, cords extending from them through holes in the roof. The bells are numbered.

Your curiosity satisfied, you go back to passage that leads to your room. As you reach the small door, you hear movement within. There is also light coming in from a hole in the wall above the door. Putting your eye to it, you realise it is a peephole! Inside you can see Kianmay wrapped in a robe, testing the water with her toe.

Do you want to stay and watch? Turn to **115**

If you are a gentleman, and decide to explore instead, turn to **262**

160

You listen at the door, hearing the muffled relaxed voices of the owner and his guests. Even so, the sounds do not seem to be coming from immediately beyond. You open the door carefully and see a small, dim room filled with racks of wine

bottles. Another door opposite must lead to where the owner is entertaining his guests. You close the door and head back into the hall to search elsewhere.

Turn to **233**

161

Your desperate rush raises the alarm as you return. Penmark and Kianmay gather close to hear your report. Penmark's face is grim, while Kianmay's eyes are wide with fearful anticipation.

"There are bandits ahead," you say. "An infamous band led by Gilmore the Groat. They saw me."

Kianmay has not heard of Gilmore the Groat. You tell her what you know. Penmark mentions some extra details that he has heard. Almost every member of the party chips in with some story, and by the end Kianmay's lips are pressed together in a tight line, and her eyes are filled with determination.

"We must destroy this man!" she says.

"They are already probably looking for me," you say. "We will be lucky to escape as it is. Gilmore will also have many men, more than we have here. The best thing we can do is turn around and go back."

Kianmay is not happy with this, but Penmark adds his advice that seeking out a superior enemy that is on the alert is poor strategy. Eventually Kianmay agrees to turning the wagon around and taking a different route to the North.

The detour makes the journey 10 days long. Pay your men ten gold coins each, then turn to **147**

162

You realise that cutting through the flesh is not going to work, so you look around with renewed desperation. There is a hole in one corner with a grill over it. You lift up the grill and see water glimmering far below. The drain is not much wider than you, and you don't fancy dropping in and getting caught in there, but it is the only other way out.

Taking a deep breath you step out over the hole and plunge down into the watery darkness. As the water rushes past you, you immediately feel it open out around you, and with your light crystal in hand you see that you are in a submerged chamber that is a kind of junction. You swim towards an opening and through a short passage. Coming into another chamber you see an opening in the ceiling and push up towards it. Your head breaks the surface and you breathe in air gratefully. Looking up you see another grill a couple of metres above you.

Pushing against the sides of the drain, you slowly edge yourself upwards, but it is hard work...

Test your STAMINA. Roll four dice. If the result is the same or less than your *current* STAMINA, turn to **503**. If it is greater, turn to **527**

163

You drop the gold coins into the man's chubby hand and once more wait for him to finish eating. Finally he says: "The Wolf fears not fire, he fears weakness in those who swear to serve him."

"All that is the password?" you ask.

The fat man looks at you impatiently. "They will ask you what the Wolf fears. You can just say *weakness*." You make a note of this word.

As you stand to leave the fat man, the two merchant guards walk past you, one of them giving you a nod. You return the acknowledgement. Everyone else in the room is drunk, so you head back upstairs.

Turn to **313**

164

You pace impatiently, and a few minutes later a clerk emerges. You shout at the man for a while, but he just apologises and does not budge an inch. Eventually you throw 15 gold to him and he thanks you.

Half an hour later the wagon is once again hitched to your oxen. If you are carrying weapons or ivory, half of them are gone, the grinning guardsmen claiming to know nothing about that. Unable to do anything about it, you continue on your way.

You leave the town of Hopenwood and make your way towards the Kilandar Mountains.

Turn to **16**

165

One of the guards at the gate directs you to wait, and you and Kianmay stop your horses behind a traveller with a pair of donkeys. The traveller has a large quantity of herbs with him, and it takes a long time to convince the guards that they are not illegal.

It is almost dark by the time the man is finally let through. You and Kianmay finally knee your horses forward, and the guards take the bridles of the horses.

"What is your business in Arantator?" asks a lieutenant crisply. His tone worries you. He is looking at you and Kianmay with great interest. You see another guard take out a folded piece of parchment from his belt. He unfolds and peers at it, then looks at Kianmay, then back at the paper. He opens his mouth to speak.

You have seen enough. You jam your heels into your horse's flanks, and jerk on the reins. The horse whinnies and rears, pulling the bridle from the grasp of the guard that holds your horse. You urge your horse forward, lashing out on both sides with your weapon to keep the guards clear. You break free into the street, and circle about, looking back at Kianmay. Her horse is held by four guards. There will be no escape for her. She meets your eye and makes a flicking gesture with one of her fingers. She is telling you to run, and take the Diamond Key you wear with you.

You grit your teeth, but there is nothing else you can do. You wheel the horse around and gallop off down the street to get some distance between you and the gate. You ride into an alley and abandon the horse, then move into the crowds on the streets. You make your way into the markets and find a vendor who sells cloaks,

trade in your cloak for another of a different colour. You relax and try to blend in. While in the market you can buy and sell any goods you wish.

You wander about for half an hour, until the immediate danger of pursuit has passed. Here in the outer city the wide streets are surrounded by often rickety structures, small and made of wood more often than stone, and painted in a variety of colours. Only the dark slate roofs are uniform. Shops and residences as well as taverns and brothels sit side by side in the outer city, the chaos of human existence filling the gaps between the well-planned, well-laid streets.

Another, less imposing wall seals off the inner city. There are guards here too, resplendent in dark blue cloaks and bright breastplates emblazoned with the tower and stars of the city's banner. You sense the vigilant air of the guards and suspect that they are looking for you. You walk casually, making a point to look at the guards as if interested in their weapons and armour.

They look back at you, but do not react and you proceed through into the inner city. Here there is greater order. The streets are older and narrower, but all the buildings are stone and the inner city is divided into sections. You are currently in the market quarter.

You ask a few residents the way to the temple district and the directions lead you through another gate, this one unguarded, into an expanse of gardens. Well cared for lawns are scattered with lone trees and groves of exotic and beautiful flowering bushes. Carefully tended flower beds are filled with blooms of all colours and shapes, filling the cold air with perfume. There are also lampposts which men dressed in the livery of the city are busy lighting, filling the gardens with a soft, warm glow.

At various locations around the gardens are temples and shrines of all sizes and styles, dedicated to a plethora of deities. The Kings of Arantator have always prided themselves on the diversity of the gods that dwell in their city. You explore the gardens and eventually you see ahead a large marble temple surrounded by oaks. A wide stone staircase leads into a trio of decorated arches. A plinth rises from the centre of the stairway, upon which stands a life-sized statue of a woman in a flowing robe. Her hands are empty, held out as if to bless or embrace the world.

Your attention is soon drawn to something else. There are paladin guarding the front of the temple, standing watch beneath the arches while an officer strolls back and forth. Something about their manner arouses your suspicion. You are too close now to turn away, so you keep walking.

As you draw near, you see the officer step forward and look down at you intently. You let him see you glance at him with disinterest as you turn to the left and make your way along the path to the shrine next door.

Stepping into the dim interior, you look around at gilded statues of a warrior bearing a huge scimitar in one hand, and a dragon's head in the other. A marble sarcophagus fills the shrine, and a sign written in several languages tells you that you have entered the shrine of Aringarator the Dragon-Slayer. You are momentarily distracted as you realise you are standing near the hero of many of your childhood stories. Aringarator himself!

You see a large alcove filled with a fine statue of the Dragon-slayer, a jade basin at its feet for inserting incense. There is a basket of incense to one side, along with a strongbox with a slot in the top. Perhaps you should pray for a blessing.

Focussing on the matter at hand, you move into the shadows near the door where you can still see the temple of the White Goddess. It is obvious that the King has set his own soldiers to watch the temple and apprehend you. Without Kianmay, you will need to speak to the High Priest, Zarim. He may not be in a position to help you

though. It is late, but it might be possible to find some vendors in the market still open and to buy a disguise of some sort. If you don't want to spend any money, you could just sneak into the temple.

What will you do?

Go back to the market and see what you can get to disguise yourself? Turn to **204**

Try to sneak into the temple? Turn to **273**

166

The third watch is yours. You sleep fitfully until you are woken to take your watch. The Wood has filled your dreams with strange and disturbing images. You walk around checking that all is well, then take a position near the fire. You keep it burning bright.

The creaking Wood is oddly hypnotic, and you get up to walk around so you don't fall asleep. Staring into the cold Wood, you imagine what treasure there might be within. Just as you turn away from the Wood, you hear a woman's voice, singing softly. As you peer into the trees you catch the glimpse of a fire. Someone is camped in there.

It could just be an illusion.

Do you want to investigate? Turn to **23**

If you think it is safer to stay in your camp, turn to **217**

167

The two guards fight well together, and you are killed for a second time. When you wake up, you are still on the floor, next to the corpse of Laremidan. Sitting up, you see Kianmay is still in her bed, and both the guards are gone.

"Why did you kill him?" she asks sadly.

"He was going to rape you!" you say. "Anyway, it is better this way. He cannot chase after us now." You stand, finding yourself whole and all your wounds healed.

"I was to be his victim, and I have forgiven him. Why can't you?" Kianmay asks.

You are not in the mood for a discussion so you tell her to get some rest. Dragging Laremidan's corpse to the bathroom, you dump it in the tub, then go and lock the door to your quarters. You move your bedroll into the bedroom and closing the door, lie down against it. She does not question you further, and you fall asleep.

Turn to **373**

168

"These are our guards?" Kianmay asks.

"Yes," you reply.

She frowns "So few? I gave you enough gold for an army! I thought that you knew what you were doing when I hired you! Well, get them on their horses, we have a long way to go!"

She stalks off and you call the men together and tell them to form up. They encircle the wagon, keeping their distance from the paladin, looking at them with the same curiosity and apprehension that you once felt. Kianmay climbs up onto the wagon seat next to you, her movements revealing her anger.

The road rolls under the wheels of the creaking wagon, and your party travels for several hours before Penmark calls for a halt at midday. You park the wagon under a large oak near the road, and the paladin begin to set up a cooking fire. You notice that the paladin and the merchant guards keep to themselves, and even though the merchant guards talk, they do so in a whisper, influenced by the quiet peace of the paladin.

Knowing this will not do, you clap your hands. “All right everyone, listen up!” Everyone looks at you. “We have a long journey to make and we need to be work as one. So I want everyone to stand up one by one. Tell us your name and where you are from. And then something else about you if you think it’ll amuse us all to hear. You there! You are first.”

You point to one of the merchant guards. Slowly he stands up. “My name is Tyren. I’m from Fang. Err...I can balance a dagger on my nose.”

This claim demands a demonstration, so Tyren draws his dagger and tilts his head back with the pommel on his broad nose. With a bit of dancing, he is able to balance the dagger for thirty seconds, drawing applause and cheers from the merchant guards.

One the merchant guards have stood up and introduced themselves, then either performed a trick or told an amusing story; it is the turn of the first paladin. The light mood becomes slightly heavier, and you wait with some nervousness. This will be the test. The paladin stands up. You recognise him as the carriage driver. He glances at Penmark, but does not wait for permission before speaking.

“I am Harteran.” He says in a quiet voice. “I am from Southern Atera. I can play the tin flute.” He takes out a slender pipe of tin and positioning his fingers on the holes plays a short merry tune. The merchant guards cheer and clap when he is done. Harteran looks a bit embarrassed and avoids looking at Penmark and lady Kianmay. The priestess is grinning broadly, and her eyes dance with light, until she sees you looking at her and her joy vanishes as she looks at you with great disappointment. The other paladin introduce themselves, some warmth breaking through their discipline.

By the time the meal is ready, all are talking, and Harteran is taking requests on his flute. Penmark, who avoided having to introduce himself by keeping away from the fire gives you a very small nod of approval as he walks past. Kianmay is still standing near the wagon, and looks very annoyed.

If you have an ivory ring and you want to offer it to Kianmay as a peace-offering. Turn to **339**

If you are carrying a Holy Broadsword, you can show it now to Kianmay to ask her about it (turn to **394**, then return to this passage).

Otherwise, to continue your journey, turn to **126**

169

You listen at the door, and gently turn the handle. It opens and you peer into a large armoury. You eagerly step inside and close the door. There is no light and you wait several long moments for your eyes to adjust.

When you can finally see, you look over the weapons and armour eagerly. You reflect that it would probably be a bad idea to fully equip yourself, but you look over what is available anyway.

You find several fine daggers and knives, all bejewelled. You can take one if you wish. There are many fine suits of armour, but most are too ornate, and would draw attention to yourself. Even so you find three suits of armour that you consider swapping with what you wear.

One is like studded leather, but a closer inspection of the studs reveals that they are silver, not steel (ARMOUR = 1). Surely this armour must be magical.

The second suit is a steel breastplate (ARMOUR = 5), and has a large, clear, octagonal crystal set in the centre of the chest. A careful fold of your cloak should keep the crystal from view.

The last suit is scalemail (ARMOUR = 3), each silver scale inscribed with fine gold-inlaid lines that are only visible up close, forming spirals and waves over each scale.

You can take any of these and leave your current armour in its place. Of course, if you are summoned to an audience with the Wolf, he might notice if you are wearing his armour.

The only other thing of interest in the room is a lacquered wooden cabinet, which proves to be locked.

If you want to force the cabinet open, turn to **131**

If you want to go back and explore elsewhere, turn to **379**

If you want to leave the wooden house altogether and explore the camp further, turn to **179**

170

Turning to the chapter on objects of silver, you flick through until you come to a picture of a Scarab Beetle. Eagerly you read the entry. The entry is confusing, but tells you that the beetle is a holy talisman of manifestation. It says nothing else except that priests are often known to carry them.

It is of no use to you, it seems.

What now?

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

171

You wake up with an aching neck, cursing the hard floorboards. Making sure your men are up, you head down to the kitchen to order early breakfasts for your

party. One of the cooks mentions something about seeing Guardsmen in the stableyard and you hurry outside. The wagon is gone, and there is no sign of the man you left to guard it.

Guessing that the Customs Clerk is behind this, you stomp off furiously to the Town Guardhouse. The Guardhouse is a two storey stone building, with battlements on top and a large walled compound. There is a heavy wooden gate leading into the compound. You pause to try and peak through the gaps, and you catch a glimpse of your wagon inside. You step back and examine the wall. It is high and has a jutting lip at the top. It will be very difficult to climb.

Do you want to walk around the compound to look for a way to sneak in? Turn to **117**

If you would rather go in and ask to speak to the Warden, turn to **247**

172

Squeezing through the pillars, you jump down onto the soil of hell. You walk warily across the blasted land and eventually approach the hut, which is built of grey sticks. As you near, you see a path leading down to a small stone pier, at which is moored a long wooden boat with a high bow and stern. It floats on the lava without burning up.

Turning your attention to the hut, you call out softly. There is no answer. The doorway is open and you look inside. Inside is just a hole in the ground. Getting closer, you see that it is actually a tunnel. A very dark tunnel.

If you have a light crystal, you can explore the tunnel; turn to **375**

Otherwise, to go back to the temple and seek out the demon, turn to **314**

173

You desperately battle against the Wolf. He is swift and strong, and wounds you many times. He is not untouched by your blade, but it seems to have no effect upon him. You draw blood, but it is as if the wounds heal themselves.

Finally you stagger and fall, and the Wolf's blade is at your throat. "Yield to me," he says.

"I yield!" you gasp.

The Wolf stands and sheaths his sword, then leaves the compound. The assembled soldiers cheer appreciatively, and a few jeer at you for losing. The sorcerer helps you stand and leads you back inside. You are led back into the throne room, where you find the Wolf, along with Kianmay waiting apprehensively. You also see a table with all of your belongings on it.

"You are free to go," the Wolf announces. "But your belongings are forfeit to me."

You look longingly at the items on the table, but before you can protest, Kianmay speaks. "We cannot leave here without our one true treasure; for it is not ours to lose."

"What treasure do you speak of?" the Wolf asks.

"A black stone inscribed with a spiral of ancient script," she replies.

“A simple stone such as you describe cannot be of more value than the coin and jewelled items upon this table. Instead take one item.” The Wolf gestures to you and you go over to the table and select one of your items to take with you.

“The stone of which I speak is more valuable than any jewel and must be returned to me.”

“What will you do with it?” the Wolf asks.

“I shall take it to the temple in Arantator.”

You move to stand next to Kianmay. Wasn't her mission meant to be a secret?

“Do you know that the King of Arantator is my enemy?”

“I do.” Kianmay replies.

“Why should I deliver this great treasure into his hands?” the Wolf asks.

“It is not for him, it is for this land.”

The Wolf raises one eyebrow. “What does that mean?”

Kianmay explains. “The stone must be placed in the earth under the temple of the White Goddess in Arantator. In the hands of any one man the stone is wasted.”

“The stone makes the man who bears it immortal. Why is this a waste?”

How does he know that? Kianmay does not seem surprised and continues. “The power which makes one man immortal can instead flow into the earth. The temple in Arantator is built upon one of the channels of power in the earth, and so the power of the stone shall be multiplied greatly and bring great blessings to this land and all who dwell here.”

“Even beyond Arantator?” the Wolf asks.

“Men build walls and draw lines upon maps. The earth knows not such things.”

“How far shall this blessing extend?”

“I do not know.” Kianmay replies.

The Wolf nods slowly, then gestures to the sorcerer.

The sorcerer reaches into the pouch on his belt and takes out the Diamond Key in its cloth bag. He approaches and hands the bag to Kianmay. She takes it eagerly. She bows. “I thank you, noble Wolf. You are a better man than most.”

“Farewell, and may you succeed on your noble mission,” the Wolf says.

Turn to **42**

174

Kianmay examines the gem and tells you that it is a Luckstone. It will replenish you LUCK to its initial level at any time except in battle.

Return now to **147**

175

You advance with your dagger. The manservant sighs and draws from his sleeves two slim bladed knives. You notice that the blades are discoloured with poison.

The manservant is Raul's personal assassin, and highly skilled at knife-fighting. Also, because of the poison, if you are wounded by him, the fight will only last for another five rounds. At that time the poison will reach your heart and you will be

dead. Even if you win within 5 rounds you will still die unless you have a healing phial with you.

GRIFFON ASSASSIN SKILL 12 STAMINA 15 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

If you are having second thoughts and want to run away, turn to **226**

If you win, turn to **180**

176

Your head is pounding as you slowly become aware once more. The first thing you become aware of is that you are in great pain. You eventually discover that you are bound to a table by your wrists and ankles. It is a large table, so you are stretched out. You have been stripped of everything you had with you except your clothes.

Craning your aching head, you look around and find yourself inside a small room. The room is empty except for a golden shrine, in which is burning some sweet-smelling incense. You pull at the ropes, but you are bound securely.

The door opens, and a female orc enters. She looks at you and smiles. Her eyes are large, and you find her strangely beautiful, except for the tusks protruding up from her lower jaw. The tusks are clean and white, though, and she has shiny, long black hair. For the first time in your life, the possibility of sleeping with an orc enters your mind.

She is clad in a silver breastplate shaped into feminine form, and wears a long skirt of dark blue silk, embroidered with silver thread about the hem. She carries a golden cup in one hand, and a long slim dagger in the other.

“Who are you?” You ask.

“Your captor.” She replies.

When did orcs get so intelligent? As you wonder this, she uses the tip of the dagger to cut open your arm. She has severed an artery, and blood streams from the wound. She catches the blood in the cup, filling it to the brim in a few seconds.

She puts the dagger down and presses her hand over the wound, sealing it. She brings the cup of blood to her face and inhales deeply with her eyes closed. She then drinks it all in one draught. She sets down the cup and looks into your eyes, wiping her lips with her other hand.

Taking a bandage from her pocket, she binds your arm. The dirty white linen quickly soaks with blood, but it is enough to stop the bleeding.

“What was that for?” You ask.

“Your knowledge is now mine.” She says. She grins suddenly, and says your name. What black magic is this?

She suddenly looks surprised at something, and her expression towards you changes. “You find me beautiful.”

She leans over you, looking down at you, smiling. Her deep black eyes are filled with mocking, but also curiosity. You have a slim chance of escape.

“May I kiss you?” You ask.

She grins, showing her pointed teeth. The sight of her teeth is slightly off-putting, but the next moment she is kissing you, her tusks poking into your cheeks. She pulls away, laughing.

“I have kissed a human!” She cries, and then saunters from the room.

Cursing, you look at the dagger she has left on the table. You try the ropes, but you are bound tightly. Minutes later, another orc comes, this one a grisly warrior. Without a word he pulls aside the bandage, and reopens the wound. He takes his fill of blood and puts the bandage back in place.

Over the next hour twenty orcs come and drink your blood, each one leaving you feeling weaker and weaker. You pass out. When you next awake, you are unbound, lying on the floor of another small room. There is a single glowing crystal sitting on the floor near you, illuminating a bowl and a phial of red liquid. You drag yourself over and open the phial with trembling hands. You turn over and toss the liquid down your throat. You feel its magic spread through your body. You lie on the floor for what seems like hours, drifting in and out as you let the potion do its work. Finally you feel stronger (Your STAMINA is now 5.) You look inside the bowl finding some sloppy substance resembling food. Despite the smell of it, you force yourself to eat it.

You fall asleep again, and when you wake, you are able to stand. Examining your cell, you realise it is a storeroom of some sort. The door is latched from the outside rather than locked. It is possible you can break it down, but once out you will be in no condition to fight anyone.

Do you want to try and break out? Turn to **392**

If you would rather wait and regain your strength, turn to **41**

177

Going to Kianmay, you nervously open your mouth to speak. "Um, we have a problem."

"What is it?" she asks in concern.

"We've run out of money."

"What?" exclaims Kianmay. "I gave you a small fortune! It's all gone?"

"More or less," you mumble, unable to look at her.

Kianmay trembles in rage and it is several moments before she can speak. "Well, what shall we do now? You have ruined us! I employed you because I thought you knew what you were doing! I-" She bites her lip and pauses. "You are fired." She says at last.

"But-" you begin.

"Go away!" Kianmay says.

With no other choice you collect your things and leave. You have failed.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

178

A small orc is assigned to lead your party through the gate and along a small road that immediately branches off to the side of the main pass. As your oxen-draw wagon proceeds slowly along, you pass caves in the mountainside; some natural, others rectangular openings carved with hammer and chisel. There are also a few round

stone-huts siting directly by the road-side. This is where the orcs live. Orcish children run about and stop to point and stare as you pass, seemingly like a cruel parody of human children. Orcish women watch from doorways or seated together engaged in various mundane tasks. You have never seen orcish women before, finding some of them not without beauty.

The orcish village is poor and smelly, very different to the human-populated town on the other side of the gates. Your small guide leads you past all of the orcs and into a ravine. The ravine begins to descend naturally, before you begin to see the signs of stone begin cleared away by pick and chisel. An arched opening appears at the base of the ravine, three times your own height, and six horses wide.

Your small guide points, then begins the walk back. As one, your party draws to a stop, looking at the dark opening with varying degrees of apprehension. You busy yourself by preparing a lantern and lighting it. You hand it to Kianmay and pause once more. Since you aren't going to go back, you dash aside your fears and urge the oxen forward. The horsemen around you follow suit and your party proceeds into the darkness.

A few of the other horsemen light lanterns as well, and the way ahead is lit with amber light. The tunnel seems to run straight, but you can't see far enough to tell for sure. After a mile or so the tunnel narrows considerably, leaving room for your wagon and not much more. The work is also cruder, the wheels bumping ever so often. No one talks as you travel through the tunnel, and everyone is tense and watchful. But being watchful is frustrating when there is so little to see. It seems like an hour before something happens.

A large area suddenly opens up to one side. You pause, and one of the paladin rides into the space, holding his lantern aloft. The semicircular vault seems to be a resting area. There is even a chute in the roof, above a small fire pit. You wonder how long the orcs have been working on this tunnel. Orcs are not known for their masonry skills. But then again, you reflect, orcs aren't known for anything much. They have been the enemy of civilised men for so long that the only significant contact has been through steel.

The paladin with the lantern pauses next to some letters carved crudely into the walls. There is a great deal of the orcish script, and a small message in several human languages, telling you that you have travelled five miles into the mountains, and have 189 miles to go.

You look at Kianmay, and she smiles in relief. You are also feeling a little better. After all, the orcs can become wealthy with such a tunnel, if they can be trusted. Your party resumes the journey and you pass once more into the oppressive darkness. You pass more of the rest stops, which are positioned every five miles. They give you a guide as you how long you have travelled, and you make a stop for a meal after 30 miles. The meal is quiet and cheerless, and everyone is eager to get moving once more, wanting to be clear of the tunnel. At the 60-mile rest stop, you make camp for the night. Nobody sleeps well. You toss and turn, your sleep filled with dreams of the thousands of tons of rock above you, slowly sinking down on top of you, crushing you. When you wake up, the stone ceiling is always where it was, but provides no relief.

On the third day, the journey is passing just like the previous two days, when you begin to hear something on the way ahead. It is a high pitched tinkling. It grows louder, and is eventually joined by the sounds of guttural voices chanting and singing. Finally you realise what it is: the orcs are digging through stone still. Does this mean

they haven't finished the tunnel? You fight down the irrational fear that rises in you. You aren't trapped. You can go back.

Suddenly the tunnel widens out into a round, domed hall. On the far side the tunnel continues, but to the right there is another, smaller tunnel. It is from here that the digging sounds are coming. There is a single orc here, seated in a chair at a battered wooden table. A single candle burns on the table, next to an empty bottle and a sword. The orc doesn't react to your arrival. It is asleep.

Kianmay shudders so violently that you feel it. "There is something down there," she says, her wide-eyed gaze directed at the smaller tunnel. "I have felt it for some time as we have penetrated deeper into the mountain. Something...ancient and evil. No doubt these orcs felt it too, now they are seeking out whatever it is. They must not be allowed to find it!"

"There are going to be hundreds of orcs down there, maybe thousands! Whatever they are doing, we can't stop it."

Kianmay bites her lip, the conflict within her playing on her face. "It is only a mile or so to the next rest stop. We can wait for you there, while you go and see what is down there. Then we can make a report and respond as we must."

You shake your head. "I am not a dwarf! I can't go sneaking about underground. I'll be captured."

"Just be careful," Kianmay says. "If you are in danger, run back to us."

It seems like a fool's errand. But Kianmay has not commanded you to go yet.

To talk her out of it, turn to **325**

If you want to check it out, turn to **21**

179

Moving away from the wooden house, you enter a supply area. There are hundreds of carts here filled with all sorts of materials and supplies. You wander about for a while, when a hand roughly grabs your shoulder. You turn and see yourself looking into the small, suspicious eyes of a large man dressed in a dirty tunic.

"You've been wandering about like a dazed cow! What are you doing here?"

If you want to push him away and tell him to mind his own business, turn to **127**

If you want to pretend to be looking for some supplies, turn to **330**

180

Once you are safe from the assassin and his poison, you look around the Count's room. A quick search reveals 20 gold coins, and a lot of jewellery. You decide to leave the jewellery. Searching the assassin you find a bottle of poison(5), and a set of lockpicks.

Deciding to leave quickly, you take no more time to search and leave via the rear door, which opens into the stable yard. Hurrying back to your inn, you prepare yourself to report to Kianmay.

Turn to **123**

181

Moving out into the hall, you leave the bathroom door slightly ajar in case you need to make a quick retreat. As you move quickly and quietly across the hall, you hear relaxed voices coming from the rooms off the other hall. Evidently the owner has guests.

Reaching the door, you listen carefully, and hearing nothing, ease the door open. There is a lamp inside, and you can see that you are in a water closet. Being a patron of outhouses you spend a few moments studying the device with interest. You are most impressed with the absence of smell.

There are two more doors here, one leading further in towards the quarters. Listening, you can hear quiet chatting amidst the sounds of porcelain and cutlery, as if servants are setting a table. Going to the opposite door, you hear nothing. Peering under the door, you see only darkness.

Confidently, you open the door and slip inside. You wait for your eyes to adjust, and find that you are in a large bedroom. In the centre against the wall is a large four-posted bed. On the near side where you stand is a tall wardrobe and a cabinet either side of the door to the water closet. In the space between the bed and the water closet is a large round rug, a small table in the centre. You see the pale rectangle of a folded sheet of parchment on the table. There is also another door here that must exit into the hall that you first came from.

Opposite the bed is a set of painted screens partitioning the area. You can see over the top of the screens another wardrobe, long enough to take up the width of the wall.

If you have a light crystal with you and would like to search this room, turn to **328**

If you want to go back to the main hall and find another room to search, turn to **233**

182

Following the general direction of the bandit's point, you move through the forest, looking out for signs of the encampment. Eventually you hear sounds of men's chatter and smell roasting meat. Creeping with greater care, you peek between the branches of a bush and look out on the encampment of Gilmore the Groat.

The bandit was not exaggerating. You count 46 bandits sitting about the cooking fire or engaged in small tasks about the encampment, which is made up of dirty canvas tents. The exception is a larger tent made of oiled canvas painted deep red in colour. Outside it is a standard made of a human skull impaled on a spear. Rumour has it that Gilmore killed his own mother, and that the skull is hers. Gilmore used to be a savage assassin in the cities, where he would make a kill for as little as a silver coin. Stories of his cruelty and depravity are legend. Although you don't believe half of what you have heard, you know that Gilmore is a dangerous person that you would be wise to keep away from. You wonder why you are even bothering to count his men and survey the camp's defences. Even if you wanted to destroy him, you don't have the resources.

In addition to the armed bandits, you see a number of slaves. They each wear a thick iron collar. A fat man works at the pot, while several others scurry about under his harsh orders. The cook wears a collar too, but is treated in a friendly way by the bandits, who do not hesitate to abuse and laugh at his assistants.

You can see a supply wagon on the far side of the camp, and another collared man works near a forge under a tarpaulin next to it. He is repairing something. Whatever he is doing, he puts it down when the cook hollers that lunch is ready. Bandits come from all sides of the camp and sit down around the fire. The smith is welcomed by the bandits and given a bowl. The other slaves are forced to wait.

A young woman, also wearing a collar walks from the large blood-red tent. The bandits call out to her, making suggestive comments, but none touches her. Obviously she is the chief's woman. The cook hands her a tray and she walks miserably back to the tent with it. Your chest burns angrily at the sight.

While then bandits are distracted, you sneak around to the side of the camp where the supply wagon is. You creep forward and reach the wagon undetected, slipping into the shadows under the tarpaulin. Coals burn in a pit next to an anvil. You look at the bandits, who are still eating.

Seeing a pair of tongs near the anvil, you pick them up and take a hot coal from the fire. You blow on it to make it glow and then place it against the side of the tarpaulin. The oiled canvas quickly catches alight. You toss the coal back into the firepit and flee back into the undergrowth. You move away from the camp, and approach again from a different side. By the time you look back on the camp, you see that the tarpaulin and the roof of the supply wagon are in flames, the bandits running back and forth between the small creek and the wagon, hurling water onto the fire from buckets, jars and any other vessels to hand.

You see the smith being loudly berated by one of the bandits. The smith humbly accepts the admonishment. Of greater interest to you is the man who stands in front of the red tent. It can only be Gilmore the Groat. He is clad in scalemail armour with a red surcoat. A golden skull adorns the front of the surcoat. He even appears to be wearing a gold circlet around his head, long black hair flowing down his back.

You watch as he walks forward, waving aside the bandit who is admonishing the smith. Without a word Gilmore draws a blade and stabs the smith in the heart. You feel a pang of guilt, but your anger is even greater.

Gilmore goes over to harass the people putting out the fire, and you see a small opportunity. There is a chance you can make it to the blood red tent undetected.

Do you want to try and make it to the tent? Turn to **296**

If you don't want to risk it, you can return and report to Kianmay about Gilmore the Groat. Turn to **61**



183

You attack the nearest guard. For two rounds you face just one, but then the other comes around the bed and joins in and you must fight both at the same time.

TOWN GUARD 1 SKILL 8 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 2

TOWN GUARD 2 SKILL 9 STAMINA 21 DB 6 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **17**

If you are killed, turn to **167**

184

Deciding the creature is evil and must be destroyed, you attack. You cannot flee from this battle.

*HELL DEMON SKILL 27 STAMINA 50 DB 20 ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **62**

If you are killed, turn to **211**

**185**

With all the bandits dead, you look towards the large, blood-red tent in the centre of the camp. You and all of the paladin move in towards the tent, forming a circle around it. As you near the entrance, a figure emerges.

Gilmore the Groat is a tall, well-built man clad in silvery scalemail armour. He clutches in his hands a long broadsword, its golden ruby-set hilt long enough for two hands, and the five-foot blade is inlaid with golden designs. His eyes blaze with fury as he looks over the carnage.

“Who has done this?” he asks, his voice hissing with contempt.

Penmark does not answer, so you step forward. “Gilmore the Groat! You are defeated. Surrender.”

Gilmore laughs. “I am not defeated. Do you not know I am greater than all my men combined?” He gazes at the sword in his hands with something like lust. “Once I was a petty bandit, but no more!” He gestures to the dead bodies strewn across the camp. “And this is no band of thieves! It is the beginnings of my imperial army! You would do well to bow before me now. Bow down and swear fealty to me! I shall be emperor of the world.”

Uncertain how to respond to this, you look to Penmark. The paladin nods to the sword Gilmore carries. “If I am not mistaken, he bears the Sword of Algarangar. A powerful weapon of evil. It is said to bear it one must have great strength of mind, else they will be driven insane.”

“Not evil!” Gilmore protests. “It is a sword of justice! It shall bring order to the world under my command! No more shall I suffer the injustice of petty kings! They

declare *me* an outlaw! Under *my* law it is *they* who will be cast out! And I shall live in a golden palace while they are forced to steal for their food like dogs!”

Gilmore doesn't look like he is going to surrender. If you are in any condition to fight, you can challenge Gilmore. Otherwise Penmark will have to do it.

To let Penmark challenge Gilmore, turn to **194**

If you wish to fight Gilmore the Groat, and you have a Holy Broadsword, note that you can add 2 to both your SKILL and your damage bonus for this round. The sword has filled Gilmore with a powerful dark energy that is corrupting his mind, turning him into an agent of evil.

*GILMORE THE GROAT SKILL 12 STAMINA 30 DB 10 ARMOUR 3

If you win, turn to **238**

If you die, turn to **309**

186

You ignore the crow and keep walking. You leave the ruined palace, seeing that the goblins have gone. You make your way through the Woods, and eventually reach a road. Hoping that you are going the right way, you head off and within a few minutes come to the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. “Do you have it?” Her eyes are wild.

“Yes.” You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

187

The assassin falls dead at your feet. If you were poisoned, you must now take a healing potion, which will counteract the poison, but not restore any STAMINA. If you don't have any with you, you keel over and fall dead next to the assassin.

Otherwise, you turn your eyes to Count Raul, who has watched the battle with great interest. “Well done,” he says. “But now you will die.”

He attacks you, swinging his longsword savagely. You have no time to drink any SKILL potions

COUNT RAUL SKILL 9 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 6

If you win, turn to **27**

If you lose, turn to **309**

188

Kianmay, Penmark and yourself go into the inn to discuss quietly what can be done. Kianmay slumps in a chair, heedless of the diseased corpse on the table before her. Her face is ashen. “We must get it back,” she says hoarsely. She looks at you. “You must send all your men to search the Wood!”

You frown. “If the stories I have heard about this Wood are right, then we could all wander in there and never return! These are not like normal woods. They are magical and hostile.”

“What do you suggest then? We cannot leave without it!” Kianmay demands, her eyes wide.

“A small party should go in. With enough left behind here so that...if we never return...”

“Then go,” Kianmay commands you. “Take your merchant guards with you.”

That settled, although you are far from happy, you go back outside and announce to your men that they will accompany you into Darken Wood. You cannot say you are surprised when they refuse. Darken Wood is the subject of many a bard’s tales of terror, and even if only a fraction of the stories are true, it is not a place to wander in search of a few trinkets.

Sighing, you ready yourself and approach the Wood. Penmark stops you.

“This is a gallant thing you do. But you need not go alone. I will send some of my men with you.”

You would like that, but you shake your head. “She might need all of you on the journey ahead. I do not expect to succeed in this mission. I will not take any men to their deaths. In fact, I think it matters little whether there is one man or a hundred.”

Penmark claps you on the shoulder. “We shall pray for you.”

You value his prayers very little, but thank him anyway and stride into the Wood. You stomp through the undergrowth, looking for signs of the thieves, but seeing nothing. It is quiet apart from the creaking of the trees, and colder than would be natural. The trees about you shift slightly as if they are writhing in pain, their movements causing the creaking you can now hear all around you.

You move deep into the wood, looking for signs of anything, but finding nothing. Eventually you do come to something. Drawn by the sound of water, you come to a small creek. You decide not to take any water from inside this Wood, and are going to turn away when you see a large dead crow sprawled on a rock in one of the few patches of sunlight. You look around, but see no other animal. Maybe it died of old age and fell from its perch.

You step across the creek and walk up to the bird. You see no wound, so you nudge it with your toe. The silver eyes flare open and the bird squawks indignantly. It flaps around on the ground trying to get to its feet, then takes to the air, flying over to a branch a short distance away.

You are about to turn away when a grumpy voice addresses you. “What did you do that for?”

The voice comes from the same direction as the crow. You look around for whoever is talking, but see no one. “Hello?” you call out.

“Over here, you Destroyer of Slumber!”

You look at the crow. It is peering at you quite directly, but you do not see its beak move. “Are you talking to me?” you ask the crow.

“Of course I am!” the crow seems to say.

“How come your beak isn’t moving?” you ask.

The crow opens its beak and lets out a cry. After a moment you hear the voice again. “Well? Did you understand that?”

“No,” you reply, a little confused.

“Right then, so now you know. Hurry up and ask for my help.”

The crow begins to preen itself, and you watch it in wonder. You remind yourself that you are in a magical wood. “Do you know this place?” you ask. “Can you guide me?”

“Of course,” the crow replies. “I am the King of Darken Wood. Where do you want to go?”

Ignoring the claim of royalty, you say: “Last night some creatures from this Wood stole some things from us. We want to get them back.”

“You mean the goblins,” the crow says thoughtfully. “They always do that. Well, worry not! There is gold and silver aplenty in the world beyond the Wood. Seek it there. Farewell.”

The crow starts to fly off. “Wait!” you call out, hurrying after it. The crow lands on another branch and turns about.

“What is it?” it asks in an irritated tone.

“It was more than gold and silver that they took. Special things that cannot be replaced. I must find them.”

“Well, I could take you to them,” the crow suggests.

“Yes, please do,” you reply.

“But on one condition,” the crow says.

“What?” you ask with a frown.

“You cannot kill any of them.”

Impatiently you agree, and the crow flies off, landing on a distant branch. You hurry after it, and reaching its position, it flies off again. In this way it leads you through the Woods. You begin to hear chattering and laughing ahead, and finally the crow perches and remains as you move up to him.

“In there,” the crow says.

“Thank you,” you reply and head down a path that slopes deeply between two trees. You are in a gully in the middle of the Wood. You descend deeper and eventually spy some diminutive goblins ahead. They are about 4 feet tall and have dark blue skin and red eyes. Their little heads are bald, and they are dressed in smocks that seem to be made of old cloaks.

They also wear rings, and necklaces and amulets, enough to weight themselves down. They are celebrating by drinking some kind of ale and tossing gems and coins at each other.

You cannot see the Diamond Key anywhere.

Do you want to run out and attack the goblins, then search their bodies later? Turn to **390**

If you would rather remember your promise to the crow and simply introduce yourself, turn to **93**

The assistant asks to see your gold before he bothers to get a ladder. You shake one of your purses at him and he grunts before disappearing out the back. Moments

later he returns with a long ladder, and stands it next to the platform. A minute later the weapon is in your hands. The blade is wide but not too long, and coming to a deadly point. The hilt is plain steel, with a lead pommel to help balance the heavy blade. There is script on each side of the blade, and although you cannot read it, you feel something stirring in you as your eyes pass over the flowing script.

You ask the assistant what it says, but he just shrugs and tells you that this sword will cost you 50 gold pieces.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Holy Broadsword	Fine sword	10

You can buy the sword if you wish, then return to **312**.

190

You quickly walk past the archway and back to the cover of the pillars. You then make your way to the head of the hall and move across to crouch behind the pedestal and the crystal globe, which is two feet in diameter.

You sense something evil about the globe, an intelligence within it. You hesitate to touch it. Maybe you shouldn't meddle with this obviously magical item.

To go back and enter the archway, turn to **393**

To touch the globe anyway. Turn to **96**

191

Realising that you can't hope to rescue Kianmay without your gear, you make your way back to the other sewer outlet on the edge of the palatial Square. Going into the water again is the last thing you want to do, but there is no other option.

After you have gathered your strength, you descend into the canal and climb into the pipe once more. Knowing how long the pipe is this time, you make your way steadily along. You reach the grate and duck under the water to pull yourself through.

Making more steady progress on the other side, you pull yourself out into the chamber once more, this time in darkness except for your light crystal. You swim to the side of the pool and pull yourself out of the water, happy to see your gear is still there.

You rest and wring out your clothes before dressing in your armour once more. Gathering up your pack and weapons, you then make your way towards the ladder.

Turn to **439**



192

You hurry forward and begin to beat the stone man with your weapon. Pieces come off, but it continues to grow and then starts to fight back.

STONE GOLEM SKILL 6 STAMINA 20 DB 0 ARMOUR 9

If you win, turn to **49**

If you lose, turn to **193**

193

You stagger under the heavy blows from the golem. Swinging your weapon, you smash it in the head. Stone breaks off, but the golem doesn't pause as it draws back its fist to land the killing blow.

Suddenly it freezes, then cracks and falls apart, collapsing into a pile of rubble. (Your STAMINA is now 1). You wearily climb to your feet, and look around for whoever has saved you. There is no one else there except the skeleton in the throne and the crow on the candelabra.

"Did you do that?" you ask the crow.

"I did," the crow says, looking at you critically. "You are not a very good warrior. I thought you were supposed to be a Champion of the Light."

"I am not a Champion of the Light!" you reply, your anger gathering.

"Then why do you seek the Diamond Key?" the crow asks.

Your anger disappears. "You know why I am here?"

The crow pauses. "Do you know why the Darken Wood exists?" It asks.

You shrug. "It is a stronghold of evil."

The crow looks offended. "You think I am evil?"

"I'm not sure," you reply.

The crow speaks, its disembodied voice booming angrily. "A thousand thousand years ago there was great evil in the land. The Kings of Light were helpless before it. So one swore an oath to take the burden of evil onto himself. So it was that all the evil in the world was drawn into one place. Seven great Captains of Darkness were drawn and imprisoned here. Thus was peace brought to the world. Thus was Darken Wood made. So it is today, that the evil that could not be destroyed is bound, and all that is evil and persecuted by the Light seeks refuge here."

You look at the skeleton. "This is that King? What happened to him?"

"He took the burden of evil onto himself," the crow says again. "He imprisoned himself in Hell so that the seven Captains of Evil would be bound here."

"In hell? And he is still there, even now?"

"No, I freed him long ago," the crow says. "How else can I be King if I do not take his place?"

"But you are here," you say.

"I am a god, you fool!" the crow says. "I can be in two places at once."

Shaking your head, you return to the matter at hand. "You mentioned the Diamond Key," you begin.

"Ah, yes," the crow says. "Darken Wood is a place where great evil is contained. Contained with powerful magic that affects the very fabric of reality itself. So it is that when greedy men come here seeking gold, the evil in this place responds to their greed, and they encounter evil that is of their own making! Then there are many

creatures who live here who prey on travellers in their own manner, such as the goblins.”

“I did not encounter anything evil,” you say. “All I encountered was you.”

“Thus!” the crow says triumphantly, “you must be here seeking the Diamond Key with the intent of goodness.”

“Do you have it?” you ask.

“I have no need of that,” the crow replies. “I put it in a safe place.”

“Will you show me?” you ask.

“I will *show* you, yes,” the crow says. The crow disappears behind the throne, and you step onto the dais, seeing another opening behind the great silver seat. Following the crow, you bend under the low doorframe and into another full-sized corridor. It descends down into the earth and soon opens into another domed chamber, this one many times larger than the other. The dome is dark blue stone set with stars made of glowing crystals, forming the constellations of the night sky. Golden pillars line the maroon walls and the floor is covered in tiles of black inlaid with gold. In the very centre of the chamber is a large chest. Next to it is a wooden stand, in which sits a long black spear with a silver blade on top. The crow is perched on the tip of the silver blade.

“Where is the Diamond Key?” you ask as you come to a stop.

“It concerns me very much that you are not a Champion of the Light,” the crow replies. “I cannot give a treasure like the Diamond Key to a mere merchant guard.”

“Then how do I become a Champion of the Light?” you ask.

“Swear an oath, and face the test,” the crow replies.

“Fine. I swear to serve the Gods of Light,” you say. “Now test me and give me the Diamond Key.”

“Your vow is insufficient,” the crow says. “You speak as if this matter is a joke of some kind. Possession of the Diamond Key is no small thing. Know you what the Diamond Key does? To what is it the key? Answer this, and I shall give it to you.”

What is the Diamond Key the key to? Since it is not made out of diamond, diamond must represent what it is the key to. Contemplate carefully. If you think you know the answer, use the alphanumeric code below to translate your single word answer into numbers, then add the numbers together and turn to that passage.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

If you can't figure it out, turn to **395**

194

Penmark steps forward and loudly challenges Gilmore, calling for him to surrender. The madman just sneers and leaps at Penmark, thrusting with his sword, the blade suddenly blazing with red flames.

Penmark parries the flaming blade and cuts at Gilmore's neck. The blow should have landed, but Gilmore brings his own weapon back with incredible swiftness and blocks the blow. The six-foot weapon is as light as a wooden cane in his hands. The

magic sword blazes whenever Gilmore attacks, seeming to feed off his aggression. But Penmark seems to have some power as well, as he parries blows that would cut a normal man in two. You see Penmark slowly gain the measure of his opponent, his style becoming less cautious and more aggressive. Finally he feints and spirals his sword in, avoiding Gilmore's desperate block and sinking his blade into the madman's throat.

The bandit leader falls to his knees, dropping the sword and clutching at his throat. He looks up at Penmark in despair, then slumps, falling off the blade. Penmark holds his sword out, letting the blood run off it. You watch in wonder as the blade is left perfectly bright and unblemished, no blood able to cling to it.

One of the paladin pulls down a piece of canvas from a tent and throws it over the sword. They pick it up and wrap it securely, eyeing it with distasteful expressions even wrapped in many layers of canvas.

You enter the blood-red tent. There is no sign of any of the slaves, and all of Gilmore's valuables have been stolen away. You organise a search of the camp for any usable materials. The paladin take some of the foodstuffs and supplies from the wagon, but will not search the dead. You have no such principles, but Penmark tells you to leave the dead in peace.

You watch as the paladin wrap the dead in their tents and lay them side by side. They pause in a prayer for the slain, then set the whole thing alight. As the flames grow, your party leaves to return to Kianmay.

Roll one die. The number that comes up is the number of merchant guards you have lost in this battle.

Turn to **44**

195

You begin to search the room, but have not gotten very far when another door to the room opens and a figure enters. He stops and stares at you, while you look at him with your hands in his drawer. He is a shaved-headed man with a short black beard. He is dressed in a black robe that ends at his knee, above tooled leather riding boots. Over the robe he wears a breastplate, enamelled in dark blue with red and gold serpents upon it. He wears a belt with a dagger, but is otherwise unarmed.

"Thief," he says scornfully.

You glance at the table where your weapons lie.

If you want to grab your weapons and attack him, turn to **142**

If you would prefer to run, turn to **337**

196

You make a lunge at the orc woman, making her retreat; then make a dash for the exit. You hear a loud crackle behind you, and the hair on the back of your neck rises. You throw yourself to the ground and a lightning bolt arcs over you. Regaining your feet you run onwards. The conflict has attracted attention and you dash past orcs coming to investigate.

Shouts and cries follow you as you climb up the stairway, then enter the tunnel. Labouring up the slope, you are a ragged wreck by the time you reach the top. The orc is still asleep and you hurry past and into the main tunnel.

You see no signs of pursuit, so you slow down. By the time you reach the others you have your breath back.

Turn to **101**

197

Going up to the door, you listen but hear nothing. Slowly you open the door and peek inside. You see a room that looks like a study and a laboratory. Shelves containing hundreds of jars and boxes fill one wall, while another is filled with books. There is a desk to one side, and a large table in the centre of the room.

You feel a surge of joy and excitement as you see spread on the table all of your belongings. Your weapons, coins and magical items. You even see the Diamond Key. You slip further into the room, but pause. Perhaps it is not a good idea to take your stuff back. Anything you take will be missed. If you do, then you will have to try and escape right away.

What will you do?

Grab your stuff, then go back to Kianmay and escape? Turn to **40**

Search the room for something that won't be missed? Turn to **195**

Just leave the room? Turn to **388**

198

As you look at the small man, you feel the helm tingle around your brow. Suddenly your vision blurs and you see a wolf standing before you. You blink and both man and wolf are there as one. The helm has the power of true sight. The Wolf is a werewolf!

Return now to **319**



199

You notice it is getting close to dusk, and hurry to find an ivory-carver. You find a shop and enter into the interior. Your gaze is drawn immediately to the massive pair of mammoth tusks hanging on the back wall. The beast must have been a true giant!

Eventually your gaze drops to a young woman who smiles at you and asks you what you are interested in. You look around, seeing numerous fine pieces in glass cases. You announce that you are interested in a large shipment, and the young woman immediately invites you to come through to the back of the shop. She shows

you a selection of bowls, cups and statues, all carved in fine detail. Regardless of whether the ivory is carved into something functional or not, the price is determined by the level of intricacy in the designs.

You can choose from the following:

Simple: 10 gold per box.

Fine: 30 gold per box

Intricate: 50 gold per box.

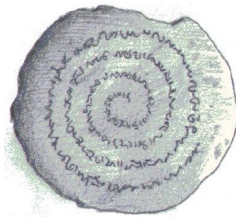
Your wagon only has enough space for 1000 jars, or 10 boxes of weapons or ivory (1 box = 100 jars). You may only purchase enough goods to fill the wagon.

If you buy ivory, the young woman also gives you an ivory ring as a gift. You can keep the ring or sell it at the markets for 1 gold coin. Once you have bought all the ivory you want, you may either:

Visit the Dye-maker, turn to **74**

Visit the weapon smith, turn to **256**

Or go to hire merchant guards, turn to **300**



200

The evening comes as you begin your search for merchant guards. Red River has countless taverns, and that is where you will find guards who are for hire. But where to go? Normally you would go to the taverns you yourself frequent. But thinking of the holy mission and the danger presented by your pursuers, you consider the matter carefully.

Eventually you choose a tavern called the Empty Purse. It is much quieter than most others, and you know that it is owned by a prominent member of the merchant guild. As you step into the warm golden light, you know you are in the right place. Many of the drinkers are merchants, thrashing out deals. But also there are many merchant guards. Your expert eyes can immediately pick out those who have no employment. The employed guards have a content, satisfied air, able to indulge in large ales, but not too much. The unemployed guards survey the merchants, either in hope, or waiting for the right moment to approach.

There are fifteen unemployed merchant guards here. Stepping onto a bench, you leap up onto a table, your thumping boots drawing attention. Those who see you thump the arms of their companions and point at you. In a moment you have the attention of all.

“I am looking for merchant guards!” you announce. “We are leaving tomorrow at dawn and heading north. Pay is 3 gold for signing up, plus 3 gold per week.”

Unexpectedly, it is one of the merchants who answers you. “Where are you going?”

“Our destination is not to be divulged here and now,” you announce, causing some to chuckle.

Another merchant calls out to you. “A secret destination! Tell us, what are you carrying?”

You describe your cargo and the same merchant smiles broadly. “Ah, so that is no secret at least,” the comment draws laughter.

The first merchant speaks again. “How long is this journey to be?”

“I can’t say,” you reply, trying not to grit your teeth.

The merchants laugh. “Well, then...” The Merchant stands to pace. “You are going...somewhere! It will take...sometime! Is there any element of danger to this job?”

You admit that there is, and the merchants all smile and look thoughtful. You came to hire merchant guards and are now bargaining with merchants! After a lengthy discussion, the merchants all decide that you should offer 6 gold pieces for signing up, 2 gold per day as wage, and another 6 gold for safe delivery.

After some arguing, you get it down to 5 gold pieces for signing up, 1 gold per day as wage, and 5 gold for safe delivery. Although it is a little bit more expensive than normal, you feel you are taking these men into danger. Even so, you insist on only taking men with more than 2 years experience.

All 15 claim to have well over 2 years experience. You reject three for being too young, one for being too old, and one for having an untrustworthy grin. You can hire all ten if you can afford 50 gold here and now.

After you hire all of your men, you tell them where to be at dawn the next morning and go back to the Happy Maid. Remember that you will need to pay the men you have hired each day. If you have ten men, it will cost you ten gold coin per day to keep the men on. You will be instructed when to pay the men. If you cannot afford to pay them, they will leave. In battles some men will also die, so keep track of this as well since you do not have to pay dead men.

You get a good night’s sleep and the next morning go to pick up your wagon and team. Your cargo has been delivered and loaded and you are able to set off immediately. You make your way to the northern gate and are pleased to see all the men you hired ready and waiting, although a bit grumpy and sleepy. They all have horses and form up around the wagon as you set out north. By the time the sun is well over the horizon, the city has been lost in the rolling lands around you. Reaching a cross-roads in a large cleared space, you decide to stop and wait here for Kianmay and the Paladin. You tell the men to relax and wait nervously for the rest of your party.

It is not too long until they appear. There is no sign of the carriage, and you see Kianmay clinging to the back of a horse as they approach. You recognise her horse as one of the carriage horses. The paladin have also acquired new cloaks, wrapped now in old and dirty cloth of various dull colours. Even Kianmay now wears a plain hooded cloak of dark blue.

As they pull up, Kianmay nods at you and dismounts clumsily.

“Where is the carriage?” you ask.

“Back in the forest where it will hopefully remain undiscovered,” she explains and looks over the wagon and oxen. She smiles as she sees the oxen, dismounting to examine the fine beasts. “My father was a farmer,” she announces, running one hand over the side of one of the oxen. “These are strong and healthy. But I hope you did not pay too much.”

“40 gold,” you reply tentatively. Who would have thought a priestess would have grown up on a farm! Now that you think about it, priestesses have to come from somewhere.

“Oh, good!” she exclaims. She turns towards the merchant guards who are playing cards under a nearby tree.

How many guards did you hire?

Five or less? Turn to **259**

More than five? Turn to **53**

201

Closing the lid, you stand to open one of the other chests. Suddenly the curtain is drawn aside, and you find yourself looking into the startled gaze of Gilmore the Groat. Before he can react, you dive under the tent wall. Rolling to your feet you dash across the camp. Shouts of alarm follow you and you plunge into the undergrowth. You run all the way back to your horse. Jumping into the saddle, you gallop all the way back to the rest of your party.

Turn to **161**

202

The creature will not have a chance to overcome its hunger if you attack it, so you raise the spear and stand up straight. The demon growls and slashes at you with its claws. You lose 5 STAMINA points.

It roars and looks ready to strike again.

If you have changed your mind and want to attack, turn to **184**

If you wish to keep on giving the creature a chance, turn to **56**

If you are dead, turn to **301**

203

Carefully removing the emerald-set ring, you slide it onto your own finger. Immediately you feel luckier. While wearing the ring, you may increase your *initial* LUCK by 3, and any time you test your LUCK you do not have to reduce your *current* LUCK by one.

Thanking the crow once more, you leave the ruined palace and make your way back through Darken Wood. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. “Do you have it?” Her eyes are wild.

“Yes.” You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

204

Going into the markets once more, you find that most of the shops have closed. Being open after dark means lighting lamp or candles and most shopkeepers have too few late customers to justify the cost. Deciding on the disguise of someone going to bring an offering to the temple, you find a clothing store that is still open. You can buy a fine robe and a hat for a total of 10 gold coins. Another store has some lamp oil for sale and you can buy a large sealed jar for 5 gold. If you can't afford this, you will have to go back and break into the temple (turn to **273**).

You buy the disguise and find a small inn in which to store your belongings. An inn called the White Garden suffices. The rooms are built around a central garden of white-flowered bushes, and a pond filled with white lilies and a pair of white swans. You get a room and hide your pack under the couch. Dressing with the robe over your armour, and wearing the hat on your head instead of a helm, you take the jar of oil and make your way back to the temple.

It is truly night as you make your way through the streets. Revellers are in the streets, and taverns are loud with talking and laughter. You ignore all as you make your way into the quiet temple district. Some of the revellers have chosen to walk through the well-lit gardens, some on their way to pray and make offerings after a day of work. You pass several groups of people or figures walking alone. No one pays any attention to you and you smile inwardly, pleased that your disguise is working.

If you have been bitten by a werewolf, turn to **407**

If you haven't, turn to **474**

205

Kianmay frowns at the wooden bowl in your hands, but does not touch it. She asks you to put it on the table.

“This is a scrying bowl, but it has been used in dark magic. It has been filled with blood, not water. Someone has been using it to try and probe into the secrets of hell!” She closes her eyes and after a moment reaches out and touches it with one fingertip. The bowl splits in two and she opens her eyes, shaking her head. “I'm sorry. I tried to purify it, but it is too corrupted.”

To compensate you for the loss of the bowl, Kianmay asks you to kneel down in front of her. She lays her hands on your head and gives you a blessing. You may restore your LUCK to its initial level, adding one to your initial level if this number is less than 12.

Return now to **147**

206

You draw the sword from its snakeskin sheath and show it to Kianmay. She takes it and examines it briefly. “It is a Serpent Sword,” she explains. It belonged to an ancient cult of snake worshippers famous for their speed. When you use the sword you can add 5 to your SKILL.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Blue Serpent Sword	Sword	4

Return now to **373**

207

With the morning everyone stirs and a paladin begins to prepare breakfast. Kianmay announces that the sick man has died, so everyone prepares to move on. Suddenly one of the merchant guards swears foul enough to shock even you.

“Aw right. ‘W’o’s taken me gold charm?” he demands.

No one owns up, so the merchant guard turns on the paladin who was sleeping next to him and accuses him of taking it. The paladin points to his pack. “I would not do such a thing. Search it and see.”

The guard does so, finding nothing of value. This makes the paladin frown. “I had silver in a pouch.”

Everyone checks their belongings and reports that all the valuables have been taken. You find that yours are all gone as well. You hurry to the wagon and see that the boxes are all still there, along with the strongbox containing all your money. But all of your valuable possessions are gone, including any small valuables you were wearing. You still have your weapons and armour.

As you come back to the fire, you see Kianmay standing clutching her side, her face as pale as snow. You go to her and ask: “What is wrong?”

“The Diamond Key!” she says quietly. “It is missing!”

Turn to **188**

208

You take out the bottle of white liquid and show it to Kianmay. She holds the bottle in her hands and concentrates. After a minute she tells you that it is a sleeping potion.

Return now to **293**

209

You snatch up the sword and turn to face the warrior. He stops and with apparent disinterest turns away and goes back to the circle. The clerk steps forward instead. “Please rejoin your companion,” he says.

You do so. The clerk takes the sword from your hand goes over to the small table in the corner. Rather than put the sword down, he uses it to lift the necromancer's wand and toss it into the fire. It smokes unnaturally and with much fizzing and popping eventually expires; leaving nothing but the smell of burnt flesh in the air.

He then goes to stand by the circle.

Turn to **264**

210

Deciding not to risk offending him you haggle for a few minutes and eventually agree on 45 golds for the pair. You ask for the team to be hitched and ready to depart at dawn tomorrow.

Leaving the yard you walk through the markets, wondering what you can purchase as cargo. Not knowing how far you have to travel, you reject anything that is perishable, and eventually narrow things down to three choices: dye, ivory, or weapons.

You can visit any or all of the vendors, but can only spend as much money as you are carrying with you.

To visit the dye-maker, turn to **74**

To visit the ivory-carver, turn to **199**

To visit the weapon smith, turn to **256**

211

The creature slashes your body open and you fall to the ground, slipping into a sea of blackness. Eventually you awaken, and are surprised to discover that you are not dead (restore your STAMINA to full). You are healed of all your wounds and lying on the floor of the throne room.

You sit up, and see the crow looking down at you. You climb to your feet. The spear you were using is gone. "Did you save me?" you ask.

"I healed you," the crow confirms. "The demon chose not to feed upon you, and so has been freed from its torment. Remember this the day that you become a demon!"

"I will not become a demon!" you exclaim.

"You do not even know what a demon is," the crow says with contempt. "You are no Champion of Light. You are a destroyer who serves fear and anger and hatred. Begone from this place."

"I cannot go without the Diamond Key," you say. "If not for me, then for Kianmay. It is for her I seek the Diamond Key."

"Alyn Mei," the crow muses. "If only you knew her true nature, given what you have done here today."

"Please give me the Key," you beg.

The crow is silent, then says: "Diamond is the most precious substance in the mortal world. Yet substance is but a thing for containing the true stuff of life. Will a man in the desert who comes up a golden goblet of water pour the water onto the sand so that he may carry away the cup? So it is in this mortal world. So it is with you!

The Diamond Key is the key to the most valuable thing in life, and that is life itself. You are not worthy to bear such a treasure. Take your golden cup and go!”

An invisible force suddenly scoops you up and you fly backwards so fast everything becomes a blur. Moments later you are dumped on the ground. You stare at the wooden floorboards. You feel hands grasp you and you find Penmark helping you stand. You are back in the inn at Tappin.

“Where did you come from, man?” Penmark asks, a little shaken.

“I don’t know,” you reply.”

Kianmay is standing nearby. She hurries over and grips your arm painfully. “Did you find it?” Her eyes are wild.

You can’t look her in the eye knowing what you are going to say. As you look away, you see a golden cup sitting on the mantle above the fireplace. That was not there before. Pushing Kianmay aside in your excitement, you rush over to the cup and snatch it off the mantle to peer inside. You turn to Kianmay and with a grin pull the Diamond Key out of the cup.

She rushes over and grasps it gratefully, leaving you holding the empty golden cup.

It is time to be going, so you head outside and tell everyone to prepare to leave. You also give orders for the diseased town to be burned. As the men work, you distribute the gems you took from the goblins, to compensate the men for the valuables that they lost.

Once the fires are established, you climb into the cart and resume your journey north.

Turn to **240**

212

Dragging both bodies down to the common room, you order the lamps to be lit, and minutes later you are staring at the bodies of two men. They are plain, dark clothing under black, hooded cloaks. They are armed with shortswords and daggers.

You search their pouches, and find 4 gold coins, 2 phials of healing potion and a phial of poison(3).

There is no information about who the men are, but Kianmay is convinced that they are her pursuers. She urges you to find a way to get through the gate. After looting these corpses you may have enough goods to sell at the market in the morning to then be able to afford to pay the Gate Fee or the Bribe.

(Gate Fee is 12 gold for the wagon and oxen, plus 4 gold per paladin and merchant guard with you. The Bribe is ten gold and one of the following items: A holy amulet, a bejewelled dagger, a bejewelled Griffon Sword, a coat of Silver Scalemail, or a luckstone.)

If this is so, then once you are ready to proceed with your journey, turn to **333**.

Otherwise you must wait around another day. Turn to **114**



213

You snatch up the sword and turn to face the warrior. He stops and with apparent disinterest, turns away and goes back to the circle. The clerk steps forward instead. "Please rejoin your companion," he says.

You do so. The clerk takes the sword from your hand goes over to the small table in the corner. Rather than put the sword down, he uses it to lift the necromancer's wand and toss it into the fire. It smokes unnaturally and with much fizzing and popping expires.

He then goes to stand by the circle.

Turn to **302**

214

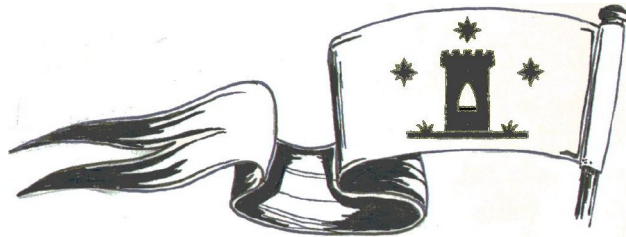
You feel yourself weakening rapidly as you try to cut down the nimble necromancer. You see him start to grin and you make a last desperate lunge. He skips aside and you crumple to the floor.

Drained to within an inch of your life you are helpless as the Necromancer has a pair of his zombies lay you out on a slab. You are chained down and the necromancer takes a knife and cuts into your chest. Several painful minutes later the necromancer finishes embedding a strange gem in your chest.

Slowly, your strength will return over days and weeks, but the Royal Necromancer's new experiment is successful. He has created a living zombie, and you obey his instructions without question.

You serve the necromancer faithfully for many years, a passenger within your own body, until age starts to weaken you. And so you are killed and turned into a traditional zombie; thereby extending your usefulness for many, many years.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

**215**

Slowly you creep forward, dagger in hand...

Test your SKILL. Roll two die. If the total is the same as or less than your current SKILL score, turn to **6**. If the total is higher than you SKILL, turn to **154**

216

The necromancer doesn't notice your change of interest until too late. The jar he is holding falls to the ground and rolls against the wall. You can take it with you if you wish. You search the laboratory, finding many ghastly things, which you leave behind. You find a crystal orb and a great quantity of silver, worth 100 gold coins. Nothing else is worth taking except maybe the wand, since the bracelet and rings are bejewelled. The jewellery cannot be removed from the arm without cutting it away. The wand might also have some useful abilities if kept intact. You can take the wand to try and sell, or to try and use in the future.

Once you have what you want, you leave. Turn to **371**

217

You ignore the woman's voice and soon it stops. You sit by the fire and a few minutes later you see something move at the edge of the Wood. You look over to see a beautiful woman, with long black hair. She is scantily clad in an outfit made of pearls and rubies. She smiles at you, and disappears back into the Wood.

Over the next hour you see all manner of temptations trying to draw you into the Wood. You ignore all of them, even when you hear a scream and a voice pleading for help. None of the other men with you even stir, so you decide it is not real and ignore it. Eventually the Wood stops and you wake one of the paladin to take the next watch. You head back to your blankets.

Turn to **207**

218

Laremidan is skilled, but cannot match you and dies next to the two armed men, who appear to be members of the Town Guard. The servant has edged around the fight to the door and as soon as you land the death-blow, he flees, taking his lamp with him.

It takes a moment for your eyes to adjust. You then go and lock the front door once more and drag all the bodies into the bathroom, dumping them in the tub. A search of the guard's bodies yields 14 gold coins, a pair of dice and a silver bladed dagger. Going back to the bedroom, you knock gently on the door.

"Who is it?" you hear Kianmay ask apprehensively.

"Me," you say. "It's safe now."

The lock clicks and the door opens. Kianmay peers out, looking at the blood on the floor. "What happened?"

"The owner of the inn tried to sneak in with armed men."

"They must have been after the Diamond Key!" Kianmay exclaims. "Should we leave?"

"No. But let me sleep against the door inside there," you suggest.

She agrees and you set up your blankets against the door, finally falling into a deep sleep.

Turn to **373**

219

The last orc falls dead, and you sigh with relief. The cost has been high. Half of your merchant guards are dead (if you have an odd number, round down), as well as two of the paladin.

The two orcs still watching jerk the leashes of their beasts, making them howl in pain, then hurry away. It would be best to stop them, but you are too weary to pursue them. Loading your dead onto the wagon, you have no room for the orcs armour or weapons, although you can take one of their spears for yourself if you wish.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Barbed Spear	Fine Spear	6

You continue on your way. You eventually make your way out of the mountains and reach the hill town of Yorman. The journey has taken ten days, so pay your surviving men 10 gold each. Also make a note that 2 paladin have been killed, so there are only 4 remaining.

Turn to **135**

220

You shake Laremidan's hand and bid him good night. He turns his back to you to leave and you draw your dagger, slipping it into his back. He stiffens and falls to his knees. You quickly lunge over to the servant, who is busy with the bottle and tray and knock him on the back of the head with the pommel of your dagger.

The servant slumps to the ground. You tie him up, then drag Laremidan's body into the bathroom and dump it in the tub where it can bleed freely. You rip up his tunic to wipe up the blood trail. You leave the servant where he is and go to your blankets.

You sleep peacefully until the morning.

Turn to **373**

221

Finishing your beer, you prepare to leave, and approach the soldiers.

"Greetings," you say with a smile. The soldiers all look at you with unfriendly stares. Unfazed, you continue. "What is that thing on the front of your helmets?"

"It is a griffon, you fool. Now begone!" snaps one of the soldiers.

"Are you circus guards?" you ask.

This makes the short-tempered guard surge to his feet. "What did you say?"

You back away, holding up your hands. "I'm sorry! But surely a creature like that would be kept in a circus, so I thought you must be circus guards since you carry that symbol around..."

"This is the symbol of our master, you brick-head!"

"Who is he?"

"Count Raul of Erinharn!" the soldier says proudly.

“Does he own a circus?”

The soldier starts to turn red, so you run from the common room as if in a panic. Once outside, you see that you are not being pursued, so you slow down and walk back to your inn. You find Kianmay reading in her room.

“Where is Penmark?” you ask.

“Purchasing food for our journey,” she replies.

“Count Raul is here in town, staying at an inn called the Elegant Peacock.”

Kianmay almost drops her book. “How do you know his name?”

“I spoke to some of his men,” you explain. “This is our chance to do away with him once and for all.”

Kianmay looks at you coldly. “You want to burn down the inn while he is asleep?”

What does she think you are? “No, of course not! But we can do something.”

“Yes, something.” Kianmay becomes thoughtful. “Many lives have been lost because of Raul. Our number was twice as many when we set out. And how many men has he lost? Just to... I will send him a message and meet with him.”

“What?” you exclaim. “This is the man you are trying to get away from!”

“He is not after me,” Kianmay replies, then closes her mouth firmly. “The Elegant Peacock you say. I will write him a letter and ask him to meet me.”

“Meet you where? Not here,” you say.

“No, I suppose not,” she agrees thoughtfully.

Apprehensively, you wait as she goes to her table and taking out pen and ink, begins to write on a sheet of parchment. She folds the sheet and hands it to you.

“Here, deliver this.”

You take the note. “What did you say?”

“I asked him to meet me in the market square in two hours.”

“Two hours? There will still be people around then.”

“What of it?” she asks.

“It...what if we have to fight him?”

“That will not happen. I have sworn there will be no conflict on my part. My vow covers you as well.” She gives you a cold, hard stare. “Do not break by vow, else I shall be damned.”

With that dire advice, she dismisses you, and you leave the inn. As you walk towards the Elegant Peacock, you look at the letter in your hand. What is she doing? Does she really know what the consequences of this action could be?

Do you want to read the letter? Turn to **305**

To do as you have been instructed, turn to **346**

222

You have a pleasant talk with Laremidan, telling him what you know of news in the South, then you ask him about what is of interest to you

“I hear there is a new King in these lands,” you say. “A man calling himself the Wolf. Is he likely to present any danger to us as we travel north?”

Laremidan is thoughtful. “I’m not to sure what to make of this so-called king yet. He seems harmless to peaceful folks like myself. If I was a king I would be worried!”

He chuckles. “He is apparently a skilled warrior and tactician. You are heading to Arantator?”

“Yes.”

“It is said he is very interested in the great city. He wants to conquer it! He will never succeed at that fool’s errand. There is a reason the city has only ever fallen by treachery! Still it will be interesting to hear news of what happens.”

Laremidan glances often at the goblet in your hand, but does not seem offended. His talk of the Wolf seems to be all rumour. Finally you set down the goblet. “We have an early start tomorrow. Thank you for your visit.”

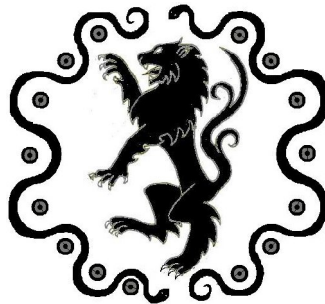
Laremidan smiles broadly and bids you a good night. He and his servant leave, and you finally have the chance to rest.

Do you want to keep at watch? If so turn to **98**
If you think things will be fine, turn to **260**

223

The demon slashes you once more, lose 5 more STAMINA points. How long will you be able to continue this?

If you have changed your mind and want to attack, turn to **184**
If you wish to keep on giving the creature a chance, turn to **250**
If you are dead, turn to **301**



224

Deciding not to double up with one of the riders, you instead climb up beside the driver of the carriage. The cool-eyed guard gives you a suspicious look, but responds to your nod before turning his eyes back to the road ahead.

The road soon branches, but Captain Penmark keeps to the main road. By midday the road starts to rise, the hills on the horizon starting to loom around you. Just as the entrance to the ancient stone highway comes into view, a path winds off to the northwest, and Captain Penmark leads the party up the narrower trail. The hillsides rise steeply each side of the trail and an eagle circles lazily overhead.

It is mid-afternoon, and many miles into the hills before Captain Penmark allows the party to stop. As the others prepare to start a fire, you see Captain Penmark climbing up one of the hillsides to try and see back down the winding trail. Someone is obviously after them. You pretend not to notice and take a place by the fire.

The guards sit in silence as one of their number prepares a stew, another carefully tending the fire so it does not smoke. Lady Kianmay emerges, once again concealed in her cowl. She approaches the fire, but does not sit, instead pacing restlessly.

The silence is the quiet discipline of well-trained soldiers, not making unnecessary sounds. Any group of merchant's guards would be laughing and joking. You watch Lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark as they step aside to speak together quietly. Aching with curiosity, you turn to the guard seated on the stone next to you.

"Do you play cards?" You ask softly.

The guard looks up, then exchanges glances with the other four. A couple look towards Captain Penmark, who is still talking with the lady, before one reaches into a pocket and takes out a stack of cards. As the pot bubbles, the guards gather around and the cards are dealt. You play a few hands with the men, still in silence. Even so, you feel like they have accepted you.

Once the meal is ready, Lady Kianmay and Captain Penmark join the circle and the stew is dished up into wooden bowls. You eagerly take yours and tearing a hunk of bread from the loaf that is passed around, you hungrily begin to eat. The stillness and silence around you makes you look up and you see the lady and the five guards paused in prayer. You stop chewing, and moments later the guards begin to eat.

The stew is good, but contains no meat. It is obvious now that the lady is a priestess, and the guards are all paladin. But which god do they serve? Is this a holy mission of some sort? You wonder what forces of evil are lined up against you.

After the meal, everything is packed up again and the journey resumes. As the trail winds back and forth, you keep an eye on the sun, hoping you are still heading mostly northward. After an hour or so the trail reaches a fork, and Captain Penmark pauses, looking back to you. You shrug, then point to the most northward-facing trail.

Captain Penmark frowns at you, but urges his horse forward. The trail is more contorted than a serpent with a stomach-ache, often so narrow that the carriage can only just scrap through. Just as the sky starts to dim with the beginnings of dusk, an unwelcome sight comes into view ahead. A rockfall has filled the trail with debris, blocking it. While the men could climb over, it is a dead end for the horses and the carriage.

Glancing at the sky, Captain Penmark orders camp to be made. None of the paladin even look at you, but you sense that they are not pleased by your guidance. You settle down for the night, briefly concerned about mountain lions. You sleep fitfully on the stones, your bedroll too thin to cushion against the hardness. Perhaps because you are sleeping so badly, you awaken suddenly when you hear a faint clink. Sensing something is very wrong, you quietly push your blankets away and grasp your weapon. You roll over and begin to crawl to a vantage point. You notice that all the paladin are awake, but lie still in their blankets, hands on their swords. You spy the sentry in the light of the dying fire, who stands concealed opposite. He waves a hand at you, telling you to be still. He points up the trail and holds up five fingers, then four. Nine assailants, sneaking up on you.

Making sure you are hidden in the shadows, you watch and see the first of the intruders. Rather than an orc or a goblin, it is a human, dressed in scalemail armour with a drawn sword in hand. He wears a helm with a rampant griffin on the brow. You see his eyes flick about nervously, looking for the sentry. Seeing nothing, he moves forward, followed by five more similarly clad soldiers. You force yourself to be calm, waiting for the sentry's lead. You wonder what he is waiting for! The first soldier is only feet away from the closest sleeping paladin. You can see all nine now,

all stepping within the boundary of the firelight. The soldiers look at each other, then one raises his sword.

“Attack.” Says the sentry. The command is so quiet that you are left behind as the paladin suddenly roll over and leap up, taking the soldiers by surprise. The sentry also leaps out behind the soldiers, and you hurry to flank him, blocking off retreat.

Steel clashes as the paladin and soldiers fight. You and the sentry charge forward. You are able to strike down one soldier as he staggers back, never even seeing you. But then you are faced by two soldiers, who leap at you and attack at the same time.

GRIFFIN SOLDIER 1 SKILL 8 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 3

GRIFFIN SOLDIER 2 SKILL 9 STAMINA 18 DB 6 ARMOUR 3

If you win, turn to **67**

If you die, turn to **309**

225

Deciding it is some trick, you rush at the woman to destroy her. A surprised look comes onto her face, followed by sadness. She raises a hand and you are suddenly gasped by some invisible force that smashes you to a stop and then hoists you off the ground.

The invisible grip begins to crush you, and your mind is swallowed in to blackness. When you regain consciousness, you are lying in the road on Tappin. You slowly get up, feeling shaken. (Lose half your STAMINA). You sit by the fire aching for the rest of your watch, then wake one of the paladin and collapse into your blankets.

Turn to **207**

226

Quickly leaving the room, you hurry to the back door, which you discover opens to the stableyard. You make it out into the streets with no sign of pursuit. You decide to be careful and take a circular route back to your inn.

You prepare yourself to report to Kianmay.

Turn to **123**

227

Going into the markets once more, you find that most of the shops have closed. Being open after dark means lighting lamp or candles and most shopkeepers have too few late customers to justify the cost. Deciding on the disguise of someone going to bring an offering to the temple, you find a clothing store that is still open. You can buy a fine robe and a hat for a total of 10 gold coins. Another store has some lamp oil for sale and you can buy a large sealed jar for 5 gold.

You buy the disguise and make your way back to the White Garden to prepare yourself for the ruse. You unlock the door and step inside. As you close the door, your instincts tell you to duck...

Test your SKILL and your LUCK. Roll 4 die. If the total is equal to or less than the sum of your current SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **365**.

Otherwise, turn to **488**

228

Dragging the dead bandit into a concealed hollow you search his body, finding a bejewelled dagger, a flask of alcohol and three whistles on a leather cord around his neck. From the crude images carved onto the whistles, you see that they are three different birdcalls; no doubt for sending signals. You can also take his longsword.

The way ahead should be safe for the wagon now, and you leave the hilltop.

Turn to **329**

229

Creeping across the hall, you listen at the door, then open it and slip into the lighted interior. You are in a study. There is another door to your left. A massive wooden desk dominates the room, facing towards where you are now, with a high backed chair behind it. On the wall behind the desk is a shield and a pair of crossed swords behind it. On either side are small shelves, each holding a large glass jar in which is a preserved head. An orc on the right, an ogre on the left. Somehow you doubt the owner killed them himself.

There are some bookshelves and cabinets scattered around the walls, but the wall to your right is oddly empty. This wall is also much further forward than the rear wall of the bathroom.

If you think there is a secret door here and know what to look for, use the alphanumeric key below to convert the letters of the single word answer into numbers, and add these numbers together to calculate the passage number you need.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Alternatively you can go through the other door by turning to **160**

Otherwise, you must return to the hall and search elsewhere. Turn to **233**

230

You reach out to snatch the box, but the manservant nimbly steps back and retreats, placing the strongbox on a sidetable in the entrance hall. He turns back to

you and draws from his sleeves two slim bladed knives. You notice that the blades are discoloured with poison.

The manservant is Raul's personal assassin. Because of the poison, if you are wounded by him, the fight will only last for another five rounds. At that time the poison will reach your heart and you will be dead. Even if you win within 5 rounds you will still die unless you have a healing phial with you.

GRIFFON ASSASSIN SKILL 12 STAMINA 15 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

If you are having second thoughts and want to run away, turn to **245**

If you win, turn to **145**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

If you win but don't have a healing potion to drink, or if the battle reaches the sixth round after you were first wounded, turn to **928**

231

Laremidan talks more about the Wolf, but it seems he only knows rumours. While he talks, you begin to feel very drowsy. Your eyelids droop and are too heavy to lift. You try as hard as you can to open your eyes, but all you manage to do is fall out of the chair. You are only vaguely aware of striking the floor. Everything turns black and you float into the darkness of death. A light blooms and embraces you, and you know that you are forgiven and that all will be well for your soul.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

232

"Hello," you say, smiling at the orcs. "What is this place?"

"How you get here?" screeches one orc, both moving to their feet and fumbling at short swords at their sides.

"We came through the tunnel," you say. "We have been suspicious of your activities here for some time, so the King has sent us to investigate. I have with me 1000 soldiers."

At you claim of 1000 soldiers, the orcs actually appear to relax. But they are still nervous, and glance towards the door.

"Where be dees soldiers?" one asks.

"Investigating the digging," you reply. "What is going on here?"

The orcs grin. "Your men soon be dead!" says one, and they both chuckle.

You see one inhale deeply. It is going to call for help! Quickly you jump forward and open its throat with a savage attack. The other orc gets out a cry for help before you can turn on it.

Test you SKILL and your LUCK. Roll 4 die.

If the total is equal to or less than the sum of your current SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **380**.

Otherwise, turn to **271**

233

Where do you want to go now?

The first door on the left? Turn to **132**

The second door on the left? Turn to **181**

The first door on the right? Turn to **229**

The second door on the right? Turn to **278**

If you would prefer to stop sneaking around and go back to your quarters for dinner, turn to **308**

234

Although the danger seems to be past, Kianmay becomes concerned about the way ahead and asks you about the likelihood of bandit attacks further ahead. You tell her that every merchant must take precautions against bandits, and that it is safer to assume you will be attacked.

Hearing this, Kianmay becomes very concerned. She is silent in thought for many moments, then says: "You have been attacked by bandits many times?"

"Yes," you reply, although 'many' could be stretching the truth somewhat.

"Then you know well the ways of bandits," she reasons. "You can look at the way ahead and tell if an attack is likely."

"Well, in part," you reply. "There are many places along any road that are suited to an ambush. Yet a group of bandits will not always use the same spot, else they be ambushed themselves. Thus they will move from place to place."

"Who are these bandits?" Kianmay asks.

You pause, then shrug. "That I have never considered. Some are criminals who cannot live in any city or town for fear of being arrested, so they live by preying upon merchants, and raiding farms. Others are poorer townsfolk who supplement their livelihood by attacking merchants that are poorly guarded."

Kianmay bites her lip. "It is very important they we are not attacked," she says. A sarcastic response comes to mind, but you keep your mouth shut. "If you scout ahead, can you make sure the way ahead is safe?"

"Well...yes," you reply reluctantly.

"Then do so," Kianmay commands, and reaches out for the reins.

Slowly, you place the reins in her gloved hands. Ready your equipment, you take one of the spare horses and urge it to a canter, drawing you ahead of the wagon. After you are a fair distance ahead, you let your horse fall back to a walk. As you move along the road, you keep alert while slumping in your saddle, trying to appear like a lone, weary traveller.

Your guise is a bit of a gamble. Alone, you are an easy target. But bandits always need to be wary of the King's Guard that patrols the highways. For this reason they prefer to attack as little as possible. If no travellers could pass through the kingdom, a drastic response would ensue. Thus the bandits choose their targets carefully. The problem is one could carefully choose to attack you. If they kill you and take your horse, then maybe no one will ever know what happened to you.

You have the advantage of knowing this road. After about two hours, you know that you are approaching a section of the forest that is strewn with rocks. Some sitting on the ground as if scattered about by a giant, others growing out of the ground. The

road passes between two rocky outcrops ahead. It is an ideal spot for an ambush, allowing a small number of men to attack a large party with great success. You heard once that a group of bandits led by Gilmore the Groat attacked a large merchant train by dumping boulders down onto the horses and oxen drawing the wagons. The boulders killed the poor beasts, and immobilised the wagons. The bandits then picked off the guards that did not flee with arrows. The King's Guard hunted Gilmore the Groat for a month in response, but he evaded capture.

Although you do not believe every part of the story; such as being able to accurately aim eight boulders and drop them without someone below noticing you trying to do it; you are still concerned about the pass ahead. Moving off the road, you tie your horse to a tree near a patch of grass and pour some water into your hand, letting the animal drink before you head off into the undergrowth. The land soon climbs, and you begin to move even more quietly and keep a watch on the trees overhead. The bandits will need a lookout.

The tree cover soon ends, and you creep along carefully, moving behind rises in the smooth moss-covered rock. As you move ahead, you hear someone cough and freeze. You listen and you think you can hear someone breathing. As slowly as you can, you move around the source of the sound. You come upon a worn path in the hillside, winding between the boulders and up-thrusting stone. Walking up the path carefully, you come upon the back of a man reclining against a rock where he can look over the road below. He is wrapped in a dark grey cloak that is a similar hue to the rocks. You spy his well-made boots and guess that this may be a professional bandit. His sword is lying next to him on the ground, next to a bottle.

Contemplating the opportunities before you, do you want to:

Try to kill him before he knows you are there? Turn to **215**

Try to take his sword without him noticing? Turn to **25**

235

You show Kianmay the crystal orb on the golden chain. As soon as she touches it, the liquid swirling inside changes colour, becoming milky white, but with a thread of black in it. She hastily gives it back to you. In your hands the orb fills with the red and black liquid once more. She tells you it is a manifesting orb, and allows you to see the nature of the being who holds it. You ask her what the colours mean, but she says she does not know. You don't think she is lying, but she is obviously not telling you everything.

Return now to **240**

236

As much as you try, you can't keep your eyes open and you fall down onto the ground and slip into a strange dreamless sleep. When you wake, you feel refreshed. (Restore your STAMINA to its initial level.) You are lying in the road near the camp, shivering. You get up and warm yourself by the fire for the rest of your watch. You

then wake one of the paladin to take their turn and return to your blankets. You are unable to sleep and lie awake until dawn.

Turn to **207**

237

Your journey across the tundra is uneventful for five days, before you reach another road. Turning towards the north once more, you reach another town by the end of the day. It is a small town surrounded by a ditch and palisade. The guards let you in without challenge and you try to find an inn. There are only two inns in the town, conveniently sitting side by side.

The first is larger and in better condition, with a gilded sign proclaiming it as The King's Tub. The second has a crude sign that simple says 'Inn'.

Do you want to go to The King's Tub? Turn to **106**

If you want to try the 'Inn', turn to **315**

238

Gilmore's blood spills down over his armour and he blinks at you. You move away to let him crash to the ground. Kicking his evil sword away from his body, you nudge him to make sure he is dead, then give orders for the camp to be searched for useful supplies.

You help yourself to Gilmore's fine Silver Scalemail armour. It will add 1 to your SKILL while wearing it. You can keep it for yourself, or sell later. Searching other bodies and the tents, you find 26 gold coins. Searching Gilmore's tent you find all the slaves have fled, and taken with them all of Gilmore's valuables.

While you have been conducting your grisly search, the paladin have pulled down sheets of canvas from the tents and wrapped the bodies of the bandits, as well as the evil sword. Piling the bodies together, they set them alight.

With nothing else to do, you gather up your gear and return to Kianmay.

Roll one die. This is the number of merchant guards that died in this battle.

Turn to **44**

239

You wish the vampire luck and ask her where the exit is. She goes over to a section of wall and pushes against it. It moves back and swings open, revealing a tunnel.

She takes a golden armband set with opals and diamonds off her arm and hands it to you with her thanks, saying the armband will protect you. You farewell her and make your way into the tunnel, making for the sunlit exit about 100 feet away.

You emerge in Darken Wood, turning around to see the white marble tower rising above the treetops. Turning away once more, you begin your journey back. You

wander through the Wood for hours, and then come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. "Do you have it?" Her eyes are wild.

"Yes." You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**



240

You continue your journey north through the great forests. If you have any of the following items, you can show them to Kianmay to identify:

- A jade ring (85)
- An orb amulet (235)
- The King's Broadsword (285)
- A winged helm (335)
- A golden armband (385)

You pass through a few small towns and semi-permanent camps before you finally leave the forests and travel across tundra towards the great northern city of Arantator.

In the winter the high grasslands are covered with snow, but now the lush green stretches as far as the eyes can see. You can also see the road winding along far into the distance and can relax at last, having no fear of bandits. There are other dangers here, but the tundra is vast and attacks by brigades and tundra beasts are unlikely.

The first night you camp on the tundra, your camp is visited by a pack of wolves. But they are easily kept at bay by the fire. If it were winter, even the fire would not protect you from their hunger.

The next day you reach a large town surrounded by a ditch and palisade. The gate is closed, but merchants are common, and as it is late in the day, the watchman calls for the gate to be opened without challenging you. The soldiers here wear breastplates set with a wolf's head of brass. Evidently the current king of these lands has won many riches with the edge of his sword. You ask one of the guards at the gate who the wolf's head represents.

"He calls himself the Wolf," the guard replies. "He gives no name."

“That sounds comical,” you suggest carefully. Is he a king or the hero of a play?

The guard gives you a hard look. “Many others have said so. Particularly the other kings that his majesty has ground into the dirt with his heel!”

You leave things there with the guard, and set about finding an inn. You find a place called the Weary Oxen, and pay 3 gold for 3 rooms, plus 1 gold for stabling the oxen. The journey from Yorman has taken ten days, so pay your men ten gold each. There is a market in the town where you may buy and sell goods. Now that you are far enough North, you can sell the ivory and dye for twice the price you paid to buy it. The weapons will sell for the same price. You are free to sell all of your goods here, as there is not much further north to go. Arantator is the last stop on the trade route.

Going down to the common room, you approach the barman and order a beer. Clutching the warm mug, you ask him about the current king.

“Calls himself the Wolf!” the barman says, and chuckles, but does so quietly. “These lands used to be ruled by Erigan the Red, if you recall. He was the first to go. The Wolf had but a small band and came right up to Erigan’s fortress just near here and demanded his surrender! Erigan just laughed at him, of course, so the Wolf challenged him to a duel. They met at dawn the next day. They say the Wolf killed Erigan in one stroke! The Red’s men were so awed they joined him right away. Well, after that story got out, none of the other kings wanted to challenge him, so they attacked him on sight. But the Wolf is cunning and one by one he defeated them all.”

“All?” you say with a frown. “But I was here only a year ago. How can he defeat a dozen kings in such a time?”

“Ah, that’s the power of rumour, my friend. He faced only five in battle. Defeated them all. Each time the losing king was dragged before him, the wolf emptied his blood into a bowl. But after he took a sip he sat it out again, saying to take in the blood of such men would weaken him! Then he tips the blood out on the ground. That’s a big deal to these northern types. When the victor drinks the blood, not only does he take his enemy’s strength, but then there is something of the old king in the new, and the oath of loyalty is transferred. But every one of the vanquished warriors swore a new oath to Wolf, just like that! And it’s a hard oath to make, my friend. Out of every ten men who swear to him, he commands one to kill himself, right then and there! So far they’ve all done it too. That’s an uncommon kind of power, friend. The other kings met to join forces against him, but instead they decided it would be best to surrender!” The barman laughs. “So now they are allowed to rule as Barons, as long as they pay the Wolf tribute!”

“What about Arantator?” you ask.

“Ah, the great city hasn’t fallen yet. Could be too big even for the Wolf. But old King Darm will be trembling in his booties I’m sure!”

“What sort of King is the Wolf?” you ask.

The barman shrugs. “Not sure yet. We haven’t heard of any new laws being passed. He appointed a magistrate to rule the city, one of his kind. A big man with a topknot. Looks like he would resolve all points of law with his axe!”

You thank the barman for his news.

The next day you leave the town. Travelling out into the tundra, the morning passes uneventfully. At midday you pause for a meal. As your men sit and prepare to eat, one of the paladin calls you. You go to where he is standing, Penmark is already there, peering into the distance. You can see a man on a horse sitting there. He carries a long lance, and remains motionless, watching your party.

You call out to him, but he does not respond. You and Penmark discuss going out to him when suddenly you hear a cry of pain and surprise from behind you. You spin

about and finally see the horseman's purpose. He has distracted you long enough for his companions to sneak up on you. Northmen in armour and furs are attacking your camp with short bows and swords. Quickly you grab your weapon and join the fray. Already you can see too many of your men are dead.

Penmark is at your side, and you protect Kianmay, who has run to hide under the cart. With the cart at your back and the sturdy warrior at your side, the raiders can only attack you one at a time.

RAIDER 1	SKILL 8	STAMINA	20	DB 6	ARMOUR 5
RAIDER 2	SKILL 3	STAMINA	22	DB 16	ARMOUR 5
RAIDER 3	SKILL 7	STAMINA	22	DB 6	ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **350**

If you are on the verge of death you can hide under the cart with Kianmay.

If you abandon the fight and wait out the battle under the cart while two or more of the three raiders are still alive, turn to **48**

If you wait out the battle, leaving just one Raider alive, turn to **252**

241

The left hand road takes you deep into the mountains. The cold turns bitter and bites into you despite the heavy furs that you wear. You spend three days clutching the reins in freezing hands, your gloves too thin to keep out the cold. Thankfully there are no blizzards.

As the third day comes to a close, you see something on the road ahead. Your heart sinks as you see an avalanche has filled the pass with rocks and snow. With no other choice you camp that night and the next day begin the journey back to the original intersection.

Pay your men 6 gold each and then take a different route:

Straight on? Turn to **351**

Thr right-hand road? Turn to **316**

242

The sorcerer leads you over to a rack where there are three weapons. The first is a heavy mace, with a shaft carved of dark wood with dragons upon it. The head is a steel ball with long spikes on it.

The second is a hammer with a large silver head, the long shaft wound with blue and silver silk. There is even a pearl set in the base of the haft.

The last is a double-headed axe, the steel head inlaid with gold in the shape of runes of power. Even the wooden haft is carved with decorative grooves that are inlaid with gold.

All the pieces are somewhat decorative; gifts sent to the Wolf. But each is well-made and functional.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Dragon Mace	Fine Mace	14

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Silver Hammer	Warhammer	12

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Rune Axe	Axe	14

If you don't like any of these and want to ask for your own weapons, turn to **295**

Otherwise, you choose your weapon and the Sorcerer leads you through the house to an adjoining compound.

Turn to **258**

243

Thrusting at the bandit, you turn and begin to dash down the slope. You take a few steps, then try to leap to the side, but the rough ground catches under your feet and you fall down. You try to roll away, and tumble down a slope. The world spins around you, and you do not know where you are. You finally come to a stop, and climb to you feet as quickly as you can. You spin around, looking for the bandit. You cannot see him, but see a way down the slop towards the cover of the trees.

You run off as quickly as you can, falling over again, but making it safely to the trees. You hear no signs of pursuit, but run all the way back to your horse. Jumping into the saddle, you gallop off up the road back towards the rest of your party.

Turn to **161**

244

Stepping forward, you look over the circle of werewolves. "I cannot allow this abomination to continue."

The warriors ignore you. The clerk speaks. "If you have a complaint; speak. You will be heard."

"I know that all of these men are werewolves," you announce.

The statement generates less of a reaction than you were expecting. The clerk replies: "What is the nature of your concern?"

"The North cannot be ruled by ravenous beasts!"

"What do you intend to do about this matter?"

What indeed. "I challenge the Wolf to a duel! If I win, the rest of you must leave this land."

"When and where?" the clerk asks.

"Here and now!" you declare.

The warrior at the foot of the circle, with his back to you, stands and turns around. He is a small man, but his dark eyes are bright with keen intelligence. He wears

chainmail under white wolf furs, and wears a scimitar at his side. He has a steel band around his shaved head, and his thick braided beard reaches his waist.

He sucks on his pipe and looks you over. "I am the Wolf. I request that you withdraw your challenge."

If you have changed your mind and want to leave, turn to **42**

If you are determined to continue, turn to **89**

245

Turning away from the manservant, you open the back door and hurry out into the stable yard. All is quiet, and the manservant does not raise the alarm. You do not pause to wonder why and hurry through the streets to the barman's house. He is relieved to see you, greeting you like a long lost friend. You silently toss him a gold coin and leave with your merchant guard.

Returning to your own inn, you climb the stairs towards Kianmay's room.

Turn to **123**

246

"I'm tired," you tell the owner. "I'm about to go to bed."

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir," he says. "Well, have a good night."

You wish him a good night as well and close the door. You are looking forward to a good night's sleep. This is not the sort of inn where you could be killed in your bed. Do you want to watch anyway?

If you do, turn to **98**

If you think everything will be fine, turn to **260**

247

Walking into the Guardhouse, you find yourself in a small room. There is a table and chair here, positioned facing the entrance, with another door behind it. On the table there is a small bell. You stride forward and pick up the bell, hurling it at the closed door.

Moments later, a lock clicks and the door opens. A strange-looking woman pulls the door open and steps out to meet you. She is tall, with a shapely body clad in a bright steel breastplate moulded to her form. She has long wavy blonde hair, and bright blue eyes. But she is one of the ugliest women you have ever seen.

"Can I help you?" she asks coolly.

"I want to see the Warden!" you demand.

"Concerning what matter?" she asks, one gloved hand resting on the hilt of her sword.

"My wagon was confiscated for no good cause! And one of my men has disappeared, presumably arrested by you!"

“A routine inspection,” the guardswoman replies. “Your man has been detained for questioning. We have just concluded our enquiries. You can have your man and your wagon now. The release fee for the man is five gold, for the wagon, ten gold.”

“What?” you exclaim. “He committed no crime! There was no contraband in the wagon! I demand to see the Warden right now!”

“Your man is drunk. As for the wagon, it is confiscated property. Ten gold is the standard fee.”

“The wagon was in a stableyard!” you protest. “It wasn’t obstructing a lane way or abandoned!”

The woman turns away. “I will send out a clerk to take your payment. If you object, feel free to leave in a huff.”

“I want to speak to the Warden!” you shout as she is about to close the door.

“You have been,” she replies, and the door clicks shut.

What do you want to do?

Pay the 15 gold? Turn to **164**

Leave and try to sneak into the compound? Turn to **117**



248

The demons talons slash across your body once more. This time it is too much, and you fall down. The demon scoops you up and carries you into the air. He slams your body onto a flesh hook and begins to feed on you. You feel the sharp teeth as they shred your flesh.

Why are you still aware? Do don’t understand what is happening, but suddenly you feel the presence of goodness, like a fresh breeze and your pain fades away. You are ascending, carried in the arms of the woman you tried to free. She smiles at you. Her skin is luminous and great silvery wings extend from her body.

“I’m sorry,” you say.

“You fought as well as you could,” she replies. “I have set your soul free from hell. Go now.”

She releases you, and you feel yourself floating. You drift gently into the embrace of light and know that you have died in the service of heaven.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

249

Kianmay is disturbed by your story and frowns, biting her lip. “Once our mission is done, we must come back here with an army and destroy these orcs. There is evil

here, that is certain, and orcs will be susceptible to it. For now I think we must move on. From what you have said I think we can expect some pursuit.”

You agree and rouse the men. Soon you are on your way again. Resuming your journey, you soon break out into the sunshine and fresh air once more. You feel the joy of freedom and shout out loudly, not caring who hears you.

You descend into the hills and soon come to the town of Yorman.

The journey has only taken 4 days. Pay your men four gold each and turn to **135**

250

Leaning wearily on the spear, you hold yourself upright. The demon glares at you. You can see confusion whirling in its eyes. It advances once more, but to your surprise it reaches out and lays its hands on your shoulders. It lifts its head and wails, tears spilling from its eyes. Suddenly it disintegrates, demonic flesh turning to dust and a glowing form rising up and disappearing through the ceiling. You hear something fall onto the floor and see the Diamond Key box and a slim jade ring being buried under a cloud of descending dust. Quickly you scoop up both treasures and look for a way out of the chamber.

. One of the bricked walls has cracked and you go over to it. Using the powerful spear, you break down the wall and see a tunnel on the other side. To your shock and dismay the spear also breaks into pieces. You follow the tunnel and soon come out into Darken Wood. You don't know where you are, but have no choice. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. “Do you have it?” Her eyes are wild.

“Yes.” You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

251

Finding the section of wall where the bricks appear to have the best foot- and hand-holds, you begin to climb the wall. It is hard going, and you fall down once. Eventually you make it to the top. Getting over the lip is a feat in itself, but you manage it. As you crouch triumphantly on the top of the wall, you peer down and see your wagon. There is also an outhouse near the rear wall, and you hurry along to it and lower yourself down inside the wall, dropping a couple of feet onto the roof. You then leap down and hurry across to your wagon.

Now that you are here, you wonder what to do next. There are some horses in a stable nearby. To move the wagon you will have to hitch some animal up to it. As

you are contemplating what to do, you hear a sudden call to alarm. You see a guardsman hurrying away from the outhouse. He advances on you with a club and unwashed hands.

Other guardsmen will be here in seconds.

Do you want to fight the Guardsman and escape? Turn to **286**

Attacking a Guardsman is a serious matter. If you prefer to surrender, turn to **364**

252

Unable to fight any more, you scramble under the wagon. Do you have 15 fighters or more in your party? If so, turn to **139**. If not, turn to **344**

253

You carefully slide the sapphire-set ring off a skeletal finger, and put it onto your own. Immediately you feel more skilful. You may add 2 to your SKILL while you are wearing this ring.

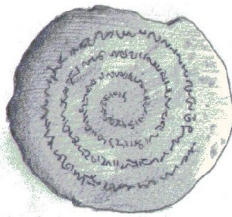
Thanking the crow once more, you leave the ruined palace and make your way back through Darken Wood. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. "Do you have it?" Her eyes are wild.

"Yes." You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**



254

Darm proves to be too strong for you, and as the death-blow descends, you cringe. But the blow never falls (your STAMINA = 1). You open your eyes to see the avatar has vanished, white mist dispersing into the air. You stagger to your feet as quickly as you can. (If you have any healing potions, you should drink them now).

Darm laughs at you from his throne. "You cannot even match me as a warrior! Give up your foolish quest and give me the Diamond Key!"

“I won’t,” you reply.

“Honourless dog!” shouts Darm, and surges to his feet. He lifts his arm and a bolt of lightning arcs from his hand, too quick for you to dodge. It strikes you and knocks you backwards.

Are you wearing crow armour, silver studded leather armour, or a golden armband?

If so, turn to **915**

If not, turn to **987**

255

You easily find the Diamond Key in its box and place it in your pack. You search for whatever else the creature was carrying, but find nothing. Giving up, you look for a way out. One of the bricked walls has cracked and you go over to it. Using the powerful spear, you break down the wall and see a tunnel on the other side. To your shock and dismay the spear also breaks into pieces. You follow the tunnel and soon come out into Darken Wood. You don’t know where you are, but have no choice. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

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Turn to **240**

256

The clang of metal, and a hundred smoking tendrils vanishing into the sky lead you to the smith’s quarter. Here a hundred hammers pound iron, copper, steel, gold and silver into everything from a humble barrel hoop to delicate gold leaf.

You locate the largest weaponsmith, his trade indicated by a sword hanging on chains above his shop entrance. Entering inside, you find a single large space like a barn, with a forge in the centre. The walls are lined with racks of weapons, and tables at which apprentices and assistants work riveting spearheads onto shafts, binding grips of swords, and fletching arrows. Platforms hang from the ceiling high above, on which you can see displayed the finer goods.

The weaponsmith is at the forge, clad in a white robe and a scarred apron. You are mesmerised as he heats a blade with a meditative air. Even when he moves to the anvil and begins to strike the glowing metal with the long-handled hammer, the clanging is like a gong at a temple.

You almost jump when an assistant addresses you.

“Good afternoon, sir. How may we be of service?”

You explain that you *might* be interested in buying a large quantity of weapons. The assistant nods and leads you over to some of the racks. He shows you a number of weapons and explains that they are sold by the box only. You attempt to bargain, but the assistant refuses to haggle. Evidently the weaponsmith does good business. The prices are reasonable anyway. You can choose from the following:

Box of 5 Spears: 80 gold
Box of 10 Javelins: 50 gold
Box of 5 Longswords: 100 gold

Your wagon only has enough space for 1000 jars, or 10 boxes of weapons or ivory (1 box = 100 jars). You may only purchase enough goods to fill the wagon.

A fine broadsword on one of the platforms also catches your eye. It is very plain in appearance, not encrusted in jewels like most of the weapons on the platforms. If you would like to take a look at it, turn to **110**.

When you have finished here, you can:

Visit the Dye-maker; turn to **74**

Visit the Ivory-carver; turn to **199**

Go to hire merchant guards; turn to **300**

257

You show Kianmay the elephant amulet. She examines it briefly and tells you its properties. It will add 2 to each of your initial SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK scores.

Return now to **293**

258

The compound is surrounded by fences at which are crowded hundreds of soldiers, with others behind standing on wagons and barrels and whatever they can find to gain a vantage point. The ground is packed dirt, the grass long since worn away and pounded flat. In the centre of the compound stands the Wolf, minus his white wolf-furs. He is clad in his bring chainmail with his scimitar in hand and a plain bell-shaped steel helm upon his head.

The assembled warriors cheer and jeer at you as the sorcerer shows you in. You walk in some way before coming to a stop. The Wolf holds up his hand, and you are shocked as the silence falls in an instant. His authority is unparalleled!

The Wolf gestures to you. "Earlier this day I found this man in my throne room. I asked him if he had come to kill me, for as you know, the king of Arantator has sent many assassins against me. All of whom have failed. This man did not sneak into my hall, nor did he charge in. In fact he wasn't even armed! I wondered if this was a new tactic I had not seen before." The assembled men laugh. "But no. He said he had not come to kill me. He likewise denied being a thief. Yet he claimed to be a warrior, and so I have brought him here. I know not if he is assassin or thief. He seems not to know either! As always I shall not kill any man I command to face me

in this place. But if he kills me he shall be richly rewarded.” The warriors cheer their king’s nobility. The Wolf holds up his hand once more, commanding silence in an instant. He lowers his arm and points at you. “Warrior! If you fight for riches, then kill me, for your reward shall be great! If you are no warrior, but a thief, then take this from me and go.” He takes from his belt a bag of coin and throws it at your feet. The bag splits and gold coins spill out. You estimate there are about 100 coins. The assembled soldiers jeer and throw out small valuables; coins, rings and gems, until the ground is littered with what is a small fortune in treasure. “If you are a true warrior, whose honour and courage is not for sale, then face me.”

Looking at the riches in the dirt you estimate it is as much as you would earn in a lifetime as a merchant guard, assuming you weren’t killed like half of those in your profession. If you kill the Wolf, the riches might be even greater. But is this what you want? What will you do?

If you want to drop your weapon and gather up all the riches, turn to **15**

If you want to refuse to fight the Wolf, turn to **113**

If you want to fight the Wolf, turn to **307**

259

“These are our guards?” Kianmay asks with a frown.

“Yes,” you reply.

“So few! Well, get them on their horses, we have a long way to go, she says, and makes her way to the wagon.

You call the men together and tell them to form up. They encircle the wagon, keeping their distance from the paladin, looking at them with the same curiosity and apprehension that you once felt. Kianmay climbs up onto the wagon seat next to you.

The road rolls under the wheels of the creaking wagon, and your party travels for several hours before Penmark calls for a halt at midday. You park the wagon under a large oak near the road and the paladin begin to set up a cooking fire. You notice that the paladin and the merchant guards keep to themselves, and even though the merchant guards talk, they do so in a whisper, influenced by the quiet peace of the paladin.

Knowing this will not do, you clap your hands. “All right everyone, listen up! Everyone looks at you. “We have a long journey to make and we need to be work as one. So I want everyone to stand up one by one. Tell us your name and where you are from. And then something else about you if you think it’ll amuse us all to hear. You there! You are first.”

You point to one of the merchant guards. Slowly he stands up. “My name is Tyren. I’m from Fang. Err...I can balance a dagger on my nose.”

This claim demands a demonstration, so Tyren draws his dagger and tilts his head back with the pommel on his broad nose. With a bit of dancing, he is able to balance the dagger for thirty seconds, drawing applause and cheers from the merchant guards.

Once the merchant guards have stood up and introduced themselves, then either performed a trick or told an amusing story; it is the turn of the first paladin. The light mood becomes slightly heavier, and you wait with some nervousness. This will be the test. The paladin stands up. You recognise him as the carriage driver. He glances at Penmark, but does not wait for permission before speaking.

“I am Harteran.” He says in a quiet voice. “I am from Southern Atera. I can play the tin flute.” He takes out a slender pipe of tin and positioning his fingers on the holes plays a short merry tune. The merchant guards cheer and clap when he is done. Harteran looks a bit embarrassed and avoids looking at Penmark and lady Kianmay. The priestess is grinning broadly, and her eyes dance with light. The other paladin introduce themselves, some warmth breaking through their discipline. Paladin come from somewhere as well, you reflect.

By the time the meal is ready, all are talking, and Harteran is taking requests on his flute. Penmark, who avoided having to introduce himself by keeping away from the fire gives you a smile and a nod of approval. Lady Kianmay also seems pleased with you.

If you are carrying a Holy Broadsword, you can show it now to Kianmay to ask her about it (turn to **394**, then return to this passage).

To continue your journey, turn to **126**

260

You settle down to sleep. You are so exhausted that you quickly drop off into a deep sleep. You are suddenly awoken by someone grabbing you. You struggle in the darkness, but you are securely bound and dragged out into the hall. Here a servant stands with a lamp and you look up at your captors, seeing two members of the town guard. They drag you into the bedroom, where you see Kianmay sitting up wide-eyed in her bed, faced with the owner Laremidan who carries a longsword in his hand.

He grins as you are dragged in. “Now we will see if you are lying.” Laremidan steps over to you and places the tip of the sword at your throat, one of the town guards grabbing your hair roughly. “Give me the Diamond Key or I will kill him.”

“I do not have it!” Kianmay says firmly.

The tip of the sword is edged forward, and draws blood. “Tell me where it is or I will kill him!”

“Would you truly imperil your soul for worldly gain?” Kianmay asks.

“Tell me!” Laremidan says loudly, the tip of the sword sticking further into your neck.

Kianmay speaks boldly. “Either you will kill him and your soul will be further damned. Or you will spare him and may be saved. All else is as dust on the wind! This Diamond Key is not as precious as your own soul.”

Laremidan loses patience and slides the sword through your throat. The pain of being poked through the neck is oddly less than you would have expected. Your blood pours out onto the floor and you fade into blackness.

As you float on the sea of darkness, you feel yourself held aloft by a shining thread. Soon you awaken once more to discover that you are not dead. You are lying somewhere that is dark and hard. You get up, finding yourself whole and unharmed (restore your STAMINA to its initial level). You feel for the Diamond Key, and find it still in the cloth bag around your neck, hidden safely under your shirt. By the light streaming under the door, you see that you are in the tub in the bathroom. You climb from the bath and creep over to the door.

You can still hear voices, and carefully open the door. All the servants and guardsmen appear to be inside the bedroom. You can hear Laremidan demanding

Kianmay tell him where the Key is. She is oddly silent. You are without your armour and weapons, which are still in the sitting room.

What do you want to do?

Do you want to pretend to be a ghost and try to scare them away? Turn to **72**

If you would rather get your armour and weapons and then attack them, turn to **324**

261

Deciding not to knock, you make your way back to your inn. You climb the stairs and knock on Kianmay's door. Penmark opens the door, and you enter to see Kianmay standing with hands on hips.

"Where were you?"

"Making sure things are safe," you reply. "I can now get you to the door of his room without danger."

"Good." Kianmay picks up a scarf and wraps it around her neck. "Let's get this over with."

"What are you going to do?" you ask.

"You will see," Kianmay replies, throwing her cloak around her shoulders and striding out the door. "Come on."

You hasten to follow, noticing that Penmark is not coming with you. It seems the two of you alone are going to take on Count Raul. You hurry up to Kianmay's side as she walks out into the street. "At least tell me your plan so that I don't get in the way."

"If anyone attacks me, you may protect me," she replies. "Other than that, do and say nothing."

With this instruction in mind, you lead her to the Elegant Peacock and push open the gate. She strides in and pauses. You close the gate and point towards the back door of Room 1. "That's the door, but it is locked and bolted."

Kianmay nods curtly and stalks up to the door. She raises one hand and knocks loudly. You wince. Why did you ever agree to the plan of a naïve priestess? It is too late now, so you ready your weapons and try to appear harmless.

The bolt slides open, and the lock clicks. A moment later the doors are opened, spilling lamp-light across the stable yard. A manservant in black and gold livery, a griffon emblazoned on his chest, stands in the doorway. The small man appears unruffled by the late-night visit. "How may I help you, lady?"

"Please inform Count Raul that Alyn Mei is here to see him."

"Of course, my lady," the servant replies, and bowing low, invites her to enter. Kianmay walks inside and you follow. The manservant closes the doors and leads Kianmay into a sitting room. He offers her water, which she declines, then goes to inform Count Raul of her arrival. Kianmay sits down in one of the chairs before the fire, facing the doorway. You move to stand behind her.

It is only a few moments later when you hear rapid footsteps and a tall, thin man of middle years almost runs into the room. He wears platemail armour and has a longsword at his side. He has longish black hair and a hooked nose, a face accustomed to an aristocrat's sneer, but now his face is as eager as an excitable boy's.

"Alyn Mei!" he exclaims. He seems to calm himself, and turns to snap at his manservant. "Bring her a glass of water!" He turns back and takes the seat opposite, never even looking at you. "Why are you here?" he asks directly.

“You have caused the deaths of many men. This is the price of your greed, of your fear. I cannot allow it to continue. I have come to ask you to give up your pursuit and go home.”

Raul shakes his head slowly. “I cannot do that, Alyn Mei. The Diamond Key is a tool of destiny! I am ready to take up that destiny. How can you leave the key lying about in some dusty vault?”

Kianmay is silent for a few moments. “Then I will give you what you want. But I warn you that it will not help you.”

Raul looks surprised. “You will give me the key? You have it with you?”

“Is it what you truly want?” Kianmay asks.

“Yes!” Raul exclaims, leaning forward in his seat.

Kianmay reaches into her robe and pulls out a small wooden box about the size of your hand. Raul eagerly moves forward, kneeling on one knee before her. She holds the box out to him and he takes it with trembling hands.

He looks up, finally sparing a glance for you. “The Diamond Key is truly in here?”

“It is.” Kianmay replies.

The word of a priestess cannot be doubted, and all his caution falls away. Sitting back on his heels, he opens the lid and his eyes widen in wonder. They his eyes flicker and he faints in delight. Kianmay quickly scoops up the box and it disappears back into the depths of her robe.

“We can go now,” Kianmay replies, standing and walking from the room.

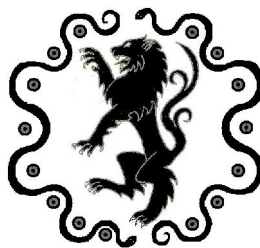
You share a shocked look with the manservant, then shrug at him and hurry after her. She is already in the stable yard by the time you catch up to her.

“What happens when he wakes up?” you ask.

“He won’t,” Kianmay explains. “I placed a sleeping spell upon him. He will sleep until I lift it. Or a powerful wizard.”

You escort her back to your inn, then go back to the barman’s apartment to collect your man and flip the relieved barman a gold coin. You then return to your inn to see Kianmay.

Turn to 290



Reaching the intersection you take one of the other passages. Most just end in a small door that when it is quiet beyond, you open to see a bathroom. Deciding not to creep around other people’s rooms, you close the doors again and resume your exploring. One door you approach has light streaming from holes above the door. And investigation finds that they are peepholes. You look through and see a fat man relaxing in the steam tub.

Seeing nothing of interest, you leave and explore the other passages. Now that you are looking, you find peepholes above all the doors. You shake your head, but reflect that servants have boring lives. You personally don't care if a young serving girl wants to watch you bathing.

Reaching the very rear of the inn, you come to another door that looks a bit different to the others as it is locked. You also find no peepholes here. It is quiet on the other side.

If you have lockpicks, do you want to try and unlock the door? Turn to **66**

If not, there is nothing else to do except go back. Turn to **308**

263

The bandits set only one sentry, and it is a simple matter to wait for him to wander off to relieve himself and quietly stab him in the lung. You nod to Penmark and you and your men move into the camp. Most of the bandits are in their tents, but a couple are wrapped in blankets near the fire. You approach them first and trying to keep calm, sink your dagger into their throats one by one, clamping a hand over their mouths to prevent them from crying out. You can see bottles lying about and guess that most have drunk at least some alcohol.

You carefully approach the first tent. You can hear soft snores from within, and as your eyes adjust, you crawl over the huddled forms, killing them one by one. The grisly task done, you leave

You begin to move towards the second tent when suddenly there is a shout behind you. You have been discovered. The bandits stagger to their feet and several rush at you. You run for the forest. Trying to fight so many in the open would be suicide.

You move into the darkness of the forest and turn around to face the bandits, who have armed themselves with torches. Roll one die. If the paladin have crossbows with them, halve this number. The resulting number is how many of the bandits you will personally have to face in the forest. You can fight them one at a time by hiding in the shadows and fighting them in the thick undergrowth.

Use the following statistics for each bandit that you face, and be thankful some of them are drunk:

BANDIT	SKILL 5	STAMINA 20	DB 6	ARMOUR 0
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If you die, turn to **309**

If you win, turn to **185**

264

The clerk gestures to the long table on the side of the room. "You may take your things and go. The Wolf will provide a guide to Arantator to ensure your safe arrival."

You quickly go to the table and pick up your pack, then regain all of your possessions and weapons, except for the Diamond Key, which is absent. You have already noticed this, and you are not the only one. As you re-equip yourself, you hear Kianmay speak with no trace of tiredness.

“We cannot leave here without the one true treasure.”

“What treasure do you speak of?” the clerk asks.

“A black stone inscribed with a spiral of ancient script,” she replies.

“A simple stone such as you describe cannot be of more value than the coin and jewelled items your companion is eagerly reclaiming.”

“The stone of which I speak is more valuable than any jewel and must be returned to me.”

“What will you do with it?” the clerk asks.

“I shall take it to the temple in Arantator.”

You move to stand next to Kianmay. Wasn't her mission meant to be a secret?

“Do you know that the King of Arantator is our enemy?”

“I do,” Kianmay replies.

“Why should we deliver this great treasure into his hands?” The clerk asks.

“It is not for him, it is for this land.”

For the first time, the clerk looks a bit uncertain and glances towards the circle. “What does that mean?”

Kianmay explains. “The stone must be placed in the earth under the temple of the White Goddess in Arantator. In the hands of any one man the stone is wasted.”

“The stone makes the man who bears it immortal. Why is this a waste?”

How is it that they have discerned this? Kianmay does not seem surprised and continues. “The power which makes one man immortal can instead flow into the earth. The temple in Arantator is built upon one of the channels of power in the earth, and so the power of the stone shall be multiplied greatly and bring great blessings to this land and all who dwell here.”

“Even beyond Arantator?” the clerk asks.

“Men build walls and draw lines upon maps. The earth knows not such things.”

“How far shall this blessing extend?”

“I do not know,” Kianmay replies.

The clerk looks towards the circle again, this time openly. A signal you do not see is passed, and the clerk bows. “The Wolf gives you your freedom and the stone.”

He reaches into the pouch on his belt and takes out the Diamond Key in its cloth bag. He approaches and hands the bag to Kianmay. She takes it eagerly. She bows towards the circle. “I thank you, noble Wolf. You are a better man than most.”

She turns and smiles at you. She looks ready to leave. You look back at the circle of werewolves. Can you allow these creatures to rule the North?

If you want to leave, turn to **42**

If you want to accuse the warriors for being werewolves, turn to **244**

265

The fourth watch is yours. You sleep fitfully until you are woken to take your watch. The Wood has filled your dreams with strange and disturbing images. You walk around checking that all is well, then take a position near the fire. You keep it burning bright. All is quiet and still except for the creaking that comes from the trees. Your eyelids begin to droop, so you stand up to walk around.

Normally a walk in the cold wakes you up, but this time you feel as if everything around you is becoming soft, even the air feels thicker and appears foggy before your eyes.

You are determined to stay awake, but whatever is trying to send you to sleep is powerful...

Test your SKILL, STAMINA, and LUCK. Roll 8 die. If the total is the same as or less than the sum of your *current* SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK scores, turn to **43** Otherwise, turn to **236**

266

The last zombie falls to the floor and you advance on the necromancer. He clutches a strange looking wand like a weapon. It is black and twisted, and eventually you recognise it as the burnt arm of a human, withered to not much more than thin bone. It looks like a child's arm. It still wears a bejewelled bracelet and rings.

"Do not come any closer!" The necromancer threatens. His aggression falters and he whines. "Please, leave me be! I do not harm! And see my creations! No longer must dead flesh be wasted. Imagine if the dead can be made to serve the living. We can all be kings!"

"Necromancy is evil," you state.

The necromancer gnashes his teeth in frustration. "I should not expect great vision of a mere thug! If my zombies were merchant guards, you could be the merchant! You would be rich! Do you enjoy the fruitless toil of your life?"

He might have a point, there. Do you want to listen to more? If so, turn to **63**
If you remain unconvinced of the importance of his work, turn to **370**

267

You walk down the pillared corridor. You walk quickly past the lighted arch and up to the door on the far side. You pause as you see a sword carved into the door. Perhaps it is the Paladin's barracks. You listen and can hear snoring inside.

If you really want to continue, turn to **466**

If you have changed your mind and want to investigate the lighted archway instead, turn to **148**

If you want to go back and try the first door, turn to **80**

268

Relaxing with your beer, you watch as the clerk readies his pen.

"Where are you bound?" he asks.

"Why, we are going to the moon, of course," you reply with a serious expression.

The clerk frowns, his lips pressed into a thin line. "Sir! Do not play games with me. If you do not answer my questions I will have to turn this matter over to the Town Warden!"

“The Town Warden?” you say, rubbing your chin with your hand. “I heard that your mother was the Town Warden. Last time I came through here she arrested every good-looking young merchant that stepped into town. Is your mother going...search *my* wagon?”

The clerk’s face takes on a similar hue to beetroot as the common room erupts in laughter and jeers. “My mother is a woman of great virtue!” the clerk bellows, clenching his fists.

“Of course she is,” you say. “A woman of great compassion and kindness, considering...well, you know...”

“What?” the clerk demands.

“About your father...” you venture.

“What about him?” the clerk asks, flustered and confused.

“Well, it’s not any woman who will sleep with a goblin.”

The common room fills with laughter again, and the clerk jumps to his feet. “My father is not a goblin! You, sir, will regret this!”

He storms off. “Running back to your mother?” you call after him. The clerk flees the ridicule, and the other drinkers cheer and raise a toast to you. One even buys you a beer.

A while later you give your apologies and head upstairs. You knock gently on Kianmay’s door before entering. She is not asleep yet. She is reading by the light of a candle. As you close the door behind you, you see Penmark in his bedroll on the floor. Well, you weren’t planning anything anyway. Laying out your own bedroll, you settle in for an uncomfortable night’s sleep.

Turn to **171**

269

“I’m just going to have a look around,” you tell Kianmay.

“At what?” she asks as you duck out. You pretend you haven’t heard and walk with a purposeful step towards the centre of the camp. You thread your way between tents as if you know where you are going. No one stops you or even looks at you. Although your weapons have been taken, you are still wearing your armour.

You suddenly upon a sight that makes you pause. A large wooden structure sits in the very centre of the camp. It has a canvas roof and you suspect that it can be pulled apart and transported. A set of double doors in the front are guarded by two northern warriors with poleaxes and grim expressions. They eye you as you walk past, but you don’t even glance at them.

Going in the front door would be a bad idea. So you circle around and find an unguarded side door.

Do you want to enter the wooden house? Turn to **77**

If you would rather keep exploring, turn to **179**

270

You stand up and bring your weapon to hand. “You are an evil freak!” you accuse. “You must die!”

The undertaker squawks in alarm and dashes for a side door, disappearing through it. He moves quickly for a drunken man. You dash after him, and find yourself at the top of a narrow stairway. Hurrying down it, you soon find yourself in a subterranean laboratory. You see the undertaker waving his hands and chanting over a number of corpses that are laid out on slabs. Each one appears to be the subject of a different experiment. One of the corpses is already animated and is shuffling towards you. You see that it has small plates of steel sewn into its skin, and its fingers have been replaced with long, heavy blades.

The others look less fearsome, but there are many of them. They are moving so slowly that you can leave if you want to and go back to the Inn (turn to **371**)

If not, you must fight it.

*ZOMBIE SOLDIER SKILL 7 STAMINA 20 DB 10 ARMOUR 5

The other zombies are slow-moving enough for you to deal with one by one.

*ZOMBIE 1 SKILL 5 STAMINA 20 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

*ZOMBIE 2 SKILL 4 STAMINA 16 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

*ZOMBIE 3 SKILL 5 STAMINA 22 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **266**

If you lose, turn to **367**

271

You lash out at the second orc, but it avoids your attack by throwing itself onto the ground. It screeches loudly before you can kill it. You hear the door to the other room open and footsteps hurry out. No wanting to be trapped inside, you dash outside, weapons ready. Standing there is a huge orc. It looks at you with surprise and curiosity. It is clad in a simple long tunic of undyed wool and its feet are bare. Obviously it was not expecting to walk into combat. However, it is carrying a wicked-looking, long-handled battleaxe as tall as you are.

Looking up at the blue-skinned monstrosity, you are not eager to fight it. It grins down at you; a gesture that cannot look friendly with those tusks. You have only a moment to decide what to do.

Run away? Turn to **279**

Attack the giant orc before it attacks you? Turn to **129**

Say hello. Turn to **374**

272

Looking around the room, you spy a gap between one of the rafters and the ceiling. The wood is rotted and the gap looks like it is just large enough. You stand on your cot and reach upwards. You have trouble stuffing the purse in. Taking it

away you reach in with your hand and feel about. Your hand touches a cloth bundle and you take it down.

It is a rag of white linen, discoloured with water stains. You sit down and unwrap the linen. Inside is a large pearl. It tingles in your hand and you sense that it is magical. You put the pearl in your purse and stuff the purse into the gap.

You then leave the room.

Turn to **323**

273

Leaving the shrine, you follow the paths of the gardens, making a wide circuit of the temple of the White Goddess. You see a few other entrances, unguarded and therefore likely to be locked. You wonder what to do when you suddenly see one of the doors open. Out steps a woman dressed in a white robe, a white cloth worn over her hair. She carries a large bag on a woven strap worn across her body. She waves goodbye to someone inside and heads off, the door closed behind her.

She starts to head in your general direction and you stroll on a course that will take you near to her. You glance about you. There are few people about the gardens, all attending to their own affairs. You stop next to a grove of tall slender trees with yellow flowers. The priestess draws nearer.

At least she looks like a priestess. As she approaches, she smiles at you with an open warmth that is very similar to Kianmay's.

Do you want to talk to her and ask her about Zarim? Then turn to **65**

If you think you can't trust her and want to knock her out and search her for a key, turn to **384**

274

You reach out for the sword. As your hand draws near, the bandit turns his head and starts in surprise. You try to snatch the sword, but the bandit is quicker and stumbles to his feet. You draw out your own weapon and attack the bandit.

BANDIT SKILL 9 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **228**

If your stamina is reduced to 4 or less, turn to **281**

275

The Wolf falls under your final savage attack, and you place your weapon at his throat. "Surrender!"

"Kill me and riches are yours!" the Wolf cries.

"No." You say, and withdraw your weapon.

The Wolf stands and with a flick of his wrist places the tip of his scimitar at your throat. He grins and sheaths his sword. "Well done! This man has defeated me in battle! Yet has spared me. He has proven both his skill and his noble spirit!"

The soldiers cheer appreciatively. The Wolf claps you on the shoulder and leads you back inside. You go through into the throne room, where you find Kianmay waiting apprehensively. You also see a large table with all of your belongings on it.

"You are free to go," the Wolf says.

You go to the table, which also has your pack on it, and load your belongings back into it. The Diamond Key is not there, but the sorcerer takes the cloth bag from a pouch at his belt and hands it to Kianmay. She takes it eagerly and looks inside. You see from the expression of delight and relief on her face that the Key is inside.

The Wolf goes over to the cabinet and opens it with a key. He takes a box from inside and comes over to you. The box is lacquered black wood inlaid with ivory and jade in the form of two fish swimming around each other, forming a circle. "You go into great peril, friend. Please take this. I hope it will aid you. I have little use for it, as precious as it is."

You take the box and lift the lid. Inside there is a single crystal that is filled with rainbow-coloured light, shifting as you tilt the box. You take out the crystal and Kianmay gasps when she sees it.

"What is it?" you ask her.

"A Primordial Crystal," she says. "It is priceless to be sure."

"What do I do with it?" you ask.

Kianmay shakes her head. "The nature of such things is...mysterious. I know of many ways in which they have been used. Sometimes for great good, sometimes for great evil."

You put the crystal back into the box and close the lid. Before you leave, two guards enter from the compound with two heavy sacks. It is the riches that were thrown into the compound, and is in total worth 1000 gold coins. You may list all of the riches as coin on your Adventure Sheet.

You thank and farewell the Wolf. Outside you find two horses loaded with supplies. You make your way through the camp and are soon on your way towards Arantator.

Turn to **293**



276

Approaching the fat man, you sit down and introduce yourself. He looks at you suspiciously and pulls an untouched dish closer to himself, as if he thinks you are after his food. He says something through a mouthful of food, apparently asking you what you want.

"I am travelling to Arantator," you tell him. "I am looking for information about the road ahead."

The fat man nods and holds up one finger as he finishes a mouthful. It takes about a minute to get it down his throat. When he can talk, he says: "I can give you what you need, but it will cost you 10 gold."

He shovels food into his mouth once more.

If you have your purse with you and want to pay him, turn to **396**

The black-robed man is gone, but you can still talk to the Merchant guards. Turn to **122**

Or to go back upstairs, turn to **313**

277

You walk over to the closed door. You listen, but hear nothing. Reaching out you gently try the doorhandle, but it is locked. What now?

Knock on the door? Turn to **336**

Go back to investigate the digging sounds. Turn to **368**

278

Creeping across the hall, you listen at the door, then open it and slip into the dark interior. There is quite a lot of light here, since there are two doors all letting light stream into the small room. You are in a small room filled with racks of wine bottles. The door to the left leads to the relaxed voices of the owner and his guests. The other door is silent, so you carefully open it and step through.

You are in a study. There is a door leading to the main hall to your right. A massive wooden desk dominates the room, facing towards where you are now, with a high backed chair behind it. On the wall behind the desk is a shield and a pair of crossed swords behind it. On either side are small shelves, each holding a large glass jar in which is a preserved head. An orc on the right, an ogre on the left. Somehow you doubt the owner killed them himself.

There are some bookshelves and cabinets scattered around the walls, but the wall opposite where you stand is oddly empty. This wall is also much further forward than the rear wall of the bathroom.

If you think there is a secret door here and know what to look for, use the alphanumeric key below to calculate the passage number you need.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Otherwise, you must return to the hall and search elsewhere. Turn to **233**



279

You smile back at the giant orc then make a dash for the exit. The orc laughs in delight and you hear rushing air as the axe sweeps within inches of your head. You run in terror, fearing the long-limbed orc will stride up and cut you down any second. You make it to the tunnel and run inside. You labour up the slope for several long minutes, stumbling in the darkness.

You have no idea if the giant orc is still following or not, but you do not stop. You run out past the still-sleeping orc at the table, and run down the main tunnel after you party. Looking back, you see you are not being followed and slow down. By the time you reach the next rest stop you have regained your breath.

Turn to **101**

280

“He didn’t give me one,” you say.

The guard becomes very suspicious, and calls for some soldiers to detain you, while another is sent to find out what is going on. The soldier soon returns and you are marched back to the tent where you were before. You are stripped of all of your belongings once more, except for your clothes and armour.

You sit down and wait once more. This time a guard is placed outside.

Turn to **20**

281

As the bandit strikes down at you again, his sword bites deep into your shoulder, finding a gap in your armour. You desperately retreat once more, staggering further down the slope. The bandit has too much of an advantage, you fear to run in case he is able to throw himself down the slope and plunge his sword through your back.

As you desperately parry another heavy attack, you know something must be done. Your only hope is to turn as if to run, then dodge aside, and hope the bandit will fall past you as he finish you off. It is risky since you cannot see the land behind you.

Test your SKILL and your LUCK. Roll 4 die. If the total is the same or less than the sum of your current SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **133**

If the total is more, turn to **243**

282

You attack the Wolf and a fierce duel begins. He is unnaturally strong and fast, and many times you barely avoid being killed. You land several blows, but your weapon seems to have no effect. You fight as hard as you can, but the Wolf seems invulnerable. Finally you fall to your knees, and the Wolf’s scimitar sweeps in...

Turn to **173**

283

You push down with all your strength and weight. The soldier flails desperately, but you shove the dagger through his throat. Rolling to your feet, you look around, and are surprised to the manservant still in his seat.

You look at him more closely. He wears the black and gold livery of Count Raul, but is a small and unimpressive man. He rises to his feet and smiles at you. "Clumsy. But congratulations. Are you an assassin by trade?"

You don't have time to stand around and chat. What will you do?

Kill him? Turn to **175**

Just leave? Turn to **226**

To talk to him anyway, turn to **326**

284

The small chest is about a foot long, carved with flowers and stained dark brown. There is a small golden lock, but it has a key in it. You slowly turn the key, and the lock clicks open. You listen, and the sounds of eating continue from beyond the curtain. The silent meal is odd, but you think nothing of it and lift the lid of the chest.

Your eyes almost pop out of your head as you see a giant emerald, set in a black velvet lining, almost 3 inches across. It is far too large to hope to sell to anyone except the most wealthy of gem-cutters. But you slip the jewel into your pocket.

What now?

Look inside one of the other chests? Turn to **201**

Just leave? Turn to **4**

285

You show Kianmay the King's Broadsword. She reads the words on the blade, tracing them with one finger.

"This is a powerful weapon of light," she tells you. In a fight against a demonic creature, marked by a *, you may double the damage bonus.

Return now to **240**

286

The guardsman expertly keeps you busy until reinforcements arrive. They then disarm you and place you under arrest with professional ease. The experience of being subdued leaves you with severe bruising to your body, (halve your STAMINA), and to your ego, (minus 1 SKILL).

You are forced to pay the following fines:

Early Release Fee for Drunken Citizen - 5 gold
Release of Confiscated Property (Class: large) - 10 gold

Trespassing – 20 gold
Assaulting a Guardsman of the Law – 40 gold

Total – 75 gold

You are allowed to sell goods from your wagon and your possessions to cover the costs; but during the course of the Guardsmen's 'inspection', half of any weapons or ivory you possessed are gone. You can choose not to pay the release fee for the drunken guard, in which case he is left behind. If you still cannot pay, then this adventure is over for you.

If you can pay the fines, then you and the wagon are released, and your party is soon on its way north once more, on the road towards the Kilandar Mountains.

Turn to **16**

287

You turn back to the crow. "I'm sorry! Thank you for being so nice!"

"All right. I forgive you," says the crow.

You look back at the stone golem, which is continuing to grow. "What about that?" you ask.

The crow looks embarrassed. "Well, I've summoned it now. Can you...take care of it please?"

"It's made from stone!" you exclaim. "I'll need a mace or warhammer to fight that."

"Very well," the crow replies, and a warhammer suddenly materialises in the air before you. It clatters to the floor and you scoop it up. It is a fine weapon, Dwarven made but in human proportions.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Dwarven Hammer	Warhammer	12

You turn to face the now fully-formed golem.

STONE GOLEM SKILL 6 STAMINA 30 DB 5 ARMOUR 10

If you win, turn to **49**

If your stamina is reduced to 5 or less, turn to **193**

288

With a final surge of energy, you throw yourself at the orc and land the killing blow. The giant crashes to the ground, its axe clattering loudly to the ground. You have no doubt the whole tribe heard the battle. Quickly you enter the giant orc's room. The large chamber has a pile of bed furs in one corner, next to a suit of platemail in giant-orc proportions lying on the floor.

At the far side of the room there is a large dais, with a marble throne upon it. The tiled floor is covered with what looks like dried blood, especially around the dais and staining the steps. The throne is empty now, except for a large ornate shield leaning against one side. It looks big enough for the giant orc, but there is something un-orcish about it. As you draw closer, you see that the golden shield is expertly worked with an intricate scene. In the centre is the sun, surrounded by the phases of the moon. This is surrounded by the major constellations and then by depictions of men and women at work and play, in every craft imaginable. Finally, around the rim are wavy lines depicting the ocean.

The great shield is as high as your waist, but the bracer on the rear side is human-sized. The great shield can only be used by a warrior whose initial SKILL is 9 or above, and whose initial STAMINA is at least 18. Otherwise, you are too weak and clumsy to use this effectively. You can take the great shield if you are able. It will add 3 to your skill, and 5 to your armour rating.

Already having used too much time, you hurry out of the room and back towards the large hall. You hear marching feet, and decide that you have out worn your welcome. Hurrying back up the tunnel, you soon reach the top and pass the still-sleeping orc.

You slow to a walk as you travel back to the rest of your party.

Turn to **101**



289

“No, I am not,” you say

“Then why do you seek the Diamond Key?” the crow asks.

“You know why I am here?” you ask in surprise.

“Do you know why the Darken Wood exists?” it asks, ignoring your question.

You shrug. “It is a stronghold of evil.”

The crow looks offended. “You think I am evil?”

“I’m not sure,” you reply.

The crow speaks, its disembodied voice booming angrily. “A thousand thousand years ago there was great evil in the land. The Kings of Light were helpless before it. So one swore an oath to take the burden of evil onto himself. So it was that all the evil in the world was drawn into one place. Seven great Captains of Darkness were drawn and imprisoned here. Thus was peace brought to the world. Thus was Darken Wood made. So it is today, that the evil that could not be destroyed is bound, and all that is evil and persecuted by the Light seeks refuge here.”

You look at the skeleton. “This is that King? What happened to him?”

“He took the burden of evil onto himself,” the crow says again. “He imprisoned himself in Hell so that the seven Captains of Evil would be bound here.”

“In hell? And he is still there, even now?”

“No, I freed him long ago,” the crow says. “How else can I be King if I do not take his place?”

“But you are here,” you say.

“I am a god, you fool!” the crow says. “I can be in two places at once.”

Shaking your head, you return to the matter at hand. “You mentioned the Diamond Key,” you begin.

“Ah, yes,” the crow says. “Darken Wood is a place where great evil is contained. Contained with powerful magic that affects the very fabric of reality itself. So it is that when greedy men come here seeking gold, the evil in this place responds to their greed, and they encounter evil that is of their own making! Then there are many creatures who live here who prey on travellers in their own manner, such as the goblins.”

“I did not encounter anything evil,” you say. “All I encountered was you.”

“Thus!” The crow says triumphantly. “You must be here seeking the Diamond Key with the intent of goodness.”

“Do you have it?” you ask.

“I have no need of that,” the crow replies. “I put it in a safe place.”

“Will you show me?” you ask.

“I will *show* you, yes,” the crow says. The crow disappears behind the throne, and you step onto the dais, seeing another opening behind the great silver seat. Following the crow, you bend under the low doorframe and into another full-sized corridor. It descends down into the earth and soon opens into another domed chamber, this one many times larger than the other. The dome is dark blue stone set with stars made of glowing crystals, forming the constellations of the night sky. Golden pillars line the maroon walls and the floor is covered in tiles of black inlaid with gold. In the very centre of the chamber is a large chest. Next to it is a wooden stand, in which sits a long black spear with a silver blade on top. The crow is perched on the tip of the silver blade.

“Where is the Diamond Key?” you ask as you come to a stop.

“It concerns me very much that you are not a Champion of the Light.” The crow replies. “I cannot give a treasure like the Diamond Key to a mere merchant guard.”

“Then how do I become a Champion of the Light?” You ask.

“Swear an oath, and face the test.” The crow replies.

“Fine. I swear to serve the Gods of Light,” you say. “Now test me and give me the Diamond Key.”

“Your vow is insufficient.” The crow says. “You speak as if this matter is a joke of some kind. Possession of the Diamond Key is no small thing. Know you what the Diamond Key does? To what is it the key? Answer this, and I shall give it to you.”

What is the Diamond Key the key to? Since it is not made out of diamond, diamond must represent what it is the key to. Contemplate carefully. If you think you know the answer, use the alphanumeric code below to translate your single word answer into numbers, then add the numbers together and turn to that passage.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

If you can't figure it out, turn to **395**

290

You knock on Kianmay's door. She calls for you to come in, and you do so, finding her sitting and reading. She smiles at you. She seems very pleased with herself. You take one of the seats at the table.

"What is the Diamond Key?" you ask.

Kianmay becomes serious. You can see she is not pleased that you have discovered the name of the treasure she carries. "Would you like to see it?" She asks at last.

"Yes, of course!" you answer.

She puts down her book and takes out the slim wooden box. She pushes it across the table and you take it cautiously. You look up at her. "It's not going to put me to sleep is it?" you ask.

Kianmay smiles slightly. "No. For the sleeping spell to work I needed Raul to be completely distracted. This was the only thing that would allow me to be so close, yet so totally ignored."

You look back at the plain box and slowly open the lid. You see no glitter or shining jewel. The inside of the box is a cavity carved out of wood, in which sits a round black stone with marks inscribed on the surface. The marks are a delicate script, forming a spiral. The marks are narrow, but very deep. The stone is polished and crossed by fine lines of grey and blue, but apart from the writing looks to be of little value. It isn't diamond, and it isn't a key!

"Is this it?" you ask in a disappointed tone.

Kianmay takes the box back and hides it once more. "It is." She picks up her book and resumes reading.

"Why does Raul want it?"

"Man who are obsessed by this mortal world often have foolish pursuits." Kianmay replies, never raising her eyes from her book.

"At least tell me why it is called the Diamond Key," you say.

Kianmay looks at you, then puts down the book with a smile. "Perhaps this is a good opportunity for you to learn. Contemplate this, and you tell me why it is called this. I will give you this clue: The name in fact describes what it does, but is only clear to those who do not have confused minds. Hate, anger, greed; these things cloud the mind and it is not clear. Think on this name, and you will have your answer."

"Count Raul's mind wasn't clear!" you respond.

"Someone else told him what it does," Kianmay explains, and returns to her book once more.

Knowing you are not going to get any more information out of her, you leave.

Turn to **299**

**291**

The crossbow bolt fired at you is completely accurate, and thumps into the seat where you were sitting only a moment before. You dive to the ground, weapon in hand. Following the volley of bolts, there is a loud cry and a large number of dirty, ragged men charge from the forest, weapons drawn.

Two bandits charge at you. Fight them both at the same time.

BANDIT 1	SKILL 5	STAMINA 18	DB 6	ARMOUR 0
BANDIT 2	SKILL 6	STAMINA 20	DB 6	ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **94**

If you die, turn to **309**

292

You slip a gold coin through the slot in the strongbox, and take a few sticks of incense from the basket. You light the fragrant sticks with the candle flame and kneeling down before the alcove, you pray to the spirit of the Dragon-slayer and ask him to protect the Key.

You insert the base of the incense sticks into the sand in the jade basin. You feel something hard under the sand as you try to push the sticks in. You move your hands and insert the incense at a different point. Reaching into the sand, your finger close on the hard object and you draw it out, shaking the sand loose. You are shocked to see the object sparkling on your palm in the candlelight. It is a ring with a t-shaped protrusion extending from the edge, looking vaguely like a key. It sparkles because it is made from diamond, with hundreds of small facets. It is a diamond key!

You slip the fake key into the cloth pouch and hide it under your clothes once more. You silently thank Aringarator.

Turn to **362**

293

The journey across the tundra has been a lonely one, but now that you near your destination, the road becomes well-defined and you can see other travellers ahead and behind you as far-flung roads gather together to form a great highway to the city of Arantator.

If you have any of the following items or equipment, Kianmay can now identify them for you.

Silver-studded leather armour, turn to **19**

A crystal-set breastplate, turn to **68**

Gold-inscribed silver scalemail, turn to **118**

A bottle of white liquid, turn to **208**

An ivory amulet in the shape of an elephant, turn to **257**

Ivory Wolf Blade, turn to **317**

Rune Pole-axe, turn to **352**

Rune Axe, turn to **386**

You know you are on the final leg when the road under your feet becomes wide and paved. The great city is still out of sight, but as the hours pass, a dark smudge on the horizon grows into the magnificent city-state.

For thousands of years Arantator was the only bastion of civilisation in the wild and barbaric northern lands. Thus it swelled as settlers sought protection and prosperity in its proximity. Some say that those early kings discovered an ancient power under the earth. Perhaps it is true. The city has always commanded great wealth even despite the disasters that have circled around it. You wonder why such a city needs the Diamond Key at all.

Even at a distance you can see the massive walls that surround the city. Huge solid blocks of stone, each as high as a man is tall, are locked together into an impenetrable barrier. It is said that 500 years ago a Southern King came to conquer the city over an argument with its ruler. The king brought many catapults that were his pride and joy. He fired one catapult at the wall, and seeing how ineffective it was, promptly went home.

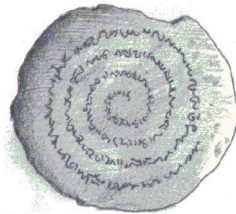
Eventually you draw near to the city and start to be mindful of those who are searching for you. One reason why Arantator has resisted so many attackers is that the gates into the city are at the end of long corridors, the city walls looming each side. Arrows and stones and boiling oil cast from above have turned away many armies before they even reached the gates.

The road that you are currently on leads straight into the corridor that will take you to the main gate. Most of the travellers are moving patiently into the gap, but there are a few travellers on a side road that follows the wall of the city.

Should you stay on the road and try to blend in with the travellers entering the main gate? Maybe you should follow the side road and try to enter another gate, one that won't be watched so closely.

To stay on your current course and enter the main gate, turn to **136**

To take the side road and look for a smaller gate, turn to **341**



294

The bandits set only one sentry, and it is a simple matter to wait for him to wander off to relieve himself and quietly stab him in the lung. You nod to Penmark and you and your men move into the camp. Most of the bandits are in their tents, but a couple are wrapped in blankets near the fire. You approach them first and trying to keep calm sink your dagger into their throats one by one, clamping a hand over their mouths to prevent them from crying out. You can see bottles lying about and guess that most have drunk at least some alcohol.

You carefully approach the first tent. You can hear soft snores from within, and as your eyes adjust, you crawl over the huddled forms, killing them one by one. The grisly task done, you leave

You begin to move towards the second tent when suddenly there is a shout behind you. You have been discovered. The bandits all jump up to attack and several rush at you. You run for the forest. Trying to fight so many in the open would be suicide.

You move into the darkness of the forest and turn around to face the bandits, who have armed themselves with torches. Roll one die. If the paladin have crossbows with them, halve this number. The resulting number is how many of the bandits you will personally have to face in the forest. You can fight them one at a time by hiding in the shadows and fighting them in the thick undergrowth.

Use the following statistics for each bandit that you face, and be thankful some of them are drunk:

BANDIT SKILL 4 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 0

If you die, turn to **309**

If you win, turn to **185**

295

“Can I use my own weapons?” you ask.

The sorcerer considers the matter. “Very well.”

He leads you through a door to his study where your belongings are spread out on a table. If you use a shield, you are allowed to take it along with your main weapon. You are not allowed to take any of your items.

Once you are equipped, the sorcerer leads you through the house and out into a compound.

Turn to **258**

296

You move around until the large red tent blocks most of the view of the bandits, then casually, but quickly and quietly, you move forward into the camp...

Test your SKILL and your LUCK. Roll four die and compare this total to the sum of your *current* SKILL and LUCK scores. If the total is equal to or less than your SKILL and LUCK, turn to **104**.

If the total is higher, turn to **361**

297

The last raider slides off your weapon, and you look up to see more raiders closing in. The rest of paladin have all been killed; and your men are either dead, or more likely fled as soon as it appeared to be going badly. As the men close in, you hear the thud of hooves and the horseman rides up. He is clad in a long cloak of dark blue lined with black fur. He has a gold helm and a silver breastplate, inlaid with a tower and three stars in gold, the symbol of Arantator.

“Surrender and you will be spared,” he says in a brisk manner. You look up into his proud face, long thin moustaches brushing his chest. You sense that he is honourable, and so you drop your weapon.

Penmark on the other hand raises his sword and points it at the nobleman. "I will not surrender unless you defeat me in a duel!"

The nobleman is surprised, but looks pleased. "You can barely stand! You are no fit opponent for me."

He picks out one of his men, but Penmark shakes his head and advances on the nobleman. "I will fight you and no other!"

The raiders raise their swords, but the nobleman commands them back. He dismounts. "Very well. I see that you are determined. But allow me to make this fair." He commands one of his men to tie one of his hands behind his back. That done, he draws a sword from a scabbard on his saddle. It is a scimitar with an ornately inscribed blade.

The duel begins. Penmark attacks swiftly and savagely, as if trying to score a kill as quickly as possible. It is the only way he can win after having already fought against many opponents and received several wounds. The nobleman is skilled with his blade, and parries and blocks as he continually retreats, letting Penmark exhaust himself.

Finally Penmark cannot go on and slumps, the point of his sword sticking into the dirt as he tries to hold himself up. "Valiant," says the noble man in admiration, and to your shock lashes out with his scimitar and cuts Penmark's throat open.

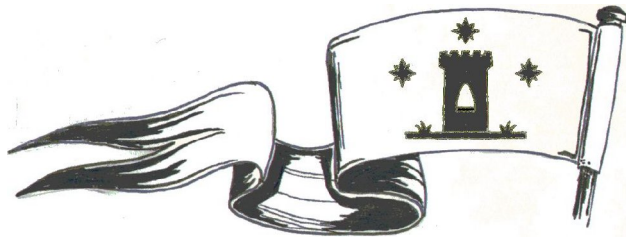
Penmark falls to the ground, his blood spilling onto the ground. The nobleman gives his sword to one of his men, instructing him to clean it. He then turns Penmark over and arranges his body neatly, placing his swords in his hands. The nobleman stands. "We will not leave these bodies to the wolves. Burn them all."

The nobleman invites Kianmay to come out from under the cart himself, promising she will be safe. She does so, her face white. She refuses to look the nobleman in the eye.

The raiders take for themselves any remaining boxes in the cart and load the dead into it. The dead are stripped of their valuables. Another raider arrives with a train of saddled horses. They take your party's horses as well, loading them with their booty. The oxen that drew your cart are set free, though they do not wander far and you wonder how they will fare on the tundra.

Soon you and Kianmay are each bound to a horse each and your captives take you away. Behind you the cart burns, sending smoke into the sky.

Turn to **398**



298

Turning to the chapter on objects of jade, you browse through until you come upon a picture of a slender ring as wide as your neck. Eagerly you read the entry. It is indeed a collar, and opens and closes with a magic word.

The wearer is blessed with a magical aura of protection that is equivalent to armour of rating 5. This is in addition to any physical armour you are wearing. You say the magical word and open the collar. You place it around your neck and close it, immediately feeling safer.

What now?

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

299

The next morning you set out once more. Once the town and Count Raul's men are behind you, you feel a great relief. They will not be chasing you any more. But there are still dangers ahead. The Northern lands are wilder, ruled by kings who have built their thrones from the bones of their enemies and bathed their lands in blood.

But now you are just one merchant among many, trading fine Southern wares for furs and raw materials. Kianmay still refuses to tell you where you are going, so you follow the major trade route north. As you descend from the hills, you plunge into the great northern forests. The road winds through the thick forest, surrounded by the sounds of birds, scurrying animals and often the thumping of axes. Occasionally you pass by a lumber cart; long carts drawn by teams of six or more oxen, loaded with logs.

Because of the wood-harvesters, there are many roads cutting through the forest; like a web. You often come to forks and intersections, and make your choices almost at random, keeping to a northerly heading.

The first two nights you camp by the roadside, but as the third day nears its end, you see an old battered sign telling you that the town of Tappin is only a three miles away. You announce to Kianmay that she might be able to sleep in a bed tonight.

She is distracted, and when she responds, it is not to your words. "There is an evil gathering around us. I have sensed it for some time, but...I could not say whether it was to one side of us or the other. Now it is all about us and is closing upon us like a ravenous beast."

You are a little startled and say nothing for a moment. "Should we turn back?" you ask.

Kianmay shakes her head. "No. Whatever it is, we cannot escape it."

You travel on in silence. It is midafternoon when you finally reach the town of Tappin. As you approach you see it is a town of wooden houses clustered either side of the road, with a wooden gate across the road at either end. You spy a single inn.

As you near the gate, you look for a gatekeeper, but all you see is a stick thrust in the ground with a black rag tied to the top. You jerk the reins, bringing the oxen to a halt.

"Plague," you say, pointing at the rag.

"We must help them." Kianmay says immediately.

“You can heal plague?” you ask.

“Not a whole town, but...I’m not sure how many have survived.”

The town does seem abandoned. Kianmay climbs down from the cart and begins to stride forward. Sighing you get down and follow. Penmark and a couple of the Paladin follow on their horses.

You open the gate and Kianmay walks through, heading for the first house. She knocks on the door, then receiving no answer tries the handle. It opens and she steps inside. You wait outside, the stench of decaying bodies enough for you. Kianmay soon emerges and shakes her head. She goes to the next house. It is the same all along one side of the street. The people have all died with signs of a potent disease.

“Something is strange here,” Kianmay says as she begins the inspection of the other side of the street. “All these people are separated in their own homes. Why not gather the sick together to care for them? It seems that this plague came on very swiftly.”

The other side of the street is the same, until you come to the inn. Inside there are bodies lined up on the tables and floor like a ward. A man sits in a chair near the bar, slumped over. His skin is pale and covered in grey spots just like the dead around him, but as you enter, his eyes open. He is dressed in travel-stained clothes and boots, and looks like a traveller.

Kianmay hurries up and kneels beside him. The man tries to get away from her. “No! We have plague! Keep away!”

“I am a priestess,” Kianmay says. “I do not fear death.” She lays a hand on his forehead. You see her shiver, but she does not take her hand away. “There is the taint of evil in this sickness. It is not natural.”

The sick man laughs gently. “It is not, lady,” he says, seeming stronger. He sits up straight, and Kianmay moves back, sitting down in a chair which Penmark places for her. The sick man looks over you and your companions and smiles. “I was sitting here, waiting to die. A lonely business. I did what I could for the people of this town, but I came too late.”

“You are a traveller?” Kianmay asks.

The man nods. “My son and I were headed for Arantator. When we arrived here, about half were dead and the rest infected. Those still living were too weak to even burn the dead. Perhaps we should have fled as soon as we saw the disease. But I was concerned about other travellers. So I closed the gates and put up the signs warning of plague. We brought those who were still living here. It was then they told us how this happened.” He shivers and coughs, then continues. “Darken Wood is nearby. Do you know of it?”

Kianmay looks at you blankly, so you speak. “It is said to be a magical wood that is present within these forests, yet it can move about. It is a place of evil.” You do not believe the stories. How can a wood move? But then you recall Kianmay’s sense of approaching evil.

“Evil, yet it is said there are riches within as well. The Wood came to the very edge of the town, and the people trembled. But a youth from the town decided to go exploring, drawn by stories of riches. He returned, bringing with him a tree of all things. A sapling no higher than your waist. It’s bark was like gold, and though there were no leaves, it was covered in tiny flowers made from gems. You could pull off one of the petals and there was a jewel in your hand! He thought to plant it in his own garden, and when it grew, he would be endlessly rich.

“He did so. But then Darken Wood surrounded the town, and the disease came. The youth caught it first and was dead within two days. Then others started dying.

When we arrived the tree was still where the youth had planted it. I told my son to dig it up and take it back into Darken Wood, as far inside as he had the courage to go, away from the town. That was two days ago. I guess he is dead somehow. And soon I will be as well.”

Kianmay leads the man to lie down, and you see her place her hands on him. The man falls into a sleep, his face becoming less pale. Kianmay stands, frowning.

“Can you heal him?” you ask.

She shakes her head sadly. “He does not want to live. Without his son he has lost hope. We must stay and care for him until the end. Perhaps his son will return soon.”

One of the paladin appears in the doorway. “Lady, Captain. There is something out here you will wish to see.”

Kianmay and Penmark immediately walk towards the door and you follow. As soon as you step outside, you see what it is. The trees around the town are suddenly changed. The leaves appear more grey than green. The forest is silent except for an ominous creaking. The shadows between the trunks seem to drink in light, leaving the air cold.

“Darken Wood!” you exclaim, and turn around to see it has encompassed the whole town.

No one wants to travel onwards through the Wood at night, so you make camp in the road. One of the men begins to build a large bonfire, and no one stops him. As night falls it is burning brightly. Kianmay stays in the inn with the dying man. You ensure it is locked securely and arrange a watch for that night.

To see when your watch is, roll one die.

If you roll a 1, turn to **5**

If you roll a 2, turn to **64**

If you roll a 3, turn to **166**

If you roll a 4, turn to **265**

If you roll a 5, turn to **311**

If you roll a 6, turn to **354**

300

The evening comes as you begin your search for merchant guards. Red River has countless taverns, and that is where you will find guards who are for hire. But where to go? Normally you would go to the taverns you yourself frequent. But thinking of the holy mission and the danger presented by your pursuers, you consider the matter carefully.

Eventually you choose a tavern called the Empty Purse. It is much quieter than most others, and you know that it is owned by a prominent member of the merchant guild. As you step into the warm golden light, you know you are in the right place. Many of the drinkers are merchants, thrashing out deals. But also there are many merchant guards. Your expert eyes can immediately pick out those who have no employment. The employed guards have a content, satisfied air, able to indulge in large ales, but not too much. The unemployed guards survey the merchants, either in hope, or waiting for the right moment to approach.

There are fifteen unemployed merchant guards here. Stepping onto a bench, you leap up onto a table, your thumping boots drawing attention. Those who see you

thump the arms of their companions and point at you. In a moment you have the attention of all.

“I am looking for merchant guards!” you announce. “We are leaving tomorrow at dawn and heading north. Pay is 3 gold for signing up, plus 3 gold per week.”

Unexpectedly, it is one of the merchants who answers you. “Where are you going?”

“Our destination is not to be divulged here and now,” you announce, causing some to chuckle.

Another merchant calls out to you. “A secret destination! Tell us, what are you carrying?”

You describe your cargo and the same merchant smiles broadly. “Ah, so that is no secret at least.” The comment draws laughter.

The first merchant speaks again. “How long is this journey to be?”

“I can’t say,” you reply, trying not to grit your teeth.

The merchants laugh. “Well, then...” The Merchant stands to pace. “You are going...somewhere! It will take...sometime! Is there any element of danger to this job?”

You admit that there is, and the merchants all smile and look thoughtful. You came to hire merchant guards and are now bargaining with merchants! After a lengthy discussion, the merchants all decide that you should offer 6 gold pieces for signing up, 2 gold per day as wage, and another 6 gold for safe delivery.

After some arguing, you get it down to 5 gold pieces for signing up, 1 gold per day as wage, and 5 gold for safe delivery. Although it is a little bit more expensive than normal, you feel you are taking these men into danger. Even so, you insist on only taking men with more than 2 years experience.

All 15 claim to have well over 2 years experience. You reject three for being too young, one for being too old, and one for having an untrustworthy grin. You can hire all ten if you can afford 50 gold here and now.

After you hire all of your men, you tell them where to be at dawn the next morning and go back to the Happy Maid. Remember that you will need to pay the men you have hired each day. If you have ten men, it will cost you ten gold coin per day to keep the men on. You will be instructed when to pay the men. If you cannot afford to pay them, they will leave. In battles some men will also die, so keep track of this as well since you do not have to pay dead men.

You get a good night’s sleep and the next morning go to pick up your wagon and team. Your cargo has been delivered and loaded and you are able to set off immediately. You make your way to the northern gate and are pleased to see all the men you hired ready and waiting, although a bit grumpy and sleepy. They all have horses and form up around the wagon as you set out north. By the time the sun is well over the horizon, the city has been lost in the rolling lands around you. Reaching a cross-roads in a large cleared space, you decide to stop and wait here for Kianmay and the Paladin. You tell the men to relax and wait nervously for the rest of your party.

It is not too long until they appear. There is no sign of the carriage, and you see Kianmay clinging to the back of a horse as they approach. You recognise her horse as one of the carriage horses. The paladin have also acquired new cloaks, wrapped now in old and dirty cloth of various dull colours. Even Kianmay now wears a plain hooded cloak of dark blue.

As they pull up, Kianmay nods at you and dismounts clumsily.

“Where is the carriage?” you ask.

“Back in the forest where it will hopefully remain undiscovered,” she explains and looks over the wagon and oxen. She frowns as she sees the oxen, dismounting to examine the beasts. “My father was a farmer,” she announces, running one hand over the side of one of the oxen. “These poor beasts are almost in their grave! And look how fat they are! They should be living in a pasture after a long life of faithful service. I hope you did not pay too much.”

“45 gold,” you reply tentatively. Who would have thought a priestess would have grown up on a farm! Now that you think about it, the priestesses have to come from somewhere.

“Forty-five gold!” she exclaims. “You utter fool! That gold cannot be wasted, it came...” She bits her lip furiously. She is very angry, and turns towards the merchant guards who are playing cards under a nearby tree.

How many guards did you hire?

Five or less? Turn to **168**

More than five? Turn to **399**

301

The demon's claws rake across your body and you fall to the ground. You slip into darkness, and float for a while on a sea of black. But then you awake, and are surprised to find that you are not dead. (Restore your STAMINA to its initial level.)

You sit up, finding yourself in the throne room. You see the Diamond Key box next to you and you snatch it up. Checking inside, you see the Key is there, and you close the lid, putting the box into your pack. As you stand, you see the crow perched on the top of the throne.

“I thought I was dead,” you say. “Did you save me?”

“I healed you,” the crow confirms. “But the demon refrained from feeding on your flesh and grieved for you; thereby redeeming itself.”

You bow to the crow. “Thank you, your majesty.”

Before you can leave, the crow says: “It concerns me greatly that you are so weak and frail. It is not good for Champions of the Light to be so pathetic. Take one of the old king's things.”

You look at the skeletal king and ask if the crow means him. He confirms that he does. What do you want?

The winged helm? Turn to **103**

The broadsword? Turn to **153**

The emerald ring? Turn to **203**

The sapphire ring? Turn to **253**

The ruby ring? Turn to **303**

302

The clerk gestures to the long table on the side of the room. “You may take your things and go.”

You quickly go to the table and pick up your pack, then regain all of your possessions and weapons, except for the Diamond Key, which is absent. You have already noticed this, and you are not the only one. As you re-equip yourself, you hear Kianmay speak with no trace of tiredness.

“We cannot leave here without the one true treasure.”

“What treasure do you speak of?” the clerk asks.

“A black stone inscribed with a spiral of ancient script,” she replies.

“A simple stone such as you describe cannot be of more value than the coin and jewelled items your companion is eagerly reclaiming.”

“The stone of which I speak is more valuable than any jewel and must be returned to me.”

“What will you do with it?” the clerk asks.

“I shall take it to the temple in Arantator.”

You move to stand next to Kianmay. Wasn't her mission meant to be a secret?

“Do you know that the King of Arantator is our enemy?”

“I do,” Kianmay replies.

“Why should we deliver this great treasure into his hands?” the clerk asks.

“It is not for him, it is for this land.”

For the first time, the clerk looks a bit uncertain and glances towards the circle. “What does that mean?”

Kianmay explains. “The stone must be placed in the earth under the temple of the White Goddess in Arantator. In the hands of any one man the stone is wasted.”

“The stone makes the man who bears it immortal. Why is this a waste?”

How is it that they have discerned this? Kianmay does not seem surprised and continues. “The power which makes one man immortal can instead flow into the earth. The temple in Arantator is built upon one of the channels of power in the earth, and so the power of the stone shall be multiplied greatly and bring great blessings to this land and all who dwell here.”

“Even beyond Arantator?” the clerk asks.

“Men build walls and draw lines upon maps. The earth knows not such things.”

“How far shall this blessing extend?”

“I do not know,” Kianmay replies.

The clerk looks towards the circle again, this time openly. A signal you do not see is passed, and the clerk bows. “The Wolf gives you your freedom and the stone.”

He reaches into the pouch on his belt and takes out the Diamond Key in its cloth bag. He approaches and hands the bag to Kianmay. She takes it eagerly. She bows towards the circle. “I thank you, noble Wolf. You are a better man than most.”

She turns and smiles at you. She looks ready to leave.

If you want to leave, turn to **42**

If you know what the Wolf's secret and want to make an issue of it, use the alphanumeric key below to calculate the number from the single word that corresponds to the Wolf's secret, then multiply this number by 3 to find the passage number.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

303

You take the ruby-set ring as your own. As soon as you slide it onto your finger you feel stronger. While wearing the ring, you may add 10 to your initial STAMINA.

Thanking the crow once more, you leave the ruined palace and make your way back through Darken Wood. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. "Do you have it?" Her eyes are wild.

"Yes." You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

304

Moving closer to the encampment, you pause in between two flowering bushes, watching a sentry pass only a few feet away. Once he is gone, you consider your next move. The three fires are positioned on three sides of the large tent, with horses pitched on the shadowed side. The only way to approach the tent is through the horses. Despite the careful defences, the sentries who circuit the camp do so lazily, not expecting any attack.

You settle in to wait. After about an hour, the men have all settled and the fires are dying. The yawning sentries patrol even slower.

There is a pile of supplies next to where the horses are pitched, and you wait until the sentries' patrols are past and then walk forward casually so as to not spook the horses. You crouch in the shadows between the tent and the supplies. The supplies are packed into saddlebags, and are likely to be mostly food. Deciding not to make a search there, you focus instead on the tent. Listening for sounds from within, you eventually hear the rustling of paper. Someone is in there, still awake.

Lying down in the shadows, you snake forward and experimentally pull at the bottom edge of the tent. You are able to lift the oiled canvas up and you peer underneath. You find yourself looking at six feet. Four of them belong to a chair, and the other two to the man who sits in it, facing away from you as he sits at a small table. A candle sits on the table, the only light in the tent. You look around as much as you can, seeing a couple of chests, and a low bunk. There is also an armour stand with a full suit of platemail and a bejewelled sword hanging upon it.

Letting the edge of the tent drop as the sentries near, you ponder what to do. You lie there for another half an hour before you hear the man inside the tent sigh and get up from the chair. He moves around inside the tent, then becomes still. You wait another half an hour, then lift the bottom of the tent again. You can hear the deep, regular breathing of someone asleep. Crawling into the tent you stop to listen, and believing yourself undetected, lift yourself up.

A small amount of light enters through the entrance of the tent, but it still takes a minute for your eyes to adjust to the deeper darkness inside. Looking at the tabletop, you see a locked box and carefully pick it up. Attracted by the sword you risk stepping across the tent, pausing every step. You close your hand on the sword and lift it off the stand. Sneaking back to the rear of the tent, you secure your prizes against your body and crawl back under the tent. You wait for the sentries to pass, then with cold excitement clenching your stomach you walk back into the shadows surrounding the camp.

Trying not to hurry, you move away from the camp, and make a big circuit back towards the paladin. Halfway there you pause to inspect your prizes. Under the starlight you can see that the sword is a fine weapon, which you may use as your own if you wish.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Griffin Sword	Fine sword	10

The box is locked, but you manage to pry it open and find within a seal, two large glass phials and a sheaf of documents that you can't read in the low light. Pocketing one of the glass phials, you put the seal, the other phial and the documents back in the box and hurry back to the encampment.

The paladin have cautiously lit no fire, and Captain Penmark is standing waiting for you. "You were gone so long," he remarks quietly. "We feared you caught."

"Just being careful," you reply.

The carriage door opens and Lady Kianmay sticks her head out. "What did you find? Describe the party to me!"

You move towards her and hold out the box. "I took this from the leader's tent."

Kianmay is surprised, but eagerly snatches the box, taking it back inside the carriage. You turn to Penmark. "They have about 20 soldiers, plus a few servants."

A light flares inside the carriage, and you hear the box being opened. Moments later lady Kianmay emerges again, holding up the seal. "It is as we feared," she says to Penmark. Turning to you she appears grateful. "Thank you." She hands you the glass phial that was in the box. "This is a Restoring potion. Please take it.." You thank her and add it to the other in your pocket. Each phial will restore your STAMINA to its initial level.

Leaving the two of them to discuss matters, you go to your bedroll and get a good night's sleep.

The next morning your party moves cautiously ahead. You scout the way ahead, but find no sign of the Griffin Soldiers, even visiting their now abandoned campsite. Knowing the enemy is ahead now, the party moves slowly and camps again as night falls.

The next day after travelling through thick forest, you approach a town on the trade route. It is a large sprawling town that some would call a city; but it is swelled with those who seek to make coin from travellers.

Turn to **90**



305

Stepping off the street, you unfold the parchment and begin to read.

Count Raul,

Too many lives have been lost in this conflict between us. I cannot allow this to continue. Therefore I give you two choices.

The first is to go home and forget all about the Diamond Key. It will save your life, but already so many have died just so you may have the chance to live beyond your allotted time. Do not be seduced by this mortal life. The true stuff of life is in the spirit. What is the state of your soul? Be concerned with this. Go home and repent.

If you cannot overcome the fear and greed in your heart, then come to the market square in two hours and I will give you the Diamond Key. But I warn you, it will not help you.

I swear by my goddess that there will be conflict or treachery on my part.

-Alyn Mei

Refolding the paper, you frown. What is this Diamond Key? Some sort of powerful healing magic? Count Raul is obviously desperate to have this treasure. And Kianmay is just going to give it to him, after everything you have been through to keep it away from him.

What will you do now?

Trust Kianmay and deliver the letter? Turn to **346**

Take matters into your own hands? Turn to **37**

306

Staying where you are, you lie quietly and wait for the soldiers to fall asleep. After half an hour or so, one takes out a flask and they share it between them, taking swigs of some potent liquor. Another half-hour passes and the soldiers begin to mutter and complain that you aren't coming back. They decide to take turns sleeping. One promptly falls asleep and the other makes himself comfortable.

Deciding you have waited long enough, you slip out from under the couch. Gripping your weapons you rush forward. The half-drunk soldier who is still awake fumbles for his weapon and calls out the alarm. You slay him and as his companion starts to stir you end his life as well.

Turn to **332**

307

Taking a deep breath, you advance on the Wolf. The soldiers cheer and the Wolf raises his scimitar. You begin to stalk around. Rather than circle with you, the Wolf remains where he is, turning with you, standing in a relaxed stance.

You attack, and the Wolf swiftly parries your blow. Soon you are fighting for your life against the swift and stroke attacks of the Wolf.

Are you fighting with a weapon made of silver? If you are, turn to **130**
If you are not, turn to **282**

308

Heading through the passage you return to the intersection and take the stairway down to the boiler room. You smile and nod at the youth stoking the fire, then make your way through the kitchens and return to your rooms.

You find the meal you ordered set up in the dining room. Bread, cheese and boiled vegetables are plain fare, but you are hungry and eat a fair portion before Kianmay arrives. She looks much better, but eats little before retiring.

With nothing else to do, you decide to have an early night, when there is a knock on your door. You get up and answer it. You see there a portly, balding, middle-aged man dressed in a fine tunic, flanked by a servant with a bottle of wine and three golden goblets on a tray.

He smiles warmly at you. "Good evening sir. My name is Laremidan. I am the proprietor of this fine establishment. I suspect you have come from the South. I am interested in news from there. May I come in? I have brought wine."

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **357**

Do you want to have wine with the owner?
If you do, turn to **140**
If you don't, turn to **246**

309

Falling to the ground, you feel cold blackness sweep over you. Your wounds have proven too great. As you slip from life into death you are comforted that you fought for good, and suddenly all fear of death is gone as you fall into the embrace of light.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

310

You draw your weapon and charge in. The vampire does not see you until it is too late and you strike her down. The other human rushes in and decapitates her in one stroke. Her body turns into dust, and the head rolling across the floor disintegrates into a train of dust. The warrior grins and sits down to rest.

"My thanks, friend!" he exclaims. "She was a tough one!"

"What are you doing here?" you ask.

"Looking for treasure. This one tried to stop us." He glances up at the sunlight pouring down through the crystal dome. "Strange one, this vampire. Normally vampires turn to dust just by sunlight. Must have been something special about this

one. Anyway, she's dead now, so we are free to find the treasure." He looks around the chamber at his fallen companions and laughs. "And it's all mine! Doesn't look like there's anything here, though. Well, except that." He points to a golden armband that is sitting in the pile of dust, and begins to crawl towards it.

A special vampire. You begin to sense that you made a mistake. This man is obviously the lowest kind of brigadier.

If you want to rectify your mistake and attack him, turn to **111**

If you want to tell him not to desecrate the remains and send him on his way, turn to **36**

311

The fifth watch is yours. You sleep fitfully until you are woken to take your watch. The Wood has filled your dreams with strange and disturbing images. You walk around checking that all is well, then take a position near the fire. You keep it burning bright, and your watch passes uneventfully. You wake one of the paladin to take his watch, then head back to your blankets.

Turn to **207**

312

The clang of metal and a hundred smoking tendrils vanishing into the sky lead you to the smith's quarter. Here a hundred hammers pound iron, copper, steel, gold and silver into everything from a humble barrel hoop to delicate gold leaf.

You locate the largest weaponsmith, his trade indicated by a sword hanging on chains above his shop entrance. Entering inside, you find a single large space like a barn, with a forge in the centre. The walls are lined with racks of weapons, and tables at which apprentices and assistants work riveting spearheads onto shafts, binding grips of swords, and fletching arrows. Platforms hang from the ceiling high above, on which you can see finer goods on display.

The weaponsmith is at the forge, clad in a white robe and a scarred apron. You are mesmerised as he heats a blade with a meditative air. Even when he moves to the anvil and begins to strike the glowing metal with the long-handled hammer, the clanging like a gong at a temple.

You almost jump when an assistant addresses you.

"Good afternoon, sir. How may we be of service?"

You explain that you *might* be interested in buying a large quantity of weapons. The assistant nods and leads you over to some of the racks. He shows you a number of weapons and explains that they are sold by the box only. You attempt to bargain, but the assistant refuses to haggle. Evidently the weaponsmith does good business. The prices are reasonable anyway. You can choose from the following:

Box of 5 Spears: 80 gold
Box of 10 Javelins: 50 gold
Box of 5 Longswords: 100 gold

Your wagon only has enough space for 1000 jars, or 10 boxes of weapons or ivory (1 box = 100 jars). You may only purchase enough goods to fill the wagon.

A fine broadsword on one of the platforms also catches your eye. It is very plain in appearance, not encrusted in jewels like most of the weapons on the platforms. If you would like to take a look at it, turn to **189**.

When you have finished here, you can:

Visit the Dye-maker, Turn to **55**

Visit the Ivory-carver, Turn to **100**

Go to hire merchant guards, Turn to **200**

313

You move along the hall and reach the door to your room. You take out the key and unlock the door. The old lock cannot be opened quickly or quietly, and you wake Kianmay. Apologising, you close and lock the door. Even though the inn is not the safest place to stay, no one will be able to sneak in, so you go to bed and get a good night's sleep.

Turn to **373**

314

Walking towards the arch, you keep an eye out for the demon. You do not see it until you enter the large hall. It hangs from the ceiling like a bat. Unfurling huge wings, it screeches and drops to the ground, landing on its talons.

It looks like a dark-grey-skinned human, except it has long pointed ears, a bald head and a mouth so full of teeth its jaw is distorted. It also stands over eight feet tall and its fingers end in long claws. It grins at you.

"The lady has sent me more meat!" it says, its words so garbled you care barely make them out. Folding its wings back, it attacks you.

*HELL DEMON SKILL 27 STAMINA 50 DB 20 ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **149**

If you lose, turn to **248**

315

Kianmay minds the horses while you trudge wearily into the inn. The door opens to a common room, populated with quiet, sullen drinkers. Even at this early hour the place is half full. You approach the barman and ask about rooms. He tells you there is only one vacant room left; the charge is one gold.

The place is dirty and there is a chance you could be robbed and maybe killed in your bed. Do you really want to bring Kianmay into a place like this?

If you want to pay for a room here, turn to **358**

If you want to check out the King's Tub, turn to **106**

316

You take the right-hand path. The pass winds through the mountains, the cold growing deeper, seeming to seep into your bones no matter how much you wear. For four days you penetrate deeper into the icy peaks, until you come across a disastrous scene.

Three wagons lie broken and overturned on the roadside. There are also numerous bodies half-buried in the snow. Light snowfall obscures most of the blood, but there are still pink patches around some of the corpses. You turn one over, and flinch away as you see the look of horror on the man's face. His chest has been torn open too, despite the studded leather armour that he wore.

No orc did this. Yet someone has been here and looted the bodies and the carts of all their valuables. There are 5 boxes of dye still in one of the wagons. A jar with its wax seal broken open lies in the snow, blue dye colouring the snow around it. One of the paladin also finds two boxes containing 10 bolts of fine silk. You may take these boxes if you have room in your wagon.

Climbing back into the wagon, you snap the reigns and the oxen continue on their way. It takes another six days to transverse the mountains (pay your men ten gold each). Finally you arrive in a small hill town called Yormen.

Turn to **135**

317

You draw the blade and show Kianmay the ivory-hilted sword. She examines it and tells you that it is a night-blade. The blade is half-ethereal and when you use it, you can ignore your opponent's armour. If your opponent is not wearing any armour, then the blade wounds normally.

Return now to **293**

318

"I'm sorry," you reply. "I am not strong enough."

The woman nods sadly. "Then please send to me a champion. I sense a great goodness in you. Do this for me, please."

You promise to do what you can and leave her. It takes a long time to get back to the camp, and when you look at the stars, you see how much they have turned. Your watch is over. You wake one of the paladin to take the next watch and return to your blankets.

Turn to **207**



319

Walking down the corridor, you stop and listen at the door. You hear nothing and so you slowly enter. Inside is a large hall, with braziers in the corners and a large carved wooden chair on a dais at the far end. You move inside and have a look around. There is a cabinet against one wall, so you head towards it.

“What are you doing?” you hear a voice ask you.

Startled, you spin about and see a short man standing nearby. He is dressed in chainmail and white wolf furs. His head is shaved with a thin steel band around his head. He wears his long black beard in a braid. One hand rests on a scimitar at his side. If you are wearing a winged helm, turn briefly to **198**.

“I’m looking for the Wolf,” you say.

“I am the Wolf,” he replies. “Are you here to assassinate me?”

“No.”

“Are you a thief?”

“Not really,” you say.

“What are you?” he asks.

“A merchant guard,” you reply.

“A warrior,” he says with interest. “Yet you are unarmed. We shall have to do something about that.”

He calls out, and the double doors at the end of the hall open. A shaven headed man with a short black beard enters. He wears a black robe that reaches his knee, stopping above tooled leather riding boots. He wears over the robe a breastplate of enamelled dark blue, decorated with serpents of red and gold.

“I shall fight this man in the Ring,” the Wolf says.

The man bows and calls out for guards. They come and take you away to another room in the house. You are kept there for almost an hour, before the man in the enamelled breastplate comes to you.

“You are to fight the Wolf in front of his entire army. If you win, you and your companion will be set free with all of your belongings. If you come with me, I will help you to select a weapon.”

You follow the man through the door and eventually come to an armoury. The room is dark, but the man speaks a word and the lamps in the room spring to life. The man is a sorcerer.

He turns to you. “What sort of weapon do you wish to fight with?”

A sword, turn to **97**

A spear, turn to **146**

A mace or axe, turn to **242**

If you want ask for your own weapons back, turn to **295**



320

The tension grows to a peak, then suddenly there is a crack of crossbow strings and the whistling of crossbow bolts. You thrust one arm under Kianmay's legs and throw her back into the wagon. She shrieks as she falls amidst the boxes, but remains safe.

As for you...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **291**

If you are unlucky, turn to **383**

321

Stepping forward, you look over the circle of men. "Which one of you is the Wolf?"

The warriors ignore you. The clerk speaks. "If you have a complaint; speak. You will be heard."

"I know that the Wolf is a werewolf," you announce.

The statement generates less of a reaction than you were expecting. The clerk replies: "What is the nature of your concern?"

"The King of the North cannot be a ravenous beast! I challenge him to a duel."

"When and where?" the clerk asks.

"Here and now!" you declare.

The warrior at the foot of the circle, with his back to you, stands and turns around. He is a small man, but his dark eyes are bright with keen intelligence. He wears chainmail under white wolf furs, and wears a scimitar at his side. He has a steel band around his shaved head, and his thick braided beard reaches his waist.

He sucks on his pipe and looks you over. "I am the Wolf. I request that you withdraw your challenge."

"I will not," you reply.

"Why should I accept this challenge?" the Wolf asks you. "Your companion does not approve of your challenge."

You look back at Kianmay, who is looking at you with a small frown. "I know well that this man is a werewolf. His true nature is not hidden from me. But he has delivered the Diamond Key back into my hands. This reveals him to be a nobler man than most who are human."

"Werewolves are evil!" you protest.

Kianmay shakes her head. "A werewolf is a creature of Chaos. But not evil."

Even so, can you allow a creature of Chaos to rule the North? What if his ambitions extend further?

The Wolf nods slowly. "I do not wish to cause this great lady any sorrow. I believe your death would upset her greatly. Therefore I shall not accept your challenge. Go in peace."

If you have changed your mind and want to leave, turn to **42**

If you want to attack the Wolf, turn to **340**



322

You hand over to gold, and the barman begins to talk.

“They came in two days ago. The soldiers work for a count from somewhere in the South. The Count himself is here too, in room 23. His name is Raul. They wanted to know if I had heard of a priestess and some paladin travelling through here. I haven’t, so they wanted to know if there were any temples in this town. That’s all I can tell you.”

“How many soldiers are there?” you ask.

“Just ten,” the bartender replies.

You thank him and finish your beer. You leave the inn and go back to your own inn, making sure that you are not followed. You find Kianmay reading in her rooms.

“Where is Penmark?” you ask.

“He is out purchasing food for our journey,” Kianmay replies. “What is wrong?”

“Count Raul is here in Yorman, staying at an inn called the Elegant Peacock.”

Kianmay is shocked. “How do you know that name?”

“I saw one of his soldiers in the market, then I followed him back to his inn and questioned the barman. I even know what room Raul is staying in.”

Kianmay is shocked at what you have discovered, and doesn’t look pleased with you.

“This is our chance to get him,” you say. “To stop him chasing you once and for all.”

“You want to sneak in and murder him in his bed?” she asks coldly.

“If he attacks us, many of his men and ours will die,” you point out.

“I have a better idea,” Kianmay announces. “Tonight you will take me there and I will deal with him.”

“But you are the one he is after!” you exclaim. “What if you get caught or killed?”

“It is not me he is after,” Kianmay says, but then closes her mouth firmly. “Can it be done?” She asks a moment later.

“I suppose so,” you say.

“Then it is settled.” She nods firmly and picks up her book again.

Feeling dismissed, you leave the room and begin to plan. You don’t know what Kianmay is intending, but there is part of this plan she doesn’t need to know about. You send one of your men to the Elegant Peacock to watch for when the barman goes home. It is late at night when your man finally returns.

He takes you through the town and stops outside a baker. Your man points to the apartment above the baker and leads you to an alley. A narrow stairway leads up to the rear of the apartments above the street below and you walk along until you get to the barman’s home.

You knock on the door, and a moment later a small window in the door is opened, and you recognise the barman peering out suspiciously. “Who are you?” he asks in a whisper.

You have the hood of your cloak pulled low so he can’t recognise you. “You are a barman at the Elegant Peacock, are you not? I want to buy some information.”

“Ask, then,” the barman says curtly.

“It is cold out here, man!” you say, starting to raise your voice.

“All right, all right,” the barman says. “Just keep quiet!”

The small window closes, and you hear a bolt slide across before the door is opened. You walk into the room, which is lit only by the candle in the barman’s hand. The room has a stove and a fireplace and a large table with four chairs. In one

corner there is a chest with children's toys in it. The single door must lead through to the bedroom where the man's family sleeps.

You sit down at the table, and a moment later the barman lowers himself into the seat opposite, looking with apprehension at your man, who stays near the door. You draw back your hood, and the barman's face pales.

"I bought information from you today," you say slowly, increasing the man's nervousness. "I was just wondering if you also sold information about me to Count Raul or his men?"

The barman is white with fear and licks his lips. "I-I am just trying to make some extra coin! I'm sorry, but I was —"

You hold up one hand and he falls into silence. "There is no need to explain," you say. "I know your type. I merely wish to make sure the information you gave me is still correct. Tonight either I or Count Raul will be dead. So this is your last chance to make any money out of this matter." You hold up a single gold coin. "What did you tell Raul?"

The barman relaxes slightly, eyeing the coin. "I told him you came asking about him and his men. He wanted a description of you. I couldn't tell him much, but I told him that I had told you he was staying in room 23. That is actually a vacant room. I think he is going to lay a trap for you."

"What room is he really staying in?" You ask.

"Room 1. Our best room." The barman says.

"I am going to leave my man here," you explain as you stand. "Then if all goes well, I will come back here and collect him, give you your gold, and leave you in peace. Is there anything else I should know to ensure that I do return?"

The barman has paled once more. "Room 1 has its own entrance, near the stables. But it will be guarded."

"Thank you." You turn to leave.

"What happens if you don't come back?" the barman asks.

"What do you think?" You ask coldly in return.

Whatever he is thinking makes the barman blanch in fear. You leave and hurry over to the Elegant Peacock. As the hour is late, the stableyard is locked. You glance up and down the street to make sure you are alone, then as quietly as possible climb over the gate. The gate is supposed to stop thieves making off with the guest's horses, so it is not difficult to climb, but it creaks on its hinges, and the bolt rattles.

Jumping down inside the yard, you pause to listen as you peer into the darkness. Nothing stirs. Gently you slid the bolt back, but leave the gate closed. There are three doors leading from the inn to the stable yard. One of them is a pair of double doors in an ornate frame. You guess that that is the back door to Room 1 and are pleased to see that it is in fact not guarded at all. Moving closer, you see why it needs no guard. It is a thick and sturdy door, with a lock, and no doubt a bolt on the inside. You carefully try the doorknob and find it locked.

You can safely bring Kianmay to this point, but what then?

If you want to knock on the door, turn to **353**.

If you would rather go back and leave things up to Kianmay, turn to **261**.



323

Locking the door to your room, you head downstairs to the common room. There are several drinkers in groups or sitting alone. You order a beer at the bar then take a look at your fellow drinkers.

There is a thin old man dressed in a black robe at a table in the corner. The other drinkers are scattered almost randomly around the small common room, but there is a noticeable gap between the black robed man and the rest, who pointedly ignore him. The old man has a whole bottle of wine to himself, and appears to be well on the way to the bottom of it.

You notice a couple of armed men who have the look of merchant guards. They talk quietly, also looking over the inhabitants of the room, often meeting your eye.

Another man sits by himself eating a meal. He is hugely overweight, but dressed scruffily, as if all his money goes on food.

The rest of the people are look drunk to tell you anything you might want to know. Who do you want to talk to?

The thin old man in the black robe? Turn to **29**

The merchant guards? Turn to **122**

The fat man? Turn to **276**

324

Quietly returning to the sitting room, you quickly put on your armour and arm yourself. You hurry back to the bedroom and burst in. The scene that confronts you makes your blood boil. The two town guards are holding Kianmay down, while Laremidan has torn her nightdress open and is threatening to rape her if she does not tell him where the Diamond Key is.

The two guards go pale and release Kianmay, grabbing their weapon as they see you. You ignore the wilting servant in the corner and charge forward, leaping up onto the bed. Laremidan turns around just in time to see your furious face as you sink your weapon into his stomach.

The guards look reluctant to attack you, and clutch their weapons defensively. You shove the dying proprietor off your weapon and leap back down onto the floor.

Do you want to attack them? Turn to **183**

If you want to convince them to leave, turn to **75**

325

You tell Kianmay that it is a dangerous idea, that she would be sending you to your death; and then you refuse to go no matter what she says.

She relents and you urge the oxen onwards. Resuming your journey, you make one more stop for the night, then early the next daybreak out into the sunshine and fresh air once more. You feel the joy of freedom and shout out loudly, not caring who hears you.

You descend into the hills and soon come to the town of Yorman. The journey has only taken 4 days. Pay your men four gold each and turn to **135**

326

“Only by necessity,” you reply. “Do you intend to avenge your master?”

The manservant waves a hand dismissively. “Not at all. He was not my master, he was my employer. Now that he is dead, he cannot pay me anymore. So then, you have no contact with assassins in this town?”

“No,” you reply. “What is your interest in assassins?”

“I am an assassin,” the small man replies. “It was for this that I was employed. Also to be a bodyguard, but you took me by surprise. Fear not! I have failed and will not attack you now. In fact, let me introduce myself. I am Cariod the Viper.”

The hair stands up on the back of your neck. This is one assassin that is so successful even you have heard of him. You had also heard that he was dead. “Why did Raul need such a man as you?”

Cariod shrugs. “I do not know. He spoke often of a difficult task I must one day accomplish for him, but he would not speak further of it. I thought perhaps you might know. He was very interested in this...Alyn Mei.”

“There are many things of which she does not speak either,” you reply with a smile.

Cariod laughs. “Come, you should be going. You have made a good kill today.”

You and the assassin leave via the back door, which opens into the stables. You walk together into the street, and Cariod invites you to come have a drink with him. You agree, and the two of you head off to a small tavern. Cariod pays for wine, and you sit together in a booth. He tells you more than one entertaining story about assassination.

Unfortunately you can't stay long, but as a farewell gift he gives you a poison ring. It looks like a signet ring, with a golden viper set in red enamel. He shows you how to manipulate a subtle trigger and extend a poisoned needle.

You thank him and leave. Cariod is a friendly man, but the dispassionate way he talks about death chills you. You return to your inn and prepare yourself to report to Kianmay.

Turn to 123

327

You battle against the Wolf desperately. He is swift and strong, and wounds you many times. He is not untouched by your blade, and the silver hisses and smokes inside his flesh. But he is too much for you and finally you stagger and fall; and the Wolf's blade is at your throat. “Yield to me,” he says.

“I yield!” you gasp.

The Wolf stands and sheaths his sword, then extends a hand to you. The assembled soldiers cheer appreciatively. The Wolf claps you on the shoulder and leads you back inside. You are led back into the throne room, where you find Kianmay waiting apprehensively. There is also a table on which you find all of your items.

“You are free to go,” the Wolf announces.

You eagerly go to the table and begin to refill your pack. As you re-equip yourself, you hear Kianmay. “We cannot leave here without the one true treasure.”

“What treasure do you speak of?” the Wolf asks.

“A black stone inscribed with a spiral of ancient script,” she replies.

“A simple stone such as you describe cannot be of more value than the coin and jewelled items your companion is eagerly reclaiming.”

“The stone of which I speak is more valuable than any jewel and must be returned to me.”

“What will you do with it?” the Wolf asks.

“I shall take it to the temple in Arantator.”

You move to stand next to Kianmay. Wasn't her mission meant to be a secret?

“Do you know that the King of Arantator is my enemy?”

“I do,” Kianmay replies.

“Why should I deliver this great treasure into his hands?” the Wolf asks.

“It is not for him, it is for this land.”

The Wolf raises one eyebrow. “What does that mean?”

Kianmay explains. “The stone must be placed in the earth under the temple of the White Goddess in Arantator. In the hands of any one man the stone is wasted.”

“The stone makes the man who bears it immortal. Why is this a waste?”

How does he know that? Kianmay does not seem surprised and continues. “The power which makes one man immortal can instead flow into the earth. The temple in Arantator is built upon one of the channels of power in the earth, and so the power of the stone shall be multiplied greatly and bring great blessings to this land and all who dwell here.”

“Even beyond Arantator?” the Wolf asks.

“Men build walls and draw lines upon maps. The earth knows not such things.”

“How far shall this blessing extend?”

“I do not know,” Kianmay replies.

The Wolf nods slowly, then gestures to the sorcerer.

The sorcerer reaches into the pouch on his belt and takes out the Diamond Key in its cloth bag. He approaches and hands the bag to Kianmay. She takes it eagerly. She bows. “I thank you, noble Wolf. You are a better man than most.”

“Farewell, and may you succeed on your noble mission,” the Wolf says.

Turn to 42



328

Taking out your light crystal, the soft light illuminates the opulent interior. The rug is covered with an intricate pattern and oil paintings hang on the wood panel walls. You pick up the parchment on the table and unfold it. It is a letter.

Laremidan,

Our lord wishes to remind you of the large reward that is promised to you if you deliver the item to him. The time draws near and so he is impatient and urges you to keep watch over your guests carefully. They may be travelling in disguise, so be vigilant. I know you have the means to quietly gain entry to all of your guest's rooms in the Tub. I urge you to use this access! But do not forget about the Inn. It is more likely they will stay in the cheaper of your establishments. Remember that our lord prefers if the lady is not harmed.

We await your report.

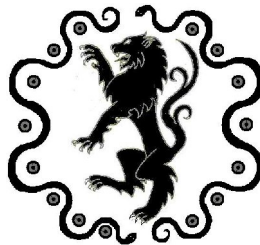
-RC

So the owner has been told to watch out for your party. Can the two of you pass without suspicion? Carefully putting the parchment back in place, you briefly search the cabinet, finding it full of personal items of no interest or worth. Moving around the bed, you move behind the screens, seeing a dresser. There is a large jewellery box here and you open it to look at the jewels. But you take none, not wanting to arouse suspicion or take anything that can be traced.

Before you leave, you look at the wall that should have the door leading to the bathroom. There is no door there. The walls are made up of wooden panels with gilded frames. You poke at the panel where the door should be and eventually find it opens by pushing on a gilded ROSE in the frame. There is a click and the panel swings outward, revealing the bathroom.

You now know how to open secret panels. With nothing else to do here, you return to the main hall.

Turn to 233



329

Riding back to the wagon, you tell Kianmay that there was a watchman on the path ahead. Cautiously your party proceeds. You pass through the gorge without incident.

For the next two days you scout ahead as well, but the journey to the town remains peaceful.

Remember to pay your men 3 gold coins each, and turn to 147

330

"I'm looking for firewood," you say.

The fat man grunts. "This way then." He leads you through the wagons to one that is piled high with firewood. He turns back to you and holds out his hand.

You look at his hand. "Am I supposed to give you something?" you ask.

"Your allocation notice!" the fat man shouts.

"I wasn't given one," you reply.

"Then go and get one, you dung-headed fool! This is an army, not a temple!"

You hurry away and decide to go back to Kianmay. She is still waiting inside the tent and you slip inside and resume your waiting.

Turn to 20



331

Deciding to talk more, you answer the Count's question. "I know many things. Some things which any man may hear, others which...are best kept as quiet as possible."

Raul glances at his manservant, knowing you are referring to him. "Well, we shall see which it is after you begin talking."

You nod. "I am a merchant guard, travelling from Yategan. A party matching your description has travelled alongside of us. They are disguised as merchants, but their disguise is poor. At least to anyone with an experienced eye."

"They are here now?" Raul asks eagerly.

"Possibly," you say coyly. "Why are you so interested in this priestess? I do not wish to help you harm her."

"It is not her that I want, it is what she has," Raul replies. "An artefact of little value to most, but very valuable to me. I am a collector."

"Your men have attacked the priestess's party more than once. Many have died. What sort of collector are you?"

Raul becomes impatient. "I am not here to have a conversation with you." He glances at the manservant. "Fetch my strongbox!"

The manservant reluctantly bows and moves away, putting down the tray and leaving the room. Raul glares at you. "Now tell me where she is and I will give you 100 gold pieces."

"Let's wait until I see the gold. Do you mind if I have that wine?" you ask, pointing at the side table.

"Go ahead!" Raul says irritably, and raises his glass to his lips.

You move forward as if to approach the table, your hand drawing your dagger under your cloak. Raul tosses his head back, exposing his throat. You lunge forward and thrust your dagger into his neck, cutting his throat open. You step back as Raul staggers, staring at you with wide eyes, his blood pouring down his chest. He falls to

his knees, clutching at his throat; the glass falls to the floor and smashes into pieces. A moment later Raul collapses onto his face and all is still.

You decide to leave quickly, and at the doorway, run into the diminutive manservant. He is carrying a strongbox in his hands. He glances at Raul's dead body dispassionately, and looks back at you. You look at the strongbox in his hands.

Do you want to take the strongbox? Turn to **230**

To just leave, turn to **245**

332

The second soldier falls dead. You quickly gather your things, dressing in your armour and pulling on your boots. You quickly search the guards, finding 15 gold coins, and a flask of strong alcohol. The guards have longswords and daggers, which you can take to use if you wish. If you wish, you may take one of the soldier's breastplates, helmets (Armour = 1) and blue cloaks, if you wish to disguise yourself as a guardsman later on.

Hastily leaving the inn, you move off down the street. Deciding to hide the Diamond Key, you go back to the Shrine of Aringarator the Dragon-slayer. The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

333

The tax collector orders the gate to be opened. As you are about to leave, he says in a casual tone: "There be many avalanches recently. Hope you make through."

He stretches out one hand, apparently examining his claws. You know that he is offering to sell you information about which way is clear. "How much?" you ask.

"For you, only 5 gold!" he says with a grin.

"What about this tunnel?" you ask, remembering what the innkeeper told you.

The orc's eyes widen with delight. "Ah, you wanna take da tunnel? Only 10 gold!"

What do you want to do?

Find your own way through the mountains? Turn to **13**

If you want to pay for information, turn to **377**

If you want to take the tunnel, turn to **178**



334

You shake Laremidan's hand and bid him a good night. He and his servant leave. You look at the armband once more. He tried to poison you. Is he likely to send a man to sneak in after you are asleep?

If you want to keep a watch, turn to **98**

If you think it is safe to sleep, turn to **260**

335

You show Kianmay the winged helm. She tells you it is has the power of true sight, and will reveal to you the hidden nature of certain beings.

Return now to **240**

336

You knock on the door and take a step backwards. You hear movement inside, then the lock clicks. The door swings open and a figure steps out into the hall, making you back away even more.

Standing there is a huge orc. It looks at you with surprise and curiosity. It is clad in a simple long tunic of undyed wool and its feet are bare. Obviously it was not expecting to walk into combat. However, it is carrying a wicked-looking, long-handled battleaxe as tall as you are.

Looking up at the blue-skinned monstrosity, you are not eager to fight it. It grins down at you; a gesture that cannot look friendly with those tusks. You have only a moment to decide what to do.

Run away? Turn to **279**

Attack the giant orc before it attacks you? Turn to **129**

Say hello. Turn to **374**

337

You grin at the man, then turn and run towards the other door. You hear the man behind you shout a word that makes your insides vibrate. Just before you reach the door something smashes into you, propelling you against the door with even greater speed. You smash your head into the wood and fall to the ground unconscious.

Some time later you wake from the painful darkness to a strange rocking sensation. As your mind clears, you gradually become aware that you are tied to a horse. You lift your head, seeing a cloaked figure on a horse ahead of you, holding the reigns of your mount. You look around, and see nothing but the road, winding across the tundra.

"Where am I?" you ask.

The figure turns, and you see that it is Kianmay. She grins at you and draws the horses to a stop. "Awake at last!" She dismounts and begins to untie your hands.

"What happened?" you ask.

Kianmay is smiling. “You were hit with a magical javelin! Serves you right for sneaking about and thieving!”

Her eyes sparkle with amusement. You rub your wrists and sit up. Your whole body is aching and you get down from the saddle, and look back down the road. “The Wolf let us go?”

“Oh, yes.” Kianmay says happily. She pulls a cord from around her neck, revealing the cloth bag. “He returned to me the Diamond Key.”

“So he didn’t know what it was?” you ask.

“Oh, he knew,” Kianmay replies. “At least he knew it could make him immortal. The sorcerer you met discerned its nature. The Wolf stopped us because he knew that King Darm was looking for us. He just wanted to know why. I told him what I wanted to do with the Key and he let us go! He is a noble and just man.”

She still seems amused at something. “What is so funny?” you ask her.

Kianmay grins. “He judged you to be a thief, so he kept all of your things, but equipped you for the rest of the journey.”

Looking down you see that you are dressed in plain leather armour with an undyed woollen cloak. At your belt is a purse, which contains only 20 gold coins, and a plain, but serviceable dagger. On the saddle of your horse hangs a similarly plain but serviceable longsword in a leather scabbard. All of your other belongings are gone.

“What is so funny about this?” you want to know, lamenting the loss of your magical items.

“Oh, it is not so funny as fitting, I think.”

She climbs back into the saddle and you have no choice but to follow.

Turn to **293**

338

You are about to leave the shrine when you see a messenger run past. He wears the livery of the King, his tunic and pants dark blue with a white lion upon the breast. You stay in the shadows and watch the messenger run straight into the temple of the White Goddess. What could the message be? It must be important for the messenger to run straight in the front door, even at night.

You are considering what to do when you see the messenger boy emerge. He trots along, his message delivered. As the boy passes the Shrine, you reach out and grab him. Bundling him into a dark corner, you hold him around the neck and try to look menacing.

“What message did you deliver to the sorcerer?” you demand.

The boy is already afraid, and at your mention of the sorcerer gaps. “J-just that the priestess has been captured!”

“From where?” you ask.

“I don’t know!” the boy says.

“Where are they keeping her?”

“I don’t know!”

The petrified boy doesn’t know much at all. He is just a messenger after all. Thinking about what a messenger boy might know that can be useful, you coerce him into describing to you the layout of the palace. The ground floor of the palace has the so-called public chambers, where various officials have their offices, and the barracks

for the guards. The dungeons are underground. The first floor contains the private chambers of those who live in the palace. The highest floor belongs to the King, and is assessable only by a long stairway, which is overlooked by guard stations. Anyone who climbs the stair must have a lion emblem and hold it aloft as they climb the stairs or they will be shot without question by crossbows.

The boy has an emblem and you take it from him. It is a palm-sized disc of ivory with a rampant lion of onyx inlaid in one face. You tell the boy he can go, but instruct him not to run. Setting him down, you watch him begin to walk stiffly away from you. You aim your blow carefully and knock him out cold.

You take the boy and leave him in a ticket of trees where he is hidden and should be relatively warm. You then rise and leave the religious precinct.

Turn to **362**

339

Taking out the ivory ring, you approach Kianmay, who still stands near the wagon, looking unhappily at the fat old oxen. She stiffens as she turns to you, still angry.

“I’m sorry,” you say. “It’s my first time buying oxen. But here, I got you this.”

You extend to her the ring. Looking at the small band of delicately carved ivory, you see her eyes darken. Is she even more angry? She snatches it from your hand, trembling with rage as she glares at you. Her voice trembles as she says: “You think I wish to adorn myself with a dead animal? One that was living in peace and happiness before humans like you killed it for no true cause? I wish I had never called you out of that drunken hovel! Go away! I don’t need you any more. You have done enough damage!”

She stalks past you. You turn to argue, but Penmark is there and your words falter. There is nothing you can do or say. For some reason you feel ashamed instead of angry, and collect your things. As you make your way back towards Red River, you see Lady Kianmay kneeling in the dirt under a flowering tree. She buries the ring and clasps her hands in prayer, praying for the soul of the great mammoth slain.

This adventure is over for you. You return to Red River, seeking solace in ale and the arms of a perfumed lady.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

340

Determined to do away with this beast, you leap forward, bringing your weapon to bear. The Wolf moves quickly, far more quickly than you expect. He also moves in a direction you do not expect: towards you. He steps past your attack and seizes your arm, hurling you over in the air with terrific strength. You land with a painful thump in the circle of men. They reach out and hold you to the ground, each arm filled with the same great strength as the Wolf. They are all werewolves!

The Wolf moves to where you can see him. “You seem to believe a werewolf must die, regardless of honour. You have much to learn. Therefore, I shall be your master.” Looking to one of his men, he says: “Bite him.”

One of the warriors leans forward. A chill of fear runs through you as the man's dark eyes turn golden, gleaming with a wild power that seems barely contained in the human form. He opens his jaw, revealing teeth that grow long and pointed. Seizing your arm, he brings it to his mouth and bites you on the forearm.

He releases your arm and the rest of the werewolves release you. You scramble away from the circle and stumble to your feet. Apart from the wound in your arm, you feel no different.

As if reading your thoughts, the Wolf says: "With the next full moon, which is in ten days, you will undergo your first transformation. Then you shall be changed. Then you will return to me. Now go."

Turn to **42**

341

Leaving the crowd, you and Kianmay take the road that runs around the base of the massive wall. You soon come to a small service gate. Here the guards are checking everybody who goes through. The guards have seen you and you don't want to arouse suspicion, so you must continue up to the gate.

Are you wearing a breastplate with the tower and stars symbol of Arantator?

If so, turn to **83**

Otherwise turn to **165**

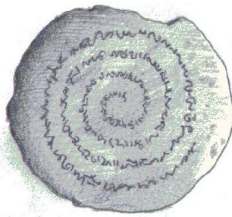
342

You walk over to the closed door. You listen carefully before trying the handle. The door is locked. What now?

Knock on the door? Turn to **336**

Pry free a light crystal? Turn to **349**

Otherwise you can go back and investigate the digging sounds. Turn to **386**



343

You tell the priest that you have changed your mind.

"Very well," he says. "But know that when the next full moon rises I shall seek you out and slay you. For then it shall be too late to save you."

With that awkward statement, he escorts you back through the temple of order and you leave to resume your mission.

Turn to **474**

344

Looking out on the battle, you see it is going very badly. There are over twenty of the Raiders. Looking at the scrubless land you wonder how they managed to sneak up on you. Suddenly Penmark falls to the ground in front of you, his blood pouring out of him. Kianmay screams in horror.

The raiders peer under the cart and laugh at you, jabbing towards you with their swords. The rest of the raiders are finishing off the paladin, your merchant guards having being all killed or more likely fled. The raiders surround you and start to taunt you. Their fun soon ends as the horseman rides up. He commands them to stand clear and jumps down from his saddle. You see his tooled leather boots approach, then he crouches and looks at the two of you with a smile. He is a proud looking man, with long, thin black moustaches that reach his chest. He is wearing a golden helm and a dark blue cloak lined with black fur. You see through the cloak that he is wearing a silver breastplate, inlaid with a tower and three stars in gold. It is the symbol of Arantator.

“Greetings, Alyn Mei. Would you and your companion please come out from there? I promise you that you will come to no harm.”

Kianmay hesitates, but then crawls out from under the cart, the nobleman giving her his hand and helping her to her feet. You follow, and the raiders roughly strip you of your weapons.

The nobleman leaves to issue orders. Your party’s horses are gather together and whatever valuables the cart and your dead have are loaded onto them. Another raider leading a line of horses appears in the distance and approaches as the raiders load the dead into the wagon and set it on fire. They set the oxen free, but the beasts do not wander far from the wagon and you wonder what will become of them.

You and Kianmay are put on horses, the reigns held by a raider, and you set off as captives, the flames behind you sending smoke into the sky.

Turn to **398**

**345**

You ignore the prickling sensation in your hand as you grasp the sword. You start to draw it out of the box, when a pain suddenly travels up your arm. You drop the sword loudly before the arc of pain can enter your chest, but even dulled it still spreads through your body (Lose 6 STAMINA). The curtain is pulled aside, and you stare into the wild gaze of Gilmore the Groat.

He opens his mouth to speak, but you dive for the tent wall and roll under it. Climbing to your feet, you dash across the camp and into the undergrowth as shouts come after you. You plunge wildly through the forest, not stopping until you reach your horse. You climb into the saddle and gallop back towards the rest of your party.

Turn to **161**

346

Making your way to the Elegant Peacock, you approach the clerk at the front desk. You give him the letter and ask that it be delivered to one Count Raul of Erinarn. You then go back to your own inn.

You try to get more detail out of Kianmay about what she intends, but she is determined that she will go to the market, with just you to accompany her, and deal with Raul by herself. You tell her he will probably have all his men with him, except for the few he'll put on the rooftops with bows. She is unfazed, telling you she is not intending any treachery.

You talk to Penmark when he returns, asking him to try and change her mind. He tells you that if she is determined, nothing will change her mind, and also suggests that you trust her. She is a priestess, not a merchant guard, and has a different way of doing things.

A foolish way, you conclude. You go down to the kitchens to enjoy a meal before your possible demise. When the time comes, you meet Kianmay in the common room, and together you walk out into the street. Silently you proceed to the marketplace.

It is still crowded, the air filled with vendors describing their wares, and the small of a thousand different products. But it is not difficult to find Raul. A knot of eight soldiers stands in the very centre of the market square, forcing everyone to move around them.

Kianmay walks straight towards them. As you near, you see Raul pacing impatiently in the middle. He is a tall, thin man of middle years with longish black hair and a hooked nose. He is dressed in full plate mail beneath his black and gold cloak. He sees Kianmay coming and commands his men to step back and make room. They open into a semicircle, and Kianmay walks right up to him. With the pressing crowd, the soldiers begin to close in again. You are not eager to step into a knot of enemy soldiers, and they close in front of you, leaving Kianmay and Raul together inside.

You can't hear what they are saying, but Kianmay appears to be trying to convince him of something. He shakes his head. Finally she takes out a small wooden box the size of your hand and offers it to Raul. His eyes widen, and with trembling hands he snatches the box from her.

He stares at it in awe and excitement. You push closer, ignoring the soldier glaring at your ear. You can now just hear what they are saying.

He looks up, some suspicion entering his expression. "The Diamond Key is truly in here?" he asks.

"It is," Kianmay replies.

The word of a priestess cannot be doubted, and all his caution falls away. Trembling, he opens the lid and his eyes widen in wonder. You crane your neck, but you can't see what is inside. Count Raul's eyes suddenly flicker and he faints in delight, collapsing in the mud. Kianmay quickly scoops up the box and it disappears back into the depths of her robe.

Kianmay starts to leave as Raul's men gather to pick him up. One grabs her arm.

"He's asleep!" you hear one soldier exclaim.

The soldier holding Kianmay slowly releases her, and she moves away. You follow after her and catch up once she is clear of the markets.

"What happens when he wakes up?" you ask.

“He won’t,” Kianmay explains. “I placed a sleeping spell upon him. He will sleep until I lift it. Or a powerful wizard.”

You return to your inn, and Kianmay goes upstairs. You pause to watch the street for a while, making sure you have not been followed. You see nothing suspicious, so you go upstairs to speak to Kianmay.

Turn to **290**

347

You shake your head. “What are the chances of all those shops being still open?” You protest.

Kianmay wrings her hands. “I cannot bear to wait until tomorrow!”

Do you and Kianmay between you have a crystal ball and a magic-enhancing pearl? If so, turn to **78**

Otherwise, she looks so stressed that you have a change of heart. Turn to **227**

348

The jade ring on your finger tells you that he is lying. So Zarim has been replaced as well. Not wanting to leave the old man to raise the alarm, you decide to enter the room and play along for a little longer.

Turn to **417**

349

Taking out your dagger, you go over to the wall and pry free one of the glowing gems. After several minutes you work it free. Your dagger tip is blunted, but you examine the palm-sized jewel with triumph. It continues to glow.

What now?

Open other door? Turn to **277**

Otherwise you can go back and investigate the digging sounds. Turn to **386**

350

If there were more than 10 fighters in your party, including yourself, the merchant guards and the paladin, turn to **88**. If your party is 10 or less, turn to **297**



Continuing straight on, you make good time into the mountains, but the cold bites deeper and deeper into you as the days pass. Each night you huddle around a fire, feeling miserable.

On the fifth day through the mountains, you have reached the highest point, and can see a spectacular view of the northern lands. It is also sunny on this day, the light sparking warmly on the snow. You are in a good mood.

It is about midday when you hear the first bark. An hour later you are urging the oxen as fast as they can go. The barking and the guttural laughter is close behind now. Penmark rides up beside you.

“We cannot outrun them! Let us find a place we can defend and stand our ground!”

You agree and you soon see a mound of rock and snow. You leave the cart behind it and gather your men on the top of the mound, weapons drawn, with Kianmay huddled protectively in the middle.

Nervously you wait. Minutes later you see a great white beast bound around a corner, a lithe black figure running after it holding a chain leash. The beast roars. It is something like a wolf and a bear rolled into one powerful form. Its shoulders are massive, and it has a long tooth-filled snout.

It tries to run forward, but recoils painfully as the leash tightens. The orc laughs and calls out something to its companions. Your heart sinks as you see two more orcs with beasts, then ten orc warriors carrying spears. The orcs do not seem to feel the cold, clad in black chainmail with horned helms. They saunter up to you arrogantly, eager to play with the toys they have found.

They gather in a group about 100 feet away and have a quiet conversation. A minute later they release one of the beasts and it charges at your group, roaring terribly.

The beast slows as it bounds up the slope, but hardly so. You and the others throw yourself against it with your weapons. The impact shakes you, but halts the creature. You score a deep gash, but then have to duck beneath a sweeping paw. Suddenly the beast howls in pain, and you look up in time to see it recoil, dragging Penmark's sword from its eye. It staggers and collapses dead on the slope of the mound.

Surprisingly the orcs cheer. They care more for sport than the poor beast. They once again discuss what is to be done. A moment later the ten spear-wielding warriors advance, leaving the two beast-keepers behind. The orcs surround the mound, then advance.

ORC REBEL SKILL 9 STAMINA 18 DB 6 ARMOUR 5

If your STAMINA is reduced too low for your comfort, you can retreat into the middle of the group.

If you wait out the rest of the battle in the middle, turn to **219**

If you win, turn to **121**

If you are killed, turn to **309**



You lower the rune-inlaid head of the pole axe to show to Kianmay. She reads the runes and tells you that they are runes of power and will add +2 to your SKILL in combat.

Return now to **293**



353

Raising one hand, you knock gently on the door. After a minute there is no response, so you knock more loudly. After a few moments, you hear the bolt slide across, then the lock clicks. The doors open, spilling lamp light across the stable yard. Standing before you is a manservant in black and gold livery with a griffon upon the breast. The servant is a small and unimpressive man, and you look past him into the apartments, seeing an opulent hall.

“How may I help you, sir?” enquires the manservant.

“I wish to see Count Raul,” you say.

“Pertaining to what matter, if I may ask?” the manservant replies in a humble but firm tone.

“A private matter concerning the priestess and paladin he has enquired about.”

“Please come this way, sir,” the manservant says, stepping aside and inviting you in with a graceful gesture.

You move inside and the manservant closes and locks the door. He leads you a sitting room and asks you to wait. There is a warm blaze in the fireplace, but you pace nervously, pretending to look at the paintings on the wall and seeing none. After a minute, rapid footsteps cause you to turn and a tall, thin man of middle years strides into the room. He is wearing plate mail armour and carries a longsword at his side. His hair is longish and black, his nose hooked.

Looking at you with equal measures of suspicion and eagerness he stops and plants his hands on his hips. “Who are you and what information do you have?”

You step forward. “I hear that you have been asking about a priestess and a group of paladin who may have been travelling this way,” you say.

“That is correct,” Raul replies. “What do you know?”

As you try to casually close the distance between yourself and Raul, the manservant offers his master a glass of wine from a silver tray. Raul takes it without looking at the servant. The manservant turns to you and offers you a second glass.

You wave him away, and he retreats a few steps, but remains close, ready to serve. For some reason his proximity makes you feel unsettled. You should be able to brush aside the little man if he tries to stop you attacking Raul. But the manservant has an air that is...very confident. Even as his eyes are downcast, you know that he is watching you.

If you want to attack Raul, turn to **81**

If you would rather keep talking, turn to **331**

354

The last watch is yours. You sleep fitfully until you are woken to take your watch. The Wood has filled your dreams with strange and disturbing images. You walk around checking that all is well, before taking a position near the fire. You keep it burning bright, even though the false dawn is already lightening the sky. You watch the light in the sky fade away, then the true dawn comes. As the first light strikes the town, Kianmay emerges.

“He is dead,” she announces, and sits quietly beside you, watching the sunrise.

Turn to **207**

355

Frowning, you glare at the seller.

“Do you think I am a fool? If this is the best you have, I will go elsewhere!”

You turn to leave and walk towards the exit. Just as you begin to think you have made the wrong decision, the seller calls after you. “Sir! I do have another pair. I was saving them for a friend, but his promises of paying soon are becoming wearisome. I am happy to sell them to you if you can pay today.”

Making a show of reluctance, you eventually let him lead you back into the stables. In the final stall there are a pair of oxen. Even to your untrained eye you can see the difference between this pair and the others. The oxen in the stall are also large, but their bodies ripple with muscle, their skin firm and eyes bright. You realise that you almost made a bad mistake, buying fat old oxen! You haggle with the seller and finally agree on 40 gold for the pair! The seller doesn’t look happy, and you guess that you have made a good deal. You ask for the oxen to be hitched and ready to depart at dawn tomorrow.

Leaving the yard you walk through the markets, wondering what you can purchase as cargo. Not knowing how far you have to travel, you reject anything that is perishable, and eventually narrow things down to three choices: dye, ivory, or weapons.

You can visit any or all of the vendors, but can only spend as much money as you are carrying with you.

To visit the dye-maker, turn to **55**

To visit the ivory-carver, turn to **100**

To visit the weapon smith, turn to **312**

356

Returning to the paladin’s camp, you discover they have lit no fire. Penmark and Kianmay sit close together, wrapped in their cloaks, talking quietly. They stand as you return.

“What did you see? Describe them to me!”

“There are 20 soldiers and a few servants, marching under the symbol of a Griffin.”

Kianmay nods grimly, sharing a look with Penmark. She thanks you for your assistance. Leaving the two of them to discuss matters, you go to your bedroll and get a good night's sleep.

The next morning your party moves cautiously onwards. You scout the way ahead, but find no sign of the Griffin Soldiers, even visiting their now abandoned camp-site. Knowing the enemy is ahead now, the party moves slowly and camps again as night falls.

The next day after travelling through thick forest, you approach a town on the trade route. It is a large sprawling town that some would call a city; but it is swelled with those who seek to make coin from travellers.

Turn to **90**

357

The ring on your finger tightens, and you know that he is lying to you. He knows exactly who you are and is not interested in news from the South.

Return now to **308**

358

You pay the gold and the barman gives you directions to the room. You go back outside and take Kianmay and the horses around the back. There is a single stableyard behind the two inns, but two distinct stables. Well-dressed stable boys mill about the King's Tub stable. You unsaddle both horses yourself. A scruffy stable boy eventually appears and you instruct him to feed and water the horses.

You go inside and find your room. The key sticks in the crude lock, but you eventually open the door. Inside is a small room the size of a prison cell. There is a narrow cot against each side wall. It does have a small table against the wall between the cots, on which is a single candle.

Kianmay goes to one of the cots and sits down. You put your pack on the other cot, and look at Kianmay, intending to go downstairs to give her some privacy. You pause as you see her open the slim wooden box that contains the Diamond Key. She also has a small cloth bag on a woven cord. She slips the Key into the bag, and pulls the cord to close the bag. She looks at you and to your surprise hands it to you.

"From now on, I think it is best if you carry this."

"Me? Why?" you ask.

"You are in more danger than I am," she replies. "And you will try to protect me if I am endangered. It is best for you to take this. Furthermore, if we are challenged again, you might need to leave me as we have left the others, and take the Key alone to its destination."

"I don't even know where that is," you protest.

"The Temple of the White Goddess in Arantator," she replies. "The High Priest there is named Zarim."

With nothing else to say, you put the cord around your neck and hide the Diamond Key under your clothes and armour. Finally giving in to her weariness, Kianmay lies down on the cot.

You tell her that you are going to go down to the common room. She just nods and closes her eyes. You pause to consider your purse. You will only need a few coppers to buy beer. Maybe you should find a secure place to hide your purse here. On the other hand, having it with you could be the safest place!

If you want to hide your purse somewhere in the room, turn to **272**

If you prefer to take the purse with you, turn to **323**

359

Stepping closer to the orc, you lower your voice.

“Listen. I’ll bet you have to send most of whatever you collect to the King, don’t you?”

“Only for da ones that we write down,” the orc grins.

You should have expected such corruption. It will mean the bribe will have to be special. “How about you don’t write us down. I’ll still give you 10 gold for your men, and for you, I’ll give you something very special.”

The orc’s eyes gleam and he nods slowly.

The orc will accept any of the following: A holy amulet, a bejewelled dagger, a bejewelled Griffon Sword, a coat of Silver Scalemail, or a luckstone.

If you cannot afford even the 10 gold, you can give a second item from the above list. If you still cannot pay, then turn to **107**

If you pay the bribe, turn to **333**

360

You easily find the Diamond Key in its box and place it in your pack. You search for whatever else the creature was carrying, and find a slim ring that appears to be made of jade. You put it in your pocket and look for a way out. One of the bricked walls has cracked and you go over to it. Using the powerful spear, you break down the wall and see a tunnel on the other side. To your shock and dismay the spear also breaks into pieces. You follow the tunnel and soon come out into Darken Wood. You don’t know where you are, but have no choice. You wander through the Wood for hours, and soon come to a road. Taking a gamble, you head north and after an hour reach the town of Tappin.

As you enter the town, the cry goes up that you have returned. Kianmay comes rushing from the inn and grabs you by the arms, her grip painfully tight. “Do you have it?” Her eyes are wild.

“Yes.” You take the box from your pack and hand it to her. She hugs it to her chest. You distribute the gems you took from the goblins amongst the paladin and merchant guards to compensate them for their losses.

You order your men to burn the diseased town. Once the flames have caught, you climb into the cart and leave the cursed town behind as you continue north.

Turn to **240**

361

As you move across the encampment, a flustered looking bandit comes into view, hurrying to fetch something. Seeing you, his eyes widen and he calls out in alarm, pulling a sword from his belt. Not waiting to see the reaction, you turn and run away as fast as you can. You plunge through the undergrowth, branches whipping at you face.

You run in a circling course, trying to lose your pursuers. You dare not look back and eventually make it back to your horse. You climb into the saddle and gallop back up the road towards your party.

Turn to **161**

362

Leaving the shrine, you make your way through the city once more. The streets are thinning now, and most of those still in the streets are either drunk, or hard men with dark glares walking quickly to undertake business it is best you know nothing about.

You reach the gates to the Inner City, the guards look out from their warm gatehouse, but do not rush out into the cold to stop you. Moving between the large public buildings you find yourself alone in the cold dark streets, the marble buildings around you silent and still. Ahead you can see the bright light of the palace, built in a keep called the Castle of Eternal Light.

Are you carrying a Primordial Crystal? If so, turn to **409**
If not, turn to **468**

363

The air around you seems to thicken, and your movement slows. Soon the air about you is solid and you are paralysed, unable even to breath. The old man smiles at you contemptuously.

“You truly are a fool!” He stands and gazes at the Diamond Key once more. “Ah, at last! Don’t worry, the King will never get his hands on this! I shall be keeping it for myself!”

Your lungs are burning, but you cannot even struggle.

Are you wearing a fire-worshippers breastplate? If so, turn to **73**
If not, turn to **473**

364

You surrender and are taken off to a cell and forced to answer some questions. After a while you are told you can go if you can pay the following fines:

Early Release Fee for Drunken Citizen - 5 gold

Release of Confiscated Property (Class: large) - 10 gold
Trespassing – 20 gold

Total – 35 gold

You are allowed to sell goods from your wagon and your possessions to cover the costs; but during the course of the Guardsmen's 'inspection', half of any weapons or ivory you possessed are gone. You can choose not to pay the release fee for the drunken guard, in which case he is left behind. If you still cannot pay, then this adventure is over for you.

If you can pay the fines, then you and the wagon are released, and your party is soon on its way north once more, on the road towards the Kilandar Mountains.

Turn to **16**

365

You duck and hurl yourself further into the room. Rolling to your feet you throw the oil jar at the two shadowy figures in the doorway. The jar breaks and spills oil all over the floor. The intruders charge at you, but slip over, giving you enough time to ready yourself for combat. They still have oil on the bottom of their boots and fight poorly.

INTRUDER 1	SKILL 5	STAMINA 20	DB 6	ARMOUR 5
INTRUDER 2	SKILL 4	STAMINA 21	DB 6	ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **415**

If you die, turn to **450**



366

You wake up from a bad night's sleep, cursing the hard floorboards. You rouse the men from the other rooms and go downstairs to the kitchen. You order an early breakfast for your party, and go out to inspect the wagon. It is safe and sound, so much so that the man you left there to guard it is still asleep.

You poke him into wakefulness and tell him to go and check the horses and oxen. Going back inside you ignore the scowling cook and talk to a pretty kitchen maid as she stirs a large pot of oats.

Your party eats a quick breakfast in the common room, and as the sun is rising into the sky you are moving through the streets of Hopenwood. Soon enough you are out on the road and approaching the Kilandar Mountains.

Turn to **16**

367

You fall before the slow zombies, collapsing to the floor bleeding from countless deep gashes. The necromancer strips the Diamond Key from your body before it can heal you. The Diamond Key makes the Necromancer even more powerful. No longer dealing with black magic alone, he weaves a powerful blend of the powers of darkness and light, creating zombies to fulfil every occupation imaginable. Generals kill their entire armies just to have them rise again as zombies; more powerful and much cheaper to maintain. The necromancer eventually becomes a powerful Sorcerer King, destroying the Wolf and conquering Arantator on his way; creating a world where corpses are valuable commodities. Death stalks the land as murder suddenly become profitable.

As for you, you serve the necromancer as his favourite zombie. Your undead desire is to travel to Arantator to deliver the Diamond Key. The necromancer uses you as his most trustworthy messenger. You are sent in a box to distant locations, given a package and told it is the Diamond Key. Then like a homing pigeon you faithfully bring the package back to the necromancer in Arantator.

You serve the necromancer and his descendants for hundreds of years before you are finally destroyed

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

368

Moving towards the sounds of digging, you step cautiously. You will not be able to hear if anyone is coming. The passage out of the hall leads into a staircase leading downwards, a high vaulted ceiling above hang at intervals with chandeliers. At the far end is another decorated arch, and you approach it nervously, ready for any figures that may step out.

You reach the bottom and peer through the arch. You can see a wide balcony around the inside of a great shaft. It is lit by a great coal bonfires piled on the balcony to one side, and you slip through the arch and into the shadows. There is a pair of orcs at the fire, helping to maintain it. The great shaft is almost 500 feet across, vanishing into darkness above. You creep forward to peer into the pit, and gape in awe at what you see. Thousands of orcs work with picks, digging away the rock. At the very centre there is a hole leading down, but the orcs are working all over, as if they intend to clear the whole shaft. Rock is piled into baskets that are hauled up on ropes that vanish into the darkness above. Even as you watch, more baskets descend.

You can see another archway on the far side of the shaft. It seems too easy to walk around the darkened balcony. In the dim light and at such a distance, the orcs opposite cannot possibly tell if you are human or orc. You walk around and reach the far side. Looking through the archway, you see the largest hall yet. Inside at the far end there is a crystal globe on a pedestal, swirling with black red and green; while in the centre is a large marble sarcophagus, the floor around it covered in blood. The walls are lined with red pillars banded with gold. The curved ceiling is decorated with worked gold, and hung with three rows of chandeliers.

You step inside and take cover behind the pillars, although it is so bright the cover is poor. You move further inside the hall, and come to another archway in the side wall. You can also see another archway opposite. You also have a fairly good view

of the sarcophagus. The lid is broken in, and from what little you can see, it is full of rubble.

What do you want to do?

Slip through the archway next to you? Turn to **393**

Investigate the strange globe? Turn to **190**

369

You open the orc woman's throat and she collapses, reaching out a clawed hand towards you. You step back and let her fall on the ground. You decide it is time you were gone.

You have a moment to pick up the barbed spear if you wish.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Barbed Spear	Fine Spear	6

You hurry from the room and go back the way you came. The conflict has attracted attention and you dash past orcs coming to investigate.

Shouts and cries follow you as you climb up the stairway, then enter the tunnel. Labouring up the slope, you are a ragged wreck by the time you reach the top. The orc is still asleep and you hurry past and into the main tunnel.

You see no signs of pursuit, so you slow down. By the time you reach the others you have your breath back.

Turn to **101**



370

The necromancer raises his gristly wand, and the hand comes alive. Energy starts to crackle between the outstretched fingers, but whatever magic it is conjuring is too slow in coming. You slay the evil sorcerer and he falls to the ground, the wand going still.

You search the laboratory, finding many ghastly things, which you leave behind. You find a crystal ball and a great quantity of silver, worth 100 gold coins. Nothing else is worth taking except maybe the wand, since the bracelet and rings are bejewelled. The jewellery cannot be removed from the arm without cutting them away. The wand might also have some useful abilities if kept intact. You can take the wand to try and sell, or to try and use in the future.

Once you have what you want, you leave. Turn to **371**

371

Leaving the necromancer's home you go back through the gate into the town. Heading back to the Inn, you go back upstairs to your room.

Turn to **313**



372

You reach out for the sword. Your hand closes on the hilt and you slowly draw it back towards yourself. Once it is securely yours, you stand and triumphantly draw the blade with a swish. Hearing this, the bandit jerks his head around, reaching for where his sword was. His hand closes on dirt and you flick the tip of the sword forward, letting it rest against his exposed neck. He freezes and swallows nervously.

“Who do you work with?” you ask coldly.

He swallows again, but then speaks with bravado. “I am the loyal servant of Gilmore the Groat! Beware if you harm me, he will pursue you until you are dead!”

“No he won't,” you reply. “Does he have a camp near here?”

His ploy having failed, the bandit becomes sullen. “Yes.”

“Where? How many men?”

The bandit points, and says: “He commands 50 warriors.”

“What sort of-“ you begin. The bandit suddenly jerks his head away and lunges at you, a dagger flashing in his hand. Instinctively you jump back, bringing the sword down on his extended arm, cutting deep above the elbow. He opens his mouth to cry in pain or for help, and you swiftly plunge the sword into his neck. He gurgles quietly and dies.

Dragging the dead bandit into a concealed hollow you search his body, finding a long bejewelled dagger a flask of alcohol and three whistles on a leather cord around his neck. From the images inscribed onto the whistles, you see that they are three different birdcalls; no doubt for sending signals. You can also take his longsword.

The wagon should be able to pass safely now. What will you do next?

Go back to your horse and continue the journey? Turn to **329**

Try to find the encampment of Gilmore the Groat? Turn to **182**

373

When the morning comes, you and Kianmay take to the road once more. Travelling north along the road is much easier than your trek across the tundra, but Kianmay is still unaccustomed to the saddle.

If you have any of the following items you would like her to identify, now is the time.

A necromancer's wand; turn to **10**

A crystal ball; turn to **59**

An arcane scroll; turn to **108**

A sapphire-set shortsword; turn to **206**

A magical pearl; turn to **387**

Your journey north continues peacefully, and you camp by the roadside. You light a small fire to conserve your firewood and sleep side by side. You are used to such conditions and are able to sleep well. Kianmay refuses to huddle next to you and shivers all night through. In the morning she looks even more tired than the night before.

As you continue your journey, you soon see riders up ahead. They draw near and are soon revealed to be a large, armed party. Kianmay asks if it would be best to flee. You shake your head. There is nowhere to hide, and running might just make the warriors kill first and ask questions later. The party soon arrives and with no noise apart from the thundering hooves they surround you, forcing you to come to a stop.

The warriors mostly wear breastplates emblazoned with a wolf's head. A few are in chainmail. They carry no banners or markings, but act in a disciplined manner. One of the warriors rides up to you, looking you over carefully. He is tall and has a long black beard braided into a thick column that sweeps his saddle. On his saddle hangs a massive gold-hilted scimitar, and his breastplate is inlaid with a wolf's head of jade. His cloak is dark green and edged in gold.

He does not look like a northerner. The origins of the warriors surrounding you are mixed, although half are Northerners. None of them look aggressive, but most look bored, which can be just as dangerous.

"Who are you and what is your business in the tundra?" the leader asks.

"I am a merchant guard travelling to Arantator to look for work. This is my wife."

The warrior looks at you suspiciously. "Do you often take your wife with you when you seek employment?"

"She is visiting the city. That is why I travel with her and not with a merchant."

The warrior grunts. He looks closely at Kianmay, then makes a gesture to his men. To you he says: "You will come back to our encampment with us. It is on your way. If all is in order, you will be released to continue your journey."

The warriors move in and take your reigns. You are escorted further north for most of the day. Even before you come within sight of the encampment, you see a hundred tendrils of smoke rising into the air. If it was not so near you would have guessed it to be the great city. Instead you see growing on the horizon a great encampment.

Thousands of tents of all different kinds are arranged in a regular grid. There are large open areas as well, which are filled with people. Your captors lead you to a part of the city where there are many banners, including one large staff hung with a wolf's head of red and gold.

As you are taken through the encampment, you see soldiers of the Wolf; many different nationalities, many different styles of dress and armour. But all share an expression of alertness and an air of discipline. The Wolf has forged a strong army indeed, and yet what you see is not enough to take the great city.

You are taken into another compound, where things are quieter and shown into a large undyed tent. Your horses and packs are confiscated, and a warrior empties your pockets and takes the Diamond Key. You gesture for Kianmay to keep quiet. She looks alarmed, but bites her lip. Being defiant now would be a bad idea.

There is a bench in the tent, as well as a barrel of water with a ladle. You sit down, but Kianmay remains standing, still sore from the saddle.

“What will happen?” she asks. “Why did they take all of our things?”

“I don’t know,” you say. “But whatever the Wolf is, he is not known to be a thief.”

You smile reassuringly at her, trying not to reveal the uneasiness you feel. Kianmay does not look reassured.

Turn to **124**

374

“You are the biggest orc I have ever seen,” you say conversationally.

“I am also the biggest orc I have ever seen,” the orc says.

You are surprised at the well-spoken behemoth. It seems very intelligent.

“What’s going on here?” you ask.

“I will show you,” the orc says.

Suddenly it lashes out. You thought you were out of its reach, but you realise you are wrong as its fist smashes into your face and you slip down into unconsciousness.

Turn to **176**

375

Clutching your light crystal in one hand, you slither into the hole. It is high enough for you to crawl, but goes down at a steep angle. You slide down and soon come to a den. It has a number of chambers, in which you find crude furniture forming a sitting room, a study, a bedroom and a kitchen surrounding the central chamber. No one is home.

You search the chambers, but find nothing of interest except a battleaxe hanging on the sitting room wall. With professional interest you take it down. It is as light in your hand as a long sword, and has similar reach, but the head is as large as any axe you have ever seen and wickedly sharp.

If you wish to take the axe, it can be wielded in one hand, with a SKILL Penalty of just -1

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Hell Axe	Battleaxe (SP -1)	16

Deciding you should leave, you crawl back up the tunnel and make your way back to the temple. You then squeeze back through the pillars.

Turn to **314**

376

Laremidan is too skilled for you, and he scores a mortal wound to your throat. You try to clutch at the blood that pours from you, as if you can push it back into your body, but you soon collapse and perish.

You float in darkness for a while, suspended by a shining thread. Soon you find yourself waking once more. You are lying on the floor of the entrance hall where you fell, but are whole and unharmed. You spend a few moments in confusion, but then remember you are wearing the Diamond Key. You stand quickly, and run into the bedroom, where lamplight streams through the open door.

You come upon Laremidan holding Kianmay by the neck, demanding she tell him where the Diamond Key is. He turns his head as you enter and blanches in shock. You run forward as he fumbles for his sword and slay him. The light in the room vanishes as the servant runs away, taking the lamp with him.

“Are you alright?” you ask as you wait for your eyes to adjust.

“Yes, thank you,” she says.

After you can see, you drag Laremidan’s body into the bathroom and dump it in the tub. You go back and drag the guard’s bodies in as well. A search of the guard’s bodies yields 14 gold coins, a pair of dice and a silver bladed dagger.

Returning to the sitting room, you lock the front door on the way, then take your bedroll into the bedroom. You close the door and lay your bedding against the door.

You lie down to sleep at last. Kianmay says nothing, and you slip into a deep sleep.

Turn to **373**



377

You hand over more of your gold, and it disappears into the tax collectors pouch.

“There be three passes. The left one be blocked. Big snow crash two days past. Middle path is clear, but Rebels are near there. Right path is good one. Little bit longer, but good for you.”

You are now free to go on.

Turn to **13**

378

You leave the paladins' barracks and go back out into the hall, closing the door on the snoring man. Where will you go now?

The lighted arch? Turn to **148**

The other door? Turn to **80**

379

Leaving the armoury, you contemplate your next move. Every moment you stay here you risk discovery. If you don't choose to leave, you can continue down the corridor to the end door, or go through the door that is now opposite you.

To leave the wooden house, turn to **179**

To go through the door opposite you, turn to **197**

To go down the corridor, turn to **319**

380

One cry is all it gets out before a quick punch crushes its throat. As it staggers back, you end its life and it falls down next to its companion. That done, you turn to see if you can find out what is going on here.

You look at the papers on the desk and see that they are pages ripped from a small tome. The text is indecipherable to you. You look into the sarcophagi, finding each empty. A search of the supplies reveals something more useful: a crate of healing potions. Unfortunately you do not have your pack with you. You can fit 5 phials into one of your pockets. You also gather together the pages of the tome and stuff it back together, slipping in into your other pocket.

Moving back out into the small hall, you consider what to do now.

Open the closed door? Turn to **342**

Go back to the main hall and investigate the sound of the digging? Turn to **368**

Try to pry free one of the light crystals from the wall? Turn to **349**

381

Deciding upon a drastic course of action, you leap up with your weapons coming to hand with practised speed. As you begin to charge around the desk, the old man waves his hands. He is casting a spell!

Are you wearing a golden armband or silver-studded leather armour? If so, turn to **402**

If not, turn to **437**

382

You agree and the necromancer explains how to use the rat and crystal so you can demonstrate it to the king. He also explains that the rat can grasp small objects and bring them back to you.

The silver is soon melted and the necromancer takes your dagger and dips it in the molten silver. He quenches it in water and sharpens it for you. You now have a silver-bladed dagger. Replacing the dagger in its sheath, you secure the jar under your cloak. Farewelling the necromancer, you leave his home and go back through the small gate into the town.

Returning to the Inn, you head upstairs to your room.

Turn to **313**

383

As your hand closes on your weapon, a crossbow bolt thumps into your chest. The powerful bolt penetrates your armour and throws you off the wagon. The blackness is consuming you and you barely notice hitting the ground. As you start to slip down into a noisy darkness, a light gently enfolds you and lifts you upwards. You are filled with peace, knowing that you have fought for good and are blessed.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

384

Waiting until the so-called priestess draws level with you, you meet her friendly smile and suddenly seize her. Pulling her into the grove, you clamp your hand over her mouth. She struggles fiercely and you almost lose your grip several times. You have no choice but to squeeze her neck until she faints.

Finally she slumps and you lay her body down on the ground. Searching her body, you find a large brass key, ten gold coins and a holy pendant that will add 2 to each of your SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK while you wear it.

In her bag are a dozen freshly baked buns. They smell good, so you eat one. In the centre are vegetables and a tangy sauce. It is delicious, and also blessed. Add 1 STAMINA and LUCK point. You also take the remaining 11 buns, which you can eat later to restore STAMINA and LUCK.

Leaving the priestess in the grove, you make your way across the lawn in the failing light to the side door that you saw the priestess exit. Taking out the brass key, you slide it into the lock and turn it. It makes a satisfying click and you are able to open the door.

You find yourself in a kind of mess hall, with long tables and chairs. There is a doorway leading to a kitchen where you can hear the clanging of pots and pans. Quickly moving the other way, you exit the mess hall into a narrow corridor.

Aware that as soon as you are sighted the alarm will probably be raised, you do not linger in the corridor. Hurrying along, ears straining for the sounds of anyone approaching, you pass several doors and finally come to an archway that opens onto a

high-ceilinged hallway. Tall, stained glass windows line one side, depicting beautiful scenes of the White Goddess aiding those in need.

Opposite the windows, the marble interior wall is lined with slender pillars and there is another archway in the centre of the wall with light spilling from it. There are also two doors in the wall, either side of the archway.

What do you want to do?

Go through the door on the near side of the arch? Turn to **80**

Go through the archway? Turn to **148**

Go through the door on the far side of the arch? Turn to **267**

385

You show Kianmay the golden armband. She examines it and tells you that it is a protective band. It will allow you to consume any poison without harm. But you also can't get drunk and drugs will have no affect upon you. You can tell if you have been poisoned by looking at the diamonds, which will turn black. The armband will also absorb the effects of any spells cast on you. So beneficial spells will not work on you while you wear the band. If you have a ruby lifestone you can still use it since you are able to remove the band and put it back on afterwards.

Return now to **240**

386

You show Kianmay the rune-inlaid battleaxe. She reads the runes and tells you that it is a Trick Axe. To use it you must reduce your SKILL by 6, but the axe has a Damage Bonus of 20.

Return now to **293**

387

You show Kianmay the magical pearl. She examines it and tells you that it will enhance the power of any spells that are cast by the one who bears it. Since you are not a spell-caster, you can either give it to Kianmay or keep it for yourself to sell.

Return now to **373**

388

You decide to leave the room and go back out into the corridor. Where to now?

The door that is now opposite you? Turn to **169**

The door at the end of the corridor? Turn to **319**

If you think it is time to leave, turn to **179**

389

The bandits set only one sentry, and it is a simple matter to wait for him to wander off to relieve himself and quietly stab him in the lung. You nod to Penmark and you and your men move into the camp. Most of the bandits are in their tents, but a couple are wrapped in blankets near the fire. You approach them first and trying to keep calm sink your dagger into their throats one by one, clamping a hand over their mouths to prevent them from crying out. You can see bottles lying about and guess that most have drunk at least some alcohol.

You carefully approach the first tent. You can hear soft snores from within, and as your eyes adjust, you crawl over the huddled forms, killing them one by one. The grisly task done, you leave.

You begin to move towards the second tent when suddenly there is a shout behind you. You have been discovered. The paladin charge from the forest and a short sharp battle ensues.

Turn to **185**

390

You rush out and slay one of the celebrating goblins. The goblins are in a drunken stupor and few notice as you move among them, killing them one by one with ease. Eventually the alarm is raised, and a screaming rises around you. They all flee, leaving behind their treasures.

You begin to search for the Diamond Key, pocketing treasures as you go. Suddenly you hear the flutter of wings and you turn to see the crow land on a root that sticks from the wall of the gully.

“You promised me,” the crow says sadly.

You shrug. “They are just goblins!”

“What is a goblin?” the crow asks you. You frown and say nothing. The crow seems to nod. “So be it.”

Suddenly you feel your whole body tingling. Then something is crushing you. You thrash about, trying to free yourself, but you are crushed down, smaller and smaller. As quickly as it came, the magical force is gone and you stand up, looking for the crow. It is gone as well.

Then you notice something is very wrong. The ground is far too close, everything around you looks enlarged. You look down at your self, your thin body covered in dark blue skin, your long fingers are webbed. You have been turned into a goblin!

You cry out, and try to wake up from this nightmare, but it is all too real. Such is the price of betraying the King of Darken Wood.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

391

“Yes, I am,” you say carefully.

“Then the Diamond Key is yours. I will just need you to retrieve it for me from the safe place.”

“Where is that?” you ask.

Suddenly you are falling, the throne room vanishing around you. You collapse heavily onto a floor. Small, rough paving stones press into your cheek and you slowly push yourself up. The fall doesn't seem to have injured you.

You climb to your feet. Another domed chamber, this time with archways lining the circular wall. The archways are all bricked in with magical runes painted in gold paint on the brickwork.

You look up at the ribbed dome, and see something large and black hanging from the apex of the dome. You look to your side and see there a tall wooden stand, in which rests a long black spear with a silver blade. The crow is perched on the tip of the spear.

“I gave it to him,” the crow whispers.

The mass hanging from the ceiling stirs at the sound, and a pair of huge bat-like wings unfold, revealing a demon hanging upside down. It growls and releases its hold, falling down and twisting about before opening the great wings and floating slowly to the ground.

It is at least 8 feet tall and covered in dark grey skin. It roars, its maw filled with a multitude of long, pointed teeth, and flexes hands that end in long curved talons. It glares at you with hungry red eyes but does not attack, glancing often at the crow as if it is afraid of it.

You look over the creature, but do not see the Diamond Key anywhere. “I don't see the Key,” you observe.

“It is inside him,” the crow replies. “This creature is a strongbox of sorts. Devils and sorcerers make creatures such as he to contain treasures. They take a soul which is bound to them, and torment it to twist its mind, making its existence painful, and filled with a great hunger, to sate which brings their only pleasure.”

“You made this thing?” you ask appalled.

“No,” the crow replies. “But I put the Diamond Key inside him. Now I shall test him and I shall test you. This spear will give you the power to destroy him if you must.”

The crow spreads its wings as if to fly off.

“Wait!” you say. “What do you mean, if I must? And what do you mean test him?”

The crow settles back on the spear. “I thought you were a Champion of the Light. Surely you know what you must do?”

“I'm new,” you offer.

The crow looks unimpressed, but says: “At all times a Champion of the Light acts with compassion. This is why a Champion of the Light must be highly skilled with weapons. Not to kill, but so that he may fight and only kill if he chooses to. When have you killed a man out of compassion for him? Rarely is it so. More often a Champion will kill a creature such as this one out of compassion. It exists in torment. Yet if it is slain, its soul shall be broken and fall down to the level beneath, from which the ascent is difficult. If this one can be redeemed in this form, that soul shall be saved.”

“How can it be saved?” you ask doubtfully.

“For a thousand years I have worked with this one, calming its heart. It has learned to speak and reason once more. But it must learn to overcome its hunger and its lust for power. For by consuming the flesh of those who come to slay it, it gains their strength. It was lust for power that caused him to foolishly bind his soul to a

devil in the first place. So now it will be tested. It must resist the hunger. And you shall be tested, for I see that there is no compassion in your heart for this creature.”

You look at the demon and see nothing but a savage beast. It is still glancing at the crow as it inches forward. “It is afraid of you,” you say. “That is the only reason it does not attack me.”

“We shall see,” the crow replies, and abruptly vanishes.

Startled, you leap over and grab the spear, levelling it at the demon, which roars.

The spear is magical, and you may triple your SKILL while you are carrying it.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Crow Spear	Spear	20

The creature eyes the spear warily, but advances.

If you want to attack and destroy it, turn to **184**

If you would rather give it a chance to overcome its hunger, turn to **202**

392

You pick up the light crystal and put it in your pocket. Going to the far side opposite the door, you gather your strength, then charge the door. You smash into the door and it swings open, dumping you onto the floor. Desperately you climb to your feet once more, and stagger through the kitchen you find yourself in. You were locked in a pantry!

You make your way into a narrow hall and eventually come to a door. You open it and find yourself behind a pillar in the first hall you came into. You shut the door behind you, glancing back to see it is painted grey like the stone around it.

You stumble across to the tunnel and wearily begin to crawl upwards. It seems to take hours, but when you reach the top the orc is still sleeping and you walk past him and into the main tunnel.

About an hour later you reach the rest stop.

Turn to **101**

393

You slip through the archway and into a large chamber in which there is a golden throne. The walls are hung with tapestries, and you examine them closely. You see the story of a great black dragon terrorising the land. A group of knights track the beast to its lair, battling other men who wear the mark of a great golden eye. The dragon is driven back with magic and sealed in its lair. The knights vow to watch the dragon for all eternity so it cannot rise again.

“His name is Maragandalar.” Says a voice.

You spin about and see an orcish woman standing near you. She wears a silver breastplate moulded to her form, and a long skirt of dark blue silk, embroidered with silver about the hem. She has long shiny black hair, falling unbound about her bare arms. She is beautiful for an orc, with large eyes and clean white tusks. She is carrying a barbed spear in her hand.

She smiles at you. "Have you come to worship Him?"

"Who?" you ask.

"Maragandalar, the Dragon," she says.

"No, I haven't," you say.

"I see," she replies.

She raises one hand and a lightning bolt streaks from it, striking you in the chest. (Lose half of your STAMINA.) You are thrown back against the wall, stunned from the blow and at what the woman has just done. There are no orcish magic-users! But you are being attacked by one, so you bring your weapon to bear.

DRAGON PRIESTESS SKILL 10 STAMINA 16 DB 6 ARMOUR 5

You can flee from this battle at any time. To run, turn to **196**
If you win, turn to **369**

394

Taking out the broadsword, you show Kianmay the words on the blade. Her eyes widen as she reads the script and looks at you in amazement. "Where did you get this?"

"A weaponsmith in the city."

She runs a finger over the words. "Here it says: 'Take me up to save others.'" She turns the blade over. "And here: 'Cast me aside to save thyself.'" She returns it to you. "This is a holy blade dedicated to our goddess. She must smile upon you to have lead you to this."

Thinking of how much it cost, you guess it couldn't have been much of a smile. Kianmay goes on to explain that this blade will have extra damage against demons and evil monsters. If you are facing an agent of evil, it will have an * before its name, and you can add 2 to your SKILL for that battle as well as a further 5 to your damage bonus.

To continue your journey, turn to **126**

395

You are unable to tell the crow the right answer. "Then go," it says to you.

"I can't," you reply. "I cannot go back to her without it."

The crow is silent for a few moments, then says: "Diamond is the most precious substance in the mortal world. Yet substance is but a thing for containing the true stuff of life. Will a man in the desert who comes up a golden goblet filled with water, pour the water onto the sand so that he may carry away the cup? So it is in this mortal world. So it is with you. The Diamond Key is the key to the most valuable thing in life, and that is life itself. You are not worthy to bear such a treasure. Take your golden cup and go!"

An invisible force suddenly scoops you up and you fly backwards so fast everything becomes a blur. Suddenly you are dumped on the ground. You stare at the wooden floorboards. You feel hands grasp you and you find Penmark helping you stand. You are back in the inn at Tappin.

“Where did you come from, man?” Penmark asks, a little shaken.

“I don’t know,” you reply.”

Kianmay is standing nearby. She hurries over and grips your arm painfully. “Did you find it?” Her eyes are wild.

You can’t look her in the eye knowing what you are going to say. As you look away, you see a golden cup sitting on the mantle above the fireplace. That was not there before. Pushing Kianmay aside in your excitement, you rush over to the cup and snatch it off the mantle to peer inside. You turn to Kianmay and with a grin pull the Diamond Key out of the cup.

She rushes over and grasps it gratefully, leaving you holding the empty golden cup.

It is time to be going, so you head outside and tell everyone to prepare to leave. You also give orders for the diseased town to be burned. As the men work, you distribute the gems you took from the goblins, to compensate the men for the valuable that they lost.

Once the fires are established, you climb into the cart and resume your journey north.

Turn to **240**

396

You take some gold coins from your purse and show them in your hand to the fat man, then you close your hand. “This had better be good.”

The fat man glares at you and you wait once more for him to finish his mouthful. As he swallows, he reaches into a bag next to him and takes out a small sheet of parchment. He unfolds it. When he can talk, he says: “Between here and Arantator you will have to go through areas heavily populated with the Wolf’s soldiers. They are stopping everyone going to and from the great city to find out information or make them deliver things into the city. They are trying to conquer the city. They never let anyone make a delivery twice, to avoid suspicion, so after they have questioned someone, they give them a pass.” He waves the piece of paper. “If you are challenged by the Wolf’s soldiers, you can show them this, and tell them the password. Then they will let you pass without delay.”

The fat man tosses the piece of parchment down onto the table. You pick it up and examine it. At the bottom is a red wax seal of a wolf. In the centre is a single line of script, which says: *The wolf fears not fire...*

“What is the password?” You ask.

The fat man holds out his hand.

If you want to pay for this, turn to **163**

If you don’t, then you can talk to the merchant guards by turning to **122**

Or go back upstairs by turning to **313**

397

The large chest is smooth, inlaid with ivory carved into the shape of elephants. It is long and when you open it is no surprise to see a sword inside. The sword is a

broadsword, with a two-hand hilt and a blade five feet long. The golden hilt is inlaid with rubies, and golden designs are inlaid in the steel of the blade right down to the tip. It looks too big, heavy and ostentatious for you to use. But maybe you can take it and sell it. As you reach for it, you feel a strange sensation in your hand, and you snatch it away. There is some evil magic in this sword.

Do you want to take it anyway? Turn to **58**

Alternatively you can:

Look inside one of the other chests; turn to **201**

Just leave? Turn to **4**

398

You spend ten miserable days as a captive of the nobleman and his soldiers. You travel long hours with few rests, taking a course than seems to wind back and forth. The nobleman spends much of his time peering into a small round mirror with a silver frame. You scorn his vanity for the first three days. Then you catch sight of the face of the mirror and see that it is black crystal. Whatever he sees within the black mirror guides your course and he avoids the Wolf's soldiers.

But by the eleventh day the nobleman is no longer looking in the mirror, but over his shoulder, urging his party to move faster and faster. By this time Kianmay is grey and exhausted, acting like a zombie, silently doing whatever is commanded of her.

By midday you too see the pursuers. Knowing that he cannot flee any further, the nobleman tells his party to form a line, with you and Kianmay and the pack animals behind. They wait to meet the pursuers.

Slowly the horsemen who are chasing you approach. They carry no banners, but soon they are close enough for you to see the wolf heads emblazoned on their breastplates. The patrol forms a line and stops about 100 feet away. The nobleman urges his horse forward, and the leader of the horsemen does so as well. They meet in the middle of the space and briefly talk.

They are unable to meet agreement and draw their swords. The two lines of warriors meet and fight. You watch, not sure who you wish to be the victor. You see the nobleman fall, and one by one his men. Soon your captors are all dead, and you become captives of the victors, who have lost half their numbers. The leader comes and questions you. He has a thick black beard won in a long braid and carries a huge scimitar dripping with blood from the battle.

You tell him you were travelling to Arantator with your wife when you were captured for unknown reasons. The leader accepts your story but tells you that you will have to come with him. Seeing Kianmay's condition, he gives her a phial of healing potion. The effect is dramatic and she appears alive again.

You are escorted northeast for one day and most of the next. Even before you come within sight of the encampment, you see a hundred tendrils of smoke rising into the air. If it was not so near you would have guessed it to be the great city. Instead you see growing on the horizon a great encampment.

Thousands of tens of all different kinds are arranged in a regular grid. There are large open areas as well, which are filled with people. Your captors lead you to a part

of the city where there are many banners, including one large staff hung with a wolf's head of red and gold.

As you are taken through the encampment, you see soldiers of the Wolf; many different nationalities, many different styles of dress and armour. But all share an expression of alertness and an air of discipline. The Wolf has forged a strong army indeed, and yet what you see is not enough to take the great city.

You are taken into another compound, where things are quieter and shown into a large undyed tent. Your horses and packs are confiscated.

There is a bench in the tent, as well as a barrel of water with a ladle. You sit down, but Kianmay remains standing, still sore from the saddle.

"What will happen?" she asks.

"I don't know," you say. "But the Wolf is no tyrant."

You smile reassuringly at her, trying not to reveal the uneasiness you feel. Kianmay does not look reassured.

Turn to **124**

399

"These are our guards?" Kianmay asks.

"Yes," you reply.

She nods in approval. "Well, at least you can do something right. Get them on their horses, we have a long way to go."

You call the men together and tell them to form up. They encircle the wagon, keeping their distance from the paladin, looking at them with the same curiosity and apprehension that you once felt. Kianmay climbs up onto the wagon seat next to you.

The road rolls under the wheels of the creaking wagon, and your party travels for several hours before Penmark calls for a halt at midday. You park the wagon under a large oak near the road and the paladin begin to set up a cooking fire. You notice that the paladin and the merchant guards keep to themselves, and even though the merchant guards talk, they do so in a whisper, influenced by the quiet peace of the paladin.

Knowing this will not do, you clap your hands. "All right everyone, listen up!" Everyone looks at you. "We have a long journey to make and we need to be work as one. So I want everyone to stand up one by one. Tell us your name and where you are from. And then something else about you if you think it'll amuse us all to hear. You there! You are first."

You point to one of the merchant guards. Slowly he stands up. "My name is Tyren. I'm from Fang. Err...I can balance a dagger on my nose."

This claim demands a demonstration, so Tyren draws his dagger and tilts his head back with the pommel on his broad nose. With a bit of dancing, he is able to balance the dagger for thirty seconds, drawing applause and cheers from the merchant guards.

The rest of the merchant guards stand up one by one and introduce themselves, then either perform a trick or tell an amusing story. Then comes the turn of the first paladin. The light mood becomes slightly heavier, and you wait with some nervousness. This will be the test. The paladin stands up. You recognise him as the carriage driver. He glances at Penmark, but does not wait for permission before speaking.

“I am Harteran,” he says in a quiet voice. “I am from Southern Atera. I can play the tin flute.” He takes out a slender pipe of tin and positioning his fingers on the holes plays a short merry tune. The merchant guards cheer and clap when he is done. Harteran looks a bit embarrassed and avoids looking at Penmark and lady Kianmay. The priestess is grinning broadly, and her eyes dance with light. The other paladin introduce themselves, some warmth breaking through their discipline. Paladin come from somewhere as well, you reflect.

By the time the meal is ready, all are talking, and Harteran is taking requests on his flute. Penmark, who avoided having to introduce himself by keeping away from the fire gives you a smile and a nod of approval. Lady Kianmay is also less angry with you, and gives you a small smile.

If you are carrying a Holy Broadsword, you can show it now to Kianmay to ask her about it (turn to **394**).

To continue your journey, turn to **126**

400

You cannot afford to be captured, so you ready yourself for combat. The guards see the grim expression on your face and move in, waving their swords. Suddenly a priestess appears, and plants herself in front of you. Her head-cloth falls away, revealing long locks of straight black hair.

“Stop!” she says. “This is holy ground! You must not take any life here!”

“He already has!” barks one of the false paladin.

“Then do not blacken your souls as he has!” the priestess implores. She turns to face you. Her skin is pale, but her eyes are bright green and full of life. “Please, sir. Do not tarnish this place any further. Surrender!”

“I cannot,” you reply.

Looking into her eyes, you are awed by the depth of the love and compassion that you see. But you know you cannot do as she wishes. Seeing your distraction, one of the guards lunges at you, thrusting with his sword. You turn to defend yourself, but it is too late.

With a desperate leap, the priestess throws herself into the path of the blade, and she falls against you with a cry of pain. You fall to the floor with her on top of you. Quickly you struggle free, but none of the guards are attempting to apprehend you. Instead they stand with looks of shock on their faces. One stands with no sword, his face grey as he stares at the priestess on the floor. You look down at the priestess and see the sword protruding from her chest. She looks up at the man who has stabbed her and holds out her hand to him.

“Please,” she says soundlessly, her eyes full of a light that makes you feel petty and ashamed. The guard kneels slowly and takes her hand. She grasps it and smiles. As she speaks, she spits flecks of blood onto her robe. “I forgive you.”

She then dies on the floor, her bright beautiful green eyes shut away forever. You feel a great anger and shame. But the urgency of your situation presses upon you, and you see that the soldiers are distracted...

Do you want to make a break for it? If so, turn to **419**

If you want to use the Diamond Key to bring the priestess back to life, knowing that you will be captured and the Key delivered to king Darm, turn to **495**

401

Quickly leaving the room you retreat back towards the narrow corridor. You hear a woman's voice call after you, asking you to stop. You quicken your step and going back to the mess hall trot between the tables and exit the temple.

Looking around to make sure no guards are about, you run across the gardens and make it to safety. If Zarim is a captive he will be held in the palace along with Kianmay. Now is the time to make your assault on the palace.

Turn to **362**

402

You feel the air start to thicken around you, but suddenly it thins again, and your charge is barely paused as you throw yourself at the old man. He only has time to look startled before you end his life.

He falls forward onto the desk with a thump. Deciding that Zarim must be held in the palace, you search the study for anything that can aid you. On the man himself you find a golden ring that look magical. In the drawers of the desk you find a dagger with runes etched on the blade and an ivory disc the size of your palm with an onyx lion inlaid in one side.

There is also a cabinet next to the door and a search of it reveals a box of ten healing potions and a single phial of green luck potion. You also find a foot-high statue of the white goddess that is exquisitely carved from jade.

Leaving the study before the death is discovered, you make your way back through the temple and out into the gardens. Now you must make your assault on the palace. But before you walk into the lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key, so you head back to the Shrine of Aringarator.

The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

403

The lock clicks open and you freeze. The sleeping man sleepily mutters something and moments later his snores resume. You open the lid slowly. Inside you find two healing phials, a blanket and a purse of 10 gold coins.

You can now leave by turning to **378**

If you want to try the second chest, you must test your luck once more.

If you are lucky, turn to **455**
 If you are unlucky, turn to **442**

404

Your fingers slip, and you are washed away, loosing your footing and sinking under and tumbling about, losing all sense of where is up. Eventually you are dumped into the calmer waters of the canal. It is a struggle against your armour, clothing and equipment to reach the surface, but the rounded canal is shallow and eventually you make it to the side where you can stick your head out of the water and catch your breath.

Halve your STAMINA for this near-drowning. If you wish, you can attempt the sewage tunnel again by turning to **413**. If you have healing potions, you can drink them now, or if you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, you can rest until your STAMINA is full once more then attempt the tunnel again.

If you want to abandon this option, you can try one of the other potential entrances:

The main gate; turn to **433**

The dungeon; turn to **481**

If you have a glass ring you can go through the stable gate by turning to **424**

405

The crystal in your hand suddenly grows hot as the brightness grows. You drop the crystal and shield your eyes. Even through your hands and eyelids the light hurts you, and you back away from the intense heat. When all grows dark and cool once more, you look down on the ground. Lying there is a broadsword with a long hilt. It has a silver hilt set with opals and bound with blue silk. The weapon is sheathed in a thin scabbard of smooth polished wood banded with silver. You reach down and pick it up, drawing the wide blade and seeing magical light dance along the edges.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Crow Sword	Sword	20

You thank the crow as you experimentally wave the powerful weapon.

“Thank me not.” The crow says. “It may not help you. It shall only cast you further down the way you have chosen to walk.”

With that, the bird flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

You continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

406

You back down the passage, out of sight of the zombies. You hear them continue to shuffle forward. You go back to the ladder and climb down. Hiding the light

crystal, you wait in the darkness and watch the passage above fill with the shadow of the two zombies.

They come right to the edge, but then stop, groaning in what seems like frustration. They remain still for a minute, then slowly turn and begin to make their way back to their posts. Moving quietly, you climb the ladder again and taking out your weapon creep up behind the zombies...

If you are using a sword or an axe, turn to **525**

If you are using another weapon or are unarmed, turn to **456**

407

As you continue towards the temple, you see a man ahead standing on the path and staring in your direction. As you near, it becomes evident that he is staring at you. He is a wiry old man, shorter than you, with skin that is browned and looks hard. His head is shaved and he wears a brown robe that has seen better days, but his leather belt is inlaid with golden discs. He stands erect, a slim wooden staff held in his hand.

You intend to walk right past him, but his dark-eyed gaze is so intense that you are compelled to stop. He points a finger at you. "You...are not what you seem," he states.

Has your disguise been uncovered? It would be a bad idea to kill the old man while the gardens are so crowded. And you might get blood on your disguise.

If you want to leave him, turn to **474**

If you want to ask him what he is talking about, turn to **447**

408

Gripping your weapon, you hack at the wall of flesh. At first you make progress, splattering blood on the floor and yourself as you open an increasingly larger wound. But as you work your way deeper, you puncture something and jet of noxious gasses are expelled. You stagger backward, your eyes and throat burning (deduct 6 STAMINA). You fall to the floor coughing and blinking. The gas continues to pour into the chamber and it becomes difficult to breathe. Getting to your hands and knees you begin to crawl from the room.

If you are still alive or have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **547**

If you are killed, turn to **928**

409

As you make your way through the streets, you come upon a strange sight. There is a tree growing in the middle of the street. You stop to examine it. There is an unearthly chill in the air about the tree, and you see it move slightly as if writhing, a faint creaking sound coming from within the rigid wood.

A tree of Darken Wood? How did it get here? And who would plant it in the middle of the street? You move on, but before you have taken a step you see two

more trees ahead. Stopping and looking around once more, you see that there are several trees growing in the street behind you and in the square that was vacant when you crossed it. Gripping your weapons, you hurry forward. The trees proliferate in your path, and soon the light ahead is blocked by the cold darkness of Darken Wood. You can still see the buildings of the city around you, but now they are shrouded by the evil forest.

As you step into what should be just an intersection, you also come to a clearing in the Wood, and there perched on the signpost is a large crow.

“What are you doing here?” you ask the crow apprehensively.

The crow looks taken aback. “That is the question I was going to ask you,” grumbles its disembodied voice.

“I am on my way to the palace to rescue a priest and priestess of the White Goddess,” you explain.

“Ah, the White Goddess,” the crow says fondly. “I know her well. A fine sense of humour. So then, are you a Champion of the Light?”

If you want to say yes, regardless of whether you passed the test or not, turn to **445**

If you want to say no, turn to **490**

410

Entering the cold chamber, you begin to search the bodies. You find a number of valuables, but decide to restrict your harvest to items of use. The pickings are slim, yielding only a brass lion key.

If you have a blanket with you, you can take the cold crystal.

You leave the cold room and will the wall to close behind you. With a gurgle the flesh closes up again and you contemplate the other doors.

Right? Turn to **414**

Centre? Turn to **482**

411

Becoming a creature of chaos could impact on your plans, so you decide to trust the priest. You undress, carefully hiding the Diamond Key inside one of your boots. Once you are inside, the priest comes over and locks the door.

He waves his hands and incants something, then moves to the other side and repeats the magical spell. Twice more he does this until you are enclosed on all sides by a spell of uncertain nature. The priest then gets a long silver sceptre and stands before the cage. He starts to speak in a low, tonal language that you do not understand.

You begin to feel hot, the cage around you becomes oppressive. You call out to the priest, telling him to release you, but he drones on, ignoring you. You thump the sides of the cage, looking for a weakness. You begin to panic, becoming frantic, and smash at the cage angrily. You feel a pressure building up inside you as if something is trying to burst out of you. It fills your whole being and it feels like it is trying to get out through every pore in your skin.

Your last memory is of throwing yourself wildly against the sides of the cage as your hands become hairy and your nails grow...

You float in an uncomfortable blackness for a while, but then you are suddenly awake. You groan. Your whole body aches and you do not feel good. (Reduce your STAMINA to half of its current value). You find yourself lying on a narrow cot, naked under some blankets. As you sit up, the priest turns from the bench where he stands.

"It is done," he says. "You will not become a werewolf. But it was close. You fully transformed."

Once you are dressed once more, you gather your things and discover with horror that the Diamond Key is missing. You turn on the priest, your hand going to your weapon. He holds up the Diamond Key in its cloth bag.

"My fee is a magical item. Shall I take this one?"

"No!" you say firmly.

"Do you know what this is?" the priest asks you.

"I do," you reply.

The priest nods and hands you the bag, which you take back quickly and secure around your neck. It is now time to pay the priest. He will take any one of the following items:

An orb amulet; an arcane scroll; a magic pearl; a jade ring; a luckstone; a golden armband; or a ring of SKILL, STAMINA or LUCK.

If you have none of these or do not wish to part with them, turn to **137**

Otherwise you give the priest one of the items. Turn to **479**

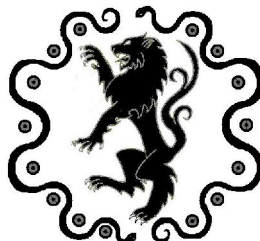
412

You make your way through, your lungs starting to ache as the pipe goes on and on. You swim desperately, fearing that you are not moving at all, but finally you pull yourself into a pool and push up towards the surface. As you head bursts free, you take a grateful gulp of air.

Looking around you find yourself in a similar chamber to the first. Here there is another hot water pipe with a ladder leading up to an opening, from which flickering torchlight plays on the mouldy ceiling. You swim to the edge and pull yourself from the water. Looking at the ladder, an idea occurs to you. If you have a rope, you can tie it to the ladder, then swim back and tie the other end to your gear, and pull it through.

If you have a rope in your pack, turn to **435**

Otherwise, you approach the ladder. Turn to **485**



413

Having a look around to make sure you are unobserved, you quickly slip down into the canal, lowering yourself in slowly. The water is warm and actually pleasant. You trudge against the flow and make your way into the pipe. It is large enough for you to walk through, although it is hard going against the chest-high water. You are forced to cling to the side, digging your fingers into the cracks between the smoothed bricks.

It is hard going...

Test your STAMINA. Roll 4 die. If the total is equal to or less than your current STAMINA, turn to **483**.
Otherwise, turn to **404**

414

Going up to the door, you wield the wand once more and the flesh opens. This door is only a couple of inches thick, and the opening reveals a cell. Inside you are shocked to see a young woman, held prisoner by a pair of fat zombies that stand each side, holding her by the wrists.

She does not look up, but you see her breathing slowly. Deciding you cannot leave this situation alone, you enter and wave your wand at the zombies.

“Let her go!”

The zombies do not react. Concentrating, you will the wand to convey your thoughts to the undead brain of one of the zombies. A moment later the zombie releases his hold, the woman slumping against the other undead. You release her other arm, and putting the wand aside, turn the woman over. She is unconscious and does not respond to your attempts to wake her.

She appears unharmed, but underfed. That said, her body is covered with numerous scars, as if her body has been opened repeatedly and the flesh crudely closed.

If you have a healing potion, do you want to revive the woman and see what is going on? Turn to **518**

If you have seen enough and want to try the central door, turn to **482**

If you want to go through the door to the left, turn to **545**

**415**

The second intruder falls dead. You see that they are wearing breastplates of the city of Arantator. You quickly search the guards, finding 15 gold coins and a flask of strong alcohol. The guards have longswords and daggers, which you can take if you

wish to use. You may take one of the soldier's breastplates, helmets (Armour = 1) and blue cloaks to use as a disguise later on.

The disguise you have bought is ruined, the oil spilt on the floor and the robe and hat that you dropped are now soaked in oil. You decide that you will just break into the temple to see Zarim. You make your way to the temple district and pause at the Shrine of Arantator to observe the temple next door. All looks calm and still.

Turn to **273**

416

You take out the zombie rat and show it to the necromancer. He gestures to a relatively clear bench. "Show me."

You go to the bench and put down the jar. Unsealing it, you pull out the rat and set it on the bench. Holding the crystal ball on the lid of the jar, you make the rat crawl in a square, making two circuits. You then turn back to the necromancer with a smile. "He taught me this to begin my training in the control of undead minds."

"Interesting," the necromancer replies. "Very well, I shall let you go free, if you leave this behind with me."

If you agree, turn to **530**

If you refuse to part with the rat, turn to **496**

417

Entering the study, you sit down in one of the small chairs before the desk while Zarim goes to a side table and offers you water. You accept and he turns his back to you as he pours you a cup of water.

If you think that this man is not Zarim, and would like to incapacitate him now, turn to **34**

If you want to wait a little longer in any case, turn to **425**

418

You feel yourself vibrate as you charge forward, but nothing else happens, and the necromancer looks at you in shock and terror a moment before you slay him.

Turn to **480**

419

You take a deep breath then make a break for it. One of the guards steps to intercept you, and you change your course, charging directly into him. Unprepared for the impact, he is thrown back and you make it into the narrow corridor. You dash through into a mess hall and then out the back door. You circle around the gardens,

looking for signs of pursuit and hide yourself inside the Shrine of Aringarator where you can watch the temple from the shadows. Many minutes pass and nothing stirs.

Now you must make your assault on the palace. But before you walk into the lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key. The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

420

Seeing your outfit, the guard grunts and closes the widow before you can say anything. The bolts are slid open and the next moment the door swings open. You hurry into the warm guardroom. There is another guard seated on a bench at a table, near a stove that is keeping the room warm.

There is another strong door opposite, and wishing the guards a good evening, you make for it.

“You need one of us to come with you?” asks the smaller guard at the table.

“No. Have a good night,” you say and continue towards the door.

Turn to **426**

421

You tell the priestess that only the High Priest can help you, and so with obvious reluctance she leads through the worship hall and into a side passage. Stopping outside a door, she knocks. A voice calls for her to enter and she opens the door and explains that you wish to see the High Priest.

The voice within calls for you to enter and you do so. An old man in a white robe with piecing blue eyes stands behind an oak wood desk. Behind him are bookshelves, and a large round rug patterned with dark blue, green and white is laid in the centre of the room. He smiles and welcomes you, inviting you to sit down in one of the seats before the desk. He thanks the priestess who is lingering in the doorway and she bows and withdraws.

He offers you a cup of water, which you accept. He pours you a cup from a jug on a side table and serves it to you. He returns to his seat behind the desk.

“What can I do for you?” he asks.

Concerned by the priestess's behaviour, you decide to test the man before you. “I am a merchant guard,” you begin. “In my life I have killed many men. Recently I met a priestess of your order that told me killing was wrong, and yet your order has paladin. Why are they different?”

Zarim nods slowly. “Do you know the vow that a man makes to become a paladin?”

“No,” you reply.

“He swears to make a penance for every life that he takes, be it a fly he accidentally squashes, or an enemy that he slays. What this penance is, that is up to each man. But it is not a thing that is taken lightly. A paladin must not kill unless it is to preserve life; but this must not be a justification for a man’s own hatred or anger. If your worst enemy is going to kill an innocent child, you may call it justice, even virtue to slay him first. Yet within, your hatred feeds upon his death. This is what the paladin seeks to avoid. In the world of darkness that we dwell in, it is necessary for the righteous to bear arms. But if a righteous man’s heart is consumed in darkness, what is the point of it? So a paladin kills with only the greatest of reluctance, for he must make penance for it; and some have chosen a terrible penance. This is the difference.”

He certainly talks like a priest. If you want to trust him, turn to **52**

If you think he is an agent of the king and want to attack him, turn to **381**

If you are unsure and just want to leave, turn to **436**

422

The warrior falls dead to the floor. You search him briefly, finding 3 phials of healing potion. There is also a crate in the corner in which you find a steel lion key, a palm-sized ivory token with an onyx rampant lion inlaid in one side, and a bottle of sleeping potion. Once you have taken what you want, you consider what to do next.

Next to the hot water pipe is a ladder that leads up to a narrow passage. But also, you notice a thin stream of glowing phosphorous flowing out from an opening hidden under the water, leading in the same direction. This pipe is completely submerged.

If you want to take the ladder, turn to **439**

If you want to explore the submerged pipe, turn to **476**

423

Taking out the flask, you wave it suggestively at the guard. “It is a cold night.”

His eyes brighten. “You’ve convinced me, stranger.”

He closes the small window and you hear the bolts being slid open. The next moment the door swings open and you enter the warm guardroom. You hand the flask over and are pointed towards the cells. You thank the guards and approach the door.

Turn to **426**

424

Moving up to the barbed doors, you take out the glass ring and taking a breath, slip it onto your finger. You take a step forward, closing your eyes. You can feel the door as you push yourself through it, willing yourself forward. It is not a pleasant

experience. Once you are inside and are sure your feet are above the ground, you pull the ring off with relief.

Feeling normal once more, you look at the two doors that open into the stableyard. The smaller door probably leads down to the dungeons, while the larger into the palace itself.

If you want to enter the dungeons to find Zarim, turn to **535**

If you want to enter the palace to look for Kianmay, turn to **512**

425

The old man hands you the cup of water, which you take with thanks. He goes back behind his desk and sits down. "What can I do for you?" he asks.

"I am a merchant guard," you begin. "In my life I have killed many men. Recently I met a priestess of your order that told me killing was wrong, and yet your order has paladin. Why are they different?"

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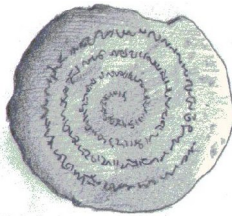
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If you are unsure and just want to leave, turn to **436**



426

Opening the door to the dungeons reveals a long dark corridor poorly lit by sputtering torches. Thick wooden doors with barred windows line both sides of the cheerless corridor. You slip inside and close the door after you. You pause to peer into each cell, but most are in darkness, and you do not know if they are inhabited at all. A few of the prisoners have candles, and sit with books or just stare at the flame.

Each one looks up at you with hope in their eyes, but you move on, unable to help them.

Eventually you come to one cell where an elderly man kneels before a trio of candles, deep in prayer with a small contented smile on his face. He is dressed in a now tattered robe of white, with a blanket draped around his shoulders. Could this be the High Priest Zarim?

If you have a ring of numbered keys and want to open the door to speak to the man, turn to **507**

If you don't have any keys or prefer to go on, turn to **516**

427

You take out the crystal orb on its chain, observing the deep red fluid with black swirling in it. You notice that the red is much darker than when you first acquired the item.

“Can you...hold this for a moment?” you ask the priest.

“A flesh orb,” the priest comments. “It will tell you little if you are trying to see if I am lying.” He takes hold of it and you see the red lightens, and the black specks disappear, to be replaced by thin white streams. “So you see, I am human, and a priest as I have said.”

You can certainly see the colours. Looking at the expression on your face, the priest grins crookedly. “Any living creature will fill the orb with red, a deeper red for the life that is within it. If an undead holds the orb, it will clear, though living and dead may fill the orb with flecks or streams of black. Black represents demonic nature, which a man such as you achieves by killing. If an orb turns black entirely, then you are faced with a demon. White represents the union of a man's heart with heaven, such as via a vow or a pure heart. If you see blue within the fluid, then you are faced with a magic-user of some kind.”

“What does it mean if the orb is white with a stream of black?” You ask.

“That is unlikely,” the priest states, but seeing your face continues. “If one of an utterly pure heart has sworn a vow to hell it may appear so. But how can such a thing be? Alternatively, if a demon has given itself unto heaven and been transformed, it may also be so. But this is even less likely.”

You take back the orb and thank the priest, making note of the colours and what they mean.

Colour	Nature
Red	Alive
Blue	Magical
White	Heavenly
Black	Demonic
Clear	Undead

You must now decide what to do.

Accept his offer? Turn to **486**

Leave? Turn to **474**

**428**

You make your way down the corridor and pause to listen at the iron-banded door. You hear nothing and open the door, stepping into a guardroom. Two guards are sitting at a table playing cards. They look up at you and stare, glancing at the water you are still dripping on the floor.

A moment passes and then as one the guards reach for their weapons and attack you. You retreat to the doorway and fight them one at a time.

DUNGEON GUARD SKILL 8 STAMINA 20 DB 4 ARMOUR 2

DUNGEON GUARD SKILL 7 STAMINA 18 DB 4 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **514**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **538**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

429

The crystal in your hand suddenly grows hot as the brightness grows. You drop the crystal and shield your eyes. Even through your hands and eyelids the light hurts you, and you back away from the intense heat. When all grows dark and cool once more, you look down on the ground. Lying there is a suit of full plate armour. It seems to be made of silver and is inscribed with leaves and flowers. On the chest is inlaid an onyx crow. If you wear the Crow Armour (Armour rating = 20), you cannot be disguised as a guardsman.

You thank the crow as you eagerly take up the powerful armour.

“Thank me not.” The crow says. “It may not help you. It shall only cast you further down the way you have chosen to walk.”

With that, the bird flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

You continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

430

The last zombie falls into writhing pieces on the floor and you take a moment to rest and survey your surroundings. The room is square and plain, but in the wall opposite the flesh door there is a set of ropes and counterweights connected to a section of the wall. There is a brass handle on the wall and you experimentally give it a push upwards. The wall slides up smoothly in greased rails, revealing a dim passage beyond. You hold up the bottom of the wall and duck through, lowering it down back to the floor.

Turn to **500**

431

The crystal in your hand suddenly grows hot as the brightness increases. You drop the crystal and shield your eyes. Even through your hands and eyelids the light hurts you, and you back away from the intense heat. When all grows dark and cool once more, you look down on the ground. Lying there is a wooden flute.

“That is going to help me?” You ask sceptically.

“It may not help you,” the crow says. “It shall only cast you further down the way you have chosen to walk.”

With that, the bird flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

You pick up the flute and continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

432

Taking the narrower corridor, you move into what appears to be some official's offices. Ahead you can see an intersection, but in the walls to your right and left are doors. On the right there is a sign with a crested helm carved into and painted with gild, while large letters tell you this is the *Office of the Guard Captain General*. Opposite another sign bearing a pair of scales informs you that it is the *Office of the Trade Authority*.

What do you want to do?

Continue on down to the intersection? Turn to **502**

Enter the Office of the Guard Captain general? Turn to **562**

Enter the Office of the Trade Authority? Turn to **585**



433

Approaching the main gatehouse of the Castle of Eternal Light, you go to one of the smaller side doors. The guards are armoured in golden plate armour, inlaid with ivory and jade, depicting the tower and trio of stars upon their chests, with rampant lions spiralling around their bracers and greaves, as well as upon shoulder plates and the sides of their crested helms. The crests are foot-high sails lined with blue tassels than hang down to the shoulders of the guards.

They stand to attention, gripping the bannered lances planted at their sides, only their eyes moving as you approach.

If you are wearing an official's robe, turn to **498**

If you are otherwise attired, turn to **521**

434

You suddenly hear muffled music coming from your pack. Taking off the pack you curiously open it and search through until you pull out the wooden flute. You discover with shock that it is playing a tune by itself, accompanying the harp.

The woman stops playing as she notices the flute. The flute falls silent as well. The woman plays another tune and the flute starts to play once more, accompanying her new tune. The woman stops again.

“What a wondrous thing. So often magic is used to destroy. Where did you find such a precious thing?”

Thinking of where it came from, you make up another answer. “It was given to me. I never knew it was even magical.”

The woman is very impressed with the item. Surely a self-playing flute will be of little use in your battle against King Darm.

If you want to give her the flute, turn to **598**

If you prefer to hang onto it, turn to **583**

435

You swim back down the pipe and pull yourself out of the water. Taking the rop from your pack, you tie it around all your belongings, and taking a deep breath, jump back into the water, taking the bundle with you. You swim into the pipe, dropping the bundle and swim against the flow once more, with the other end of the rop in hand. Lungs bursting, you just make it, gulping in air gratefully. You climb from the water and tie the rope to the metal bar. After resting for as few moments, you start pulling on the rope, you haul your belongings through the pipe. It is difficult going, but eventually you land your belongings on the filthy edge of the pool. A few minutes later you are fully equipped once more and make your way towards the ladder.

Turn to **485**



436

You thank Zarim, and tell him you will consider his words. He bids you farewell and you leave his study. Deciding not to hang around in the temple any longer, you go back the way you came and leave the temple. Now it is time to go to the palace to rescue Kianmay. Before heading into the lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key. You make your way back to the Shrine of Aringarator.

The shrine is lit by a single tall candle and you slip inside. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

437

The air around you seems to thicken, and your movements slow. Soon the air about you is solid and you are paralysed, unable even to breath. The old man smiles at you contemptuously.

“You had me fooled! I thought you no more than some weak-spined thug!” He searches you and soon finds the Diamond Key in the bag around your neck. He jerks the bag, breaking the cord. He opens the bag and takes out the Diamond Key. “Ah, at last. Don’t worry, the King will never get his hands on this! I shall be keeping it for myself!”

Your lungs are burning, but you cannot even struggle.

Are you wearing a fire-worshippers breastplate? If so, turn to **73**

If not, turn to **473**

438

You take out the orb amulet. “Can you hold this for a moment?” You ask her.

She takes the orb, looking at it curiously as the swirling fluid within turns black with a thin thread of white.

She looks at you and you thank her, taking the orb back.

Do you trust her?

If so, turn to **542**

If not, turn to **583**

439

Climbing the ladder to the darkened passage, you peer cautiously into the darkness, holding up your light crystal. All you see is that it leads to a stairway. You climb up into the passage, then take the stairway, alert for any more guards. At the top of the stairway is a small landing and a wall covered with an arrangement of ropes and counter weights. There is a brass handle in the wall and you push up on it. The wall slides up smoothly on greased rails, revealing a dim passageway. You hold up the bottom of the wall and duck through, lowering the wall back down to the floor behind you.

Turn to **500**

440

The crystal in your hand suddenly grows hot as the brightness increases. You drop the crystal and shield your eyes. Even through your hands and eyelids the light hurts you, and you back away from the intense heat. When all grows dark and cool once more, you look down on the ground. Lying there is a glass ring. You bend and pick it up. Slipping it on, you feel an odd sensation pass through your whole body. Looking down at yourself, you find yourself invisible. You also begin to sink into the ground. Panicking, you will yourself upwards, afraid to pull off the ring and have your legs encased in the stone of the street. Thank fully you see the ground fall away as you rise up. You pull off the ring and drop a short distance to the ground. Not only are you invisible, but you can pass through anything like a ghost!

You thank the crow as you carefully pocket the powerful item.

“Thank me not.” The crow says. “It may not help you. It shall only cast you further down the way you have chosen to walk.”

With that, the bird flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

You continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

441

Clearing your throat, you settle yourself. “Zytow zytox ha zytow zytox!” You intone. As you say the words, you feel your bones vibrating, something swelling inside you and with the last syllable it is invisibly disgorged from your body. You stagger as the magic draws energy from your body and applies it to the door.

You hear a series of clicks coming from the other side of the door, then to your delight the door swings silently inward, revealing a small entrance hall.

Turn to **650**

442

The sleeping man wakes up with a groan. You freeze, hoping he will drop off again. But with a sigh he swings his legs out of the bunk and stretches. As he is yawning his eyes fall on you. You have time to only get to your feet as he raises the alarm and snatches up a sword from the next bunk.

Cursing your luck you flee from the room and dash back through the temple and out the back door. You hurry across the gardens and circle back around to the Shrine of Aringarator where you can watch the temple from the shadows of the entrance. After half an hour there is no sign of guards searching for you, so you relax. You dare not go back into the temple now, so it is off to the palace with you.

Before you head into the lion's den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

443

You are standing at an intersection beneath a massive chandelier the size of a small ship, hanging from a golden dome. The stairway you ascended to reach the second floor is in one direction. When you stand with the stairwell at your back, a wide corridor extends out in front of you towards another large domed chamber that is at the centre of the second floor. To the right and the left narrower corridors lead to the corners of the floor, passing entrances to private quarters.

Where do you want to go?

To move along the main corridor towards the central dome, turn to **560**

To take the corridor to the right, turn to **519**

If you want to go down the corridor to the left, turn to **550**

444

Remembering the properties of the Sea Knight's armour, you decide to keep your pack on. Stepping back into the water, you plunge under the surface. Holding the dead man's light crystal in hand, you locate the tunnel and begin to move towards it. You find it easy enough to sink to the bottom and walk against the outflow of the pipe. You crawl into the pipe and make your way along. Your lungs start to ache, and in response, the golden lines in the armour start to glow. The discomfort in your lungs doesn't get any worse, but it is not pleasant as you crawl along the pipe for many yards. Eventually the pipe opens into another pool and you make for the edge, pulling yourself out of the water with a grateful gasp of air. You are in a similar chamber to the first. There is also a ladder here next to where the hot clean water pours out and you make for it.

Turn to **485**

445

"Yes, I am," you say firmly.

"So be it!" The crow announces. "Your choice is made!"

You wait for whatever is to follow this dramatic announcement, but nothing seems to happen except that the crow starts to preen itself.

“A choice about what?” you ask, breaking the silence.

The crow looks at you wearily. “I remember a time when Champions of the Light were wise. Now they seem to have the wit of a lump of wood!”

Ignoring the comment, you speak impatiently. “I have no time for games. Tell me what you are talking about or I shall leave.”

“Fine, go then,” the crow says sulkily.

You grit your teeth. “What have I chosen?” you demand.

The crow sighs. “Do you not carry a primordial crystal?”

“Yes,” you reply.

“Perhaps you should examine it now,” the crow suggests.

You search for the rainbow-filled crystal, but can't find it. In its place you find something else that you did not have before. It is a round disc of smooth black stone. Cut right through is a spiral of razor thin script. It is a Diamond Key!

“Is this what I think it is?” you ask.

“Of course. Since you lost the other one...”

“I didn't lose it!” you protest. “I hid it so that the king would not be able to take it from me. Now I have the same problem.”

“Oh,” the crow looks disappointed, but then brightens. “Well, I know how you can hide it and still take it with you.”

The crow spreads its wings and glides to a stop to perch upon the air before your face. Being so close to the being, you perceive a glimpse of its true nature, something immense and powerful, as if the bird before you is a keyhole through which you are spying upon a great hall. It asks you to place the Diamond Key in its beak.

Compelled by the majesty of the being, you do so. It spreads its wings once more and flies up into the night sky with the Key in its beak. You watch it circle around, then it swoops back in, heading right for you. You shift your feet, uncertain of its intent.

“Keep still!” the disembodied voice commands and you are frozen to the spot as the crow flies at you, then right through you. There is a pain in your chest, and you feel something hard lodged inside your body. You gasp, and clutch at your chest. The pain subsides, but you can still feel the lump of the Diamond Key inside you. You look up to see the crow once more perched on the signpost.

“There,” it says with an air of satisfaction. “The king is unlikely to look there!”

“I am immortal?” you gasp.

The crow sighs. “So slow. But at least you now have time to learn.”

The crow spreads its wings and flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

With the Diamond Key inside you, you can now restore your STAMINA to its initial level at any time except during combat. In combat you may restore your STAMINA at a rate of 1 point per combat round. That means after you have received damage and are not dead, you may restore one point. You can still be killed if your STAMINA reaches 0, and must turn to the relevant passage when this happens.

You continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

446

Moving straight on, you stop to look at the offices on each side of the corridor. To the right is a sign with a pair of crown interlinked like a chain, and the words: *Office of Diplomatic Relations*. Opposite is the *Office of Records*, represented by a scroll.

To enter the Office of Diplomatic Relations, turn to **524**

To enter the Office of Records, turn to **579**

447

“I am just on my way to make an offering at a temple,” you explain.

The old man waves a hand dismissively. “I speak not of this guise you wear. I speak of what is within you. You have the venom of the wolf in you.”

“Wolves don’t have venom,” you say weakly.

“Common wolves do not,” the man agrees. “But a werewolf is a primordial creature, and the spirit of chaos is powerful within it! It’s saliva, its blood, even its gaze if you stare too long into its eyes can infect you, and with the next full moon you shall become one of them!”

“What if what you say is so?” you ask.

“I am a priest of the god Mub. The guardian of order. I can heal you.”

“For what price?”

“A magical item,” the priest replies.

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **125**

If you have an orb amulet, and want to ask him to hold it so you can see his nature, turn to **427**

If you have none of these but you want to trust him, turn to **486**

If you don’t trust him or prefer to remain a werewolf, you can leave by turning to **474**

**448**

You enter in the combination and the box clicks, a crack appearing around the sides. You open it up and find inside a cushioned, red velvet lining on which is a wide silver ring set with a golden eagle. You take out the ring and close the box. You slip it on, but it does nothing right away. It is obviously magical and tingles powerfully on your finger.

After you have finished with the box, you put it back into the drawer. The rest of the desk reveals nothing, and you consider your next course of action.

What do you want to do?

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:
Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

449

You walk back and forth in the throne room, but your search yields nothing. Hoping you have not wasted too much time, you hurry out of the throne room and make directly for the stairway to the second floor.

Turn to **522**

450

You are overwhelmed and perish. The intruders strip your body of everything, including the Diamond Key and you die on the floor.

The Diamond Key is delivered to king Darm, who becomes immortal for three weeks. After that time the Wolf launches his attack and kills the king and conquers Arantator from within. The Diamond Key is given to the Temple of the White Goddess and prosperity is enjoyed by all for centuries to come.

You are unknown by most, forgotten but all except for Kianmay who prays fondly for your soul every day.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

451

Peeking through the doorway, you see an entrance hall that is unfurnished, no paintings or tapestries adorning the walls. You slip inside quietly and approach an archway. It leads to what could have been a sitting room, but it is empty. You search through the rest of the quarters and find it is completely unoccupied, except for one locked door. It is a strong door with a barred window,. Looking inside, you see only darkness. If you have a zombie rat, you could drop it through the bars and explore the room via its senses. Of course unless the rat can climb the door, it will be stuck in there.

If you have a zombie rat and want to drop it through the bars to explore the room, turn to **575**

Alternatively if you have a glass ring, turn to **666**

Otherwise there is nothing here for you and you must leave. Turn to **464**

452

Moving on you continue around the castle and come to another gate. This gate is darkened and you suspect it leads to the stableyard. It is a strong gate with iron spikes protruding from it. Putting your eye to the gap between the gates, you can see the stableyard is darkened and abandoned. This would be a good place to enter if the gates were not locked.

If you have a glass ring, turn to **424**

Otherwise, you have no choice but to continue walking. Turn to **459**

453

Moving along the corridor, you come upon a staircase to your left where a bannered doorway would normally be. The white marble banister is mounted at intervals by rampant lions carved from ivory, rubies set in their eye sockets. The steps are laid with a purple and gold carpet. The stairway is long, straight and relatively narrow; only wide enough for six men to walk abreast. At the very top you can see a purple curtain concealing the landing. The walls to each side of the stairway are white marble and inlaid with softly glowing light crystals.

It appears to be the entrance to the uppermost level of the palace.

If you would like to climb the stairway now, turn to **544**.

If you want to continue to explore the second floor, turn to **580**

454

Searching the prone body first, you find a golden ring that seems magical, so you take it. You search the drawers of the desk and find an ivory disc the size of your palm, with a onyx lion inlaid in one side, and a dagger with runes deeply etched into the blade. You can take these if you wish.

Just as you are completing your search, the door swings open...

You need to be very lucky now.

Roll three die. If the total is the same or less than you current LUCK score, turn to **51**

If the total is greater, turn to **493**

455

You rattle the picks in the lock and after a few moments the lock clicks open. The sleeping man does not stir. You open the lid slowly. Inside you find that the chest is empty.

You can now leave by turning to **378**

If you want to try the third chest, you must test your luck once more.

If you are lucky, turn to **477**

If you are unlucky, turn to **442**

456

Creeping up behind the first zombie you strike it down and smash and dismember it as quickly as you can. The other zombie turns, and just as you incapacitate the first, it attacks you.

ZOMBIE GUARD

SKILL 6

STAMINA 22

DB 8

ARMOUR 6

If you are unarmed, you use the fallen zombie's sword (SP 1, DB 4). You discover that the blades of the zombies are poisoned with a potent paralyzing venom. Every time you are wounded you must retreat and drink a healing potion to nullify the effects of the toxin. You do not gain any STAMINA from doing so. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, or are wearing a golden armband, the poison has no effect on you. If you cannot counteract the poison, you are dead.

If you are forced to flee, turn to **547**

If you win, turn to **472**

If you are wounded but don't have any healing potions left, turn to **928**

457

The crystal in your hand suddenly grows hot as the brightness intensifies. You drop the crystal and shield your eyes. Even through your hands and eyelids the light hurts you, and you back away from the intense heat. When all grows dark and cool once more, you look down on the ground. Standing there is a small crystal statue of the White Goddess, still filled with coloured light, but now it shifts slowly.

You pick up the statue, and immediately feel warm energy rushing through you, cleansing and healing your wounds and pains (restore your STAMINA to its initial level). You can use the statue to completely heal yourself at any time except in a battle.

You look to the crow gratefully. "Thank you!"

"Thank me not," the crow says. "It may not help you. It shall only cast you further down the way you have chosen to walk."

With that, the bird flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

You continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

458

Taking the golden apple from your pack you offer it to the demon. He looks at it with widening eyes and laughs at you. "You don't know what this is, do you?"

You admit that you don't. The demon stuffs the fruit into its mouth and swallows it whole. He then looks at you. "Very well, you have won my assistance. King Darm is known to me. Even now I can feel his arrogance and confidence. When you enter his hall, do not attack him right away. He will not attack you. He will seek to amuse himself by testing you. As soon as you attack him, it will be over, for he will strike you down and you will be dead. He is far too powerful for you. If you pass all his tests, he will be impressed by you and allow you to serve him. Accept this service and then you may in time learn of his weakness and destroy him."

"In time?" You ask. "You mean it could take years?"

“At least!” The demon replies, giving you a contemptuous look. “Are you only willing to serve Heaven if it takes but a small portion of your time and effort? Do you only believe in justice and order is it is easily achieved?”

You frown. “At least I am human! You are a demon!”

The demon barks a laugh. “True, but once I was a lazy, impatient human just like you! Now I am a demon!”

With that, the demon turns into a cloud of smoke and disappears.

You can now leave the treasury and the vacant quarters and return to the corridor by turning to **464**

If you haven't already and want to drink the purple potion from the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you haven't already and want to drink the blood-red potion from the wolf-box, turn to **638**

459

Continuing your exploration you come around to the fourth face of the castle. You remain in the shadows at the edge of the palatial square, and hear the sound of gushing water. Moving into the street leading away from the castle, you see a canal running down the centre of the street. The water flows from an opening in the edge of the palatial square. This is the sewage outlet from the castle. There are hot springs under the castle, perpetually flowing, so the water does not smell bad, since any wastewater is greatly diluted. The water is warm, but not too warm if you want to wade through the pipe.

If you do, then turn to **413**

Alternatively you can go back to one of the other potential entrances:

The main gate; turn to **433**

The dungeon; turn to **481**

If you have a glass ring, you can go through the stable door by turning to **424**

460

Moving onwards, you continue down the opulent hallway. You soon see coming up on your left an archway into a large ballroom. Opposite is the opening of another hallway. Ahead you can see what looks like the main entrance to the palace.

If you want to enter the ballroom, turn to **555**

If you want to go down the narrower corridor, turn to **432**

461

Taking your rope from your pack, you feed one end through the narrow bars, until you feel it coiling on the floor on the other side of the door. Sitting down, you hold

the other end in your hand and once more enter the mind of the rat. With its eyes you spy the rope and begin to climb. You clamber up the rope and through the bars and have the odd experience of looking at yourself in tones of grey. You withdraw from the rat's mind and collect the key. You return the rat to its jar and with a deep breath try the key in the lock of the strong door. To your pleasure you feel it click open.

Pushing on the door you step inside and put the key away. You head straight for the treasury.

Turn to **561**

462

You plunge into the pool and swim down to the pipe. Pulling yourself inside you begin to move along the pipe. It proves to be many metres long, and it is not easy to move in the confined pipe against the steady flow. You struggle, but with rising panic you realise that you aren't going to make it. You desperately push yourself with the current back down the pipe, but you are too heavy even for that to happen quickly enough. Your lungs burn and you begin to see flashes of light. Unable to hold your breath any longer you exhale and breathe in a lungful of water. Drowning is not a pleasant experience, especially in a dark pipe.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

Unless you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, in which case you float in darkness you what seems an eternity, a bright red star pulsing before you. Eventually your floating body starts to sink and you begin to feel heavy. You awake staring into the sun and blink. Sitting up, you hear cries of alarm in a language you do not understand. Looking around you find yourself sitting on a pile of fish in the back of a fishing boat. Sun-darkened fishermen huddle at the other end of the deck, pointing at you and making signs against evil. You stand up and see the sea all around you, a grey distant coast to one side.

You have been washed out of the sewer, down the canal, into the river and down to the sea, where you have finally been fished from the waters. You know it not yet, but your body floated in the sea for a thousand years before being caught in the net. Well and truly:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

463

You agree to share your concerns with the priestess, and she leads you to a small room that is like a miniature sitting room, with a fireplace and two chairs. She invites you to sit and offers you water.

You decline and she stokes the fire as you make yourself comfortable. You consider what you will say. It seems like there might be something strange about the high priest.

Once she is settled, you say: "You do not seem comfortable with your own High Priest."

“I am very comfortable with the High Priest,” the priestess says suggestively.

“Then who is it you are uncomfortable with?” you ask.

“We have sworn an oath forbidding us to speak of the matter which troubles me,” the priestess says, her eyes flashing angrily.

Realising she cannot speak openly, you say: “Just as the paladin who guard the front of this temple are in the service of the king, perhaps the man who calls himself High Priest here is likewise in the service of the King.”

The priestess smiles. “What you seek will truly be found in the palace dungeons.”

Thankful that you did not insist on meeting the High Priest, you thank the priestess and make your way back out of the temple. You return to the Shrine of Aringarator to think.

Now you must assault the palace itself to rescue Kianmay and Zarim. But before you head into the lion’s den you decide to hide the Diamond Key. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

464

Leaving the private quarters you consider your next move.

You can follow the corridor to the left and around the corner by turning to **504**.

Alternatively you can go to the intersection to your right by turning to **571**

465

Not knowing how long the pipe is, it might be risky to go in fully dressed with your armour, pack and weapons.

If you want to risk it and crawl fully laden into the submerged pipe, turn to **462**

If you want to remove your armour, weapons and pack while you investigate the pipe, turn to **412**

Alternatively you can forget about the pipe and just take the ladder; turn to **439**

466

Gently, you try the door and find it unlocked. Slowly turning the handle you ease the door open and peer inside. Within you can see a number of narrow bunks four levels high, and a large table in the centre with a lamp upon it; the only light source in the room. You cannot see the sleeping man, but most of the bunks are empty. Opening the door further, you go into the room. The snoring comes from a shadowy

corner, and you tiptoe further into the room, looking for anything to aid you in your quest.

There are a number of chests in the room, set against the available walls. One is too close to the sleeping man for you to risk, but you try the other three. They are locked. Breaking them open is out of the question. Unless you have some lockpicks with you, you will have to leave.

Do you have lockpicks? If so, turn to **95**

If not, turn to **378**

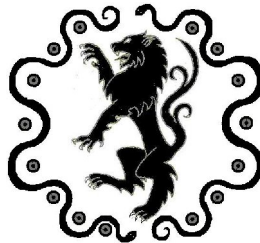
467

Moving onwards, you come to a large, round chamber with a domed ceiling. A massive chandelier hangs here, as big as a small ship. The dome above is made of black stone, which reflects the points of light in the chandelier clearly. It looks a bit like a chunk of the night sky installed in the ceiling of the palace.

The domed chamber is the intersection of two opulent hallways. In the corridor crossing your path you see to the left a grand stairway leading to second floor. To the right are a pair of golden doors. Straight ahead of you the corridor you are following seems to lead to the front entrance of the palace.

Do you want to ascend to the second floor? Turn to **522**

If you want to investigate the golden doors, turn to **532**



468

As you approach the centre of the city, you see the Castle of Eternal Light from many streets away, lighting the clouds above. You avoid the main processional avenues leading to the castle and make your way through the quieter streets, guided by the radiant castle. Finally you come to the very centre of the city, where the palace lies within the keep.

The castle is built in the centre of a great Palatial Square, made of large ancient flagstones of dark stone. Fine cracks cover most of the ancient stones. The castle is ringed by large bronze statues of lions standing on marble blocks. The smooth statues and their marble bases are much newer than the flagstones beneath, and the contrast seems jarring to your eye.

The castle itself is less impressive than one may expect. It is an ancient castle, and the walls are relatively low compared to the great castles of the South, and especially compared to the walls of Arantator itself. The dark stone walls still rise ten times your own height to crumbling battlements. The walls are hung with great

banners of a white rampant lion on a blue field. You suspect the banners cover the wear and damage of a thousand years.

The light comes from the great fires that burn atop the guard towers that line the walls. The main gate into the castle is built into a protrusion from the walls, with another great watchfire on top. There are actually three sets of iron-bound wooden doors in the protruding gatehouse, one in each outer wall. They are all closed, but a pair of guards stand outside each pair of doors, holding long lances hung with banners of the city, dressed in golden armour and crested helms.

If you want to approach the main gate, turn to **433**

If you want to make a circuit of the castle to look for another entrance, turn to **497**

469

Gaining access to the dim office, you find a shuttered light crystal in a bracket on the wall and open it, bathing the room in cold white light. There are other lights, but you leave them as they are. The office inside has four desks, two to each side and facing inwards, covered with papers. On the walls behind the desks are bookcases and filing cabinets. It looks like any clerk's office.

The only exception is a tall glass cabinet against the wall opposite the door. You walk down the carpet laid out in the centre of the room and peer inside the cabinet. You see inside a collection of curious objects. Most seem sundry, but on its own shelf you spy an intricately carved ivory box. Opening the cabinet you pick up the box and open it. To your surprise and delight you find within three golden rings, set with a sapphire, a ruby, and an emerald. These are magical rings of SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK. While wearing the ring of SKILL, you may add 2 to your SKILL. While wearing the ring of STAMINA, you may add 10 to your initial STAMINA. While wearing the ring of LUCK, you may increase your initial LUCK by 3 and you do not have to reduce your current LUCK each time it is tested..

On one of the desks half hidden under a sheaf of papers you spot what proves to be a palm-sized ivory disk, inlaid on one side with a rampant lion of onyx. You may also take this if you wish.

There is nothing else of interest here, so you decide to leave.

Turn to **528**

470

The warrior swings his sword in a savage stroke and cuts your throat. You fall down, everything going dark. But in the middle of the darkness floats a bright red star that pulses like a heartbeat. You feel like you are floating as well, but after an indeterminate time you feel yourself sinking, and begin to feel every heavy and uncomfortable. You open your eyes, and see above you the mouldy ceiling of the sewer chamber. You listen and over the sound of rushing water you can hear the warrior who slew you moving about. It sounds like he is searching through your pack. You risk lifting your head and see his huddled form as he examines your items in the light of the crystal.

You take a deep breath, then surge to your feet and jump at the man. With a look of shock he falls back. You snatch up his sword and stab him through the neck. He falls dead into the pool and floats away down the pipe. You retrieve your belongings and the man's light crystal. There is also a crate in the corner in which you find a steel lion key, a palm-sized ivory token with an onyx rampant lion inlaid in one side, and a bottle of sleeping potion. Once you have taken what you want, you consider what to do next.

Next to the hot water pipe is a ladder that leads up to a narrow passage. But also, you notice a thin stream of glowing phosphorous flowing out from an opening hidden under the water, leading in the same direction. This pipe is completely submerged.

If you want to take the ladder, turn to **439**

If you want to explore the submerged pipe, turn to **476**

471

The crystal in your hand suddenly grows hot as the brightness increases. You drop the crystal and shield your eyes. Even through your hands and eyelids the light hurts you, and you back away from the intense heat. When all grows dark and cool once more, you look down on the ground. Lying there is a diamond wand; a faceted rod as thick as your finger and about a foot long.

"What is it?" You ask as you pick it up.

"It may not help you." The crow says. "It shall only cast you further down the way you have chosen to walk."

With that, the bird flies away. You watch it disappear into the night. The trees around you are suddenly thinner, and as you turn your head you see less and less trees. None disappear while you are looking at them, but as you slowly turn around, they are soon all gone and the air feels warm by comparison.

You continue on your way to the palace.

Turn to **468**

472

With the two zombies dead, you search them, but find nothing. Approaching the skin covered door, you examine it closely. You soon realise it is not a skin-covered door, but a wall of flesh! It seals the archway. You prod it experimentally, finding it yielding like human flesh.

If you have a necromancer's wand, you can try to open a passage in the flesh. Turn to **533**

If you want to try and cut or tear your way through the flesh, turn to **408**

473

You can do nothing and as spots dance before your eyes, you see the sorcerer smile as he imagines all the things he can do now that he is immortal. The darkness in your vision soon shuts out the light and you are finally free in death.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

474

Continuing on to the Temple of the White Goddess, you climb the broad steps and smile at the false paladin outside. They watch you pass, but say nothing and you pass through one of the arches into an antechamber to the worship hall. A priestess greets you and you hand her the jar of oil. She has long locks of dark curling hair barely concealed under the tasseled white cloth worn over her head. Her face is scattered with a few moles, but she is beautiful, and seems to have light behind her face as she smiles.

“For the temple,” you say with a smile.

The white-robed priestess takes the sealed jar with a smile and bows to you. “Thank you for your kindness, sir. May I assist your worship?”

“No, thank you,” you say. “If possible I would like to have a word with the High Priest.”

The woman’s smile vanishes and a troubled look comes into her eyes. Her smile soon returns, but it is strained. “Perhaps there is someone else who...is better suited to help you. If you require spiritual guidance, perhaps I can help you?”

If you insist on seeing the High Priest, turn to **421**

If you talk to the priestess instead, turn to **463**

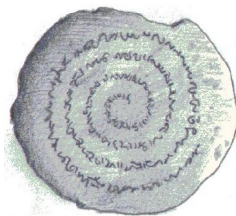
475

With a mighty swing of the Hell Axe, you decapitate the serpent demon and jump back as it crashes to the ground. Apart from the mace, which is inferior to the axe, it has nothing, so you continue on your way.

Turn to **600**

476

Are you wearing gold-inscribed scale-mail armour? If so, turn to **444**. If not, turn to **465**.



477

You rattle the picks in the lock and after a few moments the lock clicks open. The sleeping man groans and turns over, but remains asleep. You open the lid slowly. Inside you find a silver helm (ARMOUR 3).

You can now leave by turning to **378**

478

You are standing under another golden dome that houses a T-intersection. The corridor that continues through the chamber is lined with tall external windows, while the offshoot leads to the central dome of the second floor.

If you want to go towards the central dome, turn to **560**

When you stand with your back to the windows, facing the central dome, you can take the right-hand corridor by turning to **453**, or to the left by turning to **510**

479

You hand over the item, and the priest thanks you. “Since you bear the Diamond Key, I assume you are the one who was to bring it to Zarim in the temple of the White Goddess.”

You confirm that you are, but that you came with a priestess who is now captured.

The priest nods. “Then seek her and Zarim in the palace, for there is none who can aid you in the temple of the White Goddess. The one there calling himself Zarim is in fact a sorcerer in the service of the king.”

You thank the priest for his information. Now that you do not need it, you give him the jar of oil, and in return he gives you two phials of healing potion to help you recover from your ordeal.

Leaving the Temple of order, you go back to the Shrine of Aringarator to plan your next step. It is obvious now that you must go to the palace. But before you enter into the lion’s den, you decide to hide the Diamond Key. The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

480

The necromancer falls dead to the floor. You search him for useful items, but find nothing that you know how to use. You take the glove and pulling it on try to get it to do something, but nothing seems to happen, so you take it off and toss it back onto his body. Your immediate concern is how to get out of the necromancer’s chambers. You try the wand again, but it has no effect. The door to the antechamber is thin enough

for you to cut through, but as you begin to do so, you see through the hole you have made that the passage you first came through has closed again.

There is another flesh door on the opposite side of the laboratory and you approach this. Having no other option you begin to hack your way through it. At first you make progress, splattering blood on the floor and yourself as you open an increasingly larger wound. But as you work your way deeper, you puncture something and jet of noxious gasses are expelled. You stagger backward, your eyes and throat burning. You fall to the floor coughing and blinking. The gas continues to pour into the chamber, but is carried away through vents in the high ceiling.

If you have a golden armband or a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **162**

If not, you must deduct 6 STAMINA from the poisoning. If you are still alive, also turn to **162**

If you are killed, turn to **928**

481

Approaching the gate to the dungeon, you settle yourself and knock on the door. About a few seconds a small window in the door is opened and a sullen face peers out...

If you are wearing a guardsman's uniform or an official's robe, turn to **420**

If you are wearing your own gear, turn to **523**

482

Going up to the central door, you wave the wand and cause an opening to appear. A large well-lit chamber is revealed, filled with tables and benches on which are arrayed all manner of equipment and items. The walls are lined with shelves and cabinets filled with books and jars.

At the far end of the laboratory, a pair of heavy cushioned chairs are positioned before a fire. As the door opens you see a robed figure rise from the chair. It is a portly middle-aged man with jolly red cheeks that do not suit his small dark eyes. His head is balding at the front, but thick dark locks still tumble down his back. Jewelled rings sparkle on his fingers as he steps forward.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" he demands.

You step inside boldly, and hold up the wand. "I had a key," you say smugly.

The man frowns. "You are no necromancer. How is it you..." he shakes his head and waves a hand. "No matter."

He makes another gesture and speaks magical words. You hear the door gurgle behind you, and turn your head to see it closing. You thrust out the wand and concentrate, but nothing happens, and the door is sealed shut.

"I have dispelled that magic of your wand, which you no doubt obtained by some ill means!" The necromancer explains as you turn back to him. You see him pulling on a black silk glove which extends up to his elbow. There are runes sewn in silver thread on the fingertips of the glove.

With a confident smile, the necromancer walks towards you. "Now tell me who you are and why you are here."

What do you want to do?

Attack him? Turn to **509**

If you want to get him talking, turn to **543**

483

You struggle slowly through the pipe, finding the flow getting stronger as you get further in. It is pitch black, and you can see nothing. As you progress, your hand suddenly bangs against something in your way. You reach out and grab a metal grill that seals the pipe. It gives you a firm place to hold, but your heart sinks in frustration. You run your hands across the grill in the vain hope of finding a weakness. To your surprise you find that there is an opening in the grill where the metal has been cut away, the ends bent inwards as if someone has forced their way in. Taking a deep breath, you plunge under the water and pull yourself through the opening. You then continue your way through the pipe. You eventually see light ahead and come out into a chamber that is lit by the glow of a light crystal. Looking around, you see that filthy water gushes from several openings in the sidewalls, staining the bricks. From a larger pipe in the wall ahead of you clean, hot water pours down into the pool where you are currently resting.

The light crystal is sitting on a small flat area that surrounds the pool you are in, and you see sitting in the corner watching you a man dressed in a cloak and armour. You wade to his side and pull yourself from the water. He stands and a look of wariness suddenly crosses his face.

“Who are you?” he asks, as if he was expecting someone else.

“I’m just trying to sneak into the palace,” you tell him.

The man grunts. “Well, I’m sorry, thief. But I can’t afford to let you blab about what you’ve seen here if you’re caught.”

He draws his sword and attacks you. You can escape this battle at any time by jumping into the pool and swimming back down the pipe (turn to **492**).

SEWER GUARD SKILL 8 STAMINA 20 DB 6 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **422**

If you are killed, but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **470**

If you are killed, turn to **309**



484

You draw your weapon and charge at the crystal-armoured warrior. He lowers his spear and a white light starts to well from within the crystal breastplate and helm. The head of the spear also starts to glow, but this light is a hot red glare.

You are taking on King Darm’s Champion, who in addition to being a skilled fighter is magically armed. This will be a tough battle. Because of the glowing armour, it is difficult to see (minus 1 from your SKILL).

CHAMPION SKILL 12 STAMINA 24 DB 10 ARMOUR 10

If you want to give up, you can surrender at any time by turning to **559**

If you win, turn to **577**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key in your chest, turn to **592**

485

You climb the ladder, and peer cautiously into the passage. The firelight comes from a chamber at the far end and you step up into the passage and move forward cautiously. You come to a large chamber that is plain and square, but has three interesting features. One is a door that appears to be covered in human skin, filling an ornate archway of marble. The other two are dead soldiers, who are standing upright as if guarding the door.

The dead men have yellowed skin and smell strongly of preservation chemicals. They are clad in plain, but polished, well-kept armour. They each hold a long broadsword, the hilt clasped in their hands, the tips planted on the floor between their feet.

Unsure if they are undead or just dead, you step slowly out into the torchlight. As one, the jaws open and a low strangled howl escapes from the throat of each. They begin to walk forward, comically slow at first, but as the lethargy of their vigil leaves them, they begin to advance rather quickly. One even begins to pant in a mockery of laughter.

If you want to fight them, turn to **505**

If you want to retreat and see what happens, turn to **406**

486

You agree to the priest's offer and he asks you to follow him. With a spritely step the old man strides across the lawns. You are forced to jog to catch up to him. He leads you to a plain temple of brown stone that is like a cube. All the windows and doorways are square as well. He leads you into a cubic worship hall that has a large golden basin at one end, filled with water. Suspended above it is a cube a crystal that floats magically without support, spinning slowly.

You are led out through a square side door and down a corridor with its height equal to its width and into a room in the rear of the temple. The priest lays his staff down on a table. The room is a kind of study and laboratory, with a desk and bookshelves to one side, a workbench and shelves stuffed with bottles, boxes and jars on the other. Against the back wall is a cage with a strong latticework of steel.

The priest opens the cage. "You will need to get into the cage. I suggest you undress as well."

The priest goes to stoke up the flames in a small heater in one corner of the room.

"Why do I need to get into the cage," you ask.

"I must extract the primordial spirit that is in you. It may try to express itself while I do so, as a way of clinging to your flesh. You may lose control of yourself."

"How long will this take?" you ask.

"Perhaps half an hour, perhaps longer," the priest says.

If you are having second thoughts, you can leave by turning to **343**

If you want to go ahead, turn to **411**



487

Kneeling down next to the old man, you imitate his pose and try to pray. When you were a child your mother often took you to various temples to make offerings. She told you that if you gave things to the gods, they would repay you with blessings. You never saw any evidence that she got what she asked for. Your mother died young of disease, still as poor as the day your father ran off with a barmaid. Is that what she had asked for? None of the things you ever asked for had come true either. Still, your mother had seemed happy, right up to the day she died. And you cannot deny that the priests and priestesses do seem to have...something. A peace that eludes you. Perhaps that is the comfort of delusion.

Even so you visualise an image of the White Goddess in your mind, and ask her to help you to save Kianmay. When you open your eyes, the old man is sitting back on his heels with his eyes open.

“Your prayers are troubled,” he says quietly.

“I wasn’t really praying,” you explain. “I don’t think I can.”

“Sounds troubling indeed,” the old man replies with a smile. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve come to rescue you and Kianmay.”

“Alyn Mei,” the old man murmurs, then shakes his head. “No, I must stay here.”

“Why?” you ask in confusion.

“Because here I can do best what I must. King Darm has fallen a long way, and I feel that the fault is mine in part. He and I were childhood friends, you know. Yet our paths have taken very different directions. We saw each other often, but I neglected him greatly in his later years. I did not see the fear in him as his powers of youth waned. He fears death greatly, for he has so much in this world, yet who can say what he will have in the next? Thus he has sought to prolong his life by arcane means, and gathered many dark powers to serve him. He is a great sorcerer now, and his soul is greatly corrupted. He believes himself beyond redemption and refuses to try and salvage his soul, fearing that he has not enough time in the life that is remaining to him to atone for all his evils. He cannot understand that a sincere heart needs but a moment to be redeemed. That is why he put me down here, so he would not have to look at me. He has banished all holy items from his presence, as the sight of them is said to make him weep. I fear a madness is growing in him. So I must stay and pray for him. To this I shall devote the final energies of my life. So I shall not escape with you.”

“What about Kianmay?” you ask.

“Her you should rescue,” Zarim replies. “But be careful. The upper level of the palace has been transformed into a domain of darkness and magic. Go now, I must return to my prayers.”

He closes his eyes once more and you stand up. With nothing else to do, you leave the cell.

Turn to **516**

488

You duck, and receive only a glancing blow to your head. It leaves you dazed, and you feel two men grapple with you and throw you to the floor. You dimly see them raise their swords in the light of the coals in the hearth and they hack at you until you are dead. They strip your body of everything, including the Diamond Key and you die on the floor.

The Diamond Key is delivered to king Darm, who becomes immortal for three weeks. After that time the Wolf launches his attack and kills the king and conquers Arantator from within. The Diamond Key is given to the Temple of the White Goddess and prosperity is enjoyed by all for centuries to come.

You are unknown by most, forgotten but all except for Kianmay who prays fondly for your soul every day.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

489

She has told the truth. But even so, do you really want to divulge your mission to this demon?

If so, turn to **542**

If you still don't trust her, turn to **583**

**490**

“No, I am not,” you reply.

“Then you must choose the form from your human heart, the heart of fear and desires!” the crow declares.

“What are you talking about?” you ask.

The crow looks at you with pity. “So foolish. No wonder you aren't a Champion of the Light. Do you or do you not carry a great treasure?”

“No, I buried it somewhere.”

“I'm not talking about the Diamond Key, you rock-headed thug!” the crow snaps. “I'm talking about the Primordial Crystal. The Diamond Key is worthless compared to it!”

Remembering the rainbow-filled crystal, you fish through your belongings and draw out the crystal, which is warm in your palm, bathing the surrounding area in shifting, coloured light.

“This is valuable?” you ask.

“Some spirits don’t deserve to become human,” the crow mutters to itself. Addressing you it speaks slowly. “What you are holding is a primordial crystal. The essence of Creation itself! It is crystallised, yet its power is unformed. So choose the form it shall take!”

“Why now?” you ask.

“Because otherwise I shall take it from you,” the crow says. “Such a thing cannot be allowed free in the world any longer. So choose now.”

You don’t know what to say. What sort of things can it become?

If you want to choose a powerful weapon, turn to **405**

If you want to choose some powerful armour, turn to **429**

If you want to choose something that can make you invisible so you can get into the palace undetected, turn to **440**

If you want to choose something that can heal, turn to **457**

If you can’t decide and want to ask the crow to choose whatever he thinks will serve you best, turn to **499**

491

You keep running, smashing off tree after tree, but then you seem to stop striking obstacles in your path. You open your stinging eyes and try to see ahead as you run. But you can make out only vague shapes. The further you run, the more your vision clears and the burning of your skin reduces. By the time you have shaken off the last of the darkness, you find yourself standing before the ruined city and decide you may as well inspect it while you are here.

Turn to **682**

492

Turning from the warrior, you dive back into the pool and swim with the current. You are soon dumped into the canal. It is a struggle against your armour, clothing and equipment to reach the surface, but the rounded canal is shallow and eventually you make it to the side where you can stick your head out of the water and catch your breath.

Now that you must abandon this option, you can try one of the other potential entrances:

The main gate; turn to **433**

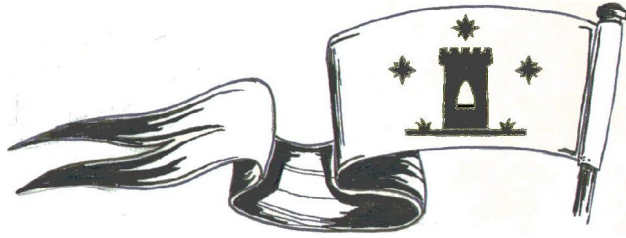
The dungeon; turn to **481**

If you have a glass ring, you can go through the stable gate by turning to **424**

493

A false paladin bursts into the room. He calls out the alarm, then drawing his sword rushes at you. You run around the desk, flinging the large chair into his path. He curses as he stumbles and you make it out into the pillared hallway. But other paladin have arrived and surround you...

Turn to **400**

**494**

Leaving the staircase for now, you move onwards to the next intersection.

Turn to **478**

495

Taking out the Diamond Key, you kneel by the priestess's side. You carefully pull the sword from the wound and put it aside. The guards stand back and watch you silently as you place the Diamond Key directly over the wound and place your hand on top.

You fervently pray for the woman's life to be restored. You kneel with your head bowed for a few minutes, before you suddenly feel the woman's chest rise under your hand. She is breathing! You keep the Key in place until her bright eyes flicker open.

The guards gasp and mutter as she sits up. You take the Diamond Key back. The priestess looks at you in confusion and wonder. You open your hand and show her the stone.

"The Diamond Key," she says with awe.

You help her to stand, and the guards back away, staring at the two of you, some with horror, others with wonder. You could probably make a break for it now, but something stirs in you as you stand beside the priestess. Suddenly it is not enough for you to escape and leave these men to their ignorance. You hold up the Diamond Key.

"This is the item your king wishes to obtain. I was to bring it here so that it could be placed in the earth, on the grounds of this temple, so that its power of life could bring prosperity to the land. But as you have seen, if one keeps it for himself, it will make that one immortal. That is what Darm wants it for. To become immortal and rule forever. Choose then what sort of men you are. Will you deliver the Key to him so that he may extend his life beyond his due? Or will you help me to put in its rightful place? Or perhaps you will kill each other to see who can take it for himself."

You toss the Key to the leader of the guards, distinguished by a decorated cord around his chest. Wide-eyed, he jerks away from it and it falls to the ground, clattering on the marble and sliding to a stop against the far wall. All eyes are on the

Key and suddenly, one of the guards steps forward and picks it up. He gazes at it with awe, but then to your surprise carries it back to you.

“Please, sir,” he says, looking at you imploringly. “My daughter is on the verge of death. A disease that has no cure. Please heal her. Then I shall serve you and defy the king!”

You are startled, but eager to avoid the Key falling into the king’s hands, you take it back and agree. The guardsman leads you from the temple. At a command from the lieutenant, the rest of the guards form up around you as if escorting a prisoner. But leaving the Temple Gardens, your party heads away from the palace and into a poor residential area of the city. Here the streets are narrow and muddy, the houses in a state of ill repair. The stench of rotting garbage and countless filthy industries such as tanneries and abattoirs make the air difficult to breathe.

You are led to a larger structure than most, and up to a heavy gate. The guardsman in the lead takes out a key and unlocks the gate. Pulling it back reveals a largish compound formed by a U-shaped arrangement of houses with their doorways facing inwards to the central area. The compound has a stone basin built into the ground with a brass tap extending from the centre. There is also a fire pit surrounded by log seats, and a few small vegetable plots.

Some of the guardsmen disappear into different houses, while others make themselves comfortable around the unlit fire with a sense of familiarity. You realise the guardsmen must have banded together to create an enclave of relative cleanliness and safety. There are even pots of large purple flowers that have a powerful scent, alleviating the stench of the poor city quarter.

You are led directly into one of the houses, which proves to be a small but clean abode. The largish front room has a hearth and a table with four chairs. A tired-looking dark-haired woman stands over a cutting board, some half-chopped vegetables before her. Seeing you, she grips the knife in her hand tightly, despite the men with you. The guardsman who has led you here greets his wife briefly, but eagerly draws you to the single back room, in which you find two beds, one to each side of the doorway. In the smaller bed, on a stuffed wool mattress under a threadbare blanket lies a girl of about ten years of age. She is thin and pale, her eyes half open as if she is in some kind of stupor. She does not turn her head as you enter.

Her father kneels at her side and whispers to her, obtaining a minimal response. He holds her hand and looks up at you expectantly. Taking a deep breath you go forward and kneel down, taking out the Diamond Key once more. You do not know what to do, but the Key seems to work by itself. You pull aside the blanket and lay the stone on the girl’s chest. You place your hand over it and pray, just in case that makes a difference.

A few minutes pass. You hear some quiet whispers and mutterings behind you, as the girl’s mother hovers nearby in uncertainty. Eventually you hear the girl’s father speak in a hushed, excited tone. “It is working!”

You open your eyes to see the girl’s face is flushed. Her breathing under your hand is deep, and eventually her eyes flicker and open wide. She looks down at your hand, then at you curiously. You hear her mother stifle a gasp and tears. Removing the Key from her chest, you stand and back away, letting the father and mother go to their daughter, who seems bemused by all the excitement. But she smiles as she is embraced.

The lieutenant touches your arm, then indicates for you to follow him. He leads you back out to the compound. “She is healed,” the lieutenant announces to all and

takes a seat by the now burning fire, indicating for you to sit as well. You do so, conscious of the stares of wonder, uncertainty and curiosity.

“Where did it come from?” The lieutenant asks, taking out a pipe and some tobacco.

“I don’t know,” you reply honestly. “I was employed as a merchant guard travelling from Erinharn. A priestess lead our party. She had the Key at first, and I knew nothing of it. But we were pursued by those who wanted the Key. The prosperity that Erinharn has enjoyed for the last 500 years has been due to the Key placed in the earth there. But too many people there learned of it and wished to take it for themselves. So it was to be moved. In the course of our journey we were attacked a number of times and our party reduced to just myself and the priestess. She gave the Key to me. She has been captured now by the King.”

The lieutenant nods. “What you say fits with the information we were given. What do you intend to do?”

That is something you are not sure about. “I must rescue the priestess and indeed the true High Priest of the Temple, Zarim.”

“You intend no harm to our King?” the lieutenant asks.

You hesitate. “Intend, no. But my action must cause him some harm.”

The guardsmen look contemplative, all looking to their leader. The lieutenant looks around at his men. “We have all sworn an oath to the King. And we have orders from him to deliver this Key to him. But I think we all know that if we do so, he will keep this power for himself. The King would not come here to heal one of our children. Erinharn is known through all the world as a blessed land. Now Arantator can become a blessed land. That is a thing which is worth more than our oaths of service and our honour. So we will assist this man in his quest. Tomorrow I alone shall report to the King and tell him that I have defied him. He will then punish me as is his right.”

The guardsman all seem to accept this, but are far from happy. The lieutenant speaks to you once more. “The priestess is unlikely to be kept in the dungeons. This High Priest too I doubt will be kept there. This matter is one that even the king must keep quiet. Thus you must get into the palace itself. Perhaps we can obtain for you an official’s outfit.”

The guardsman discuss the matter and send one of their women to cut the white lion insignia from one of their surcoats and sew it onto a blue robe which you can wear over your armour. One of the guardsmen also has a hat which after some alteration resembles an official’s cap. A shave and a haircut soon completes the disguise, though you still look like a very ragged official. You are still able to take your weapons, pack and all of your gear.

The lieutenant hands you a ring with 2 keys on it: A steel lion key and a brass lion key. The palace has ‘public’ rooms on the ground floor, including officials offices and function halls. The first floor houses the personal quarters of those who live at the palace, and the top floor being the personal area of the King. The uppermost floor is accessed only by a guarded stairway. Those ascending the stair are required to show an ivory and ebony token of a rampant lion, otherwise they will be shot with crossbows without question. The guardsmen do not have any such tokens, but tell you that messengers and higher-ranked officials often have them.

The couple whose daughter you have healed appear, leading the girl herself by the hands. She grins broadly at everyone and is greeted joyfully by all, women and children coming from the other houses to see her. A celebratory air soon replaces the grim planning and food and jars of beer soon appear. You are hugged by women and

clapped on the shoulder by men, as you enjoy a meal with the gathering. But soon you are taken aside by the lieutenant once more.

“You had best be going.” The guardsman says. “You are welcome to come back here when all is done.”

“Thank you,” you say to the lieutenant. He smiles grimly, his thoughts on the morrow when he must report to the king. Leaving without further word, you make your way out into the dark streets, making for the palace. As you pass near the Temple Gardens, you decide that it is too dangerous to take the Diamond Key with you, so you make a detour and stop at the Shrine of Aringarator, intending to hide the Key here.

The floor of the shrine is made of stones, and you go to one corner and pull at the stones until you find a loose one. It is only slightly loose and it takes several minutes to work free. You dig into the hard soil beneath and making a small cavity, take out the Diamond Key from the cloth bag and place it in the hole. You replace the stone and stamp on it to make it flat.

Do you want to offer some incense, and ask Aringarator to protect the Key? If so, turn to **292**

If you have no time for superstitious nonsense, turn to **362**

496

“No,” you say.

The necromancer shrugs. “Fine, I will just kill you and keep it.” He raises his gloved hand. Now you must fight; turn to **509**

497

Keeping to the shadowy edge of the Palatial Square, you move around the palace and soon come to a small door in the side of the castle. It is unguarded, but has a pair of torches burning in brackets to each side. There is a sign above the door featuring a pair of manacles. This is the entrance to the dungeons.

If you want to try to enter here, turn to **481**

If you want to continue your exploring, turn to **452**

498

As you near, one of the guards thumps thrice on the door. By the time you reach the door it is already swinging open. Posing as an arrogant official you ignore the guards and the doorman and step inside the opulent gatehouse. It is a gilded cube with a large chandelier hanging from the dome above. An ornately carved archway leads through into the palace and you walk forward into a long hall that seems to run the length of the palace.

Although you are not familiar with the layout of the palace, you keep walking so as to not arouse suspicion in anyone who might be looking at you. As you walk along the gaudy hall, lined with large paintings and statues, you come upon an archway that

leads into a ballroom. Opposite the arch is the entrance to a narrower, less gaudy corridor.

If you want to enter the ballroom, turn to **555**

If you want to enter the narrower corridor, turn to **432**

If you would rather continue along the main hallway, turn to **467**

499

“I will let you choose,” you tell the crow. “Choose for me whatever will aid me best in my quest.”

“What is your quest?” the crow asks.

You pause. “Well, to rescue Kianmay, certainly, and Zarim. Then I must do something about the king...”

The crow laughs. “Your quest is ill-defined. So shall be my choice! Let the sky cast lots for you!”

You look up and see a number of shooting stars suddenly cross the sky...

Roll one die to determine the number of shooting stars you see; then turn to the indicated passage to see what your fate has chosen.

1 shooting star, turn to **431**

2 shooting stars, turn to **429**

3 shooting stars, turn to **457**

4 shooting stars, turn to **405**

5 shooting stars, turn to **440**

6 shooting stars, turn to **471**

500

The long corridor is lined with thick wooden doors with small barred windows. Sputtering torches light the corridor, but brighter light comes from under a door at the far end of the corridor. The other end of the dungeon leads to a stairway.

Where do you want to go?

The lighted door? Turn to **428**

The stairway? Turn to **540**



501

The throne room is mostly empty, so there are few places to search. You go first to the throne and look around. There is nothing of interest on the dais. You make a circuit of the edge of the room, but find nothing. You begin to search the floor in case anyone has dropped something...

Roll one die.

If you roll a 1, turn to **449**

If you roll a 2, turn to **554**

If you roll a 3, turn to **564**

If you roll a 4, turn to **574**

If you roll a 5, turn to **589**

If you roll a 6, turn to **594**

502

Going on to the intersection, you look up briefly at the domed ceiling, which is painted with the scene of a prosperous village, the villages engaged in toil and crafts. The corridor continues on, where you can see another pair of doors facing each other across the corridor. To the right and left the corridors also pass the doors to more official's offices; but the corridor to the right leads to another wide, opulent corridor.

Where do you want to go?

Ahead? Turn to **446**

To the right? Turn to **572**

To the left? Turn to **582**

503

With great effort you work your way up the drain and grip the grate on top. You rest for a moment, then brace yourself against the sides of the pipe once more and lift the grate off, pushing it aside. It scapes loudly on the stone floor and you quickly grab the edge of the hole and pull yourself out. You are in a lavatory where light spills under a single crude door. You hear someone approaching from the other side of the door and ready yourself for the confrontation.

The door opens and you see a palace guardsman peer curiously in. He looks at your dripping form with some shock, his eyes going between you and the open drain a few times.

A voice calls from behind him. "What is it, Garv?"

"A sewer rat!" the guard says contemptuously, reaching for his sword. Seeing no other way to resolve the situation, you leap to attack him, forcing him to remain in the doorway. If you win, you will have to fight the second guardsman straight afterwards.

GARV THE GUARD SKILL 8 STAMINA 20 DB 4 ARMOUR 2

THE OTHER GUARD SKILL 7 STAMINA 18 DB 4 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **514**

If you are killed by have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **538**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

504

Walking along the corridor, you come to the corner and turn. Looking out the tall windows to your right you see the wall of the keep swing away to encircle a small garden, filled with trees and a large pool that sparkles in the light of moon, stars and watchfire. On your left you pass the entrance to private quarters, hung with a banner depicting four golden ropes tied in knots on a blue field. You continue on to the next intersection.

Turn to **443**

505

You stride forward and attack the Zombies as they raise their swords. Because they move slower than you, you may fight them one at a time. If you do not have your weapon with you, you must fight with only half your normal SKILL, and with a Damage Bonus of 0. After one of the Zombies is dead, you can snatch its sword and fight with it.

ZOMBIE GUARD 1 SKILL 6 STAMINA 22 DB 8 ARMOUR 6

ZOMBIE GUARD 2 SKILL 7 STAMINA 20 DB 8 ARMOUR 6

You discover that the blades of the zombies are poisoned with a potent paralyzing venom. Every time you are wounded you must retreat and drink a healing potion to nullify the effects of the toxin. You do not gain any STAMINA from doing so. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, or are wearing a golden armband, the poison has no effect on you. If you cannot counteract the poison, you are dead. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest and are killed by wounds, the Key will revive you and you can continue the fight with full STAMINA.

If you are forced to flee, turn to **547**

If you win, turn to **472**

If you are wounded and do not have a healing potion to drink, turn to **928**

506

Gaining access to the dim office, you find a shuttered light crystal in a bracket on the wall and open it, bathing the room in cold white light. There are other lights, but you leave them as they are. The office inside has four desks, two to each side and facing inwards, covered with papers. On the walls behind the desks are bookcases and filing cabinets. It looks like any clerk's office.

The only exception is a tall glass cabinet against the wall opposite the door. You walk down the carpet laid out in the centre of the room and peer inside the cabinet. You see inside a collection of curious objects. Most seem sundry, but on its own shelf you spy a large ring of jade, the size of a collar. Opening the cabinet, you take it out and examine it. You feel it tingling in your grasp and know that it is magical, but do not know what it does. Although it is collar-sized, it has no way of opening and is too big for your arm. You put it in your pack anyway.

On one of the desks half hidden under a sheaf of papers you spot what proves to be a palm-sized ivory disk, inlaid on one side with a rampant lion of onyx.

There is nothing else of interest here, so you decide to leave.

Turn to **528**



507

Taking out the keys, you find the one that corresponds to the cell number and slide it into the lock. It opens with a click and you push the door open, stepping inside. The man does not react.

“Hello,” you say. There is no reaction.

You reach out and gently prod the man in the shoulder. He still does not react, and you wonder what to do.

If you would like to pray with him, turn to **487**

Or you can leave by turning to **516**

508

You move along the corridor, tall windows to your right and soon come upon another doorway. The banner here is a white axe on black, but the door to the quarters is ajar...

If your curiosity gets the better of you and you want to look inside, turn to **451**

If you want to focus on the task at hand and continue along the corridor to the corner you can see ahead, turn to **504**

509

You lunge at the Necromancer with your weapon. The necromancer responds by waving his gloved hand in a complex gesture, and shouting words of power...

Are you wearing a golden armband, silver-studded armour or Crow Armour?

If so, turn to **418**

If not, turn to **549**

510

Following the corridor, you pass tall windows to your left, out of which you can see the tops of the walls of the keep, and the great watch fires. The soldiers there are black shadows against the hot light, so you cannot see if they react to your passage, or if they even see you. To your right you pass the entrance to some lord's private quarters, hung with the banner of a black ship on a green field. Reaching the corner,

you turn around and eventually pass another lord's quarters, his banner a red boar on a yellow field, before you arrive at a T-intersection.

Turn to **443**

511

Picking up the vase, you shake it, feeling something shaking about inside. You sneer at the warning and smash the vase on the ground. You hear a hiss, and the shards move as a small serpent uncoils itself and lifts its head. To your surprise the serpent suddenly turns into mist, the grey cloud rising up and swelling into a humanoid shape. It soon reforms into a short, fat creature with red skin and a set of long horns. It stretches and roars, before looking at you with large yellow eyes. It grins, displaying pointed teeth.

"Thank you for freeing me," it says in a guttural voice, then looks at you thoughtfully. "Now, should I eat you, or give you something in return for freeing me?"

It is a rhetorical question, but you can assist the demon in making his decision by:

Attacking him, turn to **602**,

Telling him about your quest, turn to **588**

512

Opening the door, you pass through quickly into a long opulent hall. It is lined with statues and large paintings, with gilded doorways that seem gaudy to your eye. The ceiling is lined with light-crystal chandeliers, and a deep blue carpet covers the floor. You make your way down the hall and come to a large pair of double doors on your left. Opposite there is a narrower, and slightly less opulent corridor leading off at right angles to the main corridor. You can hear noises coming from the corridor, and guess that the kitchens and servants quarters are in that direction. You carefully open the large doors and see a vacant banquet hall.

Moving on you come to a large, round chamber with a domed ceiling. A massive chandelier hangs here, as big as a small ship. The dome above is made of black stone which reflects the points of light in the chandelier clearly. It looks a bit like a chunk of the night sky installed in the ceiling of the palace.

The domed chamber is the intersection of two opulent hallways. In the corridor crossing your path you see to the right a grand stairway leading to second floor. To the left are a pair of golden doors. Straight ahead of you the corridor you are following seems to lead to the front entrance of the palace.

Do you want to ascend to the second floor? Turn to **552**

If you want to investigate the golden doors, turn to **532**

If you want to move towards the front entrance to check for more junctions, turn to **460**

513

Gaining access to the dim office, you find a shuttered light crystal in a bracket on the wall and open it, bathing the room in cold white light. There are other lights, but you leave them as they are. The office inside has four desks, two to each side and facing inwards, covered with papers. On the walls behind the desks are bookcases and filing cabinets. It looks like any clerk's office.

The only exception is a tall glass cabinet against the wall opposite the door. You walk down the carpet laid out in the centre of the room and peer inside the cabinet. You see inside a collection of curious objects. Most seem sundry, but on its own shelf you spy a silver scarab beetle the size of your palm. Opening the cabinet, you pick it up and feel it tingle on your palm. It is magical and you take it.

On one of the desks half hidden under a sheaf of papers you spot what proves to be a palm-sized ivory disk, inlaid on one side with a rampant lion of onyx.

There is nothing else of interest here, so you decide to leave.

Turn to **528**

514

The second dungeon guard falls dead and you listen carefully for sounds of any more approaching. It seems safe, so you take a look around the guardroom. There is nothing in the room apart from a small stove for cooking and heating, and a table surrounded by benches.

There are three doors in the room. A thick, bolted door leads outside, while the door to the lavatory is thin. Another secure door leads to the cells. You search the guards and find a ring of numbered keys, some chewing tobacco, and a few copper coins.

You take the keys and make for the door leading to the cells.

Turn to **426**

515

"That's no business of your, soldier!" you snap at him. "Either help me look for a diamond pin or get lost!"

You continue your search under the watchful eyes of the crystal-armoured warrior. After a few minutes he leaves. You continue searching for a while, then decide it is time to leave. Quickly you make your way to the stairway that will take you to the next level.

Turn to **522**

516

Leaving the cell, you continue on through the dungeon and come to the stairway at the end of the corridor. You climb the dark stairwell and come to another heavy

door. Opening it, you peer out into a stableyard. It is abandoned at the moment, and you make for a door in the back of the keep.

Turn to **512**

517

Leaving the domed chamber, you keep the tall windows to your left as you approach a corner. On your right you pass a doorway adorned with a banner featuring three red skulls on a white field. Moving around the corner, you soon come upon a staircase to your right where a bannered doorway would normally be. The white marble banister is mounted at intervals by rampant lions carved from ivory, rubies set in their eye sockets. The steps are laid with a purple and gold carpet. The stairway is long, straight and relatively narrow; only wide enough for six men to walk abreast. At the very top you can see a purple curtain concealing the landing. The walls to each side of the stairway are white marble and inlaid with softly glowing light crystals.

It appears to be the entrance to the uppermost level of the palace.

If you would like to climb the stairway now, turn to **544**.

If you want to continue to explore the second floor, turn to **494**

518

Taking out a healing potion, you cradle the woman's head and pour the red liquid into her mouth. She stirs and swallows. It takes a few minutes for her eyes to open. She looks at you with utter hopelessness, filling you with anger at whoever did this to her.

"I am here to help you," you tell her.

"Who are you?" she whispers.

"No one. But you are free to go. What has happened here?"

The woman remains on the floor and does not seem excited about her impending freedom. It takes a few more minutes for you to coax her to talk. She explains that a necromancer who is kept by the king lives in the bowels of the castle and conducts many experiments on the living and the dead. He used her to collect samples of blood, which he used in his dark arts.

After she has told you this, she closes her eyes and falls asleep. It will take some time for her to recover. If you have another healing phial, you leave it beside her and leave the cell. It is time to confront this necromancer. You make for the central door.

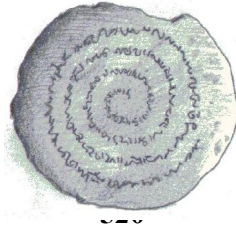
Turn to **482**

519

Following the corridor, you pass tall windows to your right, out of which you can see the tops of the walls of the keep, and the great watch fires. The soldiers there are black shadows against the hot light, so you cannot see if they react to your passage, or if they even see you. To your left you pass the entrance to some lord's private

quarters, hung with the banner of a red boar on a yellow field. Reaching the corner, you turn around and eventually pass another lord's quarters, his banner a black ship on a green field, before you arrive at a T-intersection.

Turn to **478**



Keeping an eye on the working men, you carefully make your way to the open hut. The cover is not perfect and you are forced to walk casually across an open space...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **608**

If you are unlucky, turn to **689**

521

Before you can say anything, one of the guards barks at you. "Move along! There is no entry for you here."

"But-" you begin.

The guard lowers the lance, his companion doing likewise. You glare at them but decide to back down. Even if you can finish off these two ornamental warriors, it would create a commotion that is unlikely to work in your favour.

You can now continue your circuit of the castle by turning to **497**

If you have already made a circuit of the castle, you can go to:

The dungeon, turn to **481**

The sewer pipe, turn to **413**

Or if you have a glass ring, you can enter the stable door by turning to **424**

522

Moving along the opulent corridor, you come upon the grand stairway. The deep blue carpet of the corridor continues up the stairway, but has added to it a wide band of rich golden embroidery on each side. The banisters are as thick as your waist, made of dark polished wood carved into flowing forms like waves, which crash against each other at regular intervals, some intricate form leaping upwards, each holding a light crystal. You pass mermaids with large breasts and long flowing tresses, smiling dolphins, and even the head of a mighty whale. Sea creatures you know and others that are strange to you light your way as you ascend the stair. It leads to a landing where small stairs split off to each side, winding back around to meet at the next floor.

You climb one of the smaller stairways cautiously, and find your self alone on the second floor.

Turn to **443**

523

The sullen face grows even more sullen. "What do you want?" growls the guard.

"I'm here to visit a friend," you explain with a smile.

"A bit late for visiting," the guard observes.

"I have just arrived in the city," you tell him.

He grunts, but shakes his head. "It's cold out. Get yourself a room in an inn and come back tomorrow."

"I can't do that," you reply.

If you have a flask of alcohol you want to offer to the guards, turn to **423**
Otherwise, turn to **541**

524

You try the door and find that it is locked.

If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **513**.
Otherwise, turn to **566**

525

Coming up behind the first zombie you decapitate it with one swing, then dodge past its collapsing body and give the second zombie an identical treatment. Both zombies fall to the floor, squirm for a few moments, then go still.

Turn to **472**

526

You burst into the inner sanctum and see a horribly fat horned demon resting in a large golden bathtub that is a hundred feet across. The demon's folds and expanse of fat is enough to almost fill the tub to the edge, while atop the mountain of blubber is a head no larger than your own, although it sports two long horns.

Small purple-skinned demons with six lavender-coloured eyes ladle hot steaming water over the fleshy bulk. As you enter they drop their ladles and buckets and flee. The demon in the tub cries in fear and begs you to spare him.

"Please! I was just hungry! Please don't destroy me!"

If you want to ignore the pathetic plea and give the evil creature the end he richly deserves, turn to **534**

If you want to be merciful, turn to **653**

527

You try to climb up the pipe, but fail, falling back into the water. Lose 1 STAMINA for the effort. You can try to climb the drain once more by testing your STAMINA again. Every time you fail you must minus 1 STAMINA. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, you do not have to deduct any STAMINA. If you succeed, turn to **503**. You can drink healing potions if you have any. If you cannot get up the drain turn to **47**

528

Leaving the office, you freeze as you hear the approach of many booted footsteps. It sounds like a patrol. Not wanting to be trapped in any of the dead ends, you hurry to the intersection and listen carefully. Moving away from the patrol you head towards one of the larger corridors. You peer out, and seeing the stairway to the next level to your left, decide it is time to leave the lower floor.

Turn to **522**

529

Leaving the smooth door, you walk along the corridor, and take the corner to the left. You pass another entrance to a lord's quarters and idly note the black tree on a yellow field hanging above. You soon reach another intersection.

Turn to **571**

530

You agree to give the necromancer the zombie rat, and put it back in its jar. You put the lid back on and the necromancer takes it. He takes the jar and gazes at the rat inside for several moments before putting it back down on the bench. "Yes, very interesting."

He asks you to follow him and leads you to another flesh door. He waves his hand as he approaches and the flesh opens, revealing another passage several yards long. You nod to the necromancer and enter the passage, hurrying through. You half expect the flesh to start closing in, but the necromancer remains trustworthy until you are on the other side. As you step out into the far chamber, the flesh behind you starts to close, cutting off retreat. The only light in the chamber is the light crystal in your hand, and in its light you see the small square chamber is guarded by 2 zombies standing against the side walls. They growl and turn towards you. They are all well-preserved warriors attired in polished armour with poisoned broadswords.

Because they move much slower than you, you may also fight them one at a time.

ZOMBIE GUARD 1	SKILL 6	STAMINA 22	DB 8	ARMOUR 6
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ZOMBIE GUARD 2	SKILL 5	STAMINA 20	DB 8	ARMOUR 6
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You discover that the blades of the zombies are poisoned with a potent paralyzing venom. Every time you are wounded you must retreat and drink a healing potion to nullify the effects of the toxin. You do not gain any STAMINA from doing so. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, or are wearing a golden armband, the poison has no effect on you. If you cannot counteract the poison, you are dead. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest and are killed by wounds, the Key will revive you and you can continue the fight with full STAMINA.

If you win, turn to **430**

531

Seizing the bottle in your paws, you push against it until it falls over. It rolls along the bench and clinks to a stop against the mortar and pestle. Sinking your teeth into the cork, you manage to pull it out, and the potion starts to pour out, forming a growing puddle that runs off the bench. Lapping at the potion you consume a fair amount, but nothing happens. It tastes metallic and unpleasant.

What do you want to try now?

The leaf? Turn to **610**

The granules? Turn to **626**

532

Going up to the golden doors, you push experimentally on them and watch as they swing inwards easily to reveal a large throne room. A red carpet sewn with golden thread runs down the centre from the doors to where a large white marble dais sits against the far wall. On the dais is a surprisingly small golden throne with purple cushions on it. On the wall behind is a large mural of a king clad in shining armour holding a lightning bolt like a spear ready to cast, while demons and human kings cower alike. You guess from the white lions that draw his chariot that this is King Darm himself.

The throne room is otherwise empty.

Do you want to search around in case there is something of interest here? If so, turn to **501**

If you want to go back and get on with your quest by taking the stairway to the next level, turn to **522**

533

Taking out the blackened wand, you wave it experimentally at the wall, willing it to open. The fingers twitch, and encouraged, you concentrate harder, placing the burnt hand against the wall. The hand opens and lays its palm against the flesh wall, and seconds later there is a gurgling from deep within. A small opening appears under the hand of the wand and slowly opens until there is a bone-floored passage leading through several yards of pulsing flesh.

You hurry forward, waving the wand about you protectively to prevent the flesh from closing in around you. Eventually you reach the other side, and find yourself in a large chamber with more flesh doors in each of the other three walls. There is a single light crystal held in a silver stand sitting in the centre of the room.

Where do you want to go?

The door opposite? Turn to **482**

To the right? Turn to **414**

To the left? Turn to **545**

534

Ignoring the whimpering pleas, you reach the edge of the tub and begin to hack at the demon. Opening its body spills out a foul-smelling black liquid. You damage it until you can't stand the smell any longer and retreat watch as the creature slowly deflates until it is dead.

Eventually you realise that you are now trapped in hell, as there is no way out.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

535

Opening the smaller door, you see a darkened stairwell leading downwards. Moving inside, you descend the stairway and come to a corridor lit by sputtering torches, lined with heavy wooden doors, containing small, barred windows.

As you walk along the corridor, you pause to peer into each cell, but most are in darkness, and you do not know if they are inhabited at all. A few of the prisoners have candles, and sit with books or just stare at the flame. Each one looks up at you with hope in their eyes, but you move on, unable to help them.

Eventually you come to one cell where an elderly man kneels before a trio of candles, deep in prayer with a small contented smile on his face. He is dressed in a now tattered robe of white, with a blanket draped around his shoulders. Could this be the High Priest Zarim?

You call out to him, but he does not answer you. You try to get his attention, but he does not even stir. Eventually you give up and return to the stairway. Climbing up to the stableyard, you take the larger doorway into the palace.

Turn to **512**

536

Gaining access to the dim office, you find a shuttered light crystal in a bracket on the wall and open it, bathing the room in cold white light. There are other lights, but you leave them as they are. The office inside has four desks, two to each side and facing inwards, covered with papers. On the walls behind the desks are bookcases and filing cabinets. It looks like any clerk's office.

The only exception is a tall glass cabinet against the wall opposite the door. You walk down the carpet laid out in the centre of the room and peer inside the cabinet.

You see inside a collection of curious objects. Most seem sundry, but on its own shelf you spy a large amulet of amethysts in the form of a condor. Opening the cabinet, you take it out and examine it. You feel it tingling in your grasp and know that it is magical, but do not know what it does. You put it on, but feel no different.

On one of the desks half hidden under a sheaf of papers you spot what proves to be a palm-sized ivory disk, inlaid on one side with a rampant lion of onyx. You may also take this if you wish.

There is nothing else of interest here, so you decide to leave.

Turn to **528**

537

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **469**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

538

You fall dead to the floor, and fade into blackness, hearing someone laughing at you and kicking your body. You seem to float in the blackness for a while, before you feel your spirit sinking back into your heavy physical form once more. You open your eyes, seeing the flame-lit ceiling on the guardhouse.

You carefully lift your head. Seated at the table is one of the guards, looking through your pack. You sit up and climb to your feet. Seeing you move from the corner of his eye, the guard slowly turns his head towards you, going pale. You pick up your weapon and slay him. The petrified man doesn't even move, except for toppling to the floor.

You take back your pack and refill it, taking a look around the guardroom. There is nothing in the room apart from a small stove for cooking and heating, and a table surrounded by benches.

There are three doors in the room. A thick, bolted door leads outside, while the door to the lavatory is thin. Another secure door leads to the cells. You search the guard and find a ring of numbered keys, some chewing tobacco, and a few copper coins.

You take the keys and make for the door leading to the cells.

Turn to **426**



539

Pushing aside the curtain enough to be able to peek through, you see a lavish sitting room filled with dark blue velvet cushioned couches, the furniture including a

large low square table in the centre of the room made of dark polished wood carved into flowing forms and inlaid with gold and ivory.

Silk paintings hang on the walls, and a large light-crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling. You slip through and search around briefly, but find nothing of interest. There is another archway leading through to a similarly decorated dining room. A large table here has enough seating for ten people, and is set with silver plates and cups inscribed with magical runes. In the centre is a large covered bowl with a ladle. As you set further inside, you start as you see servants standing in the corners of the dining room. The servants do not react to you and after a moment you relax as you see that they are not real. You don't know what they are made of, but they are solid and painted, only their hair looks real. Each is in the form of a scantily clad woman, and each is carved to generous proportions. The sterile faces turn you off, and you lift the lid off the covered bowl. Inside is a cold thick gruel, grey in colour and looking utterly unappealing.

If you want to sit down and eat some of the old porridge, turn to **552**

Otherwise you will have to go back and take one of the other archways:

The nest arch: turn to **625**

The rune arch: turn to **681**

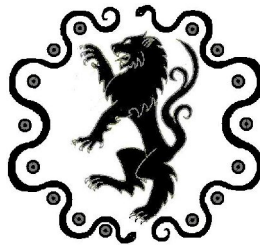
540

As you make your way down the corridor, you pause to peer into each cell, but most are in darkness, and you do not know if they are inhabited at all. A few of the prisoners have candles, and sit with books or just stare at the flame. Each one looks up at you with hope in their eyes, but you move on, unable to help them.

Eventually you come to one cell where an elderly man kneels before a trio of candles, deep in prayer with a small contented smile on his face. He is dressed in a now tattered robe of white, with a blanket draped around his shoulders. Could this be the High Priest Zarim?

You call out to the man, but he does not stir. Eventually you give up and continue towards the stairway

Turn to **516**



541

“I should have known you would be like this,” you say with a slow nod. “I’ve seen your type before.”

The man’s eyes narrow. “What do you mean, my type?”

“You half-orcs. Always interested in your own comfort rather than an honest day’s work.”

“I’m no half-orc!” thunders the guard. “You had better watch your cheek, outsider, or I’ll come out there and cut you into little pieces!”

You smile. “I don’t believe that. It is cold out here. You’ll wither like a little flower.”

With a murderous glare the small window slams shut and the next moment you hear bolts being slid, and the door opens. The guard stalks out, his fists clenched. Without any preamble he takes a swing at you. You duck under his blow and dodge around him, dashing inside the doorway.

You find yourself in a guardroom, another smaller guard sitting in a chair by a small iron stove. He leaps up and snatches a sword from the table. The first guard barrels in and lunges at you. You are forced to fight both at once.

DUNGEON GUARD 1 SKILL 8 STAMINA 20 DB 4 ARMOUR 2

DUNGEON GUARD 2 SKILL 7 STAMINA 18 DB 4 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **514**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **538**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

542

“There is a powerful artefact call the Diamond Key,” you begin. “King Darm wants it to extend his life. He has captured a priestess of the White Goddess called Kianmay, who was to deliver it to the temple here. I have hidden the Key, but I must rescue her, and do something about King Darm.”

As you have spoken the woman’s face fills with an expression of wonder. “You speak of Alyn Mei! I see her in your mind! She has been captured by Darm? You must indeed free her! She is a Barashai demon too! But from what I see in your mind she is further transformed than I. She will retain very little of her power and be utterly helpless before him!” She taps her chin thoughtfully with one finger. “It is simple enough to get into the presence of Darm, but you are too weak to face him.”

She turns away and from a small bag on a long cord takes an ivory token the size of your palm. Inlaid in one side is a rampant lion formed from onyx. “Do you have one of these? The uppermost level of the palace can only be accessed by a stairway that is guarded. If you do not hold aloft one of these, you will be struck down by crossbows without question!”

If you do not have a token already, you take hers. Continuing, the woman says: “On the second floor there are the private quarters of the palace officials. The Royal sorcerer is elsewhere, impersonating the High Priest of the White Goddess! If you can get into his quarters, then you can perhaps find something to aid you in your quest. His door will be magically sealed, but I will teach you a spell to open the ward. You must say these words: *zytow zytox ha zytow zytox!* Then the ward shall be broken.”

You carefully memorise the words. She also tells you how to get to the sorcerer’s quarters. When you reach the second floor, go straight ahead to the central dome,

then continue across to the opposite side of the palace. Take a left turn and look for a plain, unmarked door. Now that you have a plan, you feel more determined.

Turn to **583**

543

“I am no-one special,” you begin. “I am a merchant guard, but as I crossed the tundra I met a necromancer in a town. He showed me his research and I was intrigued. I wanted to learn from him, but he was killed soon after. I hoped to find another necromancer.”

“How did you hear of me?” the necromancer asks.

“I didn’t,” you reply. “I was just searching down here.”

The necromancer grunts and looks at you thoughtfully, flexing his gloved hand. “I have no need of an apprentice. However, if you can show me some proof that you started to learn with this other necromancer, I will let you go free.”

Do you have a zombie rat with you? If so, turn to **416**

If not, you had best attack him right away by turning to **509**

544

You begin to walk up the stairway when you spy a small sign on the wall. It has a white ivory disk inlaid in the top, with an onyx lion set in it. Beneath is some script which reads:

Hold aloft thy token as thou ascendest the staircase, else thou shalt come to ruin

Do you have a lion token? If so, turn to **726**

If you do not, you have no choice but to ascend without it. Turn to **755**

545

Going to the door, you extend the grisly wand and concentrate once more. The internal doors prove to be much thinner than the main entrance, only a foot thick. As the flesh opens, you feel a slight breeze as the air about you is sucked gently inwards. You then feel a chill emanating from the chamber. Revealed within are numerous corpses, lying in neat rows on the floor. The room is unlit, but you see another silver light crystal stand in the centre of the room, in which there is what appears to be a black crystal.

All of the corpses are still clothed, and have been placed as they fell in death. Most appear to have died violently. Perhaps a search of the bodies could reveal some items of value. The cold crystal could also be of value.

If you want to enter and search the chamber, turn to **410**

Alternatively you can go back and try the door on the right, turn to **414**

Or the central door, turn to **482**

546

The tendrils reach down into the earth far below and swell with power, feeding it into your hand. You try to only collect a fraction of the power this time, and the blast that shoots from your hand is indeed slightly smaller.

You still feel like your arm is being torn apart, and must shield your eyes from the blinding light as your magical attack roars and crackles. After all is still, you open your eyes and shake your numb hand, looking at the path of destruction.

Once again the floor is gouged out, the edge of it only inches from where a shocked and singed looking Kianmay is lying. The blast has put another hole in the wall of the palace, but this time only cracked and burnt the wall of the citadel. Of Darm there is no sign.

“Is he dead?” you ask Kianmay as you smash at your cage.

Shaken, Kianmay climbs to her feet and hurries to assist you. “Yes. He was trying to cast a spell at you.”

There is no body, and you can’t help worrying that Darm will return, but he never does.

Turn to **800**

547

Retreating from the zombie chamber you have nowhere else to go except back through the submerged pipe. Climbing down the ladder, you prepare yourself and dive into the water. The flow carries you back to the first sewer chamber and you pull yourself from the pool.

You climb the ladder towards the darkened passage.

Turn to **439**

548

You walk along the corridor, tall windows to your right. You soon come to an entrance on your left, and you pause. There is no banner here like the other entrances you have passed. The door has no handle, and is made of smooth polished wood.

If you want to try and enter the door, turn to **553**

If you want to continue along the corridor, turn to **529**

549

The necromancer does not fight with combat. Each attack round calculate attack strengths as normal. If your attack strength is higher then you score a wound in the normal way. If the necromancer’s score is higher, he has avoided your blow. But every attack round, regardless of whether you win or not, you will be under the effect

of his life-draining spell. Every round you must deduct 2 STAMINA. If you have a Diamond Key in your chest, it will counteract the effect of the spell.

ROYAL NECROMANCER SKILL 10 STAMINA 20 DB 0 ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **480**



550

Walking along the corridor, you look out the tall windows to your left. The wall of the keep swings away to encircle a small garden, filled with trees and a large pool that sparkles in the light of moon, stars and watch fire. On your right you pass the entrance to private quarters, hung with a banner depicting four golden ropes tied in knots on a blue field.

You take the corner to the right and soon come upon another doorway. The banner here is a white axe on black, but the door to the quarters is ajar...

If your curiosity gets the better of you and you want to look inside, turn to **451**

If you want to focus on the task at hand and go to the intersection you can see ahead, turn to **571**

551

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **506**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

552

Are you wearing a golden armband, silver studded leather armour or Crow Armour?

If so, turn to **664**

Otherwise turn to **605**

553

The door is smooth and without any visible way of opening it. You decide against knocking, and look for some way to get in.

If you are wearing a gold ring, turn to **630**

If you have a glass ring and want to use it to enter, turn to **590**

If you have spoken to Alyn Kara and were given the spell to open the magical door, turn to **441**

Otherwise, you will have to continue on your way towards the nearest intersection (**599**) or continue towards the corner (**529**).

554

You walk back and forth, looking for anything on the floor. You find a small scrap of paper with the following numbers written on it: 4-4-8. You toss the paper aside once more.

Your search reveals nothing else, so you leave the throne room and make your way to the stairway that will take you to the next level.

Turn to **522**

555

You turn into the ballroom and walk over the polished marble floor, examining the geometric designs laid out in the coloured stone. The ballroom is a large rectangle hung with chandeliers high above on a ceiling covered in a mural of a king hunting unicorns. The light wood-panelled walls are lined with red stone pillars, and a wooden stage sits against one wall. On the stage is a woman tending to a few instruments that are kept there. She has seen you enter, so you do not slow or deviate your steps. The only other exit is through a pair of double doors in one of the side walls.

You continue up to the stage, where the woman smiles at you. “Good evening sir.” She is dressed in a long plain gown of black silk, and has long dark brown hair held back in a bun by some jade hair ornaments. Her skin is soft and creamy white.

She doesn’t act like a servant, so you smile and greet her in return, then ask her what she is doing.

“The king has ordered that the instruments are always kept on display here. He dislikes the bare stage. But its not good for these instruments to be kept out like this. The strings dry out.” She plucks the string of a lute and makes a grimace. It sounds fine to you.

“Are you a music-lover?” she asks you.

“I don’t have much time to listen to music,” you reply.

“That isn’t good,” she says, and promptly sits down and picks up a small harp. She begins to play a soft tune that seems to ripple in the air around you.

Do you have a wooden flute in your pack? If so, turn to **434**
If not, turn to **583**

556

Looking at the people laid out on the slabs, you quickly notice something. Those furthest to the back of the hall are the most withered, those in the back row like corpses. Those near the front where you were laid out are fresh in appearance and there are many vacant slabs there. You reason that those who are most withered have been here longest and have had their souls drained of energy. Even the withered ones seem to still be alive.

The demon is feeding on them, gaining power. You contemplate what to do. If you push all the bodies off the slabs, the demon will not be able to feed on them any longer. However, the demon will obviously feel its power being drained and send someone to find out what is going on. You are in no condition to be battling anyone.

If you want to push all the bodies off the slabs, turn to **604**

If you just want to search the bodies for useful items, risking that someone will come along and discover you, turn to **686**

If you want to leave to try and find some way to recover your strength, turn to **677**



557

“I work here,” you say, gesturing to the armour and cloak that you wear.

“That is a City Guardsman’s uniform,” the warrior observes. “Why are you here?”

“I was sent here by one of the officials to look for his diamond pin,” you reply, thinking quickly.

The warrior grunts. “You lie well. But I can hear mistruth. Lie once more and I shall kill you where you stand. Tell me why you are here.”

If you think he is bluffing and want to maintain your story, turn to **567**

If you think its best to tell the truth, turn to **596**

558

Leaving the magician’s quarters you go back out into the corridor. You can now either go to the intersection that is nearby to your right (turn to **599**), or you can approach the corner that you see in the distance to the left (turn to **529**).

559

Dropping your weapon you fall backward and hold up your hands. “I surrender!” you cry.

The Champion points his spear at you but does not advance, and the glow slowly dies. “I asked you a question,” he says coldly.

“I’ve come to rescue a priestess that King Darm is holding captive,” you say.

The coldness in the man’s eyes fades away, and he smiles with genuine warmth, and no small amount of amusement. “I’m afraid if you cannot defeat me you stand little chance on the uppermost floor of this accursed place. Although I am the King’s Champion I wish you well in your quest. He has changed much even in the time that I have served him. He is no longer a great king, but a evil sorcerer. I would destroy him if I could. I suggest you forget about this priestess. She will not be the first or the last to suffer under Darm’s hand.”

“I must rescue her,” you say with determination.

The Champion shrugs. “Very well. If you will stand against him, so will I, even though it may cost both of our lives. I shall be watching and waiting. When the moment is right I shall strike.”

He tells you that his name is Jamar Zi and farewells you. Make a note of this name. After you have recovered, you leave the throne room and hasten towards the stairway that leads to the next level.

Turn to **522**

560

You walk towards the central chamber, passing a set of doors on each side, banners you do not recognise hung above them. You spare them little attention as you come to stand under the largest dome you have ever seen. It must be close to 100 metres across, lined with slender, golden, bejewelled pillars twice your height, the wall behind a deep red. The dome itself is polished silver that remains untarnished and mirror bright, reflecting the light of the truly massive chandelier that hangs from the dome high above. This chandelier is the size of a large ship, and must contain a million light crystals, many covered in coloured glass so that a rainbow of light is cast upon the dome and reflected all around by the polished silver.

It is an awesome sight, but you must be getting on with your quest. Four wide corridors lead into the dome. In one direction you can see the stairwell that brought you onto this floor.

To go down the corridor to the intersection at the stairwell, turn to **443**

To follow the corridor away from the stairwell to the opposite side, turn to **599**

To go down the corridor that is to your right when the stairwell is at your back, turn to **478**

To go to the left, turn to **571**

561

You flip open a few chests and see them full of gold and silver coins, or gems and jewellery. Controlling your excitement, you decide to look for things that will be useful. If you defeat Darm, you can always come back here afterwards. Opening a small box inscribed with a sword you find within a crystal bottle containing a purple potion. Another box with a wolf carved in the top contains a vial of dark red liquid that looks like blood. There is also a fine ceramic vase that is sealed and painted with runes of containment. In crude lettering is written the warning: *Danger! Contains evil spirit.*

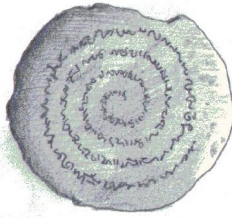
You also study the weapons. There is a fine longsword, a fine broadsword, a spear and a fine axe, all bejewelled. You can take any of these if you wish, but none are magical. Also hanging on the wall is a round silver shield. If you take this, it has an ARMOUR rating of 3 will increase your Combat SKILL by 3.

You can now leave the treasury and the vacant quarters and return to the corridor by turning to **464**

If you want to drink the purple potion from the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you want to drink the blood-red potion from the wolf-box, turn to **638**

If you want to ignore the warning on the vase and break it open to see if it contains any useful items, turn to **511**

**562**

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **506**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

563

You are slowly devoured in the darkness of the demon's belly, your power added to the demon's own.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

564

You walk back and forth in the throne room, but your search yields nothing. Hoping you have not wasted too much time, you hurry out of the throne room and make directly for the stairway to the second floor.

Turn to **522**

565

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **513**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

566

You are unable to open the door. You try some of the other doors, but find they are all locked. Suddenly you freeze, hearing the approach of many booted footsteps. It sounds like a patrol. Not wanting to be trapped in any of the dead ends, you hurry to the intersection and listen carefully. Moving away from the patrol you head towards one of the larger corridors. You peer out, and seeing the stairway to the next level to your left decide it is time to leave the lower floor.

Turn to **522**

567

"I have told you the truth!" you insist.

The warrior says nothing, but the crystal spearhead begins to glow red, you watch as the red lightens to white and finally blue. You can feel the heat of it from several metres away. The warrior suddenly levels the spear and leaps at you. His attack is not particularly swift, but it cuts through your weapon, and through your armour, and burns a hole in your chest.

You are dead before you hit the floor.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **569**, otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

568

You are backed into a corner and all hope of escape is cut off. The battle against the devouring demon is not a normal one. The interior of its mouth is bony and its scarred tongue is covered in knobs of cartilage. It needs to win only one attack round to snatch you up with its tongue and drag you into the unholy depths of its gaping throat. Every time you win an attack round, you manage to wound the demon enough to make it recoil and give yourself an opening to escape (turn to **660**). To defeat the demon you must win every single attack round.

DEVOURER DEMON SKILL 9 STAMINA 20 DB 0 ARMOUR 5

As soon as you lose an attack round, turn to **595**

If you kill the demon, turn to **613**

569

Your spirit plunges into the dark place, and you float around for a while before you begin to resurface into the world of light and life. Opening your eyes, you see the ceiling of the throne room above you.

Sitting up, you see no sign of the Champion. You also seem to have all of your equipment. The only thing you don't have is a weapon, which has been cut in half, and your armour, which is now has a large, inviting hole in the middle. You remove your armour and hide it behind the throne, dumping your useless weapon there too. Cursing, you quickly leave, making for the stairway that will take you to the next level. Hopefully you can find more weapons and armour before you confront Darm.

Turn to **522**



570

Shoving bodies off the slabs, you work as quickly as possible. Soon you hear a gruff cry and turn to see a pair of demons rushing from the archway at the back of the

hall. They are purple skinned, with six lavender coloured eyes, standing about 8 feet tall and clad in black plate armour covered with steel spikes. Each holds a staff with a hook on the end. As they draw near you see that the spikes on their armour are discoloured with poison.

They look like fearsome opponents. If you stay where you are you will have to fight both at once. Looking at the arch at the rear of the hall you reason that you could circle around the approaching guards and go through the arch. You might be able to find a narrow corridor or a doorway, which would force the guards to fight you one at a time. Of course there could be more guards through the arch.

If you want to face the demon guards in the open hall, turn to **606**

If you want to circle around and run through the arch, turn to **670**

571

You are standing under another golden dome that houses a T-intersection. The corridor that continues through the chamber is lined with tall external windows, while the offshoot leads to the central dome of the second floor.

If you want to go towards the central dome, turn to **560**

When you stand with your back to the windows, facing the central dome, you can take the right-hand corridor by turning to **508**, or to the left by turning to **597**

572

Taking the corridor to the right, you stop halfway along to inspect the two offices there. On the right a sign with a figure kneeling before another upon a throne is labelled as the *Office of Petitions*. Across the hall is the *Office of Waste Management*, represented by a broom.

To enter the Office of Petitions, turn to **551**

To enter the Office of Waste Management, turn to **565**



573

You crash into tree after tree, but the attack on you seems only to intensify. Finally you can run no more and fall to the ground. You thrash feebly as the darkness grows so thick it is solid, pinning you to the ground. Soon you cannot even move as a million avenging spirits feed on you.

The torment continues for so long you lose all sense of time. But finally you awake and the darkness is gone. You lift your arm and see that your hand is whole

and unharmed. Sitting up you look around and see that the forest is gone. Shuddering at the memory of the torment you stand, feeling oddly freer. You have atoned for some evil and your heart is lighter. Your LUCK is increased with the debt you have paid. You may increase your *initial* LUCK by 3 points and bring your *current* LUCK to this new level.

But your ordeal has not left you unscathed. Reduce your *initial* SKILL and STAMINA by 2 points.

Standing up, you see that the ruined city is still there, as is the village and the citadel. Fortunately there is no sign of the villagers. Where do you want to go now?

The Ruined city? Turn to **682**

The citadel? Turn to **619**

574

You walk back and forth, looking for any small objects that may have been dropped on the floor. Eventually you find an intricately carved ivory comb, the kind a lady would wear in her hair. It is beautiful, so you slip it into your pocket. Giving up on finding anything useful, you leave the throne room and make for the stairway that will take you to the next level.

Turn to **522**

575

Taking the jar out from your pack, you take off the lid and pull out the zombie rat. You push the rat between the bars and it drops to the floor beyond the door. You sit down, and holding the crystal ball from the lid in your hand, concentrate.

You soon begin to see in the darkness behind your eyelids. It is hard for the rat to see as well, but you make out a corridor and working your little legs you scurry along and soon see two doors on each side of the corridor. The doors are shut, but there is a gap beneath. You go to the first door and squeeze your body under it. Here there is a shuttered light crystal on the wall, and some light escapes the cracks, letting you see quite well with the rat's eyes.

You are in a treasury, and see many chests and strong boxes around you. There are also bejewelled weapons hung on the walls. But nothing is within reach of the rat, and you squeak in frustration.

Leaving the chamber, you squeeze under the other door and find yourself in a study. It looks like an alchemist's laboratory. The shelves are stocked with bundles of herbs, and jars, bottles and boxes of other components. There is a workbench where you can see some objects, including a mortar and pestle, and a few candles. As you scan the room, you spy a key hanging on the wall. You wonder if it is the key to the treasury. In any case it is out of reach.

There is a stool next to the bench and you climb up one of the legs and with the aid of your teeth clamber up onto the seat of the stool. From there it is a short leap to the bench top.

In addition to the items you saw from the floor there is a leather-bound journal of some sort, the open page filled with lines of letters and numbers that mean nothing to you. Next to the journal there is a bottle of potion, a leaf, and some granules of

something in a dish. Apart from the leaf, the other things are too big or ungainly to bring back, and you don't know what they do anyway.

Since you are here, you may as well try something.

To try the potion, turn to **531**

To nibble of the leaf, turn to **584**

To sample the granules, turn to **593**

576

The holy elephant reaches out with its trunk, and reaches *inside* your chest. You feel it pull something out from within you, and you see within its retracting trunk a glowing sphere of light. The elephant promptly places the glowing Diamond Key into its mouth, then turns and begins to walk towards the wall.

When it reaches the wall, it lowers its head and continues at a stately pace. The wall cracks and falls inwards, as the elephant proceeds, without pause, seemingly effortless. It tunnels through the palace, the walls falling away as easily as if they were made of paper.

Curious, you and Kianmay follow after it. The broken passage seems stable enough and you walk through several rooms to the edge of the palace. You see the elephant push through the citadel wall, making the ancient stones crumble and fall down. A few arrows are shot at the beast, but bounce off harmlessly. You hear a curse-ridden shout telling the guards to cease their attack. Whoever the officer is, he sounds awed and scared. Your own feelings are not so different.

The hole you stand in the edge of is too high above the ground for you to continue; the holy elephant is so big that the gap between the edge of the palace and the citadel wall presented no problem. You watch with Kianmay, and even Darm comes to stand at your side, staring out into the city.

The giant elephant walks towards the nearest houses, towering over three times the height of the rooftops, you wince in anticipation as you see it reach the first house. But it is not crushed beneath the great feet. The elephant steps up onto the house and continues on its way, walking across the rooftops as if it is as light as a bird.

You see it travel towards the Temple of the White Goddess; the spires of which you can see in the distance. But you know its true destination. It is going to fetch the original Diamond Key that you hid in the shrine of Aringarator next to the temple.

The elephant becomes a dot in the distance. You briefly see another faint flash of light as it devours the second Diamond Key. It then makes its way back across the rooftops towards you, its body now covered in dancing light.

Several minutes later it arrives, and its voice makes the earth tremor. "I have taken the Diamond Key into my body. It shall be bound to the earth through me." The great blue eyes fix on Darm. "There is no power in this world that can take the Diamond Key from me. Do you know this?"

Darm nods, and adds in a strangled voice: "Yes."

The elephant looks at Kianmay. "Farewell, priestess."

The great body turns into mist and dissipates up into the night sky, witnessed by the garrison of the citadel and more than a few of the townspeople who have wandered out from their homes.

You stand bemused, until you hear Kianmay address Darm, and your attention snaps back to the King. "Your Majesty. Have we your permission to withdraw?"

A torrent of emotions are playing over the king's face, but as he looks at the two of you, a look of annoyance settles in place. "Begone! I have no need of either of you. Trouble me no more."

He turns away, still staring out into the night. Kianmay pulls at your arm, but you hesitate...

If you want to give Darm a shove and have him plunge to his death, turn to **867**

If you would rather just leave, turn to **850**



577

With your last stroke the Champion is defeated, the glow in his armour fading. He falls to the floor and the crystal encasing his body shatters, as does the helm, scattering sharp pieces of crystal across the floor. You rest for a while after your difficult battle and then search the Champion's body. You find nothing that looks useful, but examine the crystal spear, which is intact. It takes only moment to make the crystal glow red, a painful heat emanating from it. If you channel enough concentration into it, it can melt its way through any armour. It is unlikely an opponent will give you enough time for that, however. Even so, you can take the spear if you wish.

Weapon	Class	Damage Bonus
Crystal Spear	Spear	10

Leaving the throne room, you approach the stairway, ready to ascend to the next level.

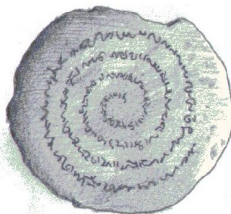
Turn to **522**

578

Readying your shield, you take a breath then charge forward. The demon face spits fire at you, but you duck behind your shield, feeling hot air surge around you. The corridor is short and the next moment you jam your shield against the face, making it curse at you.

Pushing on the handle, the door swings open and you slip inside and slam the door, dragging your shield in with you. You have made it safely into the sorcerer's study.

Turn to **760**



579

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **536**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

580

Leaving the stairway for the moment, you continue along the corridor and around the corner. On your left you pass another lord's quarters, this time with a trio of red skulls on a white field. You then come to another intersection.

Turn to **599**

581

The book is open on a page on which is written a description of the inhabitants of a spiritual plane. It goes on to describe some of which can be helpful, and those than should be avoided at all costs. About halfway down the page you notice something strange. The book is written in a script you have never seen before, yet as you look at the words, their meaning comes into your mind.

You continue reading the book, and find a description of the summoning spell. Opening a few cabinets, you locate the components you will need for the spell. You feel confident you can summon an otherworldly being to possibly aid you in your quest.

If you want to try and summon an otherworldly being, turn to **772**

If you think it's best not to and want to search the study instead **656**

582

Taking the corridor to the left, you stop halfway along to inspect the two offices there. On the right a sign with a banner and crossed sword is labelled as the *Office of Martial Affairs*. Across the hall is the *Office of Water Works*, represented by a bathtub.

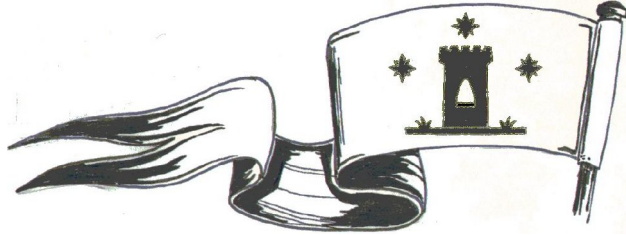
To enter the Office of Martial Affairs, turn to **537**

To enter the Office of Water Works, turn to **591**

583

Thanking the woman, you leave the ballroom, making for the other exit. Pushing open the doors you find yourself in another opulent hallway, which crosses the first. A circular domed room forms the intersection, beyond which you can see the opulent hallway continue and terminate in a grand staircase. There is another pair of doors opposite and you open one to peek inside. It is an unoccupied banquet hall brightly lit by more light-crystal chandeliers, so you close the doors once more. The hallway you are in leads to another set of double doors, but these are inlaid with gold and gems and are probably the most valuable doors you have ever seen.

Do you want to go to the stairway and up to the next level? Turn to **522**
 If you want to investigate the golden doors, turn to **532**



584

Giving the leaf a sniff, you smell something almost like some herbs you can't remember the names of. Giving it a nibble, the taste is what you imagine a raw leaf to taste like. You take a few mouthfuls, but nothing seems to happen.

What do you want to try now?

The potion? Turn to **644**
 The granules? Turn to **661**

585

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **469**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

586

Pulling out your weapon, you strike the viper from a safe distance. To your surprise your weapon clangs loudly against the reptile, as if it is made of metal. It spits venom at you, three drops landing on exposed flesh and burning into your blood stream (lose 3 STAMINA).

Deciding the creature is too dangerous, you begin the work of pushing the bodies off the slabs.

Turn to **570**

587

"I'm just me. Who are you?" you respond.

"I am the King's Champion," the tall man replies. "If you don't tell me why you are here, I will be killing you."

"I'm feeling a bit lonely, so I was looking for your mother," you say boldly.

The Champion smiles, some of the coldness leaving his eyes. "I like your courage. But let us see if you are wise as well. I am blessed to be able to hear a lie

when it is spoken to me. Tell me what you are doing here. If you lie, I will kill you where you stand. Speak the truth and I shall spare you.”

You can tell the truth by turning to **596**, or keep lying by turning to **567**
Alternatively, you can just attack him first by turning to **484**

588

“I am here to slay King Darm, who is an evil sorcerer seeking immortality,” you tell the demon. “Rather than devour me, help me to defeat him.”

The demon looks intrigued. “I can certainly help you. But what can you do for me?”

What can you do? “Er, what do you want?” you ask the demon.

“I am hungry!” The demon declares, grinning at you, his mouth widening unnaturally.

If you have a magical apple and you want to offer it to the demon, turn to **458**
Otherwise, you just spread your hands helplessly. Turn to **568**

589

As you search the floor of the throne room, you suddenly feel someone watching you and look up. Standing nearby is a warrior dressed in a crystal breastplate. Beneath he wears a dark blue robe decorated with golden thread that extends down to the ankles of his black leather boots. His helm is crystal as well, sporting a pair of long horns. The man is dark-skinned and tall, and holds a spear in his hand with a silver shaft and a long crystal head.

He smiles at you, but his eyes remain cold and hard. “Who are you?” he asks.

If you want to attack him, turn to **484**

Otherwise:

If you are wearing an officials robe, turn to **515**

If you are attired as a guardsman, turn to **557**

If you are wearing your own gear, turn to **587**

590

Slipping the glass ring onto your finger, you feel yourself becoming insubstantial and will yourself forward. Unexpectedly, you feel a resistance, as if you are trying to push through a web. Squinting you can make out a complex weave of magical threads covering the door and the surrounding walls. This must be the magic that is protecting the chambers.

You push with renewed effort against the barrier. You feel it give slightly, but then something happens. Rather than remain static, the magical weave responds, gathering its strength and repelling you. It also gathers energy and attacks you with a

crackling surge like lightning (halve your STAMINA). You fling yourself back, and pull off the ring.

The magical attack has left no physical signs of damage, but you are definitely sore and realise that in this case the ring will not help you. Nor is it any guard against magic. You make a note of the fact and reassess your options.

If you are wearing a gold ring, turn to **630**

If you have spoken to a demon and were given the spell to open the magical door, turn to **441**

Otherwise, you will have to continue on your way towards the nearest intersection (**599**) or continue towards the corner (**529**).

591

You try the door and find that it is locked. If you have a steel lion key, lockpicks or a glass ring, turn to **536**. Otherwise, turn to **566**

592

The Champion is too strong for you and slays you before you know it. Your spirit plunges into the dark place, and you float around for a while before you being to resurface into the world of light and life. Opening your eyes, you see the ceiling of the throne room above you.

Sitting up, you see no sign of the Champion. You also seem to have all of your equipment. Grateful you stand up and quickly leave, making for the stairway that will take you to the next level.

Turn to **522**

593

Setting your little paws on the edge of the dish, you pick up a few granules with your tongue and give them a munch. It feels like you are eating dirt, but you force down a few mouthfuls. You wait for something to happen, but by the time your patience has expired there is nothing to show.

What do you want to try now?

The leaf? Turn to **695**

The potion? Turn to **684**



594

You walk back and forth in the throne room, but your search yields nothing. Hoping you have not wasted too much time, you hurry out of the throne room and make directly for the stairway to the second floor.

Turn to **522**

595

The demon's tongue lashes out and wraps around your waist. Before you can even hack at it you are pulled into the gaping throat and fall down into darkness. You thrash about, but the darkness around you is like black oil that thickens as you descend. The demon's tongue releases you, but there is nothing except the darkness closing in about you. Soon you are encased in blackness and cannot even breathe. A deep fear fills you, but you can do nothing, and soon the darkness seeping into your mind is a relief as it takes all awareness from you.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **622**

Otherwise: test your SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK. Roll 8 die. If the total is the same or less than the sum of your current SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK scores, also turn to **622**

If the total is greater, turn to **563**

596

"I've come to rescue a priestess that King Darm is holding captive," you say.

The coldness in the man's eyes fades away, and he smiles with genuine warmth, and no small amount of amusement. "I'm afraid you will stand little chance on the uppermost floor of this accursed place. Although I am the King's Champion I wish you well in your quest. He has changed much even in the time that I have served him. He is no longer a great king, but an evil sorcerer. I would destroy him if I could. I suggest you forget about this priestess. She will not be the first or the last to suffer under Darm's hand."

"I must rescue her," you say with determination.

The Champion shrugs. "Very well. If you will stand against him, so will I, even though it may cost both of our lives. I shall be watching and waiting. When the moment is right I shall strike."

He tells you that his name is Jamar Zi and farewells you. Make a note of this name. After he has gone, you also leave the throne room and hasten towards the stairway that leads to the next level.

Turn to **522**

597

You walk along the corridor, tall windows to your left. You pass another entrance to a lord's quarters and idly note the black tree on a yellow field hanging above. Taking the corner you come to another entrance, but this time you pause. There is no banner here. The door has no handle, and is made of smooth polished wood.

If you want to try and enter the door, turn to **553**

If you want to continue on to the intersection that is just ahead, turn to **599**

598

You hand the woman the flute. "Please take it. It will serve you more than I."

The woman looks at you in surprise, but then smiles warmly and takes it from you with both hands, giving you a bow. "Thank you, sir. I will share its beauty with others."

You thank her for her music and turn to go. You have only taken a few steps when she speaks once more in a hushed voice. "Why are you here?"

Freezing, you slowly turn back to her. "What do you mean?"

"I can tell that you do not belong here. You are here for some purpose. Be it noble or nefarious I do not know. But I wish to help you if I may."

You are unsure how to respond, and seeing your uncertainty, the woman puts down the harp and flute and approaches you. She reaches for the clasp on her gown and lets the black silk slide off her shapely body to the floor around her feet. Attempting to be a gentleman you avert your gaze, but what you see from the corner of your eye makes you look back in shock.

She is perfectly human, and lusciously so; but extending from her back are a pair of reddish bat's wings, which she spreads out two metres to each side, a long red scaled tail like a serpent also whipping about her hips.

You recoil slightly. "What are you?"

"I am a Barashai Demon. My name is Alyn Kyra. I am one of 100 demons who swore to serve heaven. Once we served hell, but were betrayed by our demonic general, who abandoned us to be devoured by the Dragons of Heaven. We swore to serve heaven if we would be spared. And so it is. Little did we know that such service would be our redemption." She holds out one of her arms, gazing at it in wonder. "We did not always look like this. Yet the deeper our service to heaven, the more human we become, and the more of our power we lose. Yet while I am trapped here, I shall be of little service to heaven I am sure. This place has become a stronghold of evil."

She reaches down and picks up her gown. Hoping to distract her from dressing, you say: "Why are you here? Are you trapped here?"

"I am," she replies. "Darm has been casting powerful spells of darkness, the kind I have not felt since I was in hell." She shivers. "I was drawn to it. Partially the lust for power, partially to serve the Light and destroy him. But he was too powerful for

me. But he found me a curiosity, so he keeps me here like a pet. Often he calls for me to entertain him.” Her gaze darkens. “He does not appreciate my music at all.”

She folds her wings and dons the gown, concealing her body once more. “So, although I am a demon, I will aid you if you serve good.”

It is a nice story, but it can be doubted. What is beyond doubt is that she has bat’s wings and a snake’s tail!

If you have an orb amulet and want to use it to test her, turn to **438**

If you were wearing a jade ring while she told her story, turn to **489**

Otherwise, if you decide to trust her and tell her what you are up to, turn to **542**

If you don’t trust her, you can leave by turning to **583**



599

You are standing under another golden dome that houses a T-intersection. The corridor that continues through the chamber is lined with tall external windows, while the offshoot leads to the central dome of the second floor.

If you want to go towards the central dome, turn to **560**

When you stand with your back to the windows, facing the central dome, you can take the right-hand corridor by turning to **548**, or to the left by turning to **517**

600

Making your way back to the hollow, you descend down to the temple, watchful for minions of the demon, but you encounter no sentries and are soon back in the hall where you started.

If you want to search the bodies for something useful, turn to **686**

If you want to begin pushing the bodies off the slabs, turn to **570**

601

The fireball sails over your head and you slide across the floor to thump against the base of the door. The demonic face curses and grumbles at you. Reaching up, you push on the handle and the door swings open. You keep low and close to the door as you roll inside, shutting the door behind you.

You have made it into the sorcerer’s study.

Turn to **760**

602

Drawing your weapon, you lunge at the demon. It responds by opening its mouth, and you find yourself charging towards a tooth-lined pit. You recoil, and the demon moves forward, his mouth continuing to open until it gapes to human-swallowing size. Its tongue snakes out, searching for you to grasp and pull you in. The demon cannot see you when its mouth is open so wide.

If you want to dive aside and escape, turn to **660**

If you want to fight the demon, turn to **568**

603

The crystal ball smashes on the floor, releasing a plume of purple mist. It shapes itself into the form of a woman with withered purple skin and long white hair. She grins, showing pointed teeth and claps her hands.

Suddenly you feel your strength being drained from you. You pull out your weapon, but the woman skips away and you are too weak to pursue her. You soon collapse to the floor. You have been drained of your vitality. Reduce your STAMINA to 1, your LUCK to zero and minus 2 from your *initial* SKILL.

The woman laughs. You look up at her and see that she is no longer withered, but appears young, with smooth lavender skin and shining black hair. She closes her eyes, then flings out her arms, casting flames about her that sets the books and furniture on fire. She then turns to you. "Your master will rue the day he captured me!"

She then disappears. You begin to crawl from the room. You open the door and crawl along the corridor. The demonic face in the door remains still, and you make it to the entrance hall, where you collapse and rest for a while.

Eventually you stand and consider your options.

To take the nest arch, turn to **625**

To take the tree arch, turn to **539**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

604

Starting with the freshly devoured, you begin to roll them off their slabs and onto the floor. There are close to a thousand slabs in the hall, but you diligently apply yourself. You have only gotten through a hundred or so when you hear footsteps and turn to confront a figure that runs into the room.

It is a small goblin-like demon, with dark purple skin and six luminous lavender-coloured eyes. It gapes, then growls at you before running off back the way it came.

If you want to continue pushing the bodies off the slabs, turn to **570**

If you think it's best to leave, turn to **677**

605

You sit down in the chair and feel a tingling sensation. Seeing movement, you turn your head and stare in shock at the red-haired woman who smiles at you, picking up your plate. She resembles the statue that was standing in the corner on that side, but is alive and beautiful, her musky scent filling your nostrils. Experimentally you reach out and squeeze one of her hips. She feels so real that you snatch your hand away, fearing she will be offended. She looks at you and just smiles.

She serves your plate from the pot in the centre, but it is no thick, cold gruel she ladles onto your plate, but a roasted quail with herbed and honeyed vegetables. Another serving woman appears on your other side, pouring a fragrant wine into your cup. She smiles at you as well.

Picking up your cutlery, you begin to eat. It tastes fantastic! It is just like the meal you ate at a fancy inn a few years ago, your employer thanking you for catching the reigns of a frightened horse and preventing him from being thrown off the back of it. The fat, soft man was sure he would have broken his neck and wanted to thank you. The meal made quite an impression on you and your normal fare tasted plain for a week afterwards.

You eat and drink your fill, one of the serving women even singing softly as you dine. The experience leaves you feeling stronger and relaxed, restore your STAMINA and LUCK to their initial values.

Knowing you must leave, you stand up. As soon as you do so, you see the air shimmer slightly before your eyes, and the air feels slightly cooler. The four serving women, now looking solid and painted, walk stiffly back to their places.

Glancing down at the plate you see it is covered with the remains of the cold, grey gruel. Even if it wasn't real, the experience has left you happy, and the gruel was truly nourishing.

Pleased, you leave the dining hall and make your way back through the sitting room to the entrance hall to consider the other two arches.

To take the nest arch, turn to **625**

To take the rune arch, turn to **681**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

606

You prepare yourself to face the demons. Moving through the rows of slabs, they begin to circle around to approach you from both sides. You curse and quickly look for a plan. You could run to the corner and put it at your back to force them to come at you from the same side. Alternatively, you could run and attack one of the demons while they are separated.

If you want to retreat to a corner, turn to **624**

If you want to charge at one of the demons, turn to **694**

607

Going to the door you try the handle and find it unlocked. Peeking inside, you see a large kitchen. It is empty of servants. Moving inside, you walk quickly past the benches and tables, glancing briefly at the largest stove that you have ever seen. You

make for some doors at the back, which you expect to be a pantry. You open the doors and find that it is so. The pantry is poorly stocked, though, and you suspect that no one has worked the kitchens for a long time.

Even so, you find on a shelf some preserved fruit. If you want to eat this, it will restore 2 points of STAMINA. You find nothing else of interest. It is just a kitchen after all.

If you want to make a thorough search, turn to **746**

If you want to leave the kitchen and go to the door opposite, turn to **674**

If you want to go onwards further up the corridor, turn to **730**

608

You walk casually across the open space and into the hut without hearing any outcry. You remain in the relative cover of one corner and look at the chest from a distance. It is a simple wooden chest with a latch but no lock. Glancing at the working men you note that the chest is in full view of them through one of the doorways. You will have to open the chest and take out whatever is inside quickly...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **635**

If you are unlucky, turn to **675**

609

Proceeding to the end of the hall, you are faced with three sets of double doors. One directly in front, one to the right, and one to the left.

To take the central doors, turn to **727**

To take the doors on the right, turn to **888**

To take the doors to the left, turn to **770**

610

Giving the leaf a sniff, you smell something almost like some herbs you can't remember the names of. Giving it a nibble the taste is what you imagine a raw leaf to taste like. You take a few mouthfuls and wait for something to happen.

You feel the rat body begin to tremble and suddenly spots of light swirl before your beady eyes. But your vision slowly clears, and you feel much stronger. Everything even seems smaller, as if the rat has swelled in size. Looking at the key hanging on the wall with renewed hope, you jump down to the floor and run at the wall, leaping up to the key. You manage to knock the key off its hook and it falls with a ringing sound to the floor.

You feel yourself weakening and soon you are small enough to squeeze under the door once more, taking the keys with you. You then hurry back to the strong door.

Withdrawing your mind from the rat you stand and peer eagerly through the barred window. But it is too dark for you and you can see nothing. In any case the rat is trapped there unless you have something you can lower through the bars.

If you have a rope, turn to **461**

If not, you have no choice but to leave the rat behind and leave the quarters. Turn to **464**

611

You throw yourself over one of the slabs, and hear the demon crash into the stone as you roll off and onto your feet. As the demon staggers you leap forward and open its throat with your weapon. It expires with a gasp and collapses out of sight as the second demon comes at you. You place a slab between you and it and give it no chance to charge. Carefully you step around the slab and fight the demon.

The demon fights with a hook so that it can pull opponents onto its spiked armour. If the demon wins an attack round, it manages to hook you and pulls you onto its armour, poisoning you.

*DEMON GUARD SKILL 8 STAMINA 24 DB 0 ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **629**

As soon as the demon wins an attack round, turn to **671**

612

You hold the book and begin to incant the incantation. As you repeat the words, you feel your body vibrating with increasing strength, then the whole room seems to be shaking as the air above the pentagram fills with light. Eventually a figure appears amidst the light and all becomes still once more. Standing in the middle of the pentagram is a warrior clad in golden armour that is covered in glowing blue eyes made of sapphire and lapis lazuli. A cloak of white peacock feathers hangs from his shoulders and he carries a black rod. His helm is set with sapphire wings and bright blue eyes peer out at you from a dark-skinned face with long white moustaches.

“Why have you summoned me, mortal?” he asks in a deep, smooth voice.

You straighten yourself up to match his posture and speak, your own voice sounding high and jagged. “This is the palace of a king who has turned to sorcery, seeking to extend his life by unnatural means. He also keeps captive a priestess of the White Goddess. I want to rescue her and vanquish the evil King!”

“Well spoken, warrior!” the Heavenly Guard says with a nod of approval. “I can see your courage. There is little I can do to aid you, but this I do.” He waves his rod, and you feel a tingle. Your *initial* SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK are all increased by 2; and the *current* values elevated to these new *initial* levels.

Before you can thank the warrior, he disappears. The offering is gone and the silver dust of the pentagram is now black. Happy with your magical experiment, you turn your attention to a search of the room.

Turn to **656**

613

You slay the demon and it collapses back, its maw shrinking as it slumps to the floor. Its body transforms into mist that turns black, vanishing into the darkness. You feel triumphant after having beaten such a difficult opponent. You may restore your luck to its initial level.

You can now leave the treasury and the vacant quarters and return to the corridor by turning to **464**

If you haven't already and want to drink the purple potion from the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you haven't already and want to drink the blood-red potion from the wolf-box, turn to **638**

614

Readying your weapon, you step into the pentacle to do battle with the unicorn. As soon as you step over the silver dust, you find yourself in another world. Rolling plains of pale green grass surround you, blue mountains in the distance. The sky above is a pale pink colour, and the clouds are light purple. The three suns are soft and muted, and there are flowers and butterflies everywhere.

But you care not for the scenery and charge at the unicorn. The unicorn's horn is magical and will penetrate your armour like paper. For this battle, any armour you are wearing is useless. For each attack round that you lose, your armour permanently suffers one point of damage due to the hole that is put in it. Once your armour is reduced to zero it is so holey that it is useless for other encounters as well. This applies to any armour. You cannot escape from this battle as you are trapped in this plane until the unicorn is dead.

UNICORN SKILL 9 STAMINA 30 DB 10 ARMOUR 0

If you win, turn to **724**

If you lose, turn to **767**

615

Going to the table you sit down and begin to eat the stew and tear off mouthfuls of bread. Travelling with Kianmay, you haven't eaten meat for weeks and the stink of it puts you off slightly, but you fill your belly and feel stronger afterwards. You thank the woman and stand to leave.

She smiles and stands up with you. Her behaviour seems very different, and you eye her cautiously. She follows you as you leave the tower and cross the courtyard to the citadel wall. You go out through the gate and into the forecourt. Staring out across the lake, you see that something is wrong. The bridge has gone, and you cannot see the other shore. You look in all directions. It is as if the citadel rises from an ocean of lava.

The woman comes up besides you and smiles. "You see? There is nothing else for us. Come back inside now."

She tries to take your hand, but you pull away. “What did you do?” you demand. She shrugs. “I just gave you food. Now you are trapped here too. But we can keep each other company.”

You are furious, but there is nothing you can do. You have eaten food in hell, and thus bound yourself to this plane. You will remain here until your soul has repaid its debts.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

616

Since it worked on the door, you press the gold ring against the box. A crack appears around the edge of the box so that it has a lid. You are able to lift the lid and inside you find a sheaf of papers. You open them up and begin to read them. They turn out to be a correspondence between the Royal Sorcerer, whose quarters you are in, and another magic-user. They are discussing the King, no doubt why the sorcerer chose to hide the letters. Even though you only have once side of the discussion, you learn that the King’s descent into evil has caused a great deal of concern and resentment. The King has become more powerful than his own sorcerer, who once taught him the basics of magic. The result has been that the sorcerer has been given increasingly menial tasks to do, and is envious of the power that the king has gained. The sorcerer has always been cautious in his study, as all wise men are in matters of magic. But King Darm has studied and experimented with magic with a desperation and recklessness that has brought him great power, but possibly made him something less than human.

The sorcerer also mentions that the King has created a special chamber in which is something called a ‘Circle of Realms’, which can be used to gain greater power. It is a secret chamber, but the sorcerer reveals that he has discovered the entrance. It is hidden behind a painting in Darm’s study. To open the secret door, you just need to press on the serpent QUEEN in the painting.

You also read that Darm has a wife who is also a powerful magic-user. But she now fears and hates her husband. You make note of the information, and replace the letters in the box.

Your search the rest of the room, but find nothing of interest. Leaving the bedchamber, you make your way back to the entrance hall and consider your options

To take the tree arch, turn to **539**

To take the rune arch, turn to **681**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

617

You make a grab for the vipers tail and seize it. Quickly jerking the snake so it can’t bite you, you make to throw it when suddenly it changes in your hand. You are now holding a longsword, its golden hilt decorated with serpents and rubies.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Red Serpent Sword	Longsword	6

The sword has a magical venom within it, which will kill any opponent after 3 rounds once you score a hit. You may take the sword if you wish. You then begin the task of pushing the bodies off the slabs.

Turn to **570**

618

You look over the titles, finding nothing of great interest. There are so many books here that you can't afford to look at anything that isn't going to help you in the here and now.

If you are wearing a magical silver gauntlet and want to try and find out what it is here, turn to **892**

If you have been joined to a serpent woman and want to know what this means, turn to **854**

Otherwise you will have to look at something else:

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, go back through the study and into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

619

Making your way north, you trudge across the plain of grey dust and black ash until you come to the edge of the magma lake. The heat is oppressive and you cannot get too close. You see a narrow bridge crossing over the lava to the citadel, but it is not particularly high, and it wavers before your eyes the hot air flows around it.

You try to approach, but find the heat is too intense.

Do you have a cold crystal with you? If so, turn to **657**

Otherwise you will have to make your way elsewhere:

To go to the village, turn to **641**.

To go to the Ruined city, turn to **682**

To go all the way to the dark forest, turn to **668**

620

You jerk yourself upwards as the arrows smash into the wall around you, some too close for comfort. You reach the window and pull yourself through, dumping yourself on the floor beyond, heedless of the dangers within.

You quickly climb to your feet, ready to meet whatever is within, but nothing is immediately rushing at you. You relax and look around.

Turn to **933**

621

Putting your weapon away, you step up into the creature's mouth. With a gulp you are suddenly swallowed. You fall down into darkness, but then you see a vast ocean of light below you and you plunge straight into it. You find yourself rolling across the ground and once you stop, you sit up and look around.

As far as you can tell you are back in your world, but you do not recognise the land around you. In time you will learn that you have been dumped on a distant island hundreds of years into the future. King Darm and Kianmay are long dead and so:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

622

Death feels odd. As you shift about in the darkness, you become aware of a light above you, as if you are in the murky depths of a lake. You no longer seem to have a body, but you are able to will yourself upwards and you see the light getting closer and closer. Soon you break the surface...

...you open your eyes and find yourself lying on something hard beneath a cracked stone ceiling high above. Lifting your heavy head, you find yourself in a massive hall, full of rows of stone slabs, on which are stretched out the forms of all kinds of people, mostly warriors or sorcerers. But here and there is the body of a serving woman or a child.

You feel very weak, as if the stone slab is sucking your energy from you. Despite your awareness, you can feel yourself slipping back into darkness, so you gather your energies and throw yourself off the slab, crashing to the floor. You fall loudly and painfully, but have at least freed yourself from the magical force draining your energy. You briefly fall asleep again, and when you awake, you are much stronger.

Standing up, you check your equipment and find you have everything you had in life. You are skill weakened (Halve the *current* levels of your SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK), and wearily trudge towards the arched exit you see across the massive hall.

Do you want to examine the bodies on the slabs, or search them for useful items? If so, turn to **556**

If you want to escape while you can and try and find a way to replenish your strength, turn to **677**

623

“Hmm, predictable,” the demon muses. “Many ask for such prowess, yet are you wise enough to wield such power? Perhaps I shall test you. Tell me this: What can you break, merely by speaking its name?”

To answer this question, use the alphanumeric code below to assign a number to each letter of the single word answer. Add up these numbers and multiply the result by 11 to obtain the passage number.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

If you don't know the answer or the passage you turn to makes no sense, turn to **765**

If you didn't use the golden apple for the summoning and would like to offer it to the demon now in exchange for increased prowess, turn to **713**

624

You back yourself into a corner, and prepare to fight the demons. They approach, grinning broadly. They draw near and cut off all retreat. You realise that you have made a mistake. Dropping their hooks, the two demons charge forward and throw themselves at you, the poisoned spikes on their armour sticking into you. You strike at them as they barrel in, but you are crushed against the wall, spikes impaling your face and hands.

The poison is potent.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest or are wearing a golden armband, turn to **688**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

625

Peeking through the curtain, you see a tiled room with doors in each of the other three walls. Tables sit in the corners with vases of flowers and statues, and silk paintings hang on the walls, but there appears to be no function to the room. You slip inside and go first to the door to your left. It is a water closet, and you close the door without interest. The door straight ahead reveals a bathing chamber. In the corners stand statues of naked women, carved of some solid material and painted in life like colours. But they look sterile and lifeless to your eye, and a little crude. The bathtub is silver and marked with magical runes. There is nothing of interest here, so you depart.

The remaining door leads to a bedchamber. An enormous four posted bed with a vermilion and gold canopy sits on a dais in the centre of the room, covered with a vermilion and gold silken cover. Once more there are crude human figures of women in the corners, but here clad in silken, lacy robes. There are also cabinets and chests in the room and you make a search, finding clothes and shoes and other personal

effects. In the bottom of one chest you find a small box. It appears to be a solid block of wood inlaid with ivory, but when you shake it you can feel and hear things moving about inside.

If you are wearing a golden ring, turn to **616**

If you are not, turn to **685**

626

Setting your little paws on the edge of the dish, you pick up a few granules with your tongue and give them a munch. It feels like you are eating dirt, but you force down a few mouthfuls.

The next moment you feel something churning in the belly of the rat and it starts to expand. The body of the rat swells to a painful limit, then you experience the odd sensation of exploding.

You are dumped back into your own body with a shock. Shaking your head, you rest for a moment, then stand up. You now have no choice but to leave.

Turn to **464**

627

Realising you are vulnerable, you decide to use the gauntlet. Remembering the extent of the destruction unleashed the last time you used it, you shout for Kianmay to get out of the way as you concentrate on reaching for the power within the earth.

Kianmay does as you ask, while Darm starts to wave his hands and chant words of power.

Test your SKILL.

If you are skilful, turn to **546**

If you are unskilful, turn to **883**

628

You crash into tree after tree, but the attack on you seems only to intensify. Finally you can run no more and fall to the ground. You thrash feeble as the darkness grows so thick it is solid, pinning you to the ground. Soon you cannot even move as a million avenging spirits feed on you.

The torment continues for so long you lose all sense of time. But finally you awake and the darkness is gone. You lift your arm and see that your hand is whole and unharmed. Sitting up you look around and see that the forest is gone. Shuddering at the memory of the torment you stand, feeling oddly freer. You have atoned for some evil and your heart is lighter. You may increase your *initial* LUCK by 3 and bring your *current* LUCK to this new level.

But your ordeal has not left you unscathed. Reduce your *initial* SKILL and STAMINA by 2 points. You may restore your *current* statistics to these new levels.

Standing up, you see that the ruined city is still there, as is the village and the citadel. Where do you want to go now?

The Ruined city? Turn to **682**

The citadel? Turn to **619**

The village? Turn to **641**

629

The second demon falls dead to the floor. The spiked armour is too big for you to wear, and you regard their hooks dubiously. But you find in the belt pouch of one a bottle of poison(3).

You resume pushing the bodies off the slabs and once it is done, proceed through the archway. You pass by some minor rooms and passages before coming to a set of golden doors which you thrust open and march through into the inner sanctum of the temple.

Turn to **526**

630

You give the door an experimental shove. It does not budge, but as the golden ring comes in contact with the door, you feel it vibrate, and you hear a series of clicks coming from the opposite side of the door. To your delight, the door swings silently inwards, revealing a small entrance hall.

Turn to **650**

631

You feel the magical power surge up from deep in the earth and flow into your body. But rather than shoot down your arm, you feel it start to spiral inside you, growing larger and brighter as it draws up more energy from below. You feel the power grow to a peak, and with a shout you fling your arm towards Darm, releasing the energy with a burst of light. It roars through the air in a bright lance. Darm waves his hands in some kind of defensive magic, but the sneer on his face only lasts for a moment, as the hot shining lance pierces through his defences and strikes him.

The King is blasted back, striking his throne and falling to the ground with his robes partially on fire. Before you can charge forward, his head snaps up and he looks at you with a baleful glare. He staggers to his feet, obviously in great pain, and begins to cast a spell back at you.

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

If not, turn to **971**

**632**

You approach the golden doors and finding them unlocked, shove them open. You burst into the inner sanctum and see a horribly fat horned demon resting in a large golden bathtub that is a hundred feet across. Its folds and expanse of fat are enough to almost fill the tub to the edge, while atop the mountain of blubber is a head no larger than your own, although it sports two long horns.

Small purple-skinned demons with six lavender-coloured eyes ladle hot steaming water over the fleshy bulk. The fat demon grins at you, its tooth-filled smile stretching its face to unearthly proportions. It raises one thin, spidery arm and from his fingertips arcs a lightning bolt. It smashes into you and casts you back against the wall with great force.

You fall dazed to the floor. While you are stunned, the demons carry you back to your slab. This time you do not recover.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

633

Taking your rope from your pack, you feed one end through the narrow bars, until you feel it coiling on the floor on the other side of the door. Sitting down, you hold the other end in your hand and once more enter the mind of the rat. With its eyes you spy the rope and begin to climb. You clamber up the rope and through the bars and have the odd experience of looking at yourself in tones of grey. You withdraw from the rat's mind and collect it, placing it back in its jar.

Whatever treasure could have aided you will have to forget and you turn away from the strong door and return to the hallway.

Turn to **464**

634

Taking out the glass ring, you slip it onto your finger and confidently step forward. As you start to pass through the door, you feel something pressing back against you. As you push harder you feel like you are pushing against a net. The magical cords against you start to hum and you feel a dangerous energy start to build. Desperately you try to pull back, but the cords seem stuck to you, as if you have plunged into a spider's web.

All too soon you are free as a blast of hot energy surges along the cords and into your body. You are thrown across the hall and slam into the opposite door, before flopping to the ground. You lie there convulsing, your entire body filled with aching pain, darkness threatening to engulf your mind.

You have lost 12 points of STAMINA.

If you are still alive, turn to **693**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

635

You reach out and lift the lid of the box. You reach inside and grab what is within and pull it out, before closing the lid and stepping back into the corner. You peek through the gaps at the working men. They continue their work, and so you pause to examine the object carefully.

It is a tablet made of jade, on which there are lists of names and numbers. Now it is time to leave. It will be just as risky leaving as it was arriving...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **652**

If you are unlucky, turn to **689**

636

You manage to dive between the threads as they swish through the air around you. You roll to your feet, weapons ready. The queen waves her hands and dismisses the threads. Her eyes sparkle. She is enjoying this game immensely. She waves her hands once more and shouts powerful words as you charge towards her.

Suddenly the floor beneath you becomes like liquid. You plunge into it, noticing that the furniture continues to stand on the floor as if it is solid. You thrash about as the thick liquid sucks you further inside. You grasp a chair leg and desperately try to pull yourself up out of the once-floor...

Test your STAMINA. If you are strong, turn to **788**

If you are weak, turn to **811**

637

Recovering from the poison, you decide it is too dangerous to face the demons out in the open so you make a desperate dash for the archway.

Turn to **670**

638

Opening the bottle, you give the blood-red liquid a sniff. It smells like blood. Looking at the wolf on the lid of the box you wonder if this is wolf's blood.

If you really want to drink this, turn to **655**

If you haven't already and want to drink the purple potion in the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you haven't already and want to smash open the vase, turn to **511**

639

Raising your weapon, you hold it at the throat of the demon. "Do you think I am a fool? The crow told me about you! Swear that you will send me back to the same time and place as when you ate me!"

The demon starts to cry. "I'm sorry, master, I'm sorry! I promise I will send you back to the same time and the same place where I swallowed you. I promise! I swear it by the Crow spirit!"

The demon opens his mouth once more and this time you enter with confidence. With a gulp you are suddenly swallowed. You fall down into darkness, but then you see a vast ocean of light below you and you plunge straight into it. You find yourself rolling across the floor and once you stop, you sit up and look around.

You are on the floor of the treasury where you first encountered the demon. Standing, you breathe a sigh of relief and consider your options.

You can now leave the treasury and the vacant quarters and return to the corridor by turning to **464**

If you haven't already and want to drink the purple potion from the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you haven't already and want to drink the blood-red potion from the wolf-box, turn to **638**

640

You move the picks in the lock and are soon rewarded by the satisfying click of the turning tumblers. The door swings open and you stand, putting the lockpicks away. You may restore 2 LUCK points.

Pleased with yourself, you enter the room and close the door, locking it behind you.

Looking around the room you are awed by what you see. It is an armoury. It is filled with weapons and armour of all kinds. Racks of weapons stand against the walls while in the floor space in the centre are wooden stands holding erect suits of armour. Hanging on the walls are weapons of great value and beauty.

You rub your hands together with glee. You can replace your weapons and armour here, or take extra. The armoury has everything that you would find at a weaponmasters shop in a market. Once you have equipped yourself with more mundane items, it is time to look for something of greater value.

The weapons on the walls prove to be more decorative than practical. The utilitarian weapons you have already inspected are more appropriate for your

purposes. Yet you do not give up. There must be something of value here. This is Darm's personal armoury after all.

The armoury is laid out in a practical way, and yet there is a door-sized blank space on the far wall. Initially your gaze passed over it unseeing. Perhaps a rack was removed. But now determined that there must be something more here, you examine the blank wall with greater interest.

On closer examination you see that it is not blank after all. In the centre is a small hole. Since it is at head-height, you put your eye to it and see a small cavity beyond, in which is a small jade mask with tiny emeralds set in silver for eyes. The cavity is lit by a tiny sliver of a light crystal in the ceiling of the cavity.

What do you want to do?

Poke something into the hole? Turn to **775**

Try talking to the mask? Turn to **714**

If you rather not try your luck with the hole at all, you can leave and proceed further up the hall by turning to **730**, or if you haven't already try the door opposite the armoury by turning to **607**

641

Leaving the hollow, you make your way down a gentle slope covered in grey dust and black ash. As you near the crude village, you see fragments of bones scattered about. There are also knots of scrub and bushes that once lived, but are not dead and dry. The huts of the village are made out of branches broken from the plants and woven together.

The village sits beside a river of lava, at a point where the river widens into a small lake of sorts. You can see the men of the village building some thing in the middle of the river. Great blocks of black stone, obtained from somewhere rest in place in the molten stone. By means you cannot fathom the stones do not melt. They have built quite a foundation. A wooden bridge leads from the shore to the foundation, and villagers are carrying bricks of black stone to lay in place on the foundation, the beginnings of some structure.

As you near you see where the stone bricks come from. In the middle of the village sits a huge block of black granite. Villagers with hammer and chisel carve out building blocks. Apart from the ringing of metal on stone, the villages are silent and grim.

Do you want to go down and talk to the villages? If so, turn to **647**

If you want to hide and watch a little longer, turn to **697**

642

You kneel down on the floor. "Oh, great one. Please aid me in my quest, I pray!"

The demon laughs, but then casts a ball of rainbow coloured light at you. The light flows into your body and you feel it tingling throughout your being. You may increase your *initial* STAMINA by 5 points.

The demon vanishes, leaving behind a pentagram of black dust. You happily get back up to your feet and begin to search the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

643

Raising your weapon, you hold it at the throat of the demon. “Do you think I am a fool?”

The demon starts to cry. “I’m sorry, master, I’m sorry! I promise I will send you back to the same time and the same place where I swallowed you. I promise! I swear it!”

The demon opens his mouth once more and this time you enter with confidence. With a gulp you are suddenly swallowed. You fall down into darkness, but then you see a vast ocean of light below, and you plunge into it. The next moment you find yourself rolling across the floor and once you stop, you sit up and look around.

You are on the floor of the treasury where you first encountered the demon. Standing, you breathe a sigh of relief and consider your options.

You can now leave the treasury and the vacant quarters, and return to the corridor by turning to **464**

If you haven’t already and want to drink the purple potion from the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you haven’t already and want to drink the blood-red potion from the wolf-box, turn to **638**

644

Seizing the bottle in your paws, you push against it until it falls over. It rolls along the bench and clinks to a stop against the mortar and pestle. Sinking your teeth into the cork, you manage to pull it out, and the potion starts to pour out, forming a growing puddle that runs off the bench. Lapping at the potion you consume a fair amount. It tastes metallic and unpleasant.

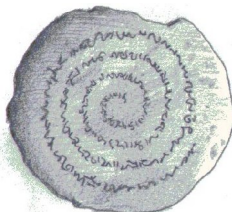
You feel the rat body begin to tremble and suddenly spots of light swirl before your beady eyes. But your vision slowly clears, and you feel much stronger. Everything even seems smaller, as if the rat has swelled in size. Looking at the key hanging on the wall with renewed hope, you jump down to the floor and run at the wall, leaping up to the key. You manage to knock the key off its hook and it falls with a ringing sound to the floor.

You feel yourself weakening and soon you are small enough to squeeze under the door once more, taking the keys with you. You then hurry back to the strong door.

Withdrawing your mind from the rat you stand and peer eagerly through the barred window. But it is too dark for you and you can see nothing. In any case the rat is trapped there unless you have something you can lower through the bars.

If you have a rope, turn to **461**

If not, you have no choice but to leave the rat behind and leave the quarters. Turn to **464**



645

If you have a diamond wand, turn to **701**. Otherwise, nothing else works and you will have to take a different course.

If you have a shield, you can use it to approach the face and blast its flames back in its...er, face. Turn to **578**

Alternatively you can run in and make a dive to slide to the bottom of the door beneath its angle of attack. Once you are there you can reassess your options. Turn to **732**

If none of these appeal to you, you can take one of the other entrances:

To take the tree arch, turn to **539**

To take the nest arch, turn to **625**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

646

Running into a side passage, you find a doorway into a room filled with supplies and prepare yourself to fight. The doorway is so small that the demons with their spiked armour cannot easily get through the door, and you do not give them the chance. Fight them one at a time.

*DEMON GUARD SKILL 8 STAMINA 24 DB 0 ARMOUR 6

*DEMON GUARD SKILL 7 STAMINA 22 DB 0 ARMOUR 6

If you win, turn to **680**

If you are killed, the demons will carry you back to your slab and this time you will not recover.

647

Putting a friendly smile at you face, you walk boldly into the village.

“Hello!” you greet. All the villages look up at you and a strangled cry arises from the throat of each, a moment later they are all rushing at you, hatred contorting their faces. Turning around, you run away. Glancing over your shoulder you see the whole village has abandoned its work and it chasing after you, each pushing the rest aside to get at you.

Hoping to lose them in the forest, you make for the large stand of dead trees. Some tower hundreds of feet above you, their trunks as thick as a house is big. Scattered between are lesser trees of all sizes, down to small saplings that stand no higher than your knee. And all of them are dead. Cracked and whitened, they look like bone, the ground carpeted in brown leaves.

Running deep into the gloom, you feel an oppressive darkness, the air feels thick and acrid in your lungs, even though you cannot smell anything at all. You dash deeper within the forest, the white trunks stark against the thick, dark air. Glancing back you can still see signs of pursuit, so you keep running until you seem to have lost

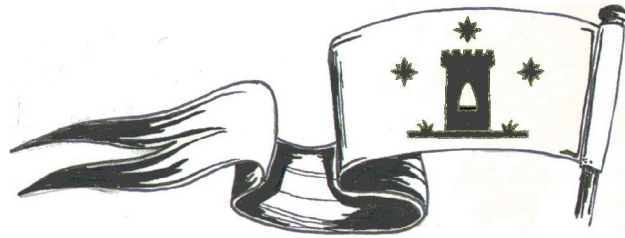
the vengeful villagers. Stopping to rest you see a knot of darkness where the air is gathered even more thickly into the vague form of something.

Before you can decide if it is safe to approach it, the dark form seems to see you, and you hear a low moan. It rushes at you and you feel your skin burn as the gathered darkness blinds you to your surrounds. Staggering back you wave your hands to dispel the darkness, but your defences are ineffectual. You hear another moan, and the burning sensation of hatred eating at your flesh intensifies. You have had enough and begin to run blindly through the forest once more. You smash into trees, and are shaken and disorientated. But all you can do is keep running...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **491**

If you are unlucky, turn to **573**



648

You set the gems in place one by one. As soon as the last gem settles in the depression, you feel the air begin to rush around you. The sapphires in the eyes of the black marble serpent begin to glow, but the others remain dark. You quickly move off the circle as the black serpent begins to move. You watch with great nervousness as the black serpent rises from the floor, thrashing about chaotically. The room begins to tremble. The serpent opens its mouth and hisses at you. The next moment it launches a bolt of lightning at you.

You attempt to dodge, but are cast back against the wall (Halve your current STAMINA score). Numbed by the energy coursing through your body you barely feel the impact as you slam against the floor. When you can feel again, it is quiet and still.

Carefully you stand up and step back over to the circle. The gems have all disintegrated. As you survey the damage caused by your ignorance, the trapdoor suddenly opens. You snatch up your weapon.

The creature that enters hardly seems worth the alarm, but you do not relax your guard. Approaching you is a small creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. He makes his way to the opposite side of the magical circle where he stops, smiling at you.

Hooking his thumbs in the belt of his kilt, the demon speaks. "Meddling in magic is a foolish and dangerous practice! His Majesty will be quite irate to hear what you have done to his Circle of Realms. But he is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you slowly follow. Going over to the trapdoor, you descend a narrow stairway and exit into a large study. The little demon is disappearing out the doors into the main corridor, and you follow reluctantly.

When you reach the corridor, you see that the creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

649

As you walk along, you suddenly feel the ground rumble. You stagger and fall over as the ground next to you erupts, a dark form pushing up from the ruined earth and looming over you. You scramble backwards, bringing your axe to bear.

The monster bends down towards you, a serpent's body as thick as your torso, with the upper part of a man, though with scaly skin of deep red with spots of white, long fangs and forked tongue appearing between drawn lips. The narrow back eyes seem to peer at the axe more than you, but soon enough you are the focus of its malevolent attention.

"My axe!" it hisses.

Slithering out of its hole, it bears down on you, swinging a spiked mace in its hands. It is a powerful opponent, able to knock you down with a charge as it uncoils its serpentine body behind it. It does this in the first attack round and every third round after that. When this happens, you are knocked off balance, and can only defend yourself, so if your ATTACK STRENGTH is higher, you have only managed to block the mace and cannot inflict any damage.

SERPENT DEMON SKILL 8 STAMINA 24 DB 10 ARMOUR 2

If you win, turn to **475**

If you are killed, turn to **663**

650

The entrance hall is a small chamber with gold leaf on the walls and ceiling, set with tiny gems in patterns. An elaborate silver fitting hangs from the ceiling with numerous light crystals providing light. Three archways lead from the entrance hall, each sealed with a rich purple curtain embroidered with gold thread. The curtain to the left is decorated with the image of a fruit tree. To the right the gold thread depicts a nest with two long-tailed birds tending to it. Straight ahead the curtain is decorated with a circular geometric pattern filled with magical runes.

Where do you want to go?

The fruit tree arch? Turn to **539**

The nest arch? Turn to **625**

The rune arch? Turn to **681**

651

“I want to kill him and bring his evil to a stop once and for all!” you proclaim.

“Well, that’s easy enough,” the crow says. “Just hit him with something until he stops moving.”

Before you can react, the crow vanishes, the circle now formed of black dust. You curse the creature and throw the magic book against the wall. With nothing else to do, you begin to search the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

652

You leave the village without being detected and hurry away. Once you feel you are a safe distance away, you contemplate your next move.

Where do you want to go now?

The citadel, turn to **619**

The forest, turn to **668**

The ruined city, turn to **682**

**653**

Brandishing your weapon, you scowl at the demon. “Why shouldn’t I kill you, you foul beast of depravity?” you spit.

“I’ll give you back your strength, and more!” The demon struggles forward, its head sliding down as the fat rolls over until his head is close to you. He stretches out his hand towards you. Before you can react, a smoky tendril extends from his hand and enters your mouth. You recoil, waving your hands to disperse the vapours. But some of it has already entered your body.

You find yourself feeling stronger and relax, letting the vapours fill you. You may restore your SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK to their initial levels. The demon withdraws its hand and bobs its head at you, smiling. “You see, master? You want to go home now, don’t you? You can trust me. I will send you home. You just need to enter my mouth.”

The demon opens its mouth wide, creating a gaping portal.

If you have spoken to the crow while in hell, you know whether or not to trust the demon. Turn to **639**

If you are wearing a jade ring, you can tell if the demon has lied to you. Turn to **691**
Otherwise, you will have to decide if you can trust the creature or not.

If you want to climb into the creature’s mouth, turn to **621**

If you don’t want to trust the demon, turn to **643**

654

You slowly climb back to your feet. Darm smiles at you. “You see how pitiful you are against me? Give up!”

You say nothing, and Darm laughs at you. “Very well! Let us continue. Your turn, sir.”

What magic will you try now? Remember you cannot choose an option you have already chosen.

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **725**

Fireball, turn to **814**

Lightning, turn to **832**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Fungus, turn to **938**

Revelation, turn to **861**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **903**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

655

You sip the liquid. It tastes like blood. Turned off by the taste, you put the cork back in the return the bottle to its box. A sip is enough, though. You have drunk the blood of a werewolf and at the next full moon will undergo a transformation. Make a note that you are a werewolf.

You can now leave by turning to **464**

If you haven't already and want to drink the potion in the sword-box, turn to **673**

If you haven't already and want to smash open the vase, turn to **511**

656

Having another look through the cabinets, you find two boxes of scrolls. The first box contains scrolls written with instructions in the common tongue, obviously intended for soldiers to carry into battle. Some are for casting fireballs, Others for casting lightning. The last type is a *Fungus* spell, and will cause a large mushroom to grow out of thin air. The scroll does not mention why this would be useful.

The second box is more interesting, and contains two scrolls written in an arcane language. One is a powerful spell that creates a magical vacuum. As long as the *Null-magic* spell is in force, no magic will function. The second spell is more obscure and the short passage at the top merely says that it is a *Revelation* spell to draw to the surface the hidden nature of a being.

You take one of each type of spell. The cabinets reveal nothing else of interest. Most of the walls are filled with bookshelves. Looking at all of them would take hours.

If you want to search through all the books, turn to **703**

If you just want to make a quick scan of the spines of the books for something that looks interesting, turn to **748**

657

Taking the bundle from your pack, you carefully unwrap the crystal and hold it out with the blanket to insulate your hands. You immediately feel the air cool around you. Walking forward, you step onto the narrow bridge and make your way across the lake of fire. You are buffeted by searing winds, but the crystal seems to respond, and you are always soon bathed in a soothing cool.

You make it across to a forecourt of the citadel, like a large platform before the gates of the citadel. You carefully wrap up the crystal and replace it in your pack. You then approach the huge black iron gates. To the side there is a smaller door and you make for this. It is unlocked and you proceed into the interior. The citadel is in fact just a huge wall surrounding a central court, in which stands a single tower. You proceed to the tower. The door is unlocked and you open the door, revealing a large chamber with a stairway winding around the walls leading up to the top of the tower. In the base of the tower there is a bed, and table and chairs set up into a comfortable living space. You enter inside and briefly look around. There is a small fireplace with a pot of stew simmering over the fire. A small bookshelf contains several worn books, and on the table is a piece of cloth stretched on a frame, embroidery needles and coloured threads sitting beside it.

“Who are you?” a harsh voice suddenly asks.

You turn to see a thin, middle-aged woman descending the stairs. She is dressed in worn, dirty servant’s clothes, her curly light brown hair cut off roughly at the nape of her neck.

“A traveller,” you respond.

The woman laughs as she comes back down onto the floor level. “Not in this place! What do you want?”

You decide to tell her the truth. “I was devoured by the demon whose temple is to the south of here. Do you know of it?”

The woman scoffs. “You truly do not know where you are. This is hell! When I look to the south I see no temple. Nothing but a sea of molten stone surrounds this place to my eyes, stretching to the horizon.”

“It is just a lake,” you explain. “There is a bridge leading to the shore.”

“Only for you!” the woman snaps. “Do you not get it? Your hell might have lakes and temples, but for me there is just this place. There is nothing else.”

“Why is it so?” you wonder.

“I don’t know,” the woman replies wearily. “That is what I was told.” She points upwards. “Ask him. He will know.”

“Who is he?”

The woman shrugs. “I don’t know. But apparently I owe him. Thus I must care for him. Then I can be freed.”

The woman begins to work on her embroidery. Curious, you go to the stairway and begin to climb. The stairway winds around and around, as the tower narrows slightly. Eventually you reach the top and ascend through a trapdoor onto the top of the tower. There you find a rooved pergola. Four carved pillars support the roof, each with a thick steel ring on it. Connected to the rings are thick chains which all meet on the steel collar that is fastened around the neck of a man. He is a thin old man with only a few scraps of white hair left on his head. He is naked and you can see his body is covered in scars.

When you look at him you feel a spark of recognition. He lifts his head and looks at you with pale blue eyes. Suddenly you feel a great rage coming up from within you. Losing control, you throw yourself at the man and claw at him and bite his face. Unable to inflict enough damage with your fingernails, you begin to beat him. When the rage abates enough for you to regain some sense, you pull out your weapon and kill the man many times over. Once your rage is spent you feel exhausted and sink down to the floor. You look at the man, and see that he is still alive. The wounds you have inflicted slowly healing. The man looks at you and smiles. "I am sorry."

You are shocked to hear him say such a thing. "I'm sorry," you respond. "I didn't...I don't know why I did that."

The man nods. "I am here because in my life I was a great general. I slaughtered thousands in battle and thousands more who were defenceless. Whole cities fell under my blade. So it was when I died I was put here so that those I have harmed could have their vengeance on me. Most are sent here in the form of vultures to feed upon my flesh, and cannot hear my apology."

"But why did I have such hatred towards you?" you ask in confusion.

"You were one of those I killed," the man explains. "In a life long before your current life. I remember you. You were just a small girl, too afraid to even beg to be spared. I killed you slowly just to torment your mother. Seven times you have already come here as a vulture to tear my flesh. Unless you forgive me, you will return again."

"I forgive you!" you exclaim.

Tears roll down the man's cheeks. "Thank you. I am one soul closer to salvation."

You ask the man what you can do for him, and he shakes his head, telling you that this is what must be to free him from the hatred he created with his own hand. Instead, he offers to help you. You tell him about the places you have seen in the hell and ask him about them.

"What these particular places are, I cannot say. But I know that they are created by you. Each one represents something that links you to this place. If you have killed men, I expect the village you describes houses them. Do not venture there! What the forest and ruined city contain I can only tell you that if some association between yourself and Hell exists, you will find it in those places."

You thank the man and unable to help him any further, leave the rooftop. Coming back down to the chamber in the base of the tower, you find the woman still at her embroidery. There is also a bowl of meaty stew on the table and a roll of bread.

The woman looks up at you, then points to the food. "For you. To regain your strength."

If you want to pause to eat a meal, turn to **615**

If you prefer to leave, turn to **692**

658

You go still, and the demon releases his hold, shoving you back. Instead of toppling to the floor, you lash out at the demon's throat and open it, spilling a curtain of blood from under his shocked expression. The next moment, it collapses to the floor.

The spiked armour is too big for you to wear, and you regard their hooks dubiously. But you find in the belt pouch of one a bottle of poison(3).

You resume pushing the bodies off the slabs and once it is done, proceed through the archway. You pass by some minor rooms and passages before coming to a set of golden doors, which you thrust open, and march through into the inner sanctum of the temple.

Turn to **526**

659

"Hmm, understandable," the demon muses. "You are indeed puny and unimpressive. But when a small man becomes large he often becomes proud. Show me that you are humble. Kneel down and worship me!"

If you want to kneel down and worship the demon, turn to **642**

If you want to refuse, turn to **765**

If you didn't use the golden apple for the summoning and would like to offer it to the demon now in exchange for increased STAMINA, turn to **713**

660

Diving to the side you avoid the enormous maw and roll towards the door. You dash out into the hall and back the way you came. Once you are on the other side of the strong door you relax. But it is definitely time you were leaving.

Turn to **464**

661

Setting your little paws on the edge of the dish, you pick up a few granules with your tongue and give them a munch. It feels like you are eating dirt, but you force down a few mouthfuls. The rat starts to tremble, the world shaking around you. The stomach of the rat churns and you decide to leave before something bad happens. Falling off the table you stagger across the floor and squeeze under the door. You struggle back to the strong door and withdraw your mind from the rat.

You withdraw your mind from the zombie rat and contemplate its predicament. The rat can climb, so you need something to dangle through the barred window.

If you have a rope, turn to **633**

If you don't have a rope, you have no choice but to leave. Turn to **464**

662

Flattening yourself against the steps you feel the massive bolt cut through the air above you, making you tremble as it passes over you. Physically devastating enough, you feel that it has been further enhanced by some potent magic.

There is a burst and crackling sound behind you, and you twist around to see where the bolt has landed. To your surprise there is no sign of it, except a wisp of blue smoke, and an acrid smell reaches your nostrils.

Cautiously you climb to your feet and continue up the steps. There is no further reaction to your presence and you reach the purple curtain at the top of the stairway.

Turn to **741**

663

The serpent demon swings his mace, smashing it into your head. Lights explode in your eyes before you are swallowed in darkness. You soon awaken and find yourself lying on the ground. You are whole and unharmed, but your *initial* SKILL and STAMINA are reduced by 2. You may restore your *current* statistics to these new *initial* levels. The only thing that is missing is 'your' axe.

Cursing your misfortune, you continue on your way.

Turn to **600**

664

You sit down in one of the chairs and briefly feel a tingle that quickly dies off. The next moment you see the four statues come to life and walk stiffly across to you. One takes your plate and serves you a glob of cold gruel. Another pours waters into your cup and another delivers a small plate with a bread roll on it.

Being an experienced traveller, you are used to eating cold, unpalatable food. The old roll is no trouble, but the gruel is hard to get through. You finish what you can and gain 4 STAMINA points. The gruel is very nourishing, but you don't know how anyone could eat it.

Standing, you leave the dining room and go back through the sitting room to consider your options.

To take the nest arch, turn to **625**

To take the rune arch, turn to **681**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**



665

A poisoned spike gashes your hand as you leap over the slab and roll to your feet. You feel it burning through your veins.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, are wearing a golden armband, or have a phial of healing potion to counteract the poison, turn to **637**. Otherwise, you fall to the ground and the demons place you back on the slab. This time you do not recover.

YOURADVENTURE ENDS HERE

666

Taking out the glass ring, you slip it onto your finger. You walk through the door and once on the other side, remove the ring. Feeling solid once more, you walk forward and see two doors at the end of the corridor. Neither of the doors are locked. You open the first door and peer without interest around an alchemist's laboratory. The second door makes your eyes widen, even in the dim light of shuttered light crystals. It is a treasury, full of boxes and chests, with bejewelled weapons hanging on the walls.

Turn to **561**

667

You are broken by the impact and are dead long before you hit the floor. Darm obtains the Diamond Key and becomes immortal.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

668

Making your way south you approach the forest of dead trees. Some tower hundreds of feet above you, their trunks as thick as a house is big. Scattered between are lesser trees of all sizes, down to small saplings that stand no higher than your knee. And all of them are dead. Cracked and whitened, they look like bone, the ground carpeted in brown leaves.

Penetrating further in to the gloom, you feel an oppressive darkness, the air feels thick and acrid in your lungs, even though you cannot smell anything at all. You explore deeper within the forest, the white trucks stark against the thick, dark air. Suddenly ahead you see a knot of darkness where the air is gathered even more thickly into the vague form of something.

Before you can decide if it is safe to approach it, the dark form seems to see you, and you hear a low moan. It rushes at you and you feel your skin burn as the gathered darkness blinds you to your surrounds. Staggering back you wave your hands to dispel the darkness, but your defences are ineffectual. You hear another moan, and the burning sensation of hatred eating at your flesh intensifies. You have had enough and

begin to run blindly through the forest back towards the edge. You smash into trees, and are shaken and disorientated. But all you can do is keep running...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **491**

If you are unlucky, turn to **628**

669

You quickly push the cork out of the phial and down the contents. The warm glow fills you and you watch as the blood flow stops, then the stump heals over. Halve your *current* STAMINA. You now cannot use shields, and you must also reduce your *initial* SKILL by 1. Weakened, you stand up and carefully climb the rest of the stairs, reaching the purple curtain at the top.

Turn to **741**

670

Using the rows of slabs, you manoeuvre around the demons and make a run for the archway. Passing through you see a set of golden doors further down the corridor, while to the sides are narrower corridors leading off to smaller rooms.

If you want to run through the golden doors, turn to **632**

If you want to run down one of the side corridors, turn to **646**

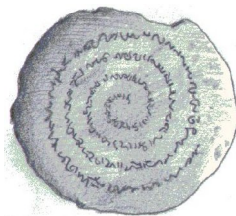
671

You are hooked and the next moment impaled on the armour. You struggle, but the demon drops his hook and hugs you against his body. The poison burns through your veins.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest or are wearing a golden armband, turn to **658**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



672

At first the creature does not notice you, so you step closer and put on a smile. "Hello."

The creature screeches in alarm as it sees you and flees back inside its hut, the door slamming shut and locks clicking. You assure the creature that you mean no harm and just want to talk. The hut is flimsy and you are confident that you could hack it open with your weapon if you wanted to.

If you would like to ask the creature to help you against King Darm, turn to **740**

If you want to threaten the creature to make him tell you what you want, you can turn to **809**

If you want to break open the flimsy hut, turn to **907**

If you think the timid creature has nothing to offer you, you can leave by turning to **858**

673

Uncorking the crystal bottle of purple potion, you give it a sniff. It smells pleasant enough so taking a deep breath you sip it experimentally. You feel your body tingle pleasantly, so you down the rest of the potion. You feel great. You have drunk an enhancing potion and can raise your *initial* SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK by 2, and restore your *current* values to this new level. You can raise your *initial* levels even if they take you above 12.

You are happy with this and you can now leave by turning to **464**

If you haven't already and want to drink the bottle of red liquid in the wolf-box, turn to **638**

If you haven't already and want to smash open the vase, turn to **511**

674

Going over to the door, you try the handle and find that it is locked. You also notice magical runes surround the doorway.

If you have a brass lion-handled key, turn to **750**

If you are wearing a glass ring and want to use it here, turn to **634**

If you have a set of lockpicks and want to try and pick the lock, turn to **704**

If you want to try the door opposite, turn to **607**

If you want to proceed further up the hall, turn to **730**

675

You quickly step over to the chest and open it. You snatch up a jade tablet that is within, glancing briefly at an incomprehensible list of names and numbers. As you close the lid, you hear a strangled cry, and turning your head see one of the warriors charging at you. The others turn to see the cause of the disturbance and seeing you let out similar cries and rush towards you, hatred contorting their faces. Turning around,

you leave the hut and run. Glancing over your shoulder you see the whole village has abandoned its work and is chasing after you, each pushing the rest aside to get at you.

Hoping to lose them in the forest, you make for the large stand of dead trees. Some tower hundreds of feet above you, their trunks as thick as a house is big. Scattered between are lesser trees of all sizes, down to small saplings that stand no higher than your knee. And all of them are dead. Cracked and whitened, they look like bone, the ground carpeted in brown leaves.

Running deep into the gloom, you feel an oppressive darkness, the air feels thick and acrid in your lungs, even though you cannot smell anything at all. You dash deeper within the forest, the white trunks stark against the thick, dark air. Glancing back you can still see signs of pursuit, so you keep running until you seem to have lost the vengeful villagers. Stopping to rest you see a knot of darkness where the air is gathered even more thickly into the vague form of something.

Before you can decide if it is safe to approach it, the dark form seems to see you, and you hear a low moan. It rushes at you and you feel your skin burn as the gathered darkness blinds you to your surrounds. Staggering back you wave your hands to dispel the darkness, but your defences are ineffectual. You hear another moan, and the burning sensation of hatred eating at your flesh intensifies. You have had enough and begin to run blindly through the forest once more. You smash into trees, and are shaken and disorientated. But all you can do is keep running...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **491**

If you are unlucky, turn to **573**

676

Going over to the door you try the handle, but find it locked.

Do you have a brass lion-handled key? If so turn to **750**

Otherwise, you will have to proceed further up the corridor. Turn to **742**



677

Making your way to the exit, you creep outside and survey the hellish landscape. The sky above is a chaotic swirl of black and red clouds. There is a muted golden glow where something like a large sun shines beyond the clouds. The land around you is dusty, or bare, blasted rock. The remains of great trees dot the land, most burnt or torn apart.

You move away from the temple, and hurry over to the cover of a jagged lump of rock. The temple sits in a hollow, and you can't see beyond the rise. Climbing to the top of the hollow, you look around and see a truly hellish scene. To the north there is a great lake of lava, with a great citadel built in the centre. A narrow bridge crosses it. To the east flows a flaming river that feeds the lake. Down there you can see a cluster of huts. To the south you see a dark forest of dead trees. To the west is a city in ruins, but the domed palace at its centre seems largely intact.

Where do you want to go?

North to the citadel? Turn to **619**

East to the village? Turn to **641**

South to the forest? Turn to **668**

West to the ruined city? Turn to **682**

678

Going over to the wall, you reach you hand up ready to grab the amulet, then set yourself to run. You take a deep breath, then snatch the amulet and dash for the exit.

The moaning wind fills the chamber once more as the air rushing past you chills. You leap over moving bones and reach the exit in moments. You are forced to slow down to climb the precarious stairway, but there are no sounds of pursuit below and you reach the surface safely.

A lone serpent-guard waits for you, and you see that he is surprised and displeased that you have returned. Silently he moves off and you follow him back through the broken hills. Once you are in the gardens, more serpent-guards appear to escort you back to the shrine. You step inside and a radiant white mist begins obscure the garden. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You pause to examine your magical amulet once more, feeling the power within it. Pleased, you take the gems from the eyes of the serpents in the floor and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

679

You will need a quick and agile hand for this one...

Test your SKILL. If you are Skilful, turn to **617**

If you are not, turn to **699**

680

The second demon falls dead and you pause to rest. The spiked armour is too big for you to wear, and you regard their hooks dubiously. But you find in the belt pouch of one a bottle of poison(3). Looking through the supplies in the storeroom, you find

boxes of incense and candles, soap, scented oils and towels. Finding nothing useful, you leave the room. Returning to the main hall, you push the rest of the bodies off the slabs and then make your way back to the golden doors, shoving them open as you enter the inner sanctum.

Turn to **526**

681

Peeking through the rune-marked curtain, you see a short corridor leading to a plain wooden door with a demonic face carved into it, painted with red and black paint until it seems quite realistic.

There is nothing else in the corridor, so you slip through the curtain and approach the door. As you reach out to push on the door, the demonic face suddenly speaks.

“You don’t belong here.”

The next moment the face opens its mouth and spits out a fireball. You are so close there is no chance to avoid it. If you are wearing a fire-worshippers breast-plate, the flame is absorbed by the crystal. Otherwise, you suffer 4 points of STAMINA loss. Retreating from the door, you dive to the floor as another fireball is spat at you. Scrambling back through the curtain you hear the face in the door laughing at you.

Considering your options you try to come up with a plan to defeat the door.

If you have a shield, you can use it to approach the face and blast its flames back in its...er, face. Turn to **578**

If you have any magical objects that you don’t know the function of, you can try to use them here. Turn to **645**

Alternatively you can run in and make a dive to slide to the bottom of the door. Once you are there you can reassess your options. Turn to **732**

If none of these appeal to you, you can take one of the other entrances:

To take the tree arch, turn to **539**

To take the nest arch, turn to **625**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

682

The ruins sprawl across the land without a definite edge. The further they spread, the more the ancient stone crumbles until it is swallowed by the dust and ash. Only one building in the very centre of the city seems whole, although it is covered in cracks. Once a fine city of domes and spires, it is like nowhere that you recognise. Walking down a grand avenue, you pass under ornate arches of triumph and celebration, worn images proclaiming victories and events long forgotten.

Reaching the centre of the city you pause to study the domed palace at the centre. Eight spired structures surround the central, domed structure. You pass through the broken gates and walk past dust-filled rooms before coming to a narrow garden between the outer ring of structures and that which supports the massive dome.

Standing before you are a pair of large wooden doors, inlaid with ivory and jade and gold, one door displaying a radiant lion, the other a luminous bull. You push on the doors and they swing slowly inwards with a screech. You step into a massive chamber under the domed roof. Coloured stones are set into the golden dome, portraying a great warrior slaying demons from his chariot. Light comes from bowls of molten stone that ring the walls, the rune-marked silver bowls withstanding the intense heat of their contents.

In the very centre of the chamber is a great golden throne, and upon it perches a figure that is familiar, yet you are surprised to see it here. You say nothing as you approach, and as you come to a stop at the foot of the white marble dais, you are certain that this large black crow is the King of Darken Wood.

“Hello,” you say to the crow.

The crow’s eyes are open, but has thus far ignored you. Perhaps this is not the same crow after all.

The silver eyes flick towards you and a disembodied voice addressed you. “What do you want?”

“I was swallowed by a Devourer Demon. I need a way to escape this place and to restore my strength.”

“The vase was marked clearly, yet you broke it,” the crow observes.

“I wanted to see what was inside,” you explain.

“And you did see. So why do you come to me with complaints? All is as you have chosen it to be.”

“I made the wrong choice,” you admit. “I am on the verge of facing King Darm. If you aid me I can defeat him. Isn’t that what you want?”

“Not really,” the crow replies. “If I wanted to defeat him I would just go and do it myself. For all his power he is less than a gnat buzzing before my beak.”

“But...you are a god,” you say.

“I haven’t forgotten,” the crow replies.

“I mean, if you are a god, and not a devil, you must want good to triumph. I am fighting for good, Darm is evil.”

“King Darm has ruled wisely for over 60 years. Many would say it would be a good thing for him to rule even longer. He is a better king than you would be.”

You are confused. “You want him to get the Diamond Key and be immortal?”

“No matter what you do, whether you succeed or fail, King Darm’s time is limited. Alyn Mei will come to no harm, no matter what you do. The Diamond Key will eventually be placed in the Earth and bring prosperity to the land, regardless of your actions.”

You are shocked into silence. When you can speak you say: “So what am I doing any of this for?”

“That is my question for you,” the crow replies.

“Then I should just go home,” you say.

“Is that your choice?”

The question seems a very meaningful one, so you avoid answering it. “What do you want to happen then?”

“I want what all gods want,” the crow replies. “For the lost to be found, for the weak to be strengthened, for the confused to be enlightened.”

“What does that mean?” you ask in frustration.

“It means that it matters not if the Diamond Key is placed in the Earth or not. It matters not whether King Darm lives his allotted years or many more. It matters not whether Alyn Mei is tortured, killed or kept safe.”

“How can those things not matter?” you shout at the crow.

“Because they may or may not help the lost to be found, the weak to be strengthened and the confused to be enlightened.”

You stare at the crow for several moments, fighting the urge to strangle it. “What do I have to do to help the lost be found, the weak strengthened and the confused be enlightened?”

“Who is lost, weak and confused?” asks the crow.

“Me, for a start!” you exclaim.

“Indeed. And so is King Darm. Your deeds when you go from this place will do nought except determine the fate of the soul of King Darm, and of your own. Remember this and let it guide you.”

“What about restoring my strength?” you ask the crow.

“Well, I suppose I can do that, but I don’t promise that it will help you.”

You feel a magical glow flow into you and strengthen you. You may raise all of your *initial* stats by 2 and bring the *current* values to these new levels. You thank the crow, then say: “How do I return to the palace in Arantator?”

“Return to the Feasting Hall of the Devourer Demon. Then you must push all of the bodies there off the slabs upon which they lie. This will weaken the demon, though not its minions which you must face. Once the minions are all dead, the demon will be helpless before you. It will offer to return you to the Realm of Dust if you leave it unharmed. But you must make it swear a vow to me that it will return you to the same time and place from where you were swallowed. It will open its mouth once more, and you can enter without fear.”

You thank the crow once more and leave the hall. Making your way back towards the temple in the hollow, you prepare yourself for what could be a tremendous battle.

If you are carrying a Hell Axe, turn to **649**

If not, turn to **600**



683

Taking out the jade tablet, you briefly glance over the list of names. There are hundreds inscribed there. A whole army! You throw the tablet into the ring of fire. It starts to glow with a white light as the flames turn red and with a roar surge upwards into a sphere that floats above the floor, leaving a black scorch-mark behind.

The air turns cold and you see dark shapes moving within the fiery sphere. Suddenly there is a moan, and out of the sphere floats the ghostly figure of a decaying man. His sorrowful eyes fall upon you, and suddenly a furious rage blazes from him, making his whole body glow. He rushes at you with a strangled moan. Others are emerging and likewise throw themselves at you.

“Not me, him!” you cry. But the souls of the dead that you have sent to hell do not care about Darm, it is you they lust for revenge against. Each one slashes at you with icy claws that are half-insubstantial. But hundreds pour from the sphere and you are slashed and bashed from all sides. You try to flee, but are blinded and strike obstacle after obstacle until you can run no more. What remaining life you have is soon torn from you by vengeful claws.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**
Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

684

Seizing the bottle in your paws, you push against it until it falls over. It rolls along the bench and clinks to a stop against the mortar and pestle. Sinking your teeth into the cork, you manage to pull it out, and the potion starts to pour out, forming a growing puddle that runs off the bench. Lapping at the potion you consume a fair amount. It tastes metallic and unpleasant.

The next moment you feel something churning in the belly of the rat and it starts to expand. The body of the rat swells to a painful limit, then you experience the odd sensation of exploding.

You are dumped back into your own body with a shock. Shaking your head, you rest for a moment, then stand up. You now have no choice but to leave.

Turn to **464**

685

No matter what you try, you can open the box or even break it. Giving up, you toss it back into the drawer.

Leaving the bedchamber, you make your way back to the entrance hall and consider your options

To take the tree arch, turn to **539**

To take the rune arch, turn to **681**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

686

With so many bodies, there are countless items to be obtained. Most of those here are warriors and you find the full range of weapons and armour present. You are able to equip yourself as you desire from the items that are listed in the *weaponsmith* and *Amouirer* sections of the Market. You also find a Ring of Fortune (which will allow you to add 3 to your *initial* LUCK as long as you are wearing it); five healing potions; a fine, jewelled helm that will add 3 to your ARMOUR. As you near the end of

your search you see coiled on the chest of one warrior a red viper. It rears up as you near, hissing.

It prevents you from searching the warrior.

Do you want to kill the serpent with your weapon? If so, turn to **586**

If you want to risk grabbing the serpent by the tail and throwing it away, leaving the relatively innocent creature with it's life, turn to **679**

687

Wasting no time you dash across the grassy lawn, heading towards a section where the trees look thick enough for you to hide. As you reach the trees, you hear a hissing behind you and look over your shoulder just in time to avoid the slashing polesword. You dive into the trees, and scramble to your feet.

The serpent-guards slither over the ground with incredible speed, and you see them moving to surround the thicket. You charge through the undergrowth and come out next to the massive palace of red and gold. Moving quickly to the shelter of its wall, you run along for about a hundred yards, then charge back through the surrounding trees again. Without pause you run across the next open area, run around another thicket then dash over to another thicket and dive inside to conceal yourself.

You take a breath and move to where you can watch comfortably. To your shock, you already see serpent men moving into the area. With their serpent parts, it is difficult for them to move through the thickets, yet even having to go around the obstacles, they still seem to be able to find you.

Deciding that your life is in peril, you run out of the thicket once more and begin to make a round-about route back to the shrine. You exit and begin to run...

Test your STAMINA. If you are strong, turn to **919**

If you are weak, turn to **977**

688

The demons laugh as they grind you against the wall, then pull away. Free of them you lash out and kill one of the demons with a single blow. The other looks at you in shock and steps back, expecting you to topple over from the poison. You attack him, giving him no chance to pick up his hook.

A short battle ensues, but the shaken demon is soon finished off and you stand triumphant. The spiked armour is too big for you to wear, and you regard their hooks dubiously. But you find in the belt pouch of one a bottle of poison(3).

You resume pushing the bodies off the slabs and once it is done, proceed through the archway. You pass by some minor rooms and passages before coming to a set of golden doors which you thrust open and march through into the inner sanctum of the temple.

Turn to **526**



689

You hear a strangled cry, and turning your head see one of the warriors charging at you. The others turn to see the cause of the disturbance. Seeing you, they let out similar cries and rush towards you, hatred contorting their faces. Turning around, you run away. Glancing over your shoulder you see the whole village has abandoned its work and is chasing after you, each pushing the rest aside to get at you.

Hoping to lose them in the forest, you make for the large stand of dead trees. Some tower hundreds of feet above you, their trunks as thick as a house is big. Scattered between are lesser trees of all sizes, down to small saplings that stand no higher than your knee. And all of them are dead. Cracked and whitened, they look like bone, the ground carpeted in brown leaves.

Running deep into the gloom, you feel an oppressive darkness, the air feels thick and acrid in your lungs, even though you cannot smell anything at all. You dash deeper within the forest, the white trunks stark against the thick, dark air. Glancing back you can still see signs of pursuit, so you keep running until you seem to have lost the vengeful villagers. Stopping to rest you see a knot of darkness where the air is gathered even more thickly into the vague form of something.

Before you can decide if it is safe to approach it, the dark form seems to see you, and you hear a low moan. It rushes at you and you feel your skin burn as the gathered darkness blinds you to your surrounds. Staggering back you wave your hands to dispel the darkness, but your defences are ineffectual. You hear another moan, and the burning sensation of hatred eating at your flesh intensifies. You have had enough and begin to run blindly through the forest once more. You smash into trees, and are shaken and disorientated. But all you can do is keep running...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **491**

If you are unlucky, turn to **573**

690

You reach out and catch the ball. Lifting it once more, you peer into it with more caution, and this time see a woman's face emerge. She is beautiful, and smiles sadly at you. She presses her hands against the side of the crystal ball, and pushes as if she is trapped inside.

If you want to free her by letting the ball smash on the ground, turn to **603**

Alternatively, you can put the ball back and continue your search by turning to **748**

691

The jade ring tells you that he has told the truth, that entering his mouth will take you back to your world.

To enter his mouth, turn to **621**

If you still don't trust the demon, turn to **643**

692

You leave the tower and cross the courtyard to the citadel wall. You go out the gate and to the forecourt where the bridge lands. Taking out the cold crystal once more, you make your way back across the bridge and to the other shore. Wrapping the crystal once more, you decide where to go next. Deciding to avoid the village you try to decide between the ruined city and the forest.

To go to the ruined city, turn to **682**

To go to the forest, turn to **668**

693

You lie on the floor, keeping still as you try to recover. Eventually the pain subsides, though you feel drained and unsteady. You try to absorb the steadiness of the floor, which is firm and hard beneath you. After a few minutes, it strikes you that it shouldn't be like that. Looking at your hand you are dismayed to see that the glass ring is cracked and its magic gone.

You are also dismayed to see standing nearby a small grinning creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. Seeing that you are awake, he smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "Up you get! His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature bows, then turns and makes its way back up the corridor. For a moment you consider just lying there until you feel better. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Struggling to your feet, you slowly follow. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

694

Charging at one of the demons, you ready yourself to strike. But as you draw near the demon suddenly charges at you, thrusting out its chest. It is trying to impale you on its poisoned spikes. Desperately you throw yourself to the side...

Test your SKILL. If you are skilful, turn to **611**

If you are unskilful, turn to **665**

695

Giving the leaf a sniff, you smell something almost like some herbs you can't remember the names of. Giving it a nibble the taste is what you imagine a raw leaf to

taste like. You take a few mouthfuls and wait for something to happen. It soon does. The rat starts to tremble, the world shaking around you. The stomach of the rat churns and you decide to leave before something bad happens. Falling off the table you stagger across the floor and squeeze under the door. You struggle back to the strong door and withdraw your mind from the rat.

You withdraw your mind from the zombie rat and contemplate its predicament. The rat can climb, so you need something to dangle through the barred window.

If you have a rope, turn to **633**

If you don't have a rope, you have no choice but to leave. Turn to **464**

696

Turning to the chapter on objects of silver, you flick through until you come to a picture of a Scarab Beetle. Eagerly you read the entry. The entry is confusing, but tells you that the beetle is a holy talisman of manifestation. It says nothing else except that priests are often known to carry them.

It is of no use to you, it seems.

Turn back to **748**

697

The huts are poorly made and you can see through the gaps that those nearest to you are empty. It is a simple matter to crouch out of sight and watch through the gaps. The faces of the men are tired and tight with a grim determination. As you watch you notice the clothing that the men wear. Most are warriors, but the styles of their armour are many and varied, some you recognise, others you don't. You are startled when you see men wearing scalemail and black surcoats emblazoned with a rampant griffon. These are soldiers of Count Raul whom you have killed.

Suspecting that it could be dangerous for you to be here, you decide to slip away. As you move behind the cover of the huts, you spy something in the village you hadn't seen before. It is a hut like the others, but with a doorway in each wall, so you can see through it and know it is empty except for a chest on a pedestal.

If you want to risk checking out the chest, turn to **520**

Otherwise you can slip away and go to:

The citadel, turn to **619**

The forest, turn to **668**

The ruined city, turn to **682**



698

Did you make an offering of a golden apple or something else?

If you used a golden apple, turn to **705**

If you used something else, turn to **762**

699

You make a grab for the serpent's tail. But as your hand closes on the viper's body its venous fangs sink into your arm. You pull away immediately, but the poison is already burning its way through your veins and towards your heart.

You must drink a healing potion to counteract the poison or you will be dead. If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest or are wearing a golden armband, you need not drink a potion.

You decide that the viper is too dangerous, so you leave it alone and begin the work of pushing the bodies off the slabs.

Turn to **570**

700

You wander from the palace, managing to avoid the citadel guards in the confusion created by the hole that has appeared in the wall and the fires in the inner city. You make your way through the streets. Many of the cityfolk have gotten up from their beds and watch the fires and those working to extinguish them. Everyone gives you a glance, but few take any interest in you.

Darm is dead, but so is Kianmay. Even though you may have succeeded in protecting the Diamond Key, you feel your quest has failed. After all, you were hired as a merchant guard. It was your job to protect her.

Mournfully you wander the streets, alone with your grief until you feel something warm shining on your face. You look up, finding yourself in front of the Temple of the White Goddess. The warmth seems to be coming from the statue that stands before you, arms extended as if in welcome.

You think about Kianmay and what life your path will now take. You are determined not to disappoint her. You step forward, accepting the welcome of the White Goddess.

THE END

701

Taking out the diamond wand, you focus on the demonic face as you peek through the gap in the curtain and wave the wand. You feel it tingle in your hand and the face of the demon starts to contort. It cries out in dismay, then the face freezes in an open-mouthed grimace. Carefully pulling aside the curtain, you put your head through. The face does not react.

You walk into the corridor and relax as the painted face remains frozen. Whatever magic was there has been dispelled. The wand has the power to nullify or reverse magical spells. Putting it carefully away, you proceed to the door and push on the handle. The door opens and you enter into the sorcerer's study.

Turn to **760**

702

You let yourself slid further into the gaze of the creature, projecting happy thoughts at it. It smiles, revealing pointed teeth, and you realise that you have made a mistake. But it is too late. You feel a pain that begins in your fingers and toes, then spreads up your limbs. It feels like you arte being eaten alive.

You scream and writhe, but there is nothing except the icy blue around you. You feel your flesh being devoured and your life force drunk with relish. Suddenly it is over, and you slump back in the chair, nothing but a wisp of your former self. Weakly you look up and seeing a meal before you reach out eagerly to replenish your strength. Your hand slides over the hard slick surface of the roasted fowl, and your hunger is denied.

The pale creature has taken your strength and freed itself, leaving you in its place. Now you will be a guest at Darm's eternal feast forever, neither dead nor alive.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



703

You pull the books down one by one and flick through them. There are hundreds of books and it is a wearying task. Finally you pull down one thick book and open it up, discovering a vacant space inside. In the space is a velvet bag. Removing the bag, you close the book and put it back on the shelf. You open the bag and find inside a crystal ball filled with purple mist.

You peer inside the crystal ball. Suddenly a demonic face appears from the mist, startling you into dropping the crystal ball...

If you want to try and catch it, test your SKILL. If you are Skilful, turn to **690**. If you are unskilful, turn to **603**

You can let the ball drop to the ground if you wish by turning to **603**

704

Taking out your lock picks, you kneel down and examine the lock. Not having been trained, you don't know what to look for, so you insert the picks and begin to shift them about...

Test your SKILL and your LUCK. Roll 4 die, if the total is less than the sum of your SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **640**. If the total is the same as the sum of your SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **736**. If the total is greater, turn to **761**

705

You watch as the unicorn devours the golden apple. You admire the beautiful creature silently. Once it has finished, it looks up at you. Several moments pass, then you spread your hands and say: "Sorry, I don't have any more apples."

The horse continues to look at you and suddenly a disembodied voice addresses you. It is a woman's voice, but is low and melodic. "You have summoned me merely to give me this offering?"

Rather than lie, you just shrug.

The unicorn continues to speak. "Even if you summoned me to kill me for my horn, your heart has moved to compassion. I sense that you are on a great undertaking. Tell me what your purpose is and I shall aid you."

You quickly tell the unicorn about King Darm, and his quest to be immortal. To your surprise the unicorn already knows much of this matter.

"Darm has come to this place many times seeking the horns of unicorns, for the ground powder will restore youth and strength. He has killed many of my kind already. Yet this has not satisfied him. But so it is that the essence of my people is in him. In this room you will find a scroll of Revelation. It will bring out the hidden nature within a being. Thus it will bring out the spiritual essence of the unicorn within him. Do this and he may be saved from his own evil."

You thank the unicorn for this information, and it vanishes. The dust of the pentagram is now black and you turn your attention to searching the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

706

Sessimass leads you out of the chamber, and into another chamber where a pair of brown-scaled guards meet you.

"So, what's this penalty?" you ask nervously.

"It will cause you no pain," Sessimass says, seemingly to herself more than you. She appears reassured and resigned as she begins wave her hands around your head.

"Wait a moment!" you say. But the spell takes hold and you slip into unconsciousness.

You open your eyes, seeing above you a plastered dome ceiling. Sitting up you stretch, feeling refreshed. The chamber you are in is indeed strange. The chamber is empty, but a design laid out in marble in the floor depicts a triple spiral of serpents.

Standing up, you spy a trap door and make for it. You descend a stairway and wander through rooms for several minutes before someone finds you. They ask you who you are, but you can't remember. Eventually they find a place for you as a soldier in the army of King Darm. Your king is a powerful and charismatic man, and you serve him loyally to the end of your days, helping him to become King of the entire known world.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

707

You dive down and to the side, trying to twist out of the path of the bolt. The world suddenly spins as you are hit and spun around in the air before crashing onto the steps, dazed.

When your mind clears, you examine yourself and to your horror see that your arm has been severed. The violence of the wound has shocked your body, but now the blood starts to flow copiously.

Do you have a healing phial? If so, turn to **669**

If not, turn to **720**

708

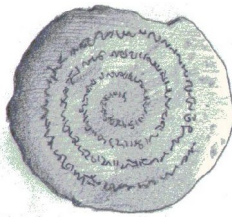
The jade ring has been buzzing on your finger most of the time Darm has been speaking and you realise he is lying when he tells you that he does not want the key for himself, yet he speaks the truth when he calls Kianmay a demon.

What will you do?

Demand proof? Turn to **798**

Pretend you believe him? Turn to **909**

Tell him he is a liar? Turn to **957**



709

“You are lucky,” grumbles the demon. Unhappily it casts a ball of rainbow coloured light at you. The light flows into your body and you feel it tingling throughout your being. You may increase your *initial* LUCK by 2 points.

The demon vanishes, leaving behind a pentagram of black dust. You happily put aside the magic book and begin to search the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

710

Investigating the strange fake feast more closely, you notice on the back of each chair there is a sheet of paper, covered in arcane script and with seals. They look like letters.

Are you wearing an amethyst condor amulet? If so, turn to **723**
Otherwise, turn to **759**

711

Turning to the chapter on objects of jade, you browse through until you come upon a picture of a slender ring as wide as your neck. Eagerly you read the entry. It is indeed a collar, and opens and closes with a magic word.

The wearer is blessed with a magical aura of protection that is equivalent to armour of rating 5. This is in addition to any physical armour you are wearing. You say the magical word and open the collar. You place it around your neck and close it, immediately feeling safer.

Turn back to **748**

712

You agree that leaving is best and the serpent woman escorts you back to the shrine, waving away the guards. On the way, she asks the name of your master, and you say the name of a famous sorcerer in Erinharn. She nods and exclaims knowingly.

Fortunately you reach the shrine before you lies can be exposed. You look at the circle on the floor, noting that the gems are in place. The serpent woman smiles and gestures for you to step onto the circle. You do so and radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you.

“Farewell, traveller!” the serpent woman calls out. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove. You have gained nothing from your journey, but you have remained safe and sound.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

713

Producing the golden apple you say: “Will you take this instead?”

The demonic eyes widen, and the creature grins. “Indeed I will! Cast it into my mouth and you shall be blessed!”

The demon opens its mouth and you toss the apple inside. It devours the bright fruit, and sparkling light of all colours flows in the darkness and blood of its being. There is an explosion of light and the demon vanishes, leaving the pentagram on the floor blackened.

But it has not vanished without giving you something. You see on the floor three small pills; one red, one blue and one green. The red pill will raise your initial STAMINA by one and allow you to raise your current STAMINA to that level. The blue pill will do the same for your SKILL, and the green for your LUCK.

You may take the pills now or later. With nothing else to do, you turn your attention to the rest of the office.

Turn to **656**

714

Feeling slightly foolish, you speak as your eye is to the hole. "Um, greetings."

The eyes blink and the smile on the mask widens. "Greetings."

"Who are you?" you ask.

"I have no name," the mask replies. "But I am the one who seals that which must be sealed."

"What do you seal?" you ask.

"Destruction. Great destruction," the mask replies in a heavy tone.

"And Darm is trying to break the seal to get this power?" you reason.

"Nay!" the mask exclaims. "Darm is the one who placed me here so that I may not fall into the hands of the foolish."

You wonder what power could be so terrible that even Darm would not dare to wield it. Or perhaps he is merely saving it for later.

If you want to try and get this power for yourself, turn to **763**

If you think it is best to leave it alone, you can only leave the armoury and proceed further up the hall by turning to **730**, or if you haven't already, try the door opposite by turning to **607**

715

Going over to the cabinet, you pick up the jug of spiced wine. Magical runes on the jug keep the contents warm. As you set out a cup you consider what you can do.

If you have some sleeping potion and want to add it to her drink, turn to **743**

If you would prefer to just do as she asks, then talk to her, turn to **952**

716

You hold the book and begin to incant the incantation. As you repeat the words, you feel your body vibrating with increasing strength, then the whole room seems to be shaking as the air above the pentagram fills with light. Eventually a figure appears amidst the light and all becomes still once more. Standing in the middle of the

pentagram is a unicorn. It is like a large, pure white horse, with a single straight horn like opal. It ignores you and begins to eat your offering. Its body dances with golden light and you feel invigorated just by looking at it. Increase your initial LUCK by one and raise your current LUCK to this new level. This is a creature of great goodness.

If you want to attack the unicorn to get its horn, turn to **614**

If you have changed your mind, turn to **698**

717

“I want a new arm,” you reply, holding out your stump.

There is a quiet muttering around the balconies above, which falls abruptly silent when the quiet voice speaks from behind the screen, with a trace of amusement. “This is indeed a simple request. What will you give us in return for this service?”

You consider what you can offer. “Will you take gold?” you ask.

“That substance is of no value here,” the queen replies. “Give to me any magical item of your choosing and your wish shall be granted.”

The snake-woman in the green silken coat appears once more at your side holding a small wooden tray.

If you want to give an item, turn to **890**

If you don't want to part with an item, you can ask for another means of payment by turning to **944**

Alternatively you can change your mind and tell them about Darm by turning to **846**, or state your wish to become a sorcerer by turning to **990**

718

The book is filled with an incomprehensible script, so you begin to search the office. You find numerous objects, but you have no idea what they do. In one cabinet you find a box of scrolls. Unrolling one you discover that it is written in the common tongue.

For the Casting of a Fireball From the Hand

This spell will enable the caster to produce a fireball travelling at the speed and range similar to an arrow. At long range it is suitable for settling aflame burnables, while in the range of three to ten yards it is an effective weapon against opponents. Within three yards there is a danger that the caster will be burnt by his own flame.

To cast, stand with your hand held before your chest, and feet firmly planted upon the ground. Recite the words at the bottom of this page, and you will feel an energy gathering in your body and consolidating as a heat in your palm. Keep your fingers closed into a round shape, as if there is a ball held within. Keep reciting the spell, and when the heat grows unbearable, fling your hand outwards in the

direction of your target, and with your thoughts cast out the heat from your body. A fireball will appear and shoot forth, propelled by the strength of your thought.

Darimarg Hunatam Jaquellin Ta

Rolling the scroll back up again, you examine the others and find two more for casting fireballs, two for casting lighting, and one for summoning a large fungus. You are unsure how the last spell would be useful, but you take one of each type of spell, and turn to examine the rest of the study.

Most of the walls are filled with bookshelves, and you pull down a book and open it. It is written in an ancient tongue. You put the book back.

If you want to search through all the books, turn to **703**

If you just want to make a quick scan of the spines of the books for words written in a language you can read, turn to **748**

719

Trying the knob of the door, it turns and you open to door slowly, peeking into a well-lit chamber. It appears to be a study, and importantly an unoccupied one. Slipping inside, you close the door behind you and look around.

The study is lined with massive bookshelves that reach the high ceiling, packed with books. The ceiling is over twice your height above and over a third of the books are beyond your reach. The bookshelves fill most of the walls except for a section on the wall to the right where there is an elaborate painting hung. Opposite the painting is an even wider clear space, the wall filled with a massive map of the known world, although it seems that Darm knows more of the world than you can remember seeing before. The massive desk, which appears to be made from deep purple crystal, sits before the map, an equally ornately shaped chair sitting behind it. In the centre of the chamber is large carpet patterned in blue and gold. Directly opposite the doors you entered by there is a set of double doors filled with stained glass depicting geometric designs.

What do you want to do?

Look at the bookshelves? Turn to **896**

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)



720

You desperately try to staunch the blood flow. Eventually by tearing off strips of your clothes you bind the end of your arm. Blood still drips from the soaked bandage. Reduce your initial STAMINA by 4 due to blood loss, and your current STAMINA to 1. You now also cannot use shields and must also reduce your SKILL by 1. Weakened, you stand up and carefully climb the rest of the stairs, reaching the purple curtain at the top.

Turn to **741**

721

Taking out the jade statue of the White Goddess, you present it to the queen. She looks at you shock.

“For me?”

“I may not be able to defeat Darm, but I may do this for you,” you say.

She puts down the cup and slowly takes the statue from you, bowing her head to you. She holds up the statue and tears spill from her eyes. “I shall keep this dear to me. You cannot know how much this means to me. Though I wish you would escape and be safe, I shall not defy your will. Instead I shall help you.”

She gently sets down the statue and goes over to one of the cabinets, opening it by tracing a rune upon the door. Inside she takes out a lacquered wooden box and carries it over to a low table. She kneels and beckons you over as she lifts the lid.

You see a soft glow coming from within, and step over cautiously to see her draw out a dagger with a blade of glowing crystal. “This will penetrate his armour. Get close to him and you may stab him despite his magic, despite his armour. Then he will die and I shall be free.”

She slides the glowing blade back into a plain leather sheath. She holds the crystal dagger out to you, and you take it. She closes the box and stands, looking at you.

“Darm is a man full of fear. He fears death, and as his power has grown he fears enemies. Thus he is now a lonely man as well. He does not even trust me. As you thrust this crystal dagger into his side, he will know it has come from me. Thus if you fail I shall pay a terrible price, but...I cannot do nothing. Seek not to attack him right away. He will destroy you. He is a lonely and bored man, and will seek to entertain himself. You must play along with his games and wait for the right chance to defeat him. There is only one more thing I dare to do to aid you. I shall cast a spell to empower you. I shall give you all my strength.”

She stands before you and waves her hands, chanting words of power. She then reaches out and clasps your face. You feel warmth flow into your body, making you feel stronger. You may increase your initial SKILL, STAMINA and LUCK by 2 points and bring your current scores up to these new levels.

Her hands slip from your face and she starts to collapse. Quickly you catch her and carry her to her bed, where you lay her down. You silently thank her and promise to free her. Closing the curtains around the bed, you quietly withdraw and make your way back to the hallway. You close the door and consider your options.

If you haven't already, you can go through the doors opposite by turning to **888**

To go through the central doors, turn to **727**

722

Making haste, you leave the kitchen. Back in the hall, you must now decide between trying the door opposite or proceeding further into the quarters.

To take the door opposite, turn to **676**

To move up along the corridor, turn to **742**

723

As the arcane symbols hit your eyes, they are transformed into meaningful words. You discover that the letters are in fact contracts, promising an eternal feast in return for service to King Darm. Looking at the table you realise this is the 'eternal' feast. You wonder what starved spirits would have agreed to such a contract.

The sheets of parchment are pasted to the backs of the chairs, and you contemplate tearing away a sheet. If the contract is torn, the bound creature might be freed. However, that might not be a good thing for you. What if its hunger is greater than its gratitude? The names on the contracts mean nothing to you, so you have no idea of what manner of creatures are bound here.

Do you want to tear one of the contracts off to see what happens? If so, turn to **764**

If you want to sit in one of the chairs to see if you can communicate with one of the spirits, turn to **731**

If you have learned enough about this feast and want to investigate the stained glass doors on the far side of the room, turn to **766**

If you haven't already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

724

With a final stroke, the unicorn falls dead to the ground. Immediately the world around you darkens and you find yourself standing back in the sorcerer's study, the unicorn's now dull body lying before you in the circle of now blackened dust. You cut away the unicorn's horn and clean it off as best as you can. How that you have it, you aren't sure what to do with it, but you put it away in a safe place.

Turn to **656**

725

Taking out the arcane scroll, you clear your throat and read the words on it in a loud voice, then point at Darm, so that the spell will know who to attack. You feel magical forces gathering, but rather than manifesting as a fierce attack on Darm, the parchment in your hand bursts into blue flame. You hastily toss it aside, and the parchment falls to the floor, where the flame spreads out into a large ring, then burns steadily.

Darm laughs heartily. “Were you hoping for something else? Let me explain to you what you have done. This is indeed a powerful spell. A summoning spell in fact. But you have spoken no name in your spell. Thus to summon a being you must place an offering into the circle. So cast an object into the ring of fire and we will see what arises. But choose your object wisely!”

What will you choose to throw into the fire?

A jade tablet? Turn to **683**

An ivory comb? Turn to **758**

A cold crystal? Turn to **873**

A unicorn horn? Turn to **870**

If you don't have any of these, turn to **897**

726

Taking out the token, you hold it up before you as you proceed up the stairway. You feel a bit foolish. Even after you are over halfway up the stairway, no one has acknowledged you, and you see no guard posts.

You reach the curtain without incident and slip the token away before proceeding carefully through.

Turn to **741**

727

Pushing open the door, you peer inside. The room is a massive hall, filled with the glitter of gold and gems. It is a treasury. The walls are lined with great chests and statues of gold, the walls hung with detailed tapestries and weapons more bejewelled than metal. Elaborately patterned carpets are laid on the floor, which in the centre is mostly clear. At the far end of the room is a massive throne of ivory, set with opals and flanked by golden statues of lions. On the wall behind the throne is a massive banner of a white lion on a blue field, formed from diamonds and pearls and sapphires sewn onto a sheet woven from golden wire. It shimmers in the light of the massive chandeliers above.

In the throne sits a purple-robed man, but your eye is drawn immediately to the white-robed woman sitting at a small table at the foot of the throne. You step into the room. The purple-robed man stands.

“Welcome!” he calls out. “Approach!”

You walk slowly forward, you see Kianmay stand and walk to meet you. She appears unharmed, but troubled. She meets you in the middle of the hall and you take in her open face, beautiful auburn hair and bright blue eyes.

“You shouldn't have come,” she whispers to you, gripping your arms.

“I had to save you,” you reply, a little hurt.

You see surprise wash over her face. “You came to rescue me, not to destroy him?”

“I may have to do both,” you say grimly.

“Yes, you may,” Kianmay admits, surprising you. You look at her more closely and see that she is painfully tired. How many hours has she spent trying to turn Darm’s heart away from its evil course?

“Enough of that!” Darm calls out impatiently. “Come here, young man so I can look at you.”

Stepping around Kianmay, you approach the throne. Darm appears younger than you expected, no doubt the result of his quest to prolong his life. His hair is iron-grey, worn long and trailing down his back. His is clean-shaven, and his sun-tanned skin is smooth. He has a large hooked nose and thick eyebrows, which make him seem commanding rather than ugly. He is tall, but now thin where in his youth he was a powerful warrior. He wears purple robes with the edges decorated by gold embroidery. Rather than a great crown, he wears a simple gold circlet.

He stands with his hands on his hips, looking down at you with a fond smile as if you are a long-lost nephew. “At last! I have been waiting for you all this long night.”

You stop many yards from the foot of the throne. “What am I to you?” you can’t help asking.

“You are the one who will bring me the Diamond Key,” Darm states simply. “If you have it, you must give it to me. If you have hidden it, you must tell me where it is.”

“Why should you be immortal?” you ask. “Why not let the Key be put into the land where it can benefit all?”

A look of surprise crosses Darm’s face. “You think I want the Key for myself? What poison has this demon poured into your mind? The Diamond Key was sent to these lands for me to receive. I have found a way to bring its power to the whole world. Perhaps you know that here on the site of this city there is a convergence of the veins of power in the earth. In fact, this place is the heart of the world! That is why the Key was sent to me from Erinharn. Why else send it from such a populous place to this wilderness stronghold? The true priestess Kianmay must have been killed long ago and replaced by this demon,” he gestures to Kianmay. “She has deceived you. I have spent this night trying to unravel her scheme, for she held the Diamond Key within her own hands, yet continued this charade.”

It is a story that seems plausible. What do you want to do?

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **708**

Demand proof? Turn to **798**

Accept his explanation? Turn to **909**

Refuse to believe him? Turn to **957**

728

You feel the light withdraw from your body, and the mask smiles at you. “You are a servant of men. My power is yours.” The cavity around the mask expands and deepens, revealing a deep hole. The mask is actually part of an ornate knob on the end of a protrusion of some kind. You reach in and draw out a long, heavy object.

As it comes out you see that it is a sword, with a jade pommel and a hilt wrapped in dark green silk. The guard is plain gold, and the thick scabbard is oddly made of stone and heavily marked by runes.

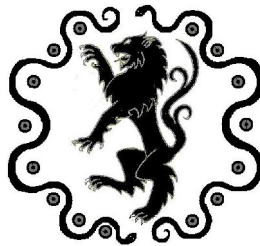
You hold the heavy sheath and draw the blade a few inches. Light blazes out and a wall of heat washes over your face a moment later. Quickly you conceal the blade once more.

Now you know what you are holding, and you tremble. It is a Firesword. A weapon of great destruction, turning even a child or a fool into a dangerous foe. Hundreds of years ago Fireswords were made, but it was quickly seen that their power was too destructive to be allowed to fall into the hands of ordinary men. Thus they were made then with magical seals upon them. But even so, most civilised nations agreed that the making of such weapons and the possession of them should be a crime. So it was even enemies vowed not to use such weapons against each other, and to punish with death even their own who were found to have one.

This is a powerful weapon indeed. To its fiery blade armour provides no more resistance than flesh, thus when you use it, you may ignore your opponents armour.

Weapon	Category	Damage Bonus
Firesword	Sword	30

Now that you have finished here, you can proceed further up the corridor by turning to **730**, or if you haven't already, try the door opposite the armoury by turning to **607**



729

With a final blow the last skeleton drops to the ground in pieces, its skittering remains the last sound before a heavy silence. The coldness in the air is gone. You have won a great battle.

Slumping down against the wall, you pause to rest, looking over your handiwork. As you do so, you notice that one of the skeletons is wearing a tarnished silver gauntlet that still appears to be in good condition. Rousing yourself from your repose, you crawl over and pick up the gauntleted limb.

You pull it from the bony arm and examine it closely. The silver is thin and inlaid with opals, around which swirl golden serpents. You give the inside of the gauntlet a sniff, then slip your hand inside. It tightens around your arm. It does not hurt, but you still try to pull it off. It does not budge. It fits so closely it looks like your forearm and hand is painted silver with opals and golden serpents inlaid in your flesh.

You are uncertain whether or not to be pleased by this treasure. It does not seem to be doing you any harm now, but you are left to wonder what its magical properties are.

With nothing else to do, you leave the chamber and climb back up the stairs once more. A lone serpent-guard waits for you, and you see that he is surprised and displeased that you have returned. Silently he moves off and you follow him back through the broken hills. Once you are in the gardens, more serpent-guards appear to

escort you back to the shrine. You step inside and a radiant white mist begins obscure the garden. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents in the floor and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

730

Proceeding up the grand yet dim passage, you come to another pair of doors, one to each side. Ahead you see the passage continue beyond the next set of massive pillars. You consider where to go.

To continue onwards, turn to **609**

To take the door to the right, turn to **747**

To take the door to the left, turn to **719**

731

Pulling out one of the heavy chairs, you lower yourself into it. As soon as you are seated, the darkness in the room deepens, and a haze covers the table. It also turns bitterly cold and you shudder as you feel pain and raging anger seeping into you.

You begin to see movement in the darkness, and shapes begin to form in the other seats. Eventually you find yourself seated at an unholy feast in the midst of a blizzard of black snow that billows and streams around the table but never falls upon it.

You look at the other diners as their forms solidify. The eleven other places are taken by beings of all sorts. Across the table from you sits a massively built red-scaled demon with a crown of ten horns and five large yellow eyes than blaze with frustration as he claws weakly at a roasted pig. To your right is a slender creature with white skin and white hair and the palest blue eyes. It looks like an elf, and stares miserably at its 'eternal' meal. To your left is what looks like another red-scaled demon, but in more human proportions, with a tri-horned crest sweeping back from its head, and a hooked beak. It's eyes are large and purple, and its fingers end in long claws that end in dexterous points as it fiddles with a bejewelled silver eating knife. It appears deep in thought.

The others at the table are just as strange and creatures the like of which you have never seen. They all ignore each other, you decide to try and speak to one of the other diners.

Do you want to talk to the white elf (turn to **817**), or the demon with the long claws (turn to **965**)?



732

Taking a deep breath you charge through the curtain and throw yourself to the floor as the face opens its mouth to spit a fireball at you...

Test your SKILL. If you are skilful, turn to **601**
If you are unskilful, turn to **753**

733

A lightning bolt blasts into the door above you as you slam yourself down onto the floor. Chips of burnt wood rain down on you. You jump to your feet and jerk open the burning door. You pause only long enough to slam it securely behind you as you tear down the ramp and dash heedlessly through the gardens.

You run with all your might and reach the shrine safely, bounding up onto the circle. As soon as you are back in the circle, radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You see several serpent-guards only paces away and realise you have made the narrowest of escapes. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You pause to rest for a few minutes, then take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

734

You push against the falling pots with your hands. The pressure just makes the pots swell outwards at other points. Finally using your chest, elbow and knee, you manage to stop the pots tumbling out.

You breathe a sigh of relief. You may replenish one luck point. You carefully push the pots until they are in a messy but stable pile and close the doors. You search the rest of the kitchen with greater care, but find nothing.

You can now go to the door across the hall by turning to **674**

If you want to proceed further into the quarters, turn to **730**



735

“I will take the trial!” you declare boldly.

“Very well,” says the mask. “Only those favoured by heaven may bear this power. Let us see what favour with heaven you have!”

The eyes of the mask glow, and you feel the light flow into your body through your eye, paralysing you as well as filling you with an odd sensation...

Test your HEAVENLY FAVOUR. Roll 3 dice. If the total is equal to or less than your current LUCK score, turn to **728**

If it is greater, turn to **756**

736

You move the picks in the lock and are soon hear the satisfying click of the turning tumblers. But at the same time you feel something sharp prick your hand. You snatch your hand away, already feeling a burning sensation in the small wound. Glancing at the lock you see a poisoned needle protruding from the keyhole.

You have been poisoned, and you start to feel light-headed as the powerful venom does it work.

If you have a healing potion, you can drink it by turning to **860** Drinking the potion will counteract the poison only. It will not restore lost STAMINA.

If you are wearing a gold armband or have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, you may also turn to **860**

Otherwise, turn to **929**

**737**

You ponder the question in silence for several moments, then speak, breaking the silence with your reply.

“You are correct,” grumbles the demon. Unhappily it casts a ball of rainbow coloured light at you. The light flows into your body and you feel it tingling throughout your being. You may increase your *initial* SKILL by 2 points.

The demon vanishes, leaving behind a pentagram of black dust. You happily put aside the magic book and begin to search the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

738

The demon laughs. "Whether one is blessed by luck or not is his own doing. Let us see if you are already lucky or not!"

Test your Luck

If you are lucky, turn to **709**

If you are unlucky, turn to **765**

If you didn't use the golden apple for the summoning and would like to offer it to the demon now in exchange for increased LUCK, turn to **713**

739

You hold the book and begin to incant the incantation. As you repeat the words, you feel your body vibrating with increasing strength, then the whole room seems to be shaking as the air above the pentagram fills with light. Eventually a figure appears amidst the light and all becomes still once more. To your surprise and dismay it is a large crow. It begins to devour your offering.

"You again?" you say.

The crow ignores you and continues to eat. You resist the temptation to throw something at it and grind your teeth. Finally it finishes and looks at you.

"Why do you keep bothering me?" the crow asks.

Ignoring the remark you get down to business. "I am in the palace of King Darm. Aid me against him."

"Very well," says the crow. "Go to the Royal Sorcerer's apartments. There you will find a spellbook that will tell you how to summon a unicorn. Use a golden apple. It will then aid you."

"I'm already in the royal sorcerer's rooms, and I summoned you!"

"I'm not a unicorn, I'm a crow," it explains compassionately.

"I know that!" you exclaim. "It's too late for me to summon the unicorn! All I have is you, so help me!"

The crow sighs. "Very well. There are many ways to defeat King Darm's evil plans. How do you wish to defeat him?"

What will you answer?

Low risk: That you want to kill Darm? Turn to **651**

High risk: That you want to save him from his own evil? Turn to **774**

740

"I am here to stop King Darm," you tell the quivering hut. "If he is keeping you here against your will I can help to free you. Will you help me against him?"

There is silence for a long time, but then finally a small shaky voice replies. "He is too powerful! Too powerful for the likes of you!"

"I have hidden talents," you boast. "But if you can help me, maybe it will increase my chances and I will reward you."

There is silence for a while longer, then the locks on the click, and the door opens a crack, just enough for a thin fingered hand to drop out a small phial of potion. The door slams shut and the locks click once more. "You drink!" the creature squeaks.

You pick up the phial, which is made of faceted crystal. It contains a very small amount of a brownish liquid.

If you want to drink the potion, turn to **801**

If you don't trust the creature, you can threaten him, by turning to **809**, or go straight to pulling the hut into pieces by turning to **907**

Alternatively, you can put down the potion and leave the gardens by turning to **858**

741

Carefully parting the curtains, you flinch back as you see the rune-marked head of a massive ballista bolt right before your face. After a moment you relax as you realise the ballista it is mounted on is still and unmanned. Stepping around the head of the weapon, you find yourself in a round chamber almost completely filled with the crossbow-like siege engine. Chains hanging from the ceiling are connected to the ballista, and a crank in a small alcove provides the means to hoist the ballista up to the domed ceiling above.

There is enough room for you to edge around the ballista and you do so, reaching a pair of tall golden doors. Carefully trying the doors, you find them unlocked and open one just enough to peek through into the dim hall beyond. Seeing it is safe, you move inside and close the doors. You have made it to the upper level of the palace, the personal residence of King Darm.

The halls here are much less opulent than those below. The walls are polished dark grey marble veined with white. The floors are laid with gold and various dark hues of marble laid out in tile-like patterns and polished smooth. The arched ceilings are high, with thick beams and boards of polished chestnut-coloured wood. The doors that line the main corridor are also the same chestnut-coloured wood.

Chandeliers as grand as those below, if much smaller, hang at intervals from the ceiling, but their light seems oddly muted, as if there is a darkness that hangs in the air. Everything around you seems still and lifeless, as if no one has lived here for a long time.

Looking at the long corridor ahead of you, you can see three doors on each side, with another door at the other end of the corridor. You have no idea of the layout of the quarters or where to find Kianmay or Darm. None of the doors are marked in any way. The corridor is divided into three sections by thick black pillars carved in relief with noble warriors holding standards that reach to the very ceiling. In the first section where you stand is a set of doors in each wall.

Where do you want to go?

To take the doorway to the right, turn to **607**

To take the doorway to the left, turn to **674**

To move further along the corridor, turn to **730**

742

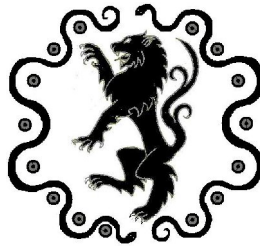
You begin to make your way up the hallway, when you see the doors at the far end begin to open. You come to a stop, your weapon coming to hand. Exiting the door opposite is a small creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. He makes his way down the corridor, smiling at you.

It does not speak until it is within a few metres of you. He hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "Welcome. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature bows, then turns and makes its way back up the corridor. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you slowly follow. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to 727



743

Taking out the bottle of sleeping potion, you quickly tip some into the cup of wine. You then turn back and approach her. You hand her the cup. She takes it and points to a seat. You obediently sit down.

She lifts the cup behind her veil and sips from it. "You are here to kill the King, aren't you?" she asks.

"Yes," you reply.

"He is a powerful sorcerer," she replies. "How do you hope to defeat him?"

"I have my ways," you reply enigmatically.

The queen sneers. "You are not the first to come here, trying to destroy him. Champions have come from near and far. All more powerful than a mere warrior such as you. I dearly wish that you would succeed in your quest. But no mere warrior can defeat him. It is best for you to leave this place and never return."

"I cannot do that," you reply. "He has captured a priestess whom I must rescue."

"She will come to no harm," the queen replies. "He is not so petty as to harm a woman. He was once a noble king."

She falls into silence, and her eyelids start to close. Her eyes flare open and she looks at you. "What have you done?" Her eyes close again and you see her head slowly lower. You gently take the cup from her hand and put it down on the table. She is asleep now and you pick her up and carry her to the bed, where you lay her down.

You pause to look down at her. Despite being a queen, you guess that she is trapped here. You draw aside her veil and are shocked to see that she is disfigured horribly. You replace the veil and close the curtains around the bed, leaving her in peace.

You then leave the room.

If you haven't already, you can go through the doors opposite by turning to **888**
To go through the doors at the end of the hall, turn to **727**

744

Turning to the chapter on objects of gold, you browse through until you come upon a picture of a golden apple. Eagerly you read the entry. The golden apple is apparently from a tree that grows in one of the lower heavens, producing three apples every 1000 years. The passage warns that eating the apple will fill the eater with the essence of the heaven from which it comes, and so only spiritual beings should eat it.

The whole thing sounds a bit dubious to you. And how can you eat a metal apple? Perhaps what you have is just a model.

Turn back to **748**

745

The darkness moves around you and you feel like you are floating. Eventually you seem to rise up and light rushes to fill your eyes. You feel something hit your side and your eyes flare open. Whatever has kicked you jumps back and you scramble to your feet.

Standing there is a small creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "So you are alive after all. You have strange powers indeed. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature bows, then turns and makes its way across the dining hall and back into the corridor. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you slowly follow, crossing the dining hall and moving into the corridor. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**



746

You open cupboards and drawers, finding plates, cups, knives, forks, spoons, dishes and bowls of all sizes. You also find wooden spoons, ladles, pots and pans, and barrels of rancid oil. It is all very ordinary, but then you discover something unusual. As you open one cupboard, you find the pots there are poorly stacked, and begin to fall.

You desperately throw out your hands, trying to stop the pots falling...

Test your SKILL. There are a lot of pots, so test your SKILL by rolling 2 die and adding 3 to this number. If this total is the same as or less than your current SKILL, turn to **734**

If the total is higher, turn to **751**

747

The double doors are wide, and as you ease the door open, you are unsurprised to see a lavish dining room. Stepping inside, you look over the thickly carved and polished wooden table. Laid out upon its surface is a great feast, in platters, bowls, plates and cups of silver inlaid with jewels. Great bejewelled candlesticks stand on the table, with thick white candles burning brightly. Yet here the air seems even darker than outside, and a chill washes over your skin.

Nonetheless, you step forward and look over the feast. At first glance it is appealing, but you quickly notice that the large shining fruits are painted and lacquered wood. Likewise the other food and meals are skillfully made from painted clay or carved wood.

Disinterested, and chilled by the strange air, you begin to turn away. But as you do so you see movement and turn your head back towards the table. Looking directly you see nothing. Carefully turning your gaze away, you try to concentrate on your peripheral vision. The shadowy air over the table moves. You cannot distinguish what is happening, but there is something strange and magical about this feast.

You look quickly over the rest of the room, seeing nothing but glass-doored cabinets full of expensive dinnerware, and a pair of doors on the far side filled in with coloured glass.

If you want to investigate the fake feast and see what is going on, turn to **710**

If you want to go through the stained-glass doors, turn to **766**

If you have had enough of this place, and haven't yet tried the opposite door, you can do so by turning to **719**

Alternatively you can proceed further up the main corridor by turning to **609**

748

In your search you suddenly see a book that is entitled: *Objects of Magic and their Uses*. You take it down and find it is a catalogue of magical items. You flick through it looking for any objects that you have.

The following objects are listed and you can look them up if you have them:

Jade Collar (**711**)

Silver Scarab (696)

Golden Apple (744)

The rest of your search reveals nothing, and you leave the quarters. The demonic face in the door remains still, and you stop in the entrance hall to consider your options.

To take the tree arch, turn to **539**

To take the nest arch, turn to **625**

If you have finished here and want to leave the quarters, turn to **558**

749

The sensations, pleasant at first, begin to hurt as you feel your body being stretched and compressed. Your face extends, and thick hair sprouts all over your body. Amidst the pain your human mind starts to slip away as a powerful hunger rises within your heart...

The human part of you vanishes as you are transformed into a wolf. Because you have been transformed by magic rather than the cycle of the moon, you remain in your wolf shape. You will never know how you fled the palace, feeding on several humans on your way, before running through the city and finding freedom in the tundra. As a werewolf you stand twice as high as any normal wolf, and are covered in thick black fur. You live alone by your instincts until a wolf pack adopts you. They too are large and black like you, but they can transform into two-legged creatures, and lead a great army of two-legs.

You join them, running at their side as they cover themselves in metal and attack a great city of stone. Eventually your pack and their two-leg army is victorious and you sit in golden halls next to the king, his companion forever.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

750

Slipping the key into the lock, you turn it and are pleased to hear the tumblers click over. Pushing open the doors, you step inside and close the door, locking it behind you.

Looking around the room you are awed by what you see. It is an armoury. It is filled with weapons and armour of all kinds. Racks of weapons stand against the walls while in the floor space in the centre are wooden stands holding erect suits of armour. Hanging on the walls are weapons of great value and beauty.

You rub your hands together with glee. You can replace your weapons and armour here, or take extra. The armoury has everything that you would find at a weaponmasters shop in a market. Once you have equipped yourself with more mundane items, it is time to look for something of greater value.

The weapons on the walls prove to be more decorative than practical. The utilitarian weapons you have already inspected are more appropriate for your

purposes. Yet you do not give up. There must be something of value here. This is Darm's personal armoury after all.

The armoury is laid out in a practical way, and yet there is a door-sized blank space on the far wall. Initially your gaze passed over it unseeing. Perhaps a rack was removed. But now determined that there must be something more here, you examine the blank wall with greater interest.

On closer examination you see that it is not blank after all. In the centre is a small hole. Since it is at head-height, you put your eye to it and see a small cavity beyond, in which is a small jade mask with tiny emeralds set in silver for eyes. The cavity is lit by a tiny sliver of a light crystal in the ceiling of the cavity.

What do you want to do?

Poke something into the hole? Turn to **775**

Try talking to the mask? Turn to **714**

If you rather not try your luck with the hole at all, you can leave and proceed further up the hall by turning to **730**, or if you haven't already try the door opposite the armoury by turning to **607**

751

You desperately try to catch the pots, but they spill around you and clatter loudly on the floor, some bouncing across the floor to bang against the walls. When all is still, you carefully stand, easing a pot off your lap and setting it down. You listen, but hear nothing. The place seems deserted after all.

Do you want to continue your search? If so, turn to **771**

If you think it is best to leave now, turn to **722**

752

Darm shouts words of power and thrusts his hand at you. The air itself rushes towards you, thickening into a spear of force. It strikes you so swiftly and powerfully that the impact is like been hit by a battering ram. Your magical protection unravels the magic, but it only needs a moment to inflict 5 points of damage to your STAMINA

If you are still alive, turn to **874**

If you are killed, but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

If you are just killed, turn to **805**

753

You have timed your dive too early and the demon face spits fire directly into your face. You shield yourself with your arms, but still suffer 6 STAMINA damage. If you are still alive, you scramble to the base of the door where the face cannot reach you. The demonic face curses and grumbles at you. Reaching up, you push on the

handle and the door swings open. You keep low and close to the door and roll inside, shutting the door behind you.

You have made it into the sorcerer's study.

Turn to **760**

754

You set the gems in place one by one, pausing before you fit the last one into the depression. You quickly step back, but nothing happens. You wait for a minute, but the chamber remains still.

You retrieve the gems and consider what to do next.

If you want to leave, you can take the trapdoor by turning to **851**, or if you came in through the window, you can leave that way by turning to **984**

Or you can try another combination:

Grey-ruby, black-sapphire, white-emerald; turn to **648**

Grey-sapphire, black-ruby, white-emerald; turn to **793**

Grey sapphire, black-emerald, white-ruby; turn to **813**

Grey-emerald, black-ruby, white-sapphire; turn to **830**

Grey-emerald, black-sapphire, white-ruby; turn to **953**

755

You begin to climb the steps, your feet falling silently on the carpeted steps. You keep alert for any signs of alarm or danger, but see nothing. When you are halfway up the steps you hear a springing sound, and see the curtains flung open as a ballista bolt shoots towards you. In the second you have to observe it you see the shaft is as thick as a slender man and the head is broad enough to shear you in two.

Desperately you dive for the floor...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **662**

If you are unlucky, but the dice roll is less than your LUCK+3, turn to **707**

If you are unlucky by more than your LUCK+3, turn to **769**

756

The light withdraws from your body. "You are a mundane being," the mask informs you. The next instant it spits a stream of fire from its mouth. You flinch backwards, but the flame has already struck your face. You try to smother the flames as you fall to the ground with a scream, feeling your flesh run off your bones. But the magical fire cannot be suppressed. Thankfully it is quick and consumes your flesh in seconds, and reduces your bones to smoke in less than a minute.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

757

Lifting your hand with a topaz ring on it, you concentrate and try to reveal the magical properties of the ring. Darm waits patiently, an indulgent smile curving his lips. You feel the magical heart of the ring, and you feel the power unlocked within emerge.

The topaz starts to glow with a soft, warm light. You wait expectantly, but there doesn't seem to be anything else happening. You hear Darm chuckle. "I gave a ring like that to my assassin. I hope you did not do him any harm? A timid creature, but he can put a knife in man's back and escape before his widow notices a thing. I dare not keep him inside the palace with me." He stands and lifts his hand. "You have had your turn. Now I will have mine!" He begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband, turn to **752**

If not, turn to **971**

758

You search through your pack for something. Your hand comes upon the ornate ivory comb that you found on the floor of the throne room. You don't know why you even bothered to take it with you. But now some instinct makes you toss it into the circle of flame.

The flames turn red and surge inwards towards the comb, sweeping it up as the flame rises into a sphere above the blackened carpet. The sphere hangs in the air for a moment, then starts to expand and take on the form of something; limbs protrude underneath, it seems to have wings. The flames die down, dancing across a wrinkled, white hide.

The last flames vanish into the air, and you stare with wonder at the massive beast. It is a huge white elephant, standing nearly as tall as the ceiling. What you thought were wings are in fact massive ears that it flaps gracefully back and forth as it turns to look around the chamber, its massive feet touching the floor lightly. When you see its head, you are amazed to see it has six tusks, and its eyes are bright blue. It looks at you with intelligence.

Kianmay steps forward and bows to the elephant. "Hanimubeli! I welcome you Great King. I am sorry if we have disturbed you. But we are facing great peril."

A deep disembodied voice replies, seeming to come from the floor itself. It resonates around the chamber, as if the earth itself is speaking. "Priestess. It would be my honour to assist you, for your merit is great. But it is not you who has summoned me." The great head swings first towards you, and then Darm, who is looking at the great elephant with as much shock as you. "The peril you speak of arises from the petty hearts of these two bound souls. Shall a man seeing two scorpions fighting separate them from their needless conflict? Once he is gone, the scorpions shall find other conflicts to fight, for violence lives within their hearts. Even if he is to keep the scorpion in a cage, he cannot change its petty heart. How then may I assist here?"

Kianmay bows once more. "What you say is true, Great King. But this man who also calls himself King wishes to take for himself the Diamond Key, and make himself immortal. He will kill this other man merely to obtain it."

The holy elephant looks at Darm for many moments, then swings back towards you. "Let the one who summoned me speak."

Kianmay gestures for you to bow. You do so, more to give yourself time to think than to show respect.

What will you say?

"This man is evil! If you are good you must destroy him!" Turn to **820**

"Please give me the strength to defeat this sorcerer!" Turn to **895**

"Please do what you can to protect the Diamond Key from greedy men." Turn to **932**

759

The only thing you recognise on the letters is the seal of King Darm. The letters are pasted onto the back of each chair, and you contemplate tearing one off to see what happens. But it could be unwise to meddle in magic you don't understand.

Do you want to tear one of the letters off to see what happens? If so, turn to **764**

If you want to sit in one of the chairs, turn to **731**

If you have learned enough about this feast and want to investigate the stained glass doors on the far side of the room, turn to **766**

If you haven't already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

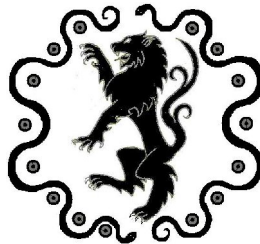
760

The study is a large chamber with a large clear space in the centre. The walls are filled with bookshelves and cabinets, and one large desk against the wall with a high-backed chair. The furniture here is plain polished wood. Fine, but lacking the garish opulence of the outer rooms.

On the desk you see what looks like a golden apple. You go over to the desk and pick up the object. It is an apple, and its cold surface is gold, but it is only a little heavier than a real apple. The skin is pure gold and depresses slightly under your grasp. You may take the apple if you wish. Also on the desk is an open book and you glance at it.

Are you wearing an amethyst condor amulet? If so, turn to **581**

If not, turn to **718**



761

You jiggle the picks around in the lock and soon hear a faint click, followed by a sharp pain in your hand. You snatch your hand back and see a poisoned needle protruding from the lock, as a burning sensation fills your hand. You have been poisoned, and you start to feel light-headed as the powerful venom does its work.

If you have a healing potion, you can drink it by turning to **804**. Drinking the potion will counteract the poison only. It will not restore lost STAMINA.

If you are wearing a gold armband or have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, you may also turn to **804**.

Otherwise, turn to **928**.

762

The unicorn sniffs at the food, then looks up at you and disappears. The circle of dust is now black and there isn't enough to make a new one. You curse the waste of time and effort. You turn your attention to searching the study instead.

Turn to **656**.

763

"How do I break the seal?" you ask.

"By submitting yourself to the trial," the mask answers promptly.

"What is the trial?"

"I must test your worthiness to bear the power I hold. If you pass, my power shall be yours. If you fail, I will destroy you. Question now the worth of your ambition."

It is a heavy price to pay for failure. "How will you test my worthiness?" you ask.

"Only he who faces the trial shall know," the mask replies enigmatically.

What will you do?

Declare you wish to take the trial? Turn to **735**.

If you think it is too risky, you must leave.

To proceed further up the hall, turn to **730**.

If you haven't already, you can try the door opposite the armoury by turning to **607**.

764

Leaning out from a safe distance, you take hold of one corner of one of the sheets of parchment and pausing to take a deep breath, jerk at it while jumping back. The parchment is torn, with smoke rising from the tear. You fling the paper away, which spins heavily through the air and lands on the carpet. The remnants on the floor and stuck on the chair begin to hiss as they smoke and dissolve away. The air around you

seems to move, though nothing stirs. You feel something rush past you, but then all is still.

You wait a little longer, but whatever was going to happen has happened, so you relax and begin to plan your next move. The next moment the doors to the dining room open and you spin around, weapon coming to hand.

Standing there is a small creature only as high as your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "There's no need for your weapon. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature holds open the door and gestures politely. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you force a smile at the creature. "You first."

The little creature just smiles and bows, then disappears through the door. Slowly you follow, peeking out cautiously before stepping out into the hall. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following or not. You follow reluctantly and see the creature go through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

765

The demon laughs at you for what seems like minutes, then finally stops and says: "I must still do as you ask, but there is a price!"

A tendril extends out from the forehead of the demon and latches onto you. You try to pull away, but the insubstantial tendril cannot be struck away, even though it seems to physically dig into you. You feel as though your insides are twisting about and collapse to the floor. After a minute the tendril is withdrawn and the demon vanishes, leaving behind a pentagram of black dust.

You lie on the floor, feeling everything inside your being churning. Your *initial* LUCK has been increased by 2, but your *initial* SKILL has been reduced by 2

Once your insides settle down once more, you stand up and begin to search the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

766

Approaching the glass filled doors, you pause to study the designs in stained glass, but it appears to be just geometric. Unlatching the doors, you push them open. Cool night air blows over you as a balcony is revealed. Stepping out, you see the light of a great watchfire and guess that the wall-top is only a little below the level of the balcony.

Deciding it is probably a good idea to keep out of sight of any patrolling guards, you instead turn and look back up at the palace. You are surprised to see another row of windows above. Isn't this supposed to be the highest level of the palace?

The windows are in the base of the massive spired dome that sits atop the palace, and soft light shines within them. You consider trying to climb up there, but after examining the slick walls, you decide it can only be done if you have a rope and grappling hook. But throwing an iron hook through the window will attract the attention of anyone inside; and then there are the guards below to consider. Against the white marble exterior, illuminated by the great watchfires, you will be very visible.

If you have a rope and grappling hook and want to undertake a highly risky and potentially fruitless course of action, turn to **819**

Otherwise you must return to the dining hall where you can:

Tear one of the parchments off to see what happens by turning to **764**

Sit in one of the chairs, by turning to turn to **731**

If you haven't already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

767

The unicorn's horn plunges into your chest for the final time and you drop your weapon, falling to your knees. The unicorn tosses its head, flinging you through the air. You crash to the ground and lie in pain for a long time. Eventually you feel stronger and moving carefully you discover you are still alive. The wounds have healed, but you are still weak.

Standing up, you see no trace of the unicorn. You are now trapped here and wander for what seems like years before a kindly spirit finds you and sends you back to the human realm. But by then it is too late. Time in the mortal world has passed much faster than in the plane where you were trapped. It is hundreds of years since the reign of King Darm.

You do the best you can to make a new life.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

768

Putting your weapon away, you quickly take out the glass ring and slip it onto your finger. You feel yourself becoming insubstantial just in time, as a sword swings towards you and passes straight through your head. You sigh in relief, then walk through the throng of moaning warriors. You find that you have to push through them, each one's magical being forming some sort of substance then you can feel. But none are able to prevent you as you make your way back across the chamber and climb up the stairs once more. You reach the top and remove your ring.

A lone serpent-guard waits for you, and you see that he is surprised and displeased that you have returned. Silently he moves off and you follow him back through the

broken hills. Once you are in the gardens, more serpent-guards appear to escort you back to the shrine. You step inside and a radiant white mist begins obscure the garden. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You pause to examine your magical amulet once more, feeling the power within it. Pleased, you take the gems from the eyes of the serpents in the floor and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

769

Your reaction is too slow, and the bolt cuts right through you, the enchanted head cutting flesh and armour alike. You are cut through the chest, and fall to the stairway in two pieces.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

770

You listen at the doors, but hearing nothing ease the door open. You see beyond the biggest bedchamber you have ever seen. The large, canopied bed sits in the centre of the room on a kind of round stage, hung with curtains of silk and satin in rich shades of red and purple with golden trim. The walls are covered in golden panels inlaid with dense designs in blue, green and red, depicting trees and birds. The giant chandelier that hangs in the centre of the pearly white dome has light crystals surrounded by globes of clouded glass to cast a soft light throughout the chamber.

There are several sets of screens sealing off the far side of the room, and you venture inside. You do not expect to find much here, but curiosity leads you to peek behind the screens.

There are plush cushioned couches, and tables loaded with vases of flowers and bowls of fruit, a dresser and standing mirror to one side and a writing desk to the other. There is yet another layer of screens sealing off a smaller area. One of the screens is draped with a gown, and you guess that it is a ladies dressing area.

The perfumed air is still and silent, and guess that no one is here. You turn to leave, but a soft voice speaks.

“Who are you to so boldly enter my chamber?”

You spin around, but see no one. Slowly, you see a form start to materialise near the writing desk. Soon a tall, elegant woman stands there, her skin light brown, shining hair black and loose, falling about her body in shimmering waves. She is dressed in sweeping robes of deep red embroidered with gold, long skirts of dark green satin trailing behind her as she walks over to you. She wears a veil of deep red silk across her lower face. Her eyes are brightest green and she peers at you unafraid, but with an intensity that you find unsettling.

“Can you intrude, yet not speak?”

“Sorry,” you blurt out. “I didn’t know you were here.”

“Ah,” she says in an amused tone. “You wished to enter my chamber while I was absent? Whatever were you planning to do?”

Light dances playfully in her eyes as she steps closer to you. “I am looking for the King,” you say.

“I see,” she replies, looking you over carefully.

“Who are you?” you ask at last. You know already that she is a magic-user, and have to be cautious.

“I am the Queen,” she says simply.

“I didn’t know Darm had a queen,” you reply.

The look that she gives you makes you fear that you have made a mistake. She turns from you and walks over to one of the couches. She sits and arranges her clothes about her before she replies. “Who does know that I am his queen? Who even knows that I exist?” She looks up at you, then points at a cabinet on the far side of the room, where there is a jug and some cups. “Bring me some wine.”

You pause, then say: “I’m sorry I intruded. But I have business with your husband, I really must be going.”

“You are sneaking about in this palace,” the queen replies flatly. “The king is in the next room and will come if I summon him. Unless you wish to be discovered, you will entertain me. Now, bring me wine and displease me no further!”

You consider your options.

To do as she asks, turn to **715**

To attack her, turn to **828**

To just leave, turn to **955**

771

You leave the pots on the floor and step around them, carefully continuing your search. You open the last cupboard and find nothing. As you stand, the kitchen door opens and you spin around, weapon coming to hand.

Standing there is a small creature only as high as your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. “There’s no need for that. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me.”

The little creature holds open the door and gestures politely. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you force a smile at the creature. “You first.”

The little creature just smiles and bows, then disappears through the door. Slowly you follow, peeking out cautiously before stepping out into the hall. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following or not. You follow reluctantly and see the creature go through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wooden doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

772

Taking a jar of silver dust, you pour out a pentagram on the floor. From a small box you take ten inscribed discs and place them in the ten outer compartments of the pentagram. The spell says that you need to place an offering in the centre of the pentagram. If you have any food with you, you can place it in the centre. Otherwise you will have to use the golden apple from the desk.

Once you are sure the magic is ready, you examine the book once more. There are several beings you can try to summon, and you consider carefully which one to choose.

The first that appeals to you is a warrior spirit, who guards the passage to heaven through the plane in question. He is described as having great affinity with fellow warriors, but is described as largely unhelpful.

Another is a unicorn spirit, as unicorns can live simultaneously on the physical and spiritual planes. The book says that the King of these creatures if summoned can be killed for its horn, though it is fearsome foe.

The third that attracts your attention is a trickster spirit that is described as potentially very helpful, but also very dangerous for the foolish.

The last you consider is a demon named Attamarg. He is serving a penance turning the wheel of the heavens, which makes the stars turn in the sky. He is most likely to help those with evil intent.

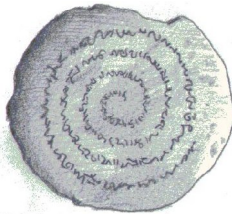
Who do you want to summon?

The Warrior Spirit? Turn to **612**

The Unicorn? Turn to **716**

The Trickster? Turn to **739**

The Demon? Turn to **776**



773

You leap aside, but one of the tendrils touches you, instantly paralysing you. The other tendrils gather and latch onto you, lifting you up into the air. The sorceress floats through the air to stop before you. She looks you over once more with scorn.

“You are a barbarian!” she spits. Energy crackles in her hands and shoots along the tendrils, entering your body and making you scream and writhe for the few moments that you remain conscious.

You awake some time later severely battered and in pain (reduce your current SKILL by two points, and halve your current STAMINA). You are still lying on the floor in the queen’s chamber, but the other figure present is not the queen. It is a rotund little man no higher than your knee. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. “That’s it! Up you get. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me.”

The little creature turns and begins to walk away. Groggily you stand and stagger after the small creature. You start to feel better as you move along. You look around for the queen, but she is nowhere in sight. By the time you reach the entrance of the bedchamber, the creature is gone, but the doors at the end of the hallway have been left ajar. Taking a deep breath, you make your way inside.

Turn to **727**

774

“I would like to save him if I can,” you say.

“Very well,” the crow replies. “Darm has gone many times to a spiritual plane seeking the horns of unicorns; for the ground powder will restore youth and strength. He has killed many of them already. Yet this has not satisfied him. But so it is that the essence of the unicorn is in him. In this room you will find a scroll of Revelation. It will bring out the hidden nature within a being. Thus it will bring out the spiritual essence of the unicorn within him. Do this and he may be saved from his own evil.”

Before you can say anything, the crow disappears. The dust of the pentagram is now black and you turn your attention to searching the rest of the study.

Turn to **656**

775

Reasoning that the mask might be a button of some sort, you find a stiletto dagger in the armoury and poke it into the hole, aiming for one of the emerald-filled eye sockets. The mask moves, but not in the way you expect. It comes to life and frowns. It then opens its mouth and spits fire.

You are too close to avoid the flame. Your hand takes most of the heat (Lose 5 STAMINA), but you also get so tongues of flame licking your face and searing your eye (Lose 1 SKILL).

You stagger back from the hole, dropping the dagger and clutching your eye. You don't have the courage to approach the hole again and cursing your luck, you leave the armoury.

To proceed further up the hall, turn to **730**

If you haven't already, you can try the door opposite by turning to **607**

776

You hold the book and begin to incant the incantation. As you repeat the words, you feel your body vibrating with increasing strength, then the whole room seems to be shaking as the air above the pentagram fills with light. Eventually a figure appears amidst the light and all becomes still once more. Hanging in the air before you is a raging mass of darkness and blood. You see a demonic face, hanging upside down shaped by the blood and darkness.

The fanged maw opens. “Why have you disturbed me?”

The voice grates your ears and a putrid stench comes from the mouth, making you feel like vomiting. You steel yourself and reply. "I am on a quest to destroy an evil sorcerer."

The demon laughs, almost flooring you with the stinking wave of its breath. "I can help you, but a price must be paid. What is it you want?"

What do you want?

Greater SKILL? Turn to **623**

Greater STAMINA? Turn to **659**

More LUCK? Turn to **738**

777

Moving casually, you begin to descend the stairway...

If you have a glass ring, you can ensure you will not be detected by slipping it on and turning to **876**

Otherwise you must test your LUCK. If you are lucky, turn to **824**

If you are unlucky, turn to **986**

778

Taking a breath, you smile at the serpent man, then turn and run as fast as you can back towards the shrine. You hear no signs of pursuit, but do not slow your steps. Reaching the shrine you bound up onto the circle. As soon as you are back in the circle, radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

779

Carefully looking from side to side, you check that no one is able to observe you. Seeing that the coast is clear, you eagerly kneel by the pool and reach out, immersing your arm in the water.

You grasp the diamond and triumphantly pull it out of the pool. The drops of water glistening on the surface appear like flaws on the gleaming jewel that sparkles and shines in the light of the suns above. The diamond even takes on the greenish tinge of the sky as your imagination bursts with ways to spend the fabulous wealth you hold in your trembling hand.

As you hold the gem, your hand starts to ache, and looking up at the statue, you see its eyes glow, and the serpent queen glares at you angrily. You feel something

travel through your body from the gem, and you hastily drop it back into the pool. But it is too late. You have been cursed. Lower your *initial* LUCK by 2. You shake your hand and look back at the statue, which appears normal once more

A hiss interrupts your lamentations and you spin towards a scraping sound that you realise you have been hearing for some time. What you see alarms you considerably. The guard that has discovered you is human-looking enough from the waist up, clad in a steel breast-plate and helm, carrying a long spear. But below the waist extends a thick serpent's body and tail covered in brown scales, extending several metres behind him.

The dark slit eyes seem to focus on your your hand and the serpent-man hisses again, levelling his spear and rearing up twice your height. He begins to thump his tail on the ground in what looks like an expression of aggression, but he does not attack. You suspect that the thumping is some kind of signal. If so, it would be unwise to be engaged in a fight when more serpent-men arrive.

If you want to surrender, turn to **869**

If you want to run, turn to **778**

780

Hoping you are not about to betray yourself to one of King Darm's allies, you take a deep breath and begin to speak. "In my world there is a man, a king, who has become a powerful sorcerer. He seeks power for he fears death. Thus he seeks a treasure from our world called the Diamond Key. This object has great power, and if a man bears it, he is granted immortality. Yet if it is planted within the earth, it brings prosperity to all who dwell upon the land. I have travelled with a priestess who sought to place the Key in the Earth, but she has been captured by Darm. Now I must rescue her and somehow put his schemes to rest."

The queen looks up at you. "Why have you not put the Diamond Key within the earth yourself? Why do you carry it with you?"

A little embarrassed you explain. "I did place it in the earth, so that it could not be taken from me. But then...I was given another and it was placed inside me."

"Who would do such a thing?" The queen asks.

"It was...a Raven," you say, not knowing how else to explain.

The queen returns to her concoction, stirring it for many minutes. She then hands the wooden spoon to one of her companions and goes to a side table, where she picks up something in her hands. To your shock you realise it is the Diamond Key that was inside you. They have extracted it.

"You have brought violence against my kind," the queen begins. "You are a small man ruled by greed. Thus I shall not allow you to bear this Diamond Key. You are mortal once more. This is the punishment you shall receive for your crimes here. As for your quest..."

She places the Diamond Key into a lacquered box, then slithers over to you, peering into your eyes.

After a moment she speaks. "I shall aid you. I shall aid you most powerfully against the Once-King Darm. He is well known to us, and he displeases me. He has demanded many things of us, but the greatest I shall give to you so that you may defeat him." She turns to one of her attendants. "Take him and prepare him to be joined!"

The queen returns to her cauldron, and a black-scaled woman with red hair and a short green coat approaches you. She bows and invites you to follow her. You do not know what is happening, but do as you are asked.

You are taken to a small chamber and told to undress and bathe in a small tub. You reluctantly do so. When you are finished, two serpent woman, heedless of your nakedness, come to take you and your belongings into another chamber.

The chamber is round and the black stone walls are covered in sinuous runes painted in gold. The serpent woman take brush and pot, and cover your body in runes also, then ask you to stand in the centre of the chamber.

They leave, and you stand naked and shivering for several minutes. Eventually the doors directly in front of you open once more, and you slithering towards you a viper-maiden. Her snake part is blood-red, her skin soft and white. Long black hair flows down around her slender shoulders. Her eyes are red and look at you dully, as if she is entranced. Her entire body is covered in runes, painted on skin and scale alike. She slithers towards you, and abruptly presses her body against yours. She wraps her arms around you, and you bring your arms up to clasp her soft, cool body. She begins to coil her serpent part around the both of you, sealing off the outside from the ground up. As she shuts out the light, you feel the tingling of powerful magic as she starts to chant.

You feel innermost core being opened up by powerful magic and you feel something slipping inside you. But then you are plunged into unfeeling blackness. Eventually you start to regain sensation and you are dreaming. But they are not comfortable dreams and you soon awake.

As you eyes open, you see a smooth, white-plastered dome above you, a single light crystal hanging there. The ground beneath you is hard and uneven. You sit up, finding yourself lying on the triple-serpent-spiral. You have been returned to your world. You stand and stretch, finding yourself whole and unharmed, except for a few aches from sleeping on hard stone. Glancing out the window, you cannot determine how much time has passed; the night is as thick as it was when you entered here.

You remove the gems from the eyes of the serpents, and place them back in their box, which you replace in the alcove. You then consider what to do next.

Although you can't see any difference yet, make a note that you have been joined to a serpent-woman.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

781

Darm points at you, and you feel your skin tingle as magic is laid upon you. But whatever effect it was supposed to have disappears. You see Darm relax, and you swiftly jump forward and strike him directly on the head.

He looks shocked, but then a look of fear fills his eyes as blood runs down his face and he falls back. He sprawls and dies on the floor in front of you.

Turn to **800**

782

Gently you reach up and take the viper-woman's face in your hands, then slowly kiss her plump red lips. She does not respond, but when you pull away she smiles and places her hands on your shoulders. You kiss her again and she responds.

You spend a few minutes tasting her soft lips, then the woman pulls away. "You will stay here and be my husband," she announces.

"What?" you ask in shock.

"You have initiated intimacy with me. Are you not presenting yourself to me? I have accepted you." Her red eyes are starting to look a little fiery, which makes them even more unnerving.

How will you respond?

If you want to say that it was just a little kiss and doesn't mean you want to marry her, turn to **902**

If you want to agree for the moment, and look for other options later, turn to **963**

783

You focus upon yourself and read from the scroll, gathering the growing power inwards and bathing yourself in it. You feel your body tingling, until every part of you is filled with sensation...

If you have drunk wolf's blood or been bitten by a werewolf without getting cured, turn to **749**

Otherwise, turn to **997**

784

You begin to recite the magic words, sending the gathering magic towards Kianmay. She watches you with bemusement, shifting about uncomfortably as she feels the magic settling around her. Suddenly she gasps and falls to her knees. You incantation reaches an end and you watch apprehensively.

Kianmay starts to writhe, and suddenly the back of her robe is torn as two great red spikes protrude out. She suddenly stands, tearing at her clothes with clawed fingers. The pieces of cloth fall away to reveal her body growing tiny red scales. Only her head remains the same, while the scales grow to cover her body and the great red spikes on her back unfurl into massive bat wings. Finally she is complete and screeches with an unholy scream, a long forked tongue lashing the air.

She leaps up into the air, the wings spreading out motionless, yet supporting her magically as she hovers in the air. She looks at you at laughs. She raises one hand, a glowing javelin appearing in it. You dash for cover and leap behind a chest as the javelin is hurled into the floor were you were moments previously, gouging out a great hole.

You realise the chest is no protection against the shining weapons, but as you rise to run, you see that Darm has taken advantage of Kianmay's attack on you to strike at her. A tendril of greyish mist rises from the ground below her. It has engulfed her and seems to be some sort of barrier. Most glowing light appears in her hands and

forms a long curved blade with which she slashes at the barrier and slips out in time to received the brunt of a massive lighting bolt cast by Darm.

It crackles over her, pushing her back in the air, but seems to leave her mostly unharmed. Her tail lashes the air in irritation as she streaks forward, shining blade in hand. Darm stumbles back and erects an invisible wall that Kianmay crashes into. She slashes at it with a scream, the magical defence shattering and fiery shards from her weapon striking Darm.

He cries out in pain, and as Kianmay descends on him to deal the death-blow, he pulls out a small black cube and shouts some words of power. A white bolt blasts out of it and strikes Kianmay. She falls from the air like a stone and lands heavily on the floor. Darm looks at the cube in annoyance and tosses it aside. Apparently it is empty now.

He stands over Kianmay and chants, waving his hands until her body transforms back into a woman, although still with tiny wings and a tail. He takes off his fine outer robe and drabs it over her naked body, then in his under robe limps away from her to glare at you.

“That was foolish. You endangered her most of all!”

Kianmay stirs, and starts to rise, holding her head. She looks around in confusion, clutching the robe around her body. Seeing Darm so close, she scrambles to her feet and retreats closer to you. She picks up the remains of her robes and begins to dress herself in them beneath Darm’s robe, as if she wishes to cast it aside as soon as she can.

Turn to **891**

785

Readying your weapon as quietly as you can you then burst from the undergrowth and lunge at the serpent-man. In surprise, he rears up and back and your weapon misses him. The serpent man glares down at you and hisses. The next moment he strikes with the spear, driving his body down. You parry the spear thrust, but stagger backwards.

This will be a tough battle against an unfamiliar opponent.

SERPENT-GUARD SKILL 10 STAMINA 20 DB 2 ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **845**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **974**

If you are just killed, turn to **309**

786

You realise that you have been deceived by a demon. “The Diamond Key is hidden under a paving stone in the back corner of the Shrine of Aringarator in the religious precinct,” you tell him.

“Thank you.” He closes his eyes, and seems to be communicating magically with someone, or something. After a few minutes he opens his eyes once more and smiles

at you. But it is not a warm smile. “Thank you,” he says again in a more sarcastic tone. He stands and raises one arm to point at you. The air in the room rushes as it is gathered into a powerful spear of physical force that slams into you and thows you back against the far wall.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **859**
Otherwise, turn to **667**

787

The ring does not react and you realise the demon is telling you the truth. By tearing away the pages from the chairs in the dining hall, you can weaken Darm’s magic.

You thank the creature for his advice without promising to free him and quickly stand up. As soon as you do so, the darkness around you vanishes and you find yourself back in the dining hall, the muted candle-lit bright to your eyes. You step away from the table and when your vision returns to normal examine the scene once more. Pasted to the back of each chair is a sheet of parchment, and you consider what to do.

If you want to rip off all the parchment’s turn to **833**

If you have learned enough about this feast and want to investigate the stained glass doors on the far side of the room, turn to **766**

If you haven’t already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

788

You pull yourself up and with a sucking sound, manage to pull yourself out of the muck. You clamber up onto the chair and take a swing at the sorceress, who simply drifts backwards to avoid the blow.

“Pathetic!” she sneers. “Darm has all of my powers and more! How can you hope to defeat him?”

She waves her hands again and launches a bolt of crackling red energy at you. You make to leap aside, but then remember that the floor might suck you in. In that moment you loose your chance to dodge the magical projectile...

Test your LUCK.

If your are lucky, turn to **962**

If you are unlucky, turn to **920**

789

With a final stroke, you slay the great bear, which collapses and expires with a groan. The body slowly reverts to its original form, the pathetic crumbled form of the yellow creature.

You search through the remains of the hut and find only a small stiletto dagger no longer than your hand and utterly useless to you. You begin to feel uncomfortable with what you have done. Your greed has led you to kill a creature who only attacked you to defend himself. Of the two of you, it is you who is the small one. Lose 4 LUCK points.

You turn and leave the grove.

Turn to **858**

790

Darm lowers himself back into his throne. "I can be patient a little longer if it amuses me to do so. I have no doubt, as you should not, that the Diamond Key will be mine before the sun rises."

His tone has turned ominous. You attempt to look threatening. "Release Kianmay right now!"

"She is released!" Darm replies immediately, with a magnanimous wave of his hand. "Go to your rest, Alyn Mei. You are tired."

You glance at Kianmay, who has come to stand near you. You see her shake her head. You know that she will not leave without you, and that Darm will not let you leave yet. You look back at Darm, and he settles back in his throne, disappointed.

"Very well. The time has come, warrior. Tell me, how do you, a mere soldier, think to defeat me, a true warrior, a king, and a sorcerer? By 20 I had mastered the art of flesh and steel and crushed my enemies. By 50 I had mastered the art of word and display, and elevated my kingship. And now I have mastered the art of magic, and dwell with the gods! How can you imagine that you will defeat me!"

His final words are an enraged shout, and you begin to wonder at the stability of his mind. You are also pondering what approach to take. Is it best to try and defeat him openly with the skills and items you have acquired, or to try and get close and betray him when he least expects it? Or should you try to save him as Kianmay has?

Darm calms himself, and a smile returns to his lips. "You are a warrior. Let us see if you can match me. I was a great champion in my day."

He closes his eyes, and the next moment, something starts to materialise on the floor before the throne. Mist fills out a humanoid shape and solidifies into a tall, well-built warrior, dressed in silver armour decorated with onyx lions and golden serpents. In one hand the warrior has a black-plumed helm, and in the other a long broadsword. The warrior also has his eyes closed, but now opens them and smiles at you. With a start you recognise Darm, as he was at the height of his physical prowess. Thick dark hair flows from his head and he laughs powerfully.

"Now we will see if you are worthy of the weapons you carry!"

He puts on the helm. You glance past him and see the Darm on the throne sits with his eyes closed as if meditating. You quickly remove your pack and anything else that is not essential to the fight, preparing yourself to face Darm.

Do you have a silver scarab with you, and do you know what it is for?

If so, turn to **831**

Otherwise, turn to **951**

791

You feel the magical power surge up from deep in the earth and flow into your body. But rather than shoot down your arm, you feel it start to spiral inside you, growing larger and brighter as it draws up more energy from below. You feel the power grow to a peak, and with a shout you fling your arm towards Darm, releasing the energy with a burst of light. It roars through the air in a bright lance. Darm waves his hands in some kind of defensive magic, but the sneer on his face only lasts for a moment, as the hot shining lance pierces through his defences and strikes him. The King is blasted back, striking his throne and falling to the ground with his robes partially on fire. Before you can charge forward, his head snaps up and he looks at you with a baleful glare. He staggers to his feet, obviously in great pain.

Turn to **891**

792

“Recently I joined a group of serpent-worshippers,” you begin. “We were small in number, and the other townspeople were afraid of us. Eventually they attacked and killed most of our members. I was sent here to try and gain power so that we can defend ourselves, and build a strong following to worship your kind, for surely you are divine beings! If you give me power, I can create a following and build temples in your name.”

Your statement is received in silence, but when the queen speaks, her voice is filled with such contempt you are surprised the screen before her does not wither. “You are a liar. You have not extended to us even the most basic of courtesy. Were it not for the Agreement with which we are bound to your world I would have you taken from this place and vanquished. The Agreement spares you much pain and suffering, and binds me, since you have spoken, however falsely, to give you a means to gain power. Listen now to my pronouncement. Since you are a crude warrior, I shall give you the path most suited to your talents. You shall be taken to a place where lies an item of power. Overcome the guardians with your steel and the item is yours. Otherwise, you will perish as so many others have.”

The guards come forward to take you away, allowing no protest. You are dragged from the palace like a prisoner and an armed escort takes you through the gardens. It’s almost as if you are being taken to your execution. You tell the guards that you can walk, but they ignore you and continue to drag you along.

A large gate leads from the gardens into a rocky wilderness. A path winds over hills strewn with shattered rocks, jagged shards jutting into the sky. The procession moves through the wounded landscape, and you twist your neck to see the walled gardens sitting on a massive flattered hilltop behind you. You are taken through the hills until the walled hilltop is no longer in sight and the procession descends into a ravine and soon comes to a cave opening that is like a slash in the earth. Here the serpent-guards release you, and one gestures to the cave.

“Proceed, warrior and receive the fate that is yours.”

“What is in there?” you ask.

“Enter, and you shall be enlightened,” states one of the guards, and lowers his twin-bladed spear, to indicate you are to proceed or be impaled.

With no other option, you ready yourself and begin your descent into the cave. The daylight quickly vanishes behind you, but before the darkness becomes complete,

a small light crystal embedded in the wall shows you the way forward. The natural passage soon gives way to a narrow staircase, the steps crumbling and slippery with slime.

Making your way carefully, you manage to avoid slipping, and eventually reach a large cavern. The floor is flat and tiled, though clusters of stalagmites are scattered throughout. The ceiling above is obscured by stalactites and an uneven coating of limestone that also creeps down the walls. Where the walls are not covered, you can see crumbling pillars.

As you proceed further into the ancient hall, which is lit by light crystals embedded in the limestone, you see human bones scattered over the floor. You reach the far end of the hall, where the greatest concentration of bones is. Warily looking out for monsters, you see none, and at first fail to notice something hanging on the wall.

It appears to be a pendant of some kind, a red stone set in gold on a golden chain. You step closer to examine it and see it is a golden serpent spiralling around a ruby. You look carefully around the chamber once more, but there is nothing there. It seems too easy, but you reach out and grasp the amulet, feeling it tingle in your hands with potent magic.

You slip the amulet on and feel protective magic settle around you. You are now under the protection of a serpent amulet. It adds 3 to your SKILL

You take one step to go when the air suddenly turns cold and a wind rushes through the cavern with a moan. The bones begin to move about in the floor and gather into separate piles. Weapons and pieces of damaged armour that are lying about also move into the growing piles, and the bones and equipment start to assemble into armed skeletons. Soon an army of skeletons is standing before you, and around the bones, ghostly flesh appears, and you see the anguished faces of warriors long dead.

“You shall not have the prize!” moans a distant voice. The cry is taken up and the dead army shambles forward, each falling over the others to get at you. Dread fills your stomach as you grip your weapons. This will be a hard fight.

If you have a glass ring and want to use it here, turn to **768**

If you have a diamond wand and want to use it, turn to **848**

Otherwise you will have to fight against the army of questing heroes, many of who are armed with magic weapons. Turn to **956**



793

You set the gems in place one by one, pausing before you set the last one in place. You quickly step back, but nothing happens. You wait for a minute, but the chamber remains still.

You retrieve the gems and consider what to do next.

If you want to leave, you can take the trapdoor by turning to **851**, or if you came in through the window, you can leave that way by turning to **984**

Or you can try another combination:

Grey-ruby, black-sapphire, white-emerald; turn to **648**

Grey-ruby, black-emerald, white-sapphire; turn to **754**

Grey sapphire, black-emerald, white-ruby; turn to **813**

Grey-emerald, black-ruby, white-sapphire; turn to **830**

Grey-emerald, black-sapphire, white-ruby; turn to **953**

794

As Darm reaches for the Diamond Key, you flick the hidden catch on the serpent ring and extend the poisoned needle. Darm does not even notice until you prick him with the poison. You let him take the key-shaped diamond from you and step back.

Darm frowns at you and rubs his hand. Suddenly his eyes widen as the potent poison burns through his veins. He clutches the key-shaped diamond against his chest, but as froth spills from his mouth, he realises you have tricked him. The fear in his eyes is terrible to see as he falls to the fall, writhing and trembling for half a minute before going still.

Darm is dead.

Turn to **800**

**795**

Taking out the arcane scroll, you clear your throat and read the words on it in a loud voice, then point at Darm, so that the spell will know who to attack. You feel magical forces gathering, but rather than manifesting as a fierce attack on Darm, the parchment in your hand bursts into blue flame. You hastily toss it aside, and the parchment falls to the floor, where the flame spreads out into a large ring, then burns steadily.

Darm laughs heartily. “Were you hoping for something else? Let me explain to you what you have done. This is indeed a powerful spell. A summoning spell in fact. But you have spoken no name in your spell. Thus to summon a being you must place an offering into the circle. So cast an object into the ring of fire and we will see what arises. But choose your object wisely!”

What will you choose to throw into the fire?

A jade tablet? Turn to **683**

A broken ivory comb? Turn to **812**

A cold crystal? Turn to **881**

A unicorn’s horn? Turn to **898**

If you don’t have any of these, turn to **897**

796

“On my way through your palace I heard people talking, servants and soldiers. They are planning a coup. They are unhappy with you, saying you don’t behave how a real king should any more. They don’t like how you’ve filled the palace with demons and don’t let your human servants near you. I heard some of the details. They are planning something for tomorrow night.”

Darm nods slowly, looking at you thoughtfully. “This I knew already, but it pleases me that you speak truthfully to me, now that I hold your life in my hands. Perhaps I should not kill you.”

He steps over to a small table next to his throne, where you see an ivory box. He opens the box and takes out a golden pendant on a short chain, just long enough to encircle your neck. Holding it in his hands, he walks down from the throne and approaches you, but stops several yards away.

“Any warrior who serves me loyally is granted one of these. You see my sign.” He shows you the pendant, which is oval-shaped, about as large as your thumb and inlaid with onyx in the form of a rampant lion, surrounded by serpents in red cornelian. “Agree to serve me and I shall give you not only your life, but this pendant, which shall grant you power in battle.”

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **841**

You look at him and the pendant dubiously. It might be a trick of some sort, although he obviously has the power to kill you if he wants to. If the pendant does indeed make you stronger you could use it against him, or at least get closer to him.

If you want to take the pendant and put it on, turn to **967**

If you can’t trust him, you had best attack him while he is relatively close. Turn to **976**



797

You swing the hook around and let it sail upwards once more. This time it smashes into the wall beside the window before clattering to the ground once more. This time no shouts come from below, the silence filling you with an ominous feeling.

Gathering up the hook again, you pause to consider your next action.

If you want to have another throw, you must test your SKILL once more.

If you are skilful, turn to **882**

If you are unskilful, turn to **840**

Otherwise you must return to the dining hall where you can:

Tear one of the parchments off to see what happens by turning to **764**

Sit in one of the chairs, by turning to turn to **731**

If you haven't already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

798

"I find that story hard to believe," you reply.

"A sensible response," Darm replies with a nod of approval. "Fortunately I have proof in the form of the 'lady' herself. Show him!" Kianmay does not move, except to hang her head. Darm speaks again, more softly. "Show him, or I will have you stripped."

Kianmay slowly complies. Loosening her robe, she bares one delicate, creamy shoulder. She drops the robe still further to reveal to you part of her back. Suddenly something emerges, unfolding from her back is a small fleshy-coloured bat's wing, little over a foot long. She hastily folds the wing once more and pulls her robe back on.

"You see?" Darm says softly. "She is a demon. I am sure you spent some portion of your journey with the real priestess. But at some point, before she started to tell you lies about me and the Key, she was replaced by this demon."

This one before you is undeniably a demon.

If you want to accept the story, turn to **909**

If you refuse to believe it, turn to **957**

799

You take out the statue of the white goddess that was formed from the Primordial Crystal. The light within it is shifting from blue to red, and as the magenta light washes over you, you feel revitalised (restore your STAMINA to its initial level).

You hold out the statue to the queen. She looks at you in surprise. "For me?"

"Perhaps I cannot defeat Darm, but at least I can do this for you."

She puts down the cup and slowly takes the statue with both hands. The light within the crystal is shifting from red to gold, bathing her in an amber light. She gasps and tears spring from her eyes as she holds up the statue. She sets it down upon

the table and slowly unpins her veil. She is beautiful, with full dark red lips. She lifts her hands to her face and touches her lips and jaw. "I am healed!" she exclaims.

You wonder what disfigurement the veil had concealed.

"I am healed!" She stands and looks down at her own hands. Looking at you, she smiles, her eyes flashing brightly. "Darm disfigured and crippled me to keep me here to ensure that I could not betray him. But now I am free! My power is freed!" She looks down at the statue and strokes it with one hand. "But yes, my heart must be healed as well. I can see now. If I strike at him my anger and hatred will harden my heart. While he lives I may save him, and save myself. What good is my freedom if my heart is bound so?" She looks at you. "I will aid you. I hope that you will try to save him rather than to slay him, but I know not what you can do. I fear that you will be able to do nothing in the end but seek to slay him. But before then, you must promise to try and save him."

"I promise," you say, unable to resist the force of her passion.

"Then I will give you the means to slay him if it must be so."

She gently strokes the statue once more then goes over to one of the cabinets, opening it by tracing a rune upon the door. Inside she takes out a lacquered wooden box and carries it over to a low table. She kneels and beckons you over as she lifts the lid.

You see a soft glow coming from within, and step over cautiously to see her draw out a dagger with a blade of glowing crystal. "This will penetrate his armour. Get close to him and you may stab him despite his magic, despite his armour. Then he will die and be free from his torment at least. But to where shall his soul go...?"

She slides the glowing blade back into a plain leather sheath. She holds the crystal dagger out to you, and you take it. She closes the box and stands, looking at you.

"Darm is a man full of fear. He fears death, and as his power has grown he fears enemies too. Thus he is now a lonely man as well. He does not even trust me. If you thrust this crystal dagger into his side, he will know it has come from me. Thus if you fail I shall pay a terrible price, but...I cannot do nothing. Seek not to attack him right away. He will destroy you. He is a lonely and bored man, and will seek to entertain himself. You must play along with his games and wait for the right chance to defeat him. I shall watch and wait, and I shall aid you if I may. I shall also come if you call out my name. Call me Palliumi."

You thank her for her assistance, and farewell her. You withdraw from her chamber and close the door behind you.

Now where will you go?

If you haven't already, you can go through the doors opposite by turning to **888**
To go through the central doors, turn to **727**

800

You and Kianmay make your way from the palace. The guards at the gate try to stop you, but Kianmay quietly begs them to allow you to pass. The guards look at her priestess' robe, and silently relent. As you walk away you feel their eyes burning into your back. If they knew that their king was dead, it may well be their spears you feel driving into your back. But how many who served the king loved him? Perhaps they would hoist you on their shoulders and call you a hero.

Whatever the case is, you do not want to risk finding out and accompany Kianmay as she moves through the cold, dark streets. She does not speak until you reach the temple of the White Goddess, where she pauses to look up at the statue of the robed woman extending her arms to the world.

“What will you do now?” she asks you, never taking her gaze from the statue.

Beyond getting some sleep it is a question you had not considered. You shrug. “There is always work for a merchant guard.”

“Is that still enough for you?” she asks.

“What do you mean?”

Kianmay closes her eyes wearily. “After all you have seen, after all you have done. Can you go back to that life? Is there no desire in you to serve something greater than yourself?”

“Are you asking me to become a paladin or something?” you ask, intending to smirk, but you too are suddenly too tired to bother.

Kianmay turns and forces her eyes open to look at you. “We are parting now,” she tells you, a trace of sadness in her voice. “A priestess and a merchant guard are unlikely to cross paths again. I wonder where you will go and what will become of you.”

You glance up at the statue above you. “Look, your goddess is good. I think you are good and you should continue to serve her. But it’s not for me. I am a merchant guard.”

Silently, and with what seems like great sadness, Kianmay reaches out and gently touches your arm. She then turns and makes her way up the stairs. She struggles so much that you feel the urge to help her climb the stairs, but something else keeps you from approaching the temple.

She does not look back and after knocking at the door is soon let in. Once the door closes behind her, you stand in the cold, feeling something draining away from you.

Eventually you smile and shake your head. Why are you standing here in the cold? It’s time to get some rest, perhaps in the arms of a perfumed lady. You wander off, planning to rest for a few days, then to look for a caravan heading south to offer your services as a merchant guard.

THE END

801

Uncorking the bottle, you sniff the liquid, but find it odourless. There is so little in the bottle that you drain it all in one gulp. As soon as you do, you know you have made a mistake. It is a magical poison that works from within to kill you instantly.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, or are wearing a golden armband, turn to **992**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

802

You take out the spell for a fireball. You set your stance, extend your hand, and read the spell in a loud, clear voice.

Have you been joined to a serpent-woman? If so, turn to **791**
If not, turn to **935**

803

Realising your desperate situation, you put all your hope in the silver gauntlet. You extend your arm and concentrate, while Darm starts to wave his hands and chant words of power...

Test your SKILL. Because you haven't used the gauntlet before and are under stress, roll three die against your SKILL.

If you are skilful, turn to **914**
If you are unskilful, turn to **883**

804

Once you recover, you carefully remove the needle and try to pick the lock once more, but it is beyond your skill. Eventually you give up and review your options once more.

If you are wearing a glass ring and want to use it here, turn to **634**
If you want to try the door opposite, turn to **607**
If you want to proceed further up the hall, turn to **730**

805

You fly backward, bouncing and rolling along the ground until you come to a stop, bleeding and broken.

You try to stand, but what isn't in pain is numb and does not respond. Slowly the light fades and you are plunged into darkness. But unlike Darm, you are not afraid. It will be good to rest. And so at peace, your soul slips into the warm embrace of death.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

806

You are slammed back into your body and stagger, disorientated. You fall over before your eyes come back into focus and you see yourself sprawled next to Darm's throne, the king standing over you with a contemptuous smile.

"However did you get my ring? No matter! It takes some time to master. But I will have to take that from you. It makes you a little too dangerous for my liking."

You try to stand but are still weak and dizzy. Darm picks up a long broadsword that sits in a stand next to his throne. You try to fend off the blow, but with practised strength, Darm drives the blade through your neck.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

807

You look up at the serpent-goddess statue, wondering what sort of deity she is. You toss a few coins into the pool, offering your respects to her. You feel something, and looking up see the serpent goddess smile at you. You are blessed. Raise your *initial* LUCK by 2 and bring your *current* LUCK to this level. Pleased, you make a prayer of gratitude to the goddess.

Your prayers are disturbed by a scraping sound, and you turn in alarm to see a strange figure progressing towards you. The people of the garden do not worship serpent-people, they are serpent people.

The guard approaching you is a brown-scaled snake from the waist down, the tree-thick body extending several metres behind him. The human part is clad in a steel breastplate and helm, a long spear carried over his shoulder.

The serpent-man does not seem aggressive and in fact appears to be trying to smile as he comes to a stop nearby. He bows to you, and you make a respectful bow in return. Planting his spear on the ground, he begins to thump his tail on the ground in a slow pattern.

It sounds like a signal, but how can anyone hope to hear the thudding at any useful distance? You try to speak to the serpent-guard, but he just nods at whatever you say.

After a minute, you hear more scraping sounds, and turn to see a procession coming down the main path. Black-scaled snake-men armoured in golden breastplates with red-crested helms move down the path. Each one holds a pole-sword that looks like an ornate scimitar blade on a long shaft. There are four of them, surrounding another figure. This one is a snake-woman, whose serpent body and tail is also black. She wears a sort green silken coat with a high collar, her black hair wound up into a bun and held in place with combs of gold and jade.

She approaches you with a smile, her features more human-looking than those of the guards around her. She makes a bow, which you return.

“Welcome, traveller.” She says in a normal-sounding voice, though with a strange accent. “How may we serve you?”

You don’t know what to say. “Er, what is this place?”

The woman looks surprised, but becomes curious rather than suspicious. “This is the Palace of Queen Shimishis. How did you come to be here?”

Feeling that she is not dangerous, you tell her the truth. “I found a spiral made of three serpents on the floor in a room, then I put some gems in the eyes sockets, and I found myself here.”

“So you are not a sorcerer?” the woman says, her eyes sparkling with amusement. “Your master would not be happy to know you have been playing with his magicks. Best you return before your intrusion is discovered.”

Your curiosity about this place is far from satisfied, yet these serpent-people could well be allies of Darm. What should you do?

If you want to leave without harm, turn to **712**

If you want to keep asking questions, turn to **822**

If you want to tell them about Darm in the hope of gaining their aid, turn to **905**

808

“This man is evil!” you declare, thrusting a figure at Darm. “If you are good, you must destroy him!”

The great eyes look down at you and you start to feel very small. Finally the great voice speaks. “One who is evil will destroy their own self in time. If I hasten this, the chance to turn away from destruction will be lost. If such destruction is mercy, then you too would benefit from such intervention. In truth there is little difference between you and this other one.” The great elephant turns to Kianmay. “Farewell, priestess.”

The great white body suddenly turns to mist and disperses up through the air. You and Darm look at each other in uncertainty. The King seems shaken. Kianmay steps forward. “Turn away from evil, your majesty. You see how the gods look upon you. They do not intervene because the greatest harm you do is to your own self!”

Darm shakes his head, a sneer curling his lips. “The gods do not understand us! They will never sicken and die! Why should I listen to them? I am sick of hearing your words!” Darm looks back at you, a malicious gleam in his eye. “You have worked your magic! Now it is my turn once more!”

He casts a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

Otherwise, turn to **971**

809

Snatching up a burning stick from the fire, you hold it near the door. “Listen to me, you little freak! Give me an item of power right now! If you don’t, I’ll burn you and your pathetic little house down!”

“Please, no!” the creature squeals. “I’m sorry! Please take this! I have nothing else!”

The lock clicks and the door opens a few inches. The creature’s trembling hand throws out a ring. It bounces across the ground as the door slams shut and is locked once more.

You take the ring and examine it, but cannot discern its function. It is a simple gold band set with a piece of cheap, flawed topaz.

If you are happy with the ring, you can leave by turning to **858**

If you think the creature is holding out on you, you can threaten him more by turning to **907**

810

The lightning bolt hits you with enough force to throw you forward into the door, your neck snapping with a sickening twist. You fall down onto the floor, and begin to slip into darkness, imagining what it would have been like to be married to a serpent-woman. Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad after all.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **974**
Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE**811**

Your hands slip and you are devoured by the floor. Your breath soon runs out as your lungs burn. Involuntarily you gulp at the liquid, but even it will not fill your lungs. Blessed darkness soon steals away your senses.

You awake some time later severely battered and in pain (reduce your current SKILL by two points, and halve your current STAMINA). You are now lying on the floor in the queen's chamber, but the other figure present is not the queen. It is a rotund little man no higher than your knee. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "That's it! Up you get. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature turns and begins to walk away. Groggily you stand and stagger after the small creature. You start to feel better as you move along. You look around for the queen, but she is nowhere in sight. By the time you reach the entrance of the bedchamber, the creature is gone, but the doors at the end of the hallway have been left ajar. Taking a deep breath, you make your way inside.

Turn to **727**

812

You search through your pack for something. Your hand comes upon the ornate ivory comb that you found on the floor of the throne room. You don't know why you even bothered to take it with you. But now some instinct makes you toss it into the circle of flame.

The flames turn red and surge inwards towards the comb, sweeping it up as the flame rise into a sphere above the blackened carpet. The sphere hangs in the air for a moment, then starts to expand and take on the form of something; limbs protrude underneath, and it seems to have wings. The flames die down, dancing across a wrinkled, white hide.

The last flames vanish into the air, and you stare with wonder at the massive beast. It is a huge white elephant, standing nearly as tall as the ceiling. What you thought were wings are in fact massive ears that it flaps gracefully back and forth as it turns to look around the chamber, its massive feet touching the floor lightly. When you see its head, you are amazed to see it has six tusks, and its eyes are bright blue. It looks at you with intelligence.

Kianmay steps forward and bows to the elephant. “Hanimubeli! I welcome you Great King. I am sorry if we have disturbed you. But we are facing great peril.”

A deep disembodied voice replies, seeming to come from the floor itself. It rumbles around the chamber, as if the earth itself is speaking. “Priestess. It would be my honour to assist you, for your merit is great. But it is not you who has summoned me.” The great head swings first towards you, and then Darm, who is looking at the great elephant with as much shock as you. “The peril you speak of arises from the petty hearts of these two bound souls. Shall a man seeing two scorpions fighting separate them from their needless conflict? Once he is gone, the scorpions shall find other conflicts to fight, for violence lives within their hearts. Even if he is to keep the scorpion in a cage, he cannot change its petty heart. How then may I assist here?”

Kianmay bows once more. “What you say is true, Great King. But this man who also calls himself King wishes to take for himself the Diamond Key, and make himself immortal. He will kill this other man merely to obtain it.”

The holy elephant looks at Darm for many moments, then swings back towards you. “Let the one who summoned me speak.”

Kianmay gestures for you to bow. You do so; more to give yourself time to think than to show respect.

What will you say?

“This man is evil! If you are good you must destroy him!” Turn to **808**

“Please give me the strength to defeat this sorcerer!” Turn to **940**

“Please do what you can to protect the Diamond Key from greedy men.” Turn to **932**

813

You set the gems in place one by one. As soon as the last gem settles in the depression, you feel the air begin to rush around you. The rubies in the eyes of the white marble serpent begin to glow, but the others remain dark. You quickly move off the circle as the white serpent begins to move, but the others are still. You watch with great nervousness as the white serpent rises from the floor, thrashing about chaotically. The floor begins to tremble. The serpent opens its mouth and hisses at you. The next moment it launches a ball of fire at you.

You throw yourself to the floor as the fire singes your hair. With your cheek pressed against the floor, you feel the tremors slowly die down. After a minute it is quiet and still once more.

Carefully you stand up and step back over to the circle. The gems have all disintegrated. As you survey the damage caused by your ignorance, the trapdoor suddenly opens. You snatch up your weapon.

The creature that enters hardly seems worth the alarm, but you do not relax your guard. Approaching you is a small creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. He makes his way to the opposite side of the magical circle where he stops, smiling at you.

Hooking his thumbs in the belt of his kilt, the demon speaks. “Meddling in magic is a foolish and dangerous practice! His Majesty will be quite irate to hear what you have done to his Circle of Realms. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me.”

For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you slowly follow. Going over to the trapdoor, you descend a narrow stairway and exit into a large study. The little demon is disappearing out the doors into the main corridor, and you follow reluctantly.

When you reach the corridor, you see that the creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wooden doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

814

Searching around in your pack, you find the sheaf of parchments. Darm waits patiently with an indulgent smile as you search through and find the spell for a fireball. Reading the instructions carefully, you set your stance, extend your hand, and read the spell in a loud, clear voice.

Have you been joined to a serpent-woman? If so, turn to **631**
If not, turn to **880**

815

You smash down the skeleton before you, bone chips flying as the ghostly flesh flows off the shattered bones. The way ahead of you is clear, but closing fast as the mass of approaching skeletons spill around each other to try and get at you.

You dash towards the exit, parrying a clumsy blow aimed at you as you pass the nearest skeletons. Then suddenly you are free. You leap up the precarious stairs as quickly and carefully as you can, and soon reach the cave above. You pause, but hear no sounds of pursuit. Moving at a slower pace, you make your way out of the cave.

A lone serpent-guard waits for you, and you see that he is surprised and displeased that you have returned. Silently he moves off and you follow him back through the broken hills. Once you are in the gardens, more serpent-guards appear to escort you back to the shrine. You step inside and a radiant white mist begins obscure the garden. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You pause to examine your magical amulet once more, feeling the power within it. Pleased, you take the gems from the eyes of the serpents in the floor and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**



816

You call out loudly for Palliumi. You see an expression of surprise cross Darm's face as you shout the name of his queen. Your shout echoes around the chamber, but there is no response. Darm starts to smile, but then the stone hands holding you suddenly crumble and you fall to the floor.

As you struggle to your feet, you see Palliumi materialise nearby. She is dressed in plain black robes, her hair worn up and held in place with ivory combs. Her face is uncovered and she smiles at Darm when she sees his shock.

"It ends here," she states with determination.

Darm recovers from his surprise to laugh. "You are my student! And I have only taught you a part of the Lesser Mysteries! The only thing that can end here is you."

"I agree," Palliumi replies, stealing away Darm's scorn. "I cannot bear to be with you like this any more. I would rather die! So this day either you will be defeated, or I shall be dead. But I am not alone here. Your victory is not so assured."

Darm looks over the three of you facing him, and his lip curls. "A priestess, an apprentice and a thug! You think that even together you can defeat me?"

Palliumi smiles. "You forget that my father was a great sorcerer. Don't you think that he may have taught me magic? Magic to protect me when my life was in peril?"

Darm's smile fades as he considers this. You note the dangerous glint in his eyes as for the first time he believes his life may be in true peril. You have seen the look before and you know what is coming. You glance at Palliumi and see she is enjoying playing defiance, and cannot see what is going to happen.

You know that Darm will attack Palliumi to remove her as a threat. What will you do?

Throw yourself in front of her to protect her so she can attack him in turn? Turn to **879**

Wait until he attacks her, and strike? Turn to **945**

817

You turn to the elf and put on a smile. "Hello."

The pale creature appears startled and turns to you. It is very feminine in appearance, but still you sense it is male. It is clad in a long robe of tiny silver scales. Its nose and mouth are small, but the eyes are very large, like pools of frozen water. It says nothing, but the eyes appear to grow larger. You blink refocus your vision, and the eyes appear normal once more. But as you stare, they appear to grow larger again. You are about to tear your eyes away once more when you see the creature reach one and touch your hand delicately with its fingertips, a small smile appearing on its pale pink lips.

It seems to be trying to reassure you. Perhaps it can only communicate with its eyes. On the other hand, given the nature of the other creatures here, this being is likely a servant of chaos or evil.

If you want to let yourself slip deeper into the eyes of the pale creature, turn to **702**.

If you think it's best not to risk it and want to pull yourself away, turn to **899**



818

The thickening air provides momentary resistance as you leap down at Darm. You see his eyes widen in shock as his magic fails. He grasps your arm and tries to stop the sharp blade ending his precious life. He holds you back for a moment, but then the dagger plunges through his throat.

His blood spurts out and spills out over the floor. You stand and retreat from the spreading crimson pool as the great King of the North finally meets his end.

Turn to **800**

819

Taking a precautionary peek over the balcony, you see a few shadowy figures standing near the crackling watchfire. Hopefully they will be too busy to turn around.

Taking out your grappling hook, you uncoil your rope and knot it to the ring on the base of the hook. Moving into position, you take a deep breath and sight your target.

You begin to swing the hook around, gathering momentum, then fling it upwards. The hook soars towards the window, the rope dragging behind it...

Test your SKILL

If you are skilful, turn to **980**

If you are unskilful, turn to **894**

820

“This man is evil!” you declare, thrusting a figure at Darm. “If you are good, you must destroy him!”

The great eyes look down at you and you start to feel very small. Finally the great voice speaks. “One who is evil will destroy their own self in time. If I hasten this, the chance to turn away from destruction will be lost. If such destruction is mercy, then you too would benefit from such intervention. In truth there is little difference between you and this other one.” The great elephant turns to Kianmay. “Farewell, priestess.”

The great white body suddenly turns to mist and disperses up through the air. You and Darm look at each other in uncertainty. The King seems shaken. Kianmay steps forward. “Turn away from evil, your majesty. You see how the gods look upon you. They do not intervene because the greatest harm you do is to your own self!”

Darm shakes his head, a sneer curling his lips. “The gods do not understand us! They will never sicken and die! Why should I listen to them? I am sick of hearing your words!” Darm looks back at you, a malicious gleam in his eye. “You have worked your magic! Now it is my turn once more!”

He casts a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **927**

Otherwise, turn to **855**

821

You begin to recite the magic words, sending the gathering energy towards Darm. You see his smile slowly fade as he feels the magic settling around him. He surges to his feet, but too late as your spell reaches its conclusion.

The air around Darm sparkles, and his flesh actually starts to glow. An expression of wonder fills his face, but then an expression of grief contorts his features, and he falls to his knees and starts to weep. The glow fades, but he continues to cry like a child.

Many minutes pass, and finally Darm stands. He looks stronger and you expect him to look at you furiously and launch another attack. Instead when he sees you he looks surprised, but then he recalls what has happened, and a look of resolve hardens his face.

“Soldier! The Diamond Key. It must be placed in the earth!”

“It has been,” you reply after a startled pause.

“Good,” Darm replies, and sits back in his throne. He looks at Kianmay thoughtfully. “I do not know what has happened to me. But I remember all your words, and now they resonate within me with the ring of truth. Before I was too afraid to even listen to you. From whence this courage? This lifting of blindness from my eyes?”

Kianmay cannot answer him.

Turn to **1000**

822

“Why do sorcerers come here?” you ask.

The snake-woman smiles. “As a simple warrior there is much you cannot understand. Let it be said that we are creatures of power. As such, sorcerers and other practitioners of magic often come to us to seek power. We are bound to hear all offers, yet few are granted what they seek.”

If you want to ask for power, turn to **960**

If you want to leave now, turn to **712**

If you think you can trust the snake-people and want to tell the woman about Darm, turn to **905**

823

The ball of black energy strikes you, and for a moment pain fills your body, but it quickly fades and you regain your balance. Palliumi is jarred to action and begins to chant. Darm starts to cast another spell, weaving a wall of protection about himself.

You cannot see what is happening behind you as you stand protectively in front of the sorceress, but suddenly the chamber is bathed in rainbow light and warmth buffets you from behind. Darm looks above your head, gaping. Something bright and shining moves forward above you. You look up and see the underbelly of a massive dragon that looks like it is made out of diamonds, beams of light shining onto it broken into multicoloured rays. It snakes slowly through the air with graceful curves.

Darm retreats from the diamond dragon. It opens its mouth and gently breaths out white fire that descends slowly and settles over Darm and the surrounding area, passing through his shield as if it is not there. Darm watches the fire that burns his body in wonder, his flesh disintegrating, apparently in no pain.

Eventually he is gone and the fires die down to nothing. You watch the dragon circle back and descend towards Palliumi, collapsing into a diamond like stream of light that flows into her forehead as she stands with hands folded on her chest and eyes closed.

After the dragon is gone, her eyes open and she smiles. "I am free."

"Now you can rule," you tell her. "And rule justly."

But Palliumi shakes her head. "Few knew that Darm had a queen. I doubt I would have the support I would need to rule. I would rather just disappear, anyway."

"Will you come with me?" Kianmay asks her.

"To be a priestess?" Palliumi asks.

Kianmay is a little surprised, but then nods. "I will vouch for you."

Palliumi starts to look stronger and smiles. "I will follow in time. For now, leave me to pray for my husband."

She goes to where Darm disappeared and kneels down. Kianmay touches your arm and the two of you leave.

Turn to **800**

824

Keeping an eye on the battlements above, you descend the stair without incident. Reaching the bottom, you move out into the gardens. The gardens are filled with beds of flowers and fountain pool full of brightly coloured fish. But at the centre of the gardens there is an unusually large thicket of dense trees. You move inside and find a large clearing, except the surrounding trees have knit their branches into a dome-like roof above, shielding the interior from the eyes of those above.

In the clearing you see a hut, outside which is a small creature cooking a fish from the pond over a small fire. It is an odd creature, dressed in rags with sickly yellowish skin and thin patchy white hair. It sits waiting for the fish to cook, looking very bored and miserable.

If you would like to step out and talk to the creature, turn to **672**

If you want to go back to the balcony, turn to **858**

825

You begin the lengthy task of kicking the bones aside. You start with the ones furthest from the wall so you can run if something bad happens. Nothing does happen, and you begin to kick the rest of the bones into a corner, jumbling them up hopelessly and making sure there are lots of stalagmites between the pile and your escape route.

As you work, you discover one skeleton that is a little different from the others. You notice that the bones are inscribed with sinuous runes, and although the rest of its

equipment is damaged and corroded, it wears a silver gauntlet that is tarnished but whole.

You pull it from the limb and examine it closely. The silver is thin and inlaid with opals, around which swirl golden serpents. You give the inside of the gauntlet a sniff, then slip your hand inside. It tightens around your arm. It does not hurt, but you still try to pull it off. It does not budge. It fits so closely it looks like your forearm and hand is painted silver with opals and golden serpents inlaid in your flesh.

The gauntlet is obviously magical, but you cannot discern its function. You have more or less cleared the chamber of bones now. What will you do?

Just leave with your prize? Turn to **988**

Grab the amulet too? Turn to **678**

826

You reach for the cloth bag that is tied around your neck, glancing at Kianmay. She meets your eye, but turns to give Darm a sorrowful look. You untie the cord from around your neck as you walk forward. Darm eagerly walks down the steps to meet you at the foot of the throne.

You are careful not to let Kianmay see the fake key, and slowly open the bag as you approach. Does Darm know what the real key looks like? You are only a few yards away from him when you take the key-shaped diamond from the bag. You see Darm's eyes gleam with greed and ambition. It is obviously everything he has imagined.

He reaches out a trembling hand for it, stepping closer to you, and you lift your hand, presenting the fake Diamond Key to him...

If you have a serpent ring, and want to use it to poison Darm, turn to **794**

If you have a rune dagger or a crystal dagger and want to stab him with it, turn to **985**

Otherwise, you will have to use a normal dagger. Turn to **862**

827

Moving quickly away from the corpse of the serpent-guard, you leave the path and head off across a lawn to a thicket of trees. You pause to watch more serpent-men arrive. The new comers, six in number, look more dangerous, their serpent parts covered in black scales. Their breastplates are golden and they wear helms with red crests. Each one also holds a pole-sword that looks like a scimitar on top of a long shaft. You see their tongues flickering as they taste the air.

Moving away quietly, you move from thicket to thicket, carefully scanning the area before hurrying across the open ground. You have moved about a hundred yards away from the site of your battle, and pause to rest and review your course of action.

You can see now the roof of a large red and gold structure in the centre of the gardens, beyond a line of trees that seem to encircle the building. Glancing back the way you have come, you then spin your self around in alarm for a second look. The serpent guards have tracked you somehow! They spread out in the grassy area you have just crossed and taste the air with their tongues. They appear to be waiting for

something. With the breeze you doubt they could have tracked you by your scent in the air. How then did they find you?

One moves off to the edge of your thicket and begins to peer within, tongue flickering. Moving as quietly as you can, you move back through the thicket until you reach the far side. Another stretch of lawn lies between you and the line of trees surrounding the large building.

If you want to make another run to get away from the serpent-men, turn to **687**

If you want to climb a tree and hide until they go away, turn to **948**

828

You draw your weapon and lunge at the woman. You see her eyes widen in shock, but she dematerialises before your weapon can touch her. You hear chanting behind you and spin around to see her floating in the air several yard away and out of reach. She waves her hands, then flings them towards you. Black threads seem to fly out from her fingertips, spreading out like a net. You dive to the side, trying to avoid the threads...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **838**

Otherwise:

Test your SKILL.

If you are skilful, turn to **636**

If you are unskilful, turn to **773**



829

You pull out the parchment from your pack, while Darm waits with an indulgent smile. You set yourself, clear your throat and read the spell in a loud clear voice. The words of power ring through the chamber, and as the last echo dies, the paper in your hand starts to swell up. You drop the paper and watch as it grows takes root and starts to grow upwards. It looks like a mushroom, and eventually you are confronted with a growth as tall as you. The stem is creamy white, and the top brownish with blue spots scattered over it.

Darm chuckles. "A sorcerer with a sense of humour perhaps?"

His smile fades as he begins to cast a spell. He shouts words of power and flings his hand at you. A great bolt of lightning shoots out towards you. But it curves in its path, drawn towards the mushroom. It strikes the mushroom and the fungal growth explodes, showing you with smoking pieces.

When all is quiet, Darm looks surprised. “Odd, but effective.”
He gestures for you to take your next turn.

What magic will you perform?

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **795**

Fireball, turn to **802**

Lightning, turn to **918**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Revelation, turn to **949**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **757**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

830

You set the gems in place one by one, pausing before you set the last one in place. As soon as the gem settles in the depression, you feel the air begin to rush around you. The emeralds in the eyes of the grey marble serpent begin to glow, but the others remain dark. You quickly move off the circle as the grey serpent begins to move, but the others are still. You watch with great nervousness as the stone serpent rises from the floor, thrashing about chaotically. The floor begins to tremble. The serpent opens its mouth and hisses at you. The next moment it spits a cloud of poison at you.

You throw yourself backwards, but the venomous cloud billows and engulfs you, stinging your eyes and burning your nostrils. You fall to the floor coughing. (Lose half of your STAMINA). After a minute the poisonous vapours fade and it is quiet and still once more.

Carefully you stand up and step back over to the circle. The gems have all disintegrated. As you survey the damage caused by your ignorance, the trapdoor suddenly opens. You snatch up your weapon.

The creature that enters hardly seems worth the alarm, but you do not relax your guard. Approaching you is a small creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. He makes his way to the opposite side of the magical circle where he stops, smiling at you.

Hooking his thumbs in the belt of his kilt, the demon speaks. “Meddling in magic is a foolish and dangerous practice!. His Majesty will be quite irate to hear what you have done to his Circle of Realms. But his Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me.”

For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you slowly follow. Going over to the trapdoor, you descend a narrow stairway and exit into a large study. The little demon is disappearing out the doors into the main corridor, and you follow reluctantly.

When you reach the corridor, you see that the creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

831

As you put aside your possessions, you remember the silver scarab and the explanation of its properties. Taking it from your pack, you give it to Kianmay, hoping that she will be able to use it. She takes it from you, and you see a spark of recognition in her tired eyes.

You then turn to face Darm.

Turn to **951**

832

Searching around in your pack, you find the sheaf of parchments. Darm waits patiently with an indulgent smile as you search through and find the spell for lightning. Reading the instructions carefully, you set your stance, extend your hand, and read the spell in a loud, clear voice.

Have you been joined to a serpent-woman? If so, turn to **631**
If not, turn to **880**

833

Deciding to strike an early blow against Darm, you settle yourself and take a few deep breaths. Snatching at the first parchment, you rip it away from the chair, and fling the remnants aside as you step over to the next chair. A single rip tears the next in two as well. As you dash around the table, you glance back to see the fragments of paper hissing and dissolving, spewing out smoke as they do so. The air around you seems to pulse and swell, but nothing stirs your hair or the tablecloth.

You rip away the last parchment, then stand back, watching the last fragments dissolve and the wisps of smoke climb towards the ceiling. The coldness in the air around you diminishes, as the hazy shadows surge around and then disappear. You feel light a weight has been lifted from the room and your own shoulders. You may restore your LUCK to its initial level.

Eventually all is still. You watch the dining room doors, waiting for the savage reprisal, no doubt in the form of some massive ferocious beast. You hear footsteps, then the doors do indeed swing open and you ready yourself for combat.

Standing there is a small creature only as high as your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "There's no need for your weapon. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature holds open the door and gestures politely. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you force a smile at the creature. "You first."

The little creature just smiles and bows, then disappears through the door. Slowly you follow, peeking out cautiously before stepping out into the hall. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following or not. You follow reluctantly and see the creature go through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

834

Kianmay throws herself at Darm, trying to stop him casting his final spell, but he pushes her aside. The next moment a blaze of light streaks across the room and strikes Darm in the chest, sending him sprawling, his robes, if not his flesh, in flames.

The king cries out in pain, and rolls along the floor trying to extinguish the flames. As he rolls about, you see a glowing figure step into view. It is the King's Champion. The tall, dark skinned warrior clad in crystal breastplate and helm spares neither you nor Kianmay a glance, but looks with surprising loathing on his monarch.

Darm extinguishes the flames, and rolls over just in time to see Jamar Zi towering over him, just before he plunges the crystal spearhead of his weapon into Darm's chest. The crystal blazes, and Darm opens his mouth in a silent scream as his insides are burnt away.

The king slumps dead to the floor. Jamar Zi turns away and approaches you. "To thing I could have slain him so easily at any time. Yet I did not. You and your courage, even in your weakness, has shown me the way to freedom. I thank you."

He frees you from the marble confinement with a stroke of his weapon, then with a bow to you and Kianmay leaves the room.

Turn to **800**

835

At the last moment, Darm jerks his head towards you, and your gaze meets his as the dagger slides into his side. His eyes widen in shock. You see anger briefly flicker in his eyes, but then a deep fear that chills even you possesses him. With his final strength he pushes you away, sliding off the blade in his side with a gasp.

He falls to the floor, clutching the key-shaped diamond with a hope that moves your heart. Darm soon realises it is fake, and dies with a look of utter hopelessness on his face.

Turn to **800**

836

You stroll along at you fiancé's side until you reach the small side passage. Then you abruptly rip you hand from hers and dash down the side passage. You hear her cry out in surprise and rage. But then she begins a chant that raises the hairs on the back of your neck. As you reach the door, the air behind you crackles, and you fling yourself to the ground...

Test your LUCK.

If you are lucky, turn to **733**

If you are unlucky, turn to **810**

837

Drawing your weapon, you brandish it boldly. "Why don't you face me like a man? Enough of these games!"

You stalk forward. Darm watches your approach with amusement. "If you really want a fight, I shall give you a fight!"

He stands and waves his hands, chanting words of power. You stop as something starts to materialise in front of you. The mist starts to solidify into something quite large and you step back as it becomes fully formed. Dread fills your stomach as you look upon the horned monstrosity before you, summoned up from some hellish plane.

It is humanoid, half again as tall as you and twice as thick. Its skin is greenish and coarse, and covered in horns. It glares at you with a tormented gaze and opens a maw full of needle-like teeth. Its roar fills you with trembling, as the stench of the raw flesh it has devoured rolls over you.

Suddenly it rushes at you, and you must defend yourself.

HORNED MONSTROSITY SKILL 14 STAMINA 40 DB 10 ARMOUR 5

If you win, turn to **961**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

If you are just killed, turn to **309**

838

You try to leap aside, but one of the tendrils catches your leg. Its effect is momentary, as it dissolves away. You roll to your feet, seeing the queen's look of surprise. She flicks her fingers and lashes you with the remaining threads. They dissolve as they touch you.

The queen floats closer, intrigued. She alights on the ground, a hopeful look on her face. Her expression stays your hand and you let her draw near. "Can it be..?" she begins. "You have come to destroy Darm, haven't you?" she asks.

Seeing no profit in lying, you tell the truth. “I have come to rescue a priestess, and to stop him. But by what means I do not know.”

She bows her head. “I truly hope you can stop him. It was my choice to be his queen, and I have learnt much from him, but...I am bound here and I wish to be free. But this will not happen while he bears such power. If his magic cannot touch you, then perhaps you have a chance to defeat him. I have a weapon that will aid you. Were I to bear it I would not be strong enough, but you, you can slay him with it.”

She goes to a cabinet and opens it by tracing a rune upon the door. Inside she takes out a lacquered wooden box and carries it over to a low table. She kneels and beckons you over as she lifts the lid.

You see a soft glow coming from within, and step over cautiously to see her draw out a dagger with a blade of glowing crystal. “This will penetrate his armour. Get close to him and you may stab him despite his magic, despite his armour. Then he will die and I shall be free.”

She slides the glowing blade back into a plain leather sheath. She holds the crystal dagger out to you, and you take it.

“Go now.” She begs. “He will be waiting for you.”

You thank the queen and turn away. You do not look back, but can feel her eyes burning into you with bright hope. You exit the bedchamber and close the door behind you.

Where to now?

To enter the doors at the end of the hall, turn to **727**

If you haven't already, you go through the doors opposite you by turning to **888**

839

The air about you thickens until it feels solid. Even the air in your lungs and throat hardens, paralysing and suffocating you. Darm stands, looks at the key-shaped diamond, then throws it to the ground in rage. It smashes into pieces.

You feel your mind beginning to fill with haze as dots dance before your eyes. Darm picks up a broadsword from a stand next to his throne and hacks off your head with a single stroke, sparing you the fate of suffocating to death.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

840

You throw the hook for the third time, and to your embarrassment you miss yet again. As the hook clatters to the ground, you jump as you see someone in the doorway of the dining hall. Standing there is a small creature only as high as your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. “There's nothing up there, and you seem to be having some trouble anyway. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me.”

The little creature holds open the door and gestures politely. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you force a smile at the creature. "You first."

The little creature just smiles and bows, then walks back through the dining room and out the doorway into the hall. Slowly you follow, crossing the dining hall and peeking out cautiously before stepping out into the hall. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following or not. You follow reluctantly and see the creature go through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

841

He is lying.

Since you can't trust him, you had best attack him while he is relatively close. Turn to **976**

842

Darm reaches for the key-shaped diamond. You let him take it, and drop one hand back to your belt. You grip the hilt of the magical dagger and draw and thrust it at his side in one swift movement...

Test your SKILL.

If you are skilful, turn to **835**

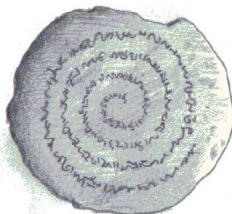
If you are unskilful, turn to **993**

843

With nothing else to do, you charge at Darm with your weapon raised. Darm smiles and points at you, and you feel your skin tingle as magic is laid upon it. You move forward to smash him, but you find your body suddenly stiffening. You fall over as your legs can't keep up with your momentum and crash to the floor. Your flesh is rapidly hardening. As your eyes harden your vision disappears, and your other senses disappear as well.

You have been turned to stone, and your soul soon flutters away to find a new place to roost.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



844

As you battle Darm, you feel a heaviness in the air lift away from you. You hesitate, and Darm also jumps back with a grin. He thrusts his hand at you, shouting words of power...

Are you wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband? If so, turn to **781**
Otherwise turn to **921**

845

You parry the snakeman's final spear thrust and wound him fatally before he can pull away. He opens his mouth wide and emits a long hiss as he collapses to the ground and expires.

The battle was not quiet, and you expect more guards to arrive. The body is too big for you to drag and hide anyway. You hear more faint scraping sounds approaching, and estimate that more than one serpent man is on the way.

What do you want to do?

To run further into the gardens, turn to **827**
If you think you've done enough and want to leave the gardens altogether, turn to **856**

846

Hoping you are not about to betray yourself to one of King Darm's allies, you take a deep breath and begin to speak. "In my world there is a man, a king, who has become a powerful sorcerer. He seeks power because he fears death. Thus he seeks a treasure from our world called the Diamond Key. This object has great power, and if a man bears it, he is granted immortality. Yet if it is planted within the earth, it brings prosperity to all who dwell upon the land. I have travelled with a priestess who sought to place the Key in the Earth, but she has been captured by Darm. Now I must rescue her and somehow put his schemes to rest."

Deathly silence fills the hall as the last echo of your words fades into the shadows. Eventually there is the sound of movement from behind the screens, and a collective gasp sounds around you as a snake-woman emerges. It can only be the queen herself, built with sensuous power she slithers towards you. Her snake part is scaled red like a viper, and her human part voluptuous and bare but for armbands and neck-pieces of gold and gems. Her skin is soft and white, her jet-black hair glistening as it is coiled up on her head and held in place with a great comb that is set with diamonds. Her eyes are bright red, and she stops before you, peering intently into your eyes.

After a moment she speaks. "I shall aid you. I shall aid you most powerfully against the Once-King Darm. He is well known to us, and he displeases me. He has demanded many things of us, but the greatest I shall give to you so that you may defeat him." She turns to one of her attendants. "Take him and prepare him to be joined!"

The queen retreats back to her hidden throne, and a black-scaled woman with red hair and a short green coat approaches you. She bows and invites you to follow her. You do not know what is happening, but do as you are asked.

You are taken to a small chamber and told to undress and bathe in a small tub. You reluctantly do so. When you are finished, two serpent woman, heedless of your nakedness, come to take you and your belongings into another chamber.

The chamber is round and the black stone walls are covered in sinuous runes painted in gold. The serpent woman take brush and pot, and cover your body in runes also, then ask you to stand in the centre of the chamber.

They leave, and you stand naked and shivering for several minutes. Eventually the doors directly in front of you open once more, and you slithering towards you a viper-maiden. Her snake part is blood-red, her skin soft and white. Long black hair flows down around her slender shoulders. Her eyes are red and look at you dully, as if she is entranced. Her entire body is covered in runes, painted on skin and scale alike. She slithers towards you, and abruptly presses her body against yours. She wraps her arms around you, and you bring your arms up to clasp her soft, cool body. She begins to coil her serpent part around the both of you, sealing off the outside from the ground up. As she shuts out the light, you feel the tingling of powerful magic as she starts to chant.

You feel innermost core being opened up by powerful magic and you feel something slipping inside you. But then you are plunged into unfeeling blackness. Eventually you start to regain sensation and you are dreaming. But they are not comfortable dreams and you soon awake.

As you eyes open, you see a smooth, white-plastered dome above you, a single light crystal hanging there. The ground beneath you is hard and uneven. You sit up, finding yourself lying on the triple-serpent-spiral. You have been returned to your world. You stand and stretch, finding yourself whole and unharmed, except for a few aches from sleeping on hard stone. Glancing out the window, you cannot determine how much time has passed; the night is as thick as it was when you entered here.

You remove the gems from the eyes of the serpents, and place them back in their box, which you replace in the alcove. You then consider what to do next.

Although you can't see any difference yet, make a note that you have been joined to a serpent-woman.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

847

“Wait!” you cry out. “I have information that can help you.”

Darm pauses in his spell casting and looks at you critically. “Very well, I will listen to you. But the surest way to save your life is to give me the Diamond Key!”

If you have a fake Diamond Key and you want to offer it to him as a way of getting close to him, turn to **826**

If you know the Wolf's secret and want to reveal it to Darm, turn to **910**

Otherwise you will just have to make something up. Turn to **959**

848

Taking out the diamond wand, you hold it before you as the undead horde advances. You feel some sort of energy building up inside the wand, and when you feel it reach a peak, you wave it towards the shambling skeletons intent on your destruction.

Another unfelt wind seems to blow through the cavern, and the skeletons all collapse, ghostly flesh vanishing as bones tumble and spill over the floor. In moments all is still once more and you put the wand away. As you go, you briefly examine the weapons the once-heroes wielded. Most are damaged and corroded. But you spy the glimmer of bright metal in one pile of bones and go over to investigate.

You pull from the bones a gauntlet made of silver, set with opals, around which golden serpents are inlaid. You extract the limb that is still inside, and after a careful sniff of the interior, you slip your own hand in.

As soon as you do so, the gauntlet tightens on your hand and seals itself to your flesh. It does not hurt, but you still try to pull it off. It will not budge. It melds to your flesh so closely it seems your skin is painted silver and golden serpents and opals are inlaid in your flesh.

You do not know what the strange gauntlet does, so you are not sure how to feel about it. Walking through the field of bones, you climb the stairway once more. A lone serpent-guard waits for you, and you see that he is surprised and displeased that you have returned. Silently he moves off and you follow him back through the broken hills. Once you are in the gardens, more serpent-guards appear to escort you back to the shrine. You step inside and a radiant white mist begins obscure the garden. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You pause to examine your finds once more. The amulet will definitely aid your quest, but it is really nothing special. Perhaps the strange gauntlet you wear was the prize that the serpent-Queen meant would aid you. But you have to find out how it works.

Pleased, you take the gems from the eyes of the serpents in the floor and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

849

Deciding to use the silver gauntlet, you raise your arm and point it at Darm. He smiles indulgently, obviously not recognising the gauntlet. You close your eyes and concentrate. You reach into the heart of the magical power of the gauntlet. Tendrils are released and plunge downwards, thread-thin, seeking the power within the earth. The tendrils join with the veins of power within the earth, and suddenly swell to the thickness of tree-trunks as magical power pours into your arm.

You cry out in pain and will the energy to burst forth. It does so, and you feel like your arm is being torn apart. There is a roaring and crackling sound accompanied by a blinding light. After all is quiet, you open your eyes and look at the destruction before you.

The floor is gouged out in a path between you and where the throne used to be. The blast has put a hole in the wall of the palace, and another blackened hole in the

wall of the citadel. Through the hole you can see distant rooftops on fire. Of Darm there is no sign.

“Is he dead?” you ask Kianmay, turning to see her sitting on the floor in shock.

You hurry over to help her up, your hand still numb. Shaken, she says: “Yes. He never suspected you...could have such power.” She obviously never suspected either.

There is no body, and you can't help worrying that Darm will return, but he never does.

Turn to **800**

850

You and Kianmay wander through the palace, walking calmly as servants and soldiers rush around you. In the confusion created by the hole in the side of the palace, you escape into the city without incident. There are many people in the streets, helping to extinguish the fires or watching them burn, and you pass through them, receiving a few glances. One person asks you what happened, but you tell him you do not know and accompany Kianmay as she moves through the cold, dark streets.

She does not speak until you reach the temple of the White Goddess, where she pauses to look up at the statue of the robed woman extending her arms to the world.

“What will you do now?” she asks you, never taking her gaze from the statue.

Beyond getting some sleep it is a question you had not considered. You shrug. “There is always work for a merchant guard.”

“Is that still enough for you?” she asks.

“What do you mean?”

Kianmay closes her eyes wearily. “After all you have seen, after all you have done. Can you go back to that life? Is there no desire in you to serve something greater than yourself?”

“Are you asking me to become a paladin or something?” you ask, intending to smirk, but you too are suddenly too tired to bother.

Kianmay turns and forces her eyes open to look at you. “We are parting now,” she tells you, a trace of sadness in her voice. “A priestess and a merchant guard are unlikely to cross paths again. I wonder where you will go and what will become of you.”

You glance up at the statue above you. “I don't know.”

Kianmay smiles. “Come, take shelter here tonight, then tomorrow you can leave...or stay.”

You accept her offer and together you climb the steps to the temple.

THE END

851

Going over to the trapdoor, you grasp the handle and lift it up, revealing a narrow stairway lit at intervals by light crystals. You proceed down the stairs, closing the trapdoor behind you. The stairway goes downwards, to a small room with a hinged

panel in one wall, a switch beside it. You go up and pull on the switch. It releases a catch and the panel swings outwards revealing a brightly-lit room.

You tense in case anyone is inside the room, but all remains quiet and still. Relaxing, you step out into the study and close the panel, which on this side is a large painting of a battle. You locate the switch on this side, finding it under the image of a serpent QUEEN in the painting

The study is lined with massive bookshelves that reach the high ceiling, packed with books. The ceiling is over twice your height above and over a third of the books are beyond your reach. The bookshelves fill most of the walls except for the section of wall behind you. Opposite the painting is an even wider clear space, the wall filled with a large map of the known world, although it seems that Darm knows more of the world than you can remember seeing before. The massive desk, which appears to be made from deep purple crystal, sits before the map, an equally ornately shaped chair sitting behind it. In the centre of the chamber is large carpet patterned in blue and gold. To your right there is a set of double doors filled with stained glass depicting geometric designs, and to the left another door which you guess leads to the main hallway.

What do you want to do?

Look at the bookshelves? Turn to **896**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

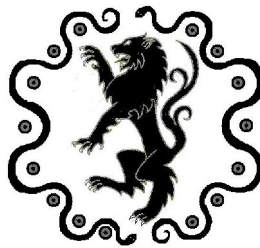
Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

852

You flail uselessly as the marble fingers close in, immobilising you. Darm waves another hand and sets you on fire...

It takes some time for Darm to work out how to extract the Diamond Key from your chest, but he does so, and eventually you die a true death from which you do not return.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



853

Darm shields himself from the hail of coins, then points his finger at you. You see him start to chant, but as you draw close he loses his nerve and abandons the spell, throwing himself back and snatching up a long broadsword that sits in a stand next to his throne. He brings it around just in time to fend off your blow. He sets himself and meets your attack. Thanks to your successful magical attacks, Darm is considerably weakened.

KING DARM SKILL 10 STAMINA 10 DB 10 ARMOUR 10

If you win, turn to **998**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

**854**

You look over the titles, not sure what you are looking for. As you pass Darm's desk, you spy there an open book. It is open at a page with a diagram of a triple spiral of serpents just like the chamber above. You pick it up and start to read.

It tells you that in a different realm there dwells a race of serpent-people. They are a manifestation of magic itself; magic being a living force. As such they are bound to serve all who practice magic, but to serve them in the manner of their own choosing. A sorcerer may go to them and obtain objects and skills of power. But the greatest power is to be found when one is able to join with one of their serpent women. If this is done, then the serpent woman's magical being becomes part of the sorcerer, losing her own awareness.

This leaves the sorcerer with many times greater personal power to wield and the ability to naturally tap into the veins of power within the earth. As such, it is sought after by all, but few are granted such a privilege.

You put the book down and look down at yourself. You feel no different, yet you now have great magical reserves at your command. But you are no sorcerer. You guess that now if you use magical objects, the force will be many times greater.

Since you are at Darm's desk, you search it. There are drawers underneath and in them you find papers and ink and pens and blocks of wax for the seal that sits on the desk. You also find two small chests. One is unlocked and is full of gold coins, which you ignore for now. The second has a combination lock in the top. You can't force it open because it is magically sealed and has no crack to force anything into.

There are three wheels with numbers from 1 to 9. If you want to guess the combination, or if you somehow know what it is, you can turn to the passage number that corresponds to your combination. If that passage makes no sense, you must turn back to this passage.

After you have finished with the box, you put it back into the drawer. The rest of the desk reveals nothing, and you consider your next course of action.

What do you want to do?

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

855

A small lightning bolt arcs from Darm's hand and strikes you in the chest, blasting you backwards with pain coursing through your body and limbs. You are knocked to the ground (minus 10 STAMINA).

If you survive, turn to **654**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest turn to **943**

If you are just killed, turn to **983**

856

Hearing scraping sounds in the distance getting quickly louder, you hurry back towards the shrine. You hear no signs of pursuit, but do not slow your steps. Reaching the shrine you bound up onto the circle. As soon as you are back in the circle, radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

857

With a final jolt, the magical energy dissipates, and you stagger to your feet.

Darm looks down at you with a look of contempt. "You are helpless before me! A worm trying to devour a dragon! I have no patience for physical contest anymore. I am a sorcerer now, and you will not best me without magic! Let us have a contest. Or will you be wise and give me the Diamond Key? Dare you match your pitiful skills against me?"

"I will not give you the Diamond Key," you say firmly.

“Many a fool is used for entertainment!” Darm snarls, but then calms himself. “Very well! I shall let you go first. Do what magic you will to attack me!”

What magic will you perform?

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **725**

Fireball, turn to **814**

Lightning, turn to **832**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Fungus, turn to **938**

Revelation, turn to **861**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **903**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

858

Leaving the gardens, you ascend the stairs one more and reach the balcony. Stepping into the study, you consider your next course of action.

Look at the bookshelves? Turn to **896**

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm’s desk? Turn to **936**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven’t already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

859

The powerful magic tears through your torso, limbs and head, blasting you into unconsciousness even before your body is smashed against the far wall. You are dead long before you hit the floor.

You float in a spinning blackness for a while, before things calm and with renewed strength, you rise to the surface once more...

You open your eyes and sit up. You see Darm and Kianmay speaking on the other side of the room. As you move, they turn as one to regard you with shock. You stand up.

Darm stares at you in confusion, and you stare back, uncertain what to do. The silence lasts for several moments, but is broken by the opening of the treasury door. In walks a small rotund creature, bearing a proud smile on his face and the Diamond Key in his hands. Jarred to action, Darm shouts a warning, but it is too late. You leap

over and snatch the Diamond Key, then kick the little man away. He screeches and falls, then flees from the room with a limp.

You put the Diamond Key inside your armour, where pressed against your skin, it adds its power to that of the one in your chest. You can actually feel both of them now, throbbing with a slow beat like the heart of the earth itself.

Darm launches another lightning bolt at you. It strikes you and smashes you back against the wall. But the healing glow envelopes you and you do not pass out. By the time you have climbed to your feet, you are restored once more. If you have lost an arm, it will now regrow, and you may restore the lost SKILL point.

You advance on Darm cautiously. He does not seem too alarmed, rather he is frowning. He waves his hand and the floor begins to shake. Suddenly a number of marble spikes shot up around you, piecing the carpet and closing around you. You find that they are on all sides of you, and you are soon trapped.

If you are wielding a firesword, turn to **923**

If you are wearing a silver gauntlet, and have learnt how to use it, turn to **627**

If you are wearing a silver gauntlet but haven't learnt to use it, turn to **803**

If Jamar Zi offered you his assistance, turn to **834**

Otherwise, turn to **852**



860

Once you have recovered, you stand and enter the room, closing the door behind you. Looking around the room you are awed by what you see. It is an armoury, filled with weapons and armour of all kinds. Racks of weapons stand against the walls while in the floor space in the centre are wooden stands holding erect suits of armour. Hanging on the walls are weapons of great value and beauty.

You rub your hands together with glee. You can replace your weapons and armour here, or take extra. The armoury has everything that you would find at a weaponmasters shop in a market. Once you have equipped yourself with more mundane items, it is time to look for something of greater value.

The weapons on the walls prove to be more decorative than practical. The utilitarian weapons you have already inspected are more appropriate for your purposes. Yet you do not give up. There must be something of value here. This is Darm's personal armoury after all.

The armoury is laid out in a practical way, and yet there is a door-sized blank space on the far wall. Initially your gaze passed over it unseeing. Perhaps a rack was removed. But now determined that there must be something more here, you examine the blank wall with greater interest.

On closer examination you see that it is not blank after all. In the centre is a small hole. Since it is at head-height, you put your eye to it and see a small cavity beyond, in which is a small jade mask with tiny emeralds set in silver for eyes. The cavity is lit by a tiny sliver of a light crystal in the ceiling of the cavity.

What do you want to do?

Poke something into the hole? Turn to **775**

Try talking to the mask? Turn to **714**

If you rather not try your luck with the hole at all, you can leave and proceed further up the hall by turning to **730**, or if you haven't already try the door opposite the armoury by turning to **607**

861

You fish around inside your pack until you find the scroll you want. You set yourself, glancing up at Darm who is looking down at you with an indulgent smile. You consider the scroll in your hands. What does the Revelation spell do? Are you supposed to cast it on Darm, or maybe yourself...?

To cast the Revelation spell on Darm, turn to **821**

To cast the spell on yourself, turn to **783**

To cast the spell on Kianmay, turn to **904**

862

Darm reaches for the key-shaped diamond. You let him take it, and drop one hand back to your belt. You grip the hilt of your dagger and draw and thrust it at his side in one swift movement.

The blade strikes his side, but you feel it slide off some sort of mail hidden under his robes. Darm staggers back, clutching the key-shaped diamond. You lunge at him again, this time aiming for his throat. Darm avoids the blow by letting himself fall to the floor, and shouts words of power.

As you make to leap on him, you feel the air thickening about you...

Are you wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband?

If so, turn to **818**

If not, turn to **839**

863

You slash furiously at the skeletons, one eye on the shambling mass that comes to seal your doom and the other on with fading hope the distant exit. The skeletons' weapons cut into you again and again, and you collapse under their corroded steel.

You fade into darkness, but you can feel something grasping you. A golden serpent has hold of you, and you feel it come to life within the amulet you wear. It tries to bind you with magic to serve as a guardian of the chamber, but the Diamond Key within your chest seems to dissolve the magic as it is laid upon you.

Soon all is still, and you feel yourself rising up through the darkness. You open your eyes and sit up. You are still in the dim limestone-covered ancient hall, surrounded by bones. You look and see that the serpent amulet is back on the wall.

You stand up and retrieve your weapon. You are beginning to suspect that the amulet is not the secret treasure at all. After all, its powers are quite modest. You recall how its magic tried to trap your soul, and you look at all the other foolish warriors who now lie as bones around your feet. If it were not for the Diamond Key, you would have joined them.

You look around the chamber for any sign of a concealed treasure, but you can't find anything. Eventually you give up and contemplate the amulet once again. The magic takes a few seconds to assemble the army, and now that you know what will happen, you can probably snatch the amulet and make a run for it. Of course, if you wanted to be sure of escape, you could sweep all the bones aside. That would take a while, and might set off some other defensive magic.

If you want to snatch the amulet and make a run for it, turn to **678**

If you want to risk sweeping up the bones, turn to **825**

If you would prefer to just leave, turn to **988**

864

You search through your pack, looking for a suitable item. You consider and reject a few, then out of the corner of your eye you see the fire start to die. You turn your head in time to see it vanish completely. Darm rises from his throne.

"My turn!" He waves his hands and begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

Otherwise, turn to **971**

865

You thank the creature for his advice without promising to free him and quickly stand up. As soon as you do so, the darkness around you vanishes and you find yourself back in the dining hall, the muted candle-lit bright to your eyes. You step away from the table and when your vision returns to normal examine the scene once more. Pasted to the back of each chair is a sheet of parchment, and you consider what to do.

If you want to rip off all the parchment's turn to **833**

If you have learned enough about this feast and want to investigate the stained glass doors on the far side of the room, turn to **766**

If you haven't already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

866

Gripping the diamond wand, you charge at Darm. He gives you an incredulous look and waves his hand at you. A lightning bolt exits his hand, but the wand glows

and the lightning bolt fizzles out to nothing, the final few useless sparks drawn into the diamond wand. He stands and chants words of power, but the wand glows and whatever he wanted to happen doesn't. You bound up the steps of the throne, drawing your weapon.

Darm falls back and snatches up a long broadsword that sits in a stand next to his throne. He brings it around just in time to fend off your blow. He sets himself and meets your attack.

KING DARM SKILL 10 STAMINA 20 DB 10 ARMOUR 10

If you win, turn to **998**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

If you are just killed, turn to **309**

867

Pulling free of Kianmay, you barrel into Darm's back, shoving him through the broken hole. Darm cries out in alarm, and thrashes at the air before plunging downwards out of sight. You step carefully to the edge just in time to see the evil monarch smash onto the stones below.

You nod in satisfaction, and turn to face Kianmay with a smile. You see one of the arrows that the citadel guards shoot at you strike her in the side, and blood blooms on her white robe. She does not even flinch, her eyes on you with great sorrow.

One of the arrows strikes you in the neck and the both of you die with your eyes locked together; her sorrow and your confusion. Why wasn't she happy that you destroyed an evil man?

Her radiant spirit gathers up your feeble soul and carries you away from the mortal world. Unfettered by the illusions of the physical world, you begin to see and understand. But you are a bound soul. The wheel turns and you forget all you have learned to become no more than you are.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



868

The air about you thickens until it feels solid. Even the air in your lungs and throat hardens, paralysing and suffocating you. Darm stands, looks at the key-shaped diamond, then throws it to the ground in rage. It smashes into pieces.

He begins to wave his hands, casting another spell. You feel your mind beginning to fill with haze as dots dance before your eyes. Lightning bursts from Darm's hands and strikes you, blasting you backwards...

Turn to **987**

869

Putting away your weapons, you hold up your hands. The serpent-guard, lowers himself down slightly, but keeps his spear ready to skewer you. Scrapping sounds in the distance grow louder, and soon a procession appears.

. Black-scaled snake-men armoured in golden breastplates with red-crested helms move down the path. Each one holds a pole-sword that looks like an ornate scimitar blade on a long shaft. There are four of them, surrounding another figure. This one is a snake-woman, whose serpent body and tail is also black. She wears a sort green silken coat with a high collar, her black hair wound up into a bun and held in place with combs of gold and jade.

She approaches you with narrowed eyes, her features more human-looking than those of the guards around her.

“Who are you and why have you come here?” she demands in a normal-sounding voice, though with a strange accent.

You don’t know what to say. “Er, what is this place?”

The woman looks surprised, but then becomes curious rather than suspicious. “This is the Palace of Queen Shimishis. How did you come to be here?”

Feeling that she is not dangerous, you tell her the truth. “I found a spiral made of three serpents on the floor in a room, then I put some gems in the eyes sockets, and I found myself here.”

“So you are not a sorcerer?” the woman says, her eyes sparkling with amusement. “Your master would not be happy to know you have been playing with his magicks. Best you return before your intrusion is discovered.”

Your curiosity about this place is far from satisfied, yet these serpent-people could well be allies of Darm. What should you do?

If you want to leave without harm, turn to **712**

If you want to keep asking questions, turn to **822**

If you want to tell them about Darm in the hope of gaining their aid, turn to **905**

870

Searching through your pack, you come across the unicorn’s horn. You pull it out and regard it carefully. If it is going to be useful, this is probably the only time. With that thought you toss the horn into the ring of fire.

The flames turn orange, then sweep inwards and gather up the horn as they form a sphere floating in the air above the blackened carpet. After a moment of suspense the orb of fire lengthens, touching the ground once more, filling out into the shape of a large horse, with an opal-like horn protruding from its forehead. Its long tail floats upon the air as it turn to regard you with bright blue eyes, magical light dancing over its snowy hide.

“So, killer,” a disembodied woman’s voice addresses you, sounding sad rather than angry. “Why have you summoned me?”

Killer? “Why are you calling me that?” you ask uneasily.

“You killed me to take my horn,” the unicorn explains. “Why would you do such a thing? Am I your enemy?”

You are somewhat startled that you are facing the unicorn again, but boldly justify your actions. “I needed the power of the horn to defeat this sorcerer! He is evil. I ask your forgiveness and beg you to aid me against him.”

The unicorn is silent for a moments, then speak once more. You call him evil. If this is because he does harm to others to achieve his desire, then I look at you and see no different. Shall I destroy you also?”

“I am fighting for good,” you declare.

“Perhaps this one wishes to do good also. But I see you stand with a priestess, and though she would never approve of you killing me, I see that you are allied with her. Therefore I shall allow you to serve good according to your nature. You have killed me to gain power against this one. Thus offer to me your life, and I shall save this one from his evil.”

“What?” you ask. “I have to die?”

“To give your life to save another is a deed of great merit. You will kill to defeat him. Will you not die to save him?”

If you have a diamond Key embedded in your chest and want to offer your ‘life’, turn to **906**

If you want to really offer your life, turn to **885**

If you want to ask for another way, turn to **975**



871

You call out loudly for Palliumi. You see an expression of surprise cross Darm’s face as you shout the name of his queen. Your shout echoes around the chamber, but there is no response. Just as you begin to think she has abandoned you, Palliumi materialises nearby. She is dressed in plain black robes, her hair worn up and held in place with ivory combs. Her face is uncovered and she smiles at Darm when she sees his shock.

“It ends here,” she states with determination.

Darm recovers from his surprise to laugh. “You are my student! And I have only taught you a part of the Lesser Mysteries! The only thing that can end here is you.”

“I agree,” Palliumi replies, stealing away Darm’s scorn. “I cannot bear to be with you like this any more. I would rather die! So this day either you will be defeated, or I shall be dead. But I am not alone here. Your victory is not so assured.”

Darm looks over the three of you facing him, and his lip curls. “A priestess, an apprentice and a thug! You think that even together you can defeat me?”

Palliumi smiles. “You forget that my father was a great sorcerer. Don’t you think that he may have taught me magic? Magic to protect me when my life was in peril?”

Darm’s smile fades as he considers this. You note the dangerous glint in his eyes as for the first time he believes his life may be in true peril. You have seen the look

before and you know what is coming. You glance at Palliumi and see she is enjoying playing defiance, and cannot see what is going to happen.

You know that Darm will attack Palliumi to remove her as a threat. What will you do?

Throw yourself in front of her to protect her so she can attack him in turn? Turn to **879**

Wait until he attacks her, and strike? Turn to **945**

872

You slash furiously at the skeletons, one eye on the shambling mass that comes to seal your doom and the other with fading hope on the distant exit. The skeletons' weapons cut into you again and again, and you collapse under their corroded steel.

You fade into darkness, but you can feel something grasping you. A golden serpent has hold of you, and you feel it come to life within the amulet you wear. It binds your soul with magic. Now you too will become a guardian of the true treasure hidden within the chamber

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

873

You quickly search your pack for the most powerful item that you have. Feeling the chill of the cold crystal even through the thick blankets around it, you decide to pull out the frosty bundle.

Even wrapped in the blanket, the cold bites painfully into your fingers, and you toss the whole bundle into the ring of fire. The flames turn red and surge inwards towards the bundle, sweeping it up as the flame rise into a sphere above the blackened carpet. The sphere hangs in the air for a moment, then bursts apart as a howling wind emerges from within. The air turns cold and you even see ice crystals form in the air around a dull blue dense volume of air. The ice crystals rain to the floor as the ice-elemental streaks around the chamber, accompanied by a howling wind. The spirit seems confined, as if searching for a way out. You can see within its form a vague shape, with arms and head. It finally pauses in the air high above, the raining crystals like snow, before it roars and flies down towards Darm.

Javelins of ice shoot forth, and Darm has to wave his hands to erect a shield against them. The javelins shatter against an invisible wall. The next moment the elemental is upon him and a furious battle ensues. The elemental slashes at Darm, insubstantial claws wounding him deep within. Meanwhile Darm summons fire and burns the air.

It continues for a minute or so, when eventually the elemental dissipates and the coldness leaves the air around you. Darm collapses in his throne, but glares at you balefully. You have wounded him gravely, but there is still more than enough fight in him.

After a moment he pushes himself carefully to his feet, and stands tall. “Well done! But you cannot repeat this attack, and we have only just begun! Now I will take my turn!”

He casts a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**
Otherwise, turn to **971**

874

Darm looks down at you with a glare, no longer smiling. But he does not attack you again. It seems he is still playing the game for now. You consider your next move.

What magic will you perform? Remember that you can't use the same item twice, and spells can only be repeated if the casting does not consume the parchment.

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **795**

Fireball, turn to **802**

Lightning, turn to **918**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Fungus, turn to **829**

Revelation, turn to **949**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **757**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

875

Sweeping out your weapon, you charge at Darm. He waves a hand at you and you feel the air momentarily thicken, but then you break through whatever magic it was and continue your charge on Darm.

With no time to cast another spell, he falls back and snatches up a long broadsword that sits in a stand next to his throne. He brings it around just in time to fend off your blow. He sets himself and meets your attack. Thanks to your successful magical attacks, Darm has been weakened considerably.

KING DARM SKILL 10 STAMINA 10 DB 10 ARMOUR 10

If you win, turn to **998**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

876

You slip the ring on and move down the stairs. Reaching the bottom, you move out into the gardens, leaving the ring on in case there is someone, or thing, wandering around. The gardens are filled with beds of flowers and fountain pool full of brightly coloured fish. But at the centre of the gardens there is an unusually large thicket of dense trees. You move inside and find a large clearing, except the surrounding trees have knit their branches into a dome-like roof above, shielding the interior from the eyes of those above.

In the clearing you see a hut, outside which is a small creature cooking a fish from the ponds over a small fire. It is an odd creature, dressed in rags with sickly yellowish skin and thin patchy white hair. It sits waiting for the fish to cook, looking very bored and miserable.

If you would like to take off your ring and talk to the creature, turn to **672**

If you would rather stay invisible and search its hut, turn to **926**

877

The elephant turns and begins to walk towards the wall. When it reaches the wall, it lowers its head and continues at a stately pace. The wall cracks and falls inwards as the elephant proceeds without pause, seemingly effortless. It tunnels through the palace, the walls falling away as easily as if they were made of paper.

Curious, you and Kianmay follow after it. The broken passage seems stable enough and you walk through several rooms to the edge of the palace. You see the elephant push through the citadel wall, making the ancient stones crumble and fall down. A few arrows are shot at the beast, but bounce off harmlessly. You hear a curse-ridden shout telling the guards to cease their attack. Whoever the officer is, he sounds awed and scared. Your own feelings are not so different.

The hole you stand in the edge of is too high above the ground for you to continue; the holy elephant is so big that the gap between the edge of the palace and the citadel wall presented no problem. You stand and watch with Kianmay, and even Darm comes to stand at your side, staring out into the city.

The giant elephant walks towards the nearest houses, over three times the height of the rooftops, you wince as you see it reach the first house, but it does not fall down. The elephant steps up onto the house and continues on its way, walking across the rooftops as if it is as light as a bird.

You see it travel towards the Temple of the White Goddess; the spires of which you can see in the distance. But you know its true destination. It is going to fetch the Diamond Key that you hid in the shrine of Aringarator next to the temple.

The elephant becomes a dot in the distance. You briefly see a faint flash of light. The Great King then makes its way back across the rooftops towards you, its body now glowing.

Several minutes later it arrives, and its voice makes the earth tremor. "I have taken the Diamond Key into my body. It shall be bound to the earth through me." The great blue eyes fix on Darm. "There is no power in this world that can take the Diamond Key from me. Do you know this?"

Darm nods, and adds in a strangled voice: "Yes."

The elephant looks at Kianmay. "Farewell, priestess."

The great body turns into mist and dissipates up into the night sky, witnessed by the garrison of the citadel and more than a few of the townspeople who have wandered out from their homes.

You stand bemused, until you hear Kianmay address Darm, and your attention snaps back to the King. “Your Majesty. Have we your permission to withdraw?”

A torrent of emotions are playing over the king’s face, but as he looks at the two of you, a look of annoyance settles in place. “Begone! I have no need of either of you. Trouble me no more.”

He turns away, still staring out into the night. Kianmay pulls at your arm, but you hesitate...

If you want to give Darm a shove and have him plunge to his death, turn to **867**

If you would rather just leave, turn to **850**

878

Leaving the safety of the thicket, you once again make your way from cover to cover. You hear no signs of pursuit, but do not slow your steps. Reaching the shrine you bound up onto the circle. As soon as you are back in the circle, radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

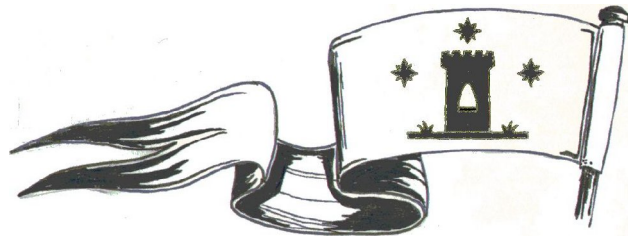
879

You dash across the room and leap in front of Palliumi. As you start your run, Darm lifts his hand and shouts words of power. A great ball of crackling black energy bursts forth and strikes you just as you throw yourself in front of the sorceress...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **823**

If you don’t but have a Diamond key embedded in your chest, turn to **893**

Otherwise, turn to **954**



880

You can't help turning your head away as the magical energy shoots down your arm and into your hand, where it bursts forth. You hear your attack roar through the air, and open your eyes just in time to see Darm wave his hands, making the magic unravel and the attack fades into nothing, a few sparks hitting his robe.

"Pathetic!" He declares. "How can a foot-soldier's spell harm me?"

He laughs contemptuously and begins to cast another spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **927**

If not, turn to **855**

881

You quickly search your pack for the most powerful item that you have. Feeling the chill of the cold crystal even through the thick blankets around it, you decide to pull out the frosty bundle.

Even wrapped in the blanket, the cold bites painfully into your fingers, and you toss the whole bundle into the ring of fire. The flames turn red and surge inwards towards the bundle, sweeping it up as the flames rise into a sphere above the blackened carpet. The sphere hangs in the air for a moment, then bursts apart as a howling wind emerges from within. The air turns cold and you even see ice crystals form in the air around a dull blue dense area of air. The ice crystals rain to the floor as the ice-elemental streaks around the chamber, accompanied by a howling wind. The spirit seems confined, as if searching for a way out. You can see within its form a vague shape, with arms and head. It finally pauses in the air high above, the raining crystals like snow, before it roars and flies down towards Darm.

Javelins of ice shoot forth, and Darm has to wave his hands to erect a shield against them. The javelins shatter against an invisible wall. The next moment the elemental is upon him and a furious battle ensues. The elemental slashes at Darm, insubstantial claws wounding him deep within. Meanwhile Darm summons fire and burns the air.

It continues for a minute or so, when eventually the elemental dissipates and the coldness leaves the air around you. Darm collapses in his throne, but glares at you balefully. You have wounded him gravely, but there is still more than enough fight in him.

After a moment he carefully pushes himself to his feet and stands tall.

Turn to **891**

882

Once more you spin the rope and let the hook soar upwards. To your delight the hook sails through the opening and rattles loudly above. You pull the rope until it is taut, then begin to climb upwards.

Once you are halfway up you hear a cry of triumph from the wall below and turn your head to see a group of guards looking at you. The next moment an arrow cracks

into the wall beside you. The guards make a disappointed cry. You are being used for target practice.

You climb faster, and more arrows bounce off the wall around you, cracking the marble. Finally one hit's its mark and you stiffen. The rope slips through your weakening grasp and you plunge to the ground below, smashing into the paved stone of the balcony. The stars above you spin as you slip into darkness.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your body, turn to **745**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

883

You try to concentrate, but can't keep your mind focused as Darm waves his hand and sets you on fire...

It takes some time for Darm to work out how to extract the Diamond Key from your chest, but he does so, and eventually you die a true death from which you do not return.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

884

You peruse the books on the shelves, finding nothing in any language you know or have even seen before. You were proud to be able to read as a child. Of course at that time you had no idea there were so many languages to be ignorant of. Now you feel rather small.

Suddenly you see a book with a title written in the common tongue. It is entitled: *Magical Items; An Exhaustive Catalogue of Magical Items for the Use of the Non-Magic-User.*

If you have a silver scarab and want to look it up, turn to **170**

If you have a jade collar and want to try and look it up, turn to **298**

Otherwise you can:

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

885

You stand up straight. "I will offer my life to save Darm from his evil."

The unicorn says nothing, but walks over to you and raises her head. You see a flicker of white flame sprout from the tip of the horn and float up into the air like a snowflake. It drifts downwards and lands on your head. Cold white fire flows down over your body. You watch with wonder as the fire eats away at your flesh, dissolving you to nothing within seconds.

Your spirit floats above the ground, and you see your bones and armour dissolve into smoke as well, leaving nothing but a black circle on the floor. The unicorn turns from where you were and faces Darm. It says nothing, but its horn starts to glow softly.

In response, Darm's skin starts to sparkle. An look of wonder fills his face, but then an expression of grief contorts his features, and he falls to his knees and starts to weep. The glow fades, but he continues to cry like a child. The unicorn turns into white smoke, which breaks apart and disperses towards the ceiling.

Many minutes pass, and finally Darm stands. He looks more at peace and stares at Kianmay with a smile. "I do not know what has happened to me. But I remember all your words, and now they resonate within me with the ring of truth. Before I was too afraid to even listen to you. From whence this courage? This lifting of blindness from my eyes?"

Kianmay cannot answer him.

You start to drift away, and cannot hear whatever else is said. You depart from the mortal world into a world of light.

THE END**886**

You keep as still as you can, trying not to breathe. But the serpent-man has detected your scent and begins to thrust the spear into the bushes. You are forced to push it aside so that it does not end up in your throat.

The serpent man rears up and back, then begins to thump the ground with his tail. Aware of your extremely vulnerable position, you charge from the bushes with your weapons at the ready. You face off with the serpent-man as you hear more scraping sounds approaching.

Getting into a fight now is out of the question. Therefore you can:

Surrender, turn to **869**

Run, Turn to **778**

887

"As you must know there is a nomadic king in the great tundra who calls himself the Wolf," you begin.

"Yes?" Darm says in a neutral tone, but you see that he is interested.

"It is no secret that he intends to attack this city to take for himself. But he has another secret that I happen to know which will aid you against him."

“Well, what is it?” Darm asks impatiently.

“The Wolf is in fact a werewolf!”

Darm nods slowly, looking at you thoughtfully. “This I knew already, but it pleases me that you speak truthfully to me, now that I hold your life in my hands. Perhaps I –”

You feel something stiffening your body. You try to speak but you are paralysed. You begin to hurt as you feel your body being stretched and compressed. Your face extends, and thick hair sprouts all over your body. Amidst the pain your human mind starts to slip away as a powerful hunger rises within your heart...

The human part of you vanishes as you are transformed into a wolf. Because you have been transformed by magic rather than the cycle of the moon, you remain in your wolf shape. You will never know how you fled the palace, feeding on several humans on your way, before running through the city and finding freedom in the tundra. As a werewolf you stand twice as high as any normal wolf, and are covered in thick black fur. You live alone by your instincts until a wolf pack adopts you. They too are large and black like you, but they can transform into two-legged creatures, and lead a great army of two-legs.

You join them, running at their side as they cover themselves in metal and attack a great city of stone. Eventually your pack and their two-leg army is victorious and you sit in golden halls next to the king, his companion forever.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

888

You listen at the door, but here nothing, so you open the door and peek inside. Inside you see a large bathing chamber. The walls are mirrored and lined with large marble basins filled with flowering plants, while birds sing from the branches of small trees that grow in larger pots in the corners of the room. The light in the room comes from the domed ceiling, which glows softly with a yellowish light

In the very centre of the room stairways from all sides descend down into a large bath full of steaming water. You step inside to look around, but it seems to be no more than a bathing chamber.

If you want to take a bath, turn to **999**

If you have other things you should be doing, you can leave this room and:

Enter the central doors by turning to **727**

Or if you haven't already, you can enter the doors opposite by turning to **770**

889

Taking out the scroll, you clear your throat and read the words of the spell. You feel magical energy growing in the air around you, and with your final word you feel something settle into place. You quickly toss the paper aside and draw your weapon, charging towards the throne.

Darm is frowning, feeling the effects of your spell. Seeing you advance, he stands and chants words of power, but whatever he wanted to happen doesn't. You bound up the steps of the throne, drawing your weapon.

Darm falls back and snatches up a long broadsword that sits in a stand next to his throne. He brings it around just in time to fend off your blow. He sets himself and meets your attack. Because you are under the effects of the spell also, any benefits from magical items are cancelled. This includes your weapons and armour, which will function in the same way as their mundane versions

KING DARM SKILL 10 STAMINA 20 DB 10 ARMOUR 10

If you win in less than 5 rounds, turn to **998**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

If you are still fighting after 5 rounds, turn to **844**

890

You place a magical item on the tray, and the serpent woman in the short green silk coat smiles and bows her head before taking the tray up to the dais behind the screens. You notice that the serpent woman keeps her eyes downcast as she extends the tray. A moment later she withdraws with the empty tray.

The voice floats out from behind the screen once more. "Take him and give him a new arm, then release him back to his world."

The serpent woman at your side bows, then with a smile invites you to follow her. You do so and she leads you from the throne room into another chamber off to one side. You are curious as to how your arm will be restored, but the serpent woman simply coils herself up to one side of the room in front of a table and begins to write on a piece of paper.

"How will you restore my arm?" you ask her.

"With this," she says, holding up the piece of paper. It is a simple square of paper no larger than your palm, and on it the serpent woman has written a number of sinuous runes. She opens a small ceramic pot, and wets a brush with the clear, sticky contents. She places a dab on the back of the paper square, then packs up her equipment and uncoils herself, approaching you. "Hold out your severed arm," she instructs.

Bemused, you do so and she pastes the paper square to the end of your stump.

She then invites you to follow her again. With a group of serpent guards escorting you, you are taken back to the shrine where you first appeared. As you step up into the shrine, you raise your arm, feeling foolish with the paper square stuck on there. It itches uncomfortably.

"How does this work?" you ask.

"Return to your world, and your arm will be restored," she says.

With nothing else to do, you wave goodbye and proceed into the shrine. As soon as you are back in the circle, radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm.

To your surprise and pleasure, the paper square is gone, and in its place is a new arm. It feels numb at first, but increasingly feeling returns; mostly it hurts and itches.

But soon enough it is strong and fully functional again. You may restore your lost *initial* and *current* SKILL point.

You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

891

“Very good,” Darm mutters darkly. “You are more than a mere foot soldier. I underestimated you. But now I will give you no further chance to defy me! He begins to cast a spell...

What will you do?

Tell him you have information that could be of use to him? Turn to **847**

If Palliumi promised to assist you, you can call on her now by turning to **871**

If Jamar Zi promised to assist you, you can call on him now by turning to **917**

If you gave Kianmay a silver scarab, turn to **925**

Otherwise, you will just have to charge at him; turn to **976**



892

You look over the books and finally find a catalogue of magical items. It is spread across several volumes, but through using the contents page, you quickly locate the relevant chapter of the correct volume.

Looking through, you find a picture of a similar-looking gauntlet, and read the description. It isn't exactly the same, but perhaps it is close enough. The book tells that gauntlets of this nature were made during the Age of Conflict, where the world was almost destroyed in great magical battles. They were designed to enable the wearer to use magic without draining their own energy, drawing instead upon the magic within the earth, tapping into the veins of power that flow through the planet.

The passage also explains that the wearer merely needs to use the skills of concentration to use the gauntlet, once it becomes part of their body as it has clearly yours.

If you would like to practise using the gauntlet now, turn to **950**

Otherwise, if you haven't already you can:

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

893

The pain that fills your body is incomprehensible, but lasts only for a few moments as you feel everything inside you twisting. You are dead before you fall to the floor. Your spirit floats in darkness for a time, then rushes back towards the light.

You open your eyes, and hear a gasp. You sit up, seeing Kianmay and Palliumi kneeling at your side. Kianmay smiles, while the queen looks shocked. You stand up and stretch, looking around for Darm.

"Where is the King?" you ask.

"He is gone," Palliumi says with a satisfied smile. "My father's magic..."

She does not elaborate, and starts to look lost.

"Now you can rule," you tell her. "And rule justly."

But Palliumi shakes her head. "Few knew that Darm had a queen. I doubt I would have the support I would need to rule. I would rather just disappear, anyway."

"Will you come with me?" Kianmay asks her.

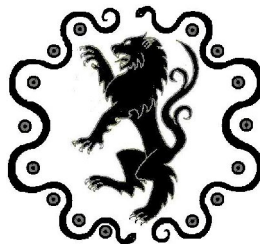
"To be a priestess?" Palliumi asks.

Kianmay is a little surprised, but then nods. "I will vouch for you."

Palliumi starts to look stronger and smiles. "Then I shall come to you soon. For now I will pray for my husband's soul."

She stands and walks over to a point before the throne and kneels down. Kianmay touches your arm and the two of you silently leave the hall.

Turn to **800**



894

The hook clangs loudly into the marble below the window, then falls clattering to the floor. You wince at each loud noise. You hear a shout from one of the guards below the balcony, but nothing else happens as you crouch, sweating on the balcony.

After a minute, you gather up the rope and hook and contemplate having another throw.

If you want to have another throw, you must test your SKILL once more.

If you are skilful, turn to **916**

If you are unskilful, turn to **797**

Otherwise you must return to the dining hall where you can:

Tear one of the parchments off a chair to see what happens by turning to **764**

Sit in one of the chairs, by turning to **731**

If you haven't already, you can leave the dining room and go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

895

“Great King! I am in the service of the light against this servant of evil! Give me the strength to match his magic!”

The giant white elephant looks down at you for several moments before the great voice speaks. “Whatever service you give to goodness is momentary and conditional. Your heart will easily waver in the face of true challenge. Unfortunately this one will never give you the chance to run. You shall be destroyed before cowardice can drive your heart. In truth the outcome of this battle between you is of no relevance. Whether either of you are immortal or not will not change the world, even if you rule the entire world as king. People will still live and die and live and die again, each soul ascending or descending as before. Whether one king or many rule the world this will not change the truth of things, unless a man of true worth has a crown upon his head. Neither of you are such men.”

“But...he will rule beyond his allotted time!” you protest.

The great voice replies sadly. “One petty king ruling for a thousand years is no different to 20 petty kings ruling for a thousand years. A bound soul will be rewarded and punished regardless of whether its wheel turns swiftly or slowly. The goodness you serve is but temporary. How can I who sees across eternity aid you?” Before you can answer, the elephant continues. “I shall aid you because of this priestess here, who has within her heart the ability to build something eternal. For her sake I will aid you. If you are wise, you will heed her advice.”

The elephant reaches out with its trunk and touches you on the forehead. You feel energy rushing into your body. You may increase your *initial* skill by 2 points, your *initial* STAMINA by 5 points, and your LUCK by 2 points. You may also raise your *current* statistics to these levels.

The elephant withdraws its trunk and turns to Kianmay. “Farewell, priestess.”

The great white body suddenly turns to mist and disperses up through the air. You and Darm look at each other in uncertainty. The King seems shaken. Kianmay steps forward. “Turn away from evil, your majesty. You see how the gods look upon you. They do not intervene because the greatest harm you do is to your own self!”

Darm shakes his head, a sneer curling his lips. “The gods do not understand us! They will never sicken and die! Why should I listen to them? I am sick of hearing your words!” Darm looks back at you, a malicious gleam in his eye. “You have worked your magic! Now it is my turn once more!”

He casts a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **927**

Otherwise, turn to **855**

896

Are you wearing an amethyst condor amulet? If so, turn to **618**

If not, turn to **884**

897

You search through your pack, looking for a suitable item. You consider and reject a few, then out of the corner of your eye you see the fire start to die. You turn your head in time to see it vanish completely. Darm rises from his throne.

“My turn!” He waves his hands and begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **927**

Otherwise, turn to **855**

898

Searching through your pack, you come across the unicorn’s horn. You pull it out and regard it carefully. If it is going to be useful, this is probably the only time. With that thought you toss the horn into the ring of fire.

The flames turn orange, then sweep inwards and gather up the horn as they form a sphere floating in the air above the blackened carpet. After a moment of suspense the orb of fire lengthens, touching the ground once more, filling out into the shape of a large horse, with an opal-like horn protruding from its forehead. Its long tail floats upon the air as it turn to regard you with bright blue eyes, magical light dancing over its snowy hide.

“So, killer,” a disembodied woman’s voice addresses you, sounding sad rather than angry. “Why have you summoned me?”

Killer? “Why are you calling me that?” you ask uneasily.

“You killed me to take my horn,” the unicorn explains. “Why would you do such a thing? Am I your enemy?”

You are somewhat startled that you are facing the unicorn again, but boldly justify your actions. “I needed the power of the horn to defeat this sorcerer! He is evil. I ask your forgiveness and beg you to aid me against him.”

The unicorn is silent for a moments, then speak once more. You call him evil. If this is because he does harm to others to achieve his desire, then I look at you and see no different. Shall I destroy you also?"

"I am fighting for good," you declare.

"Perhaps this one wishes to do good also. But I see you stand with a priestess, and though she would never approve of you killing me, I see that you are allied with her. Therefore I shall allow you to serve good according to your nature. You have killed me to gain power against this one. Thus offer to me your life, and I shall save this one from his evil."

"What?" you ask. "I have to die?"

"To give your life to save another is a deed of great merit. You will kill to defeat him. Will you not die to save him?"

If you have a diamond Key embedded in your chest and want to offer your 'life', turn to **906**

If you want to really offer your life, turn to **885**

If you want to ask for another way, turn to **964**

899

You try to pull your gaze away, but suddenly find that you are indeed trapped. With a great effort, you tear yourself physically away, but no matter where you face, the eyes are there. You see its mouth open in a grin, revealing small pointed teeth. Knowing now that it is evil, you redouble your efforts to pull away.

You feel like you are trying to climb out of an ice-walled pit as you continually slip back into the depths of the cold malevolent gaze of the pale creature. In desperation you gather your strength and instead of trying to escape throw yourself forward and drive your fear and aggression right into the massive eye before you.

The eyes recoil and the pale creature blinks. For a moment you are free, and you throw yourself away from it. You feel yourself hit the ground with a crash, and quickly crawl away as quickly as you can. You smash into a cabinet, and rebound, falling to the floor. Your vision clears in time to see the cabinet rock and eject a large number of painted porcelain platters that smash loudly on the floor around you.

When all settles, you look around, and see the chair you were sitting in on its side. You climb to your feet, broken shards of porcelain tinkling to the floor you brush yourself off.

Suddenly the doors to the dining room open and you spin about, your weapon coming to hand.

Standing in the doorway is a small creature no higher than your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "There's no need for that." He says, glancing at your weapon. "His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature bows, then turns and makes its way back into the corridor. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Putting away your weapon, you slowly follow. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following him or

not. The creature soon goes through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

900

You wander from the palace, astounded by what you have seen. The palace guards briefly detain you, but you mumble some story and they let you go. What would they do if they knew their king has disappeared?

You wander the streets, alone with your helplessness until you feel something warm shining on your face. You look up, finding yourself in front of the Temple of the White Goddess. The warmth seems to be coming from the statue that stands before you, arms extended as if in welcome.

You think about Kianmay and what life your path will now take. You are determined not to disappoint her. You step forward, accepting the welcome of the White Goddess.

THE END

901

Your charge interrupts Darm and he stumbles over the words of power. He tries to cast a new spell, but before he can complete the incantation you are on him. You knock him down and raise your weapon. You see the fear in his eyes and it chills you, but you do not hesitate as you bring down your weapon, striking him in the head.

The light fades from Darm's eyes as blood runs down over his face. He slumps back and lies still, finally dead.

Finally it is done. You clean your weapon and walk over to where Palliumi and Kianmay are waiting.

"I am sorry," Palliumi tells you. "I should have helped you. You could have been killed. But thank you. Now I am free."

"Now you can rule," you tell her. "And rule justly."

But Palliumi shakes her head. "Few knew that Darm had a queen. I doubt I would have the support I would need to rule. I would rather just disappear, anyway."

"Will you come with me?" Kianmay asks her.

"To be a priestess?" Palliumi asks.

Kianmay is a little surprised, but then nods. "I will vouch for you."

Palliumi starts to look stronger and smiles. "Then go and leave this place. I shall remain for a time. Then I will follow you and leave this place forever."

Kianmay nods, and steps away, gesturing for you to follow. The two of you leave, while Palliumi prays for her husband's soul.

Turn to **800**



902

“It’s just a little kiss, baby,” you explain. “It doesn’t mean I’m going to marry you. It’s just for fun. You enjoyed it didn’t you?”

The viper-woman stares at you in confusion, but her eyes then start to look very bright and hard. “You mean, I am a game to you?”

“Not a game, baby,” you reply. “I’ve never had a kiss that was so special before. But marriage is such a serious thing. There’s no need to spoil our fun with talk like that. Just relax baby, and I’ll show you a good time.”

You can feel the force of her hostility as it blazes out of her eyes. She rears up and draws back her arm to slap you. You are going to let her vent her anger, but at the last minute you realise you might have made a mistake. But by then it is too late. Rather than slap you, she slices your exposed face with her long nails. You flinch backwards, the wounds burning with some potent venom.

But she is not finished yet. Waving her hands in a complex gesture, she chants and suddenly flings her hands out at you. Lighting arcs from her fingers and combines into a bolt that blasts you at short range, sending you flying backwards and smashing into the wall head first.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **974**
Otherwise the poison burns through your body to your heart and...

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

903

Lifting your hand with a topaz ring on it, you concentrate and try to reveal the magical properties of the ring. Darm waits patiently, an indulgent smile curving his lips. You feel the magical heart of the ring, and you feel the power unlocked within emerge.

The topaz starts to glow with a soft, warm light. You wait expectantly, but there doesn’t seem to be anything else happening. You hear Darm chuckle. “I gave a ring like that to my assassin. I hope you did not do him any harm? A timid creature, but he can put a knife in man’s back and escape before his widow notices her new status. I dare not keep him inside the palace with me.” He stands and lifts his hand. “You have had your turn. Now I will have mine!” He begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband, turn to **927**

If not, turn to **855**

904

You begin to recite the magic words, sending the gathering magic towards Kianmay. She watches you with bemusement, shifting about uncomfortably as she feels the magic settling around her. Suddenly she gasps and falls to her knees. Your incantation reaches an end and you watch apprehensively.

Kianmay starts to writhe, and suddenly the back of her robe is torn as two great red spikes protrude out. She stands, tearing at her clothes with clawed fingers. The

pieces of cloth fall away to reveal her body growing tiny red scales. Only her head remains the same, while the scales grow to cover her body and the great red spikes on her back unfurl into massive bat wings. Finally she is complete and screeches with an unholy scream, a long forked tongue lashing the air.

She leaps upwards, the wings spreading out motionless, yet supporting her magically as she hovers in the air. She looks at you at laughs. She raises one hand, a glowing javelin appearing in it. You dash for cover and leap behind a chest as the javelin is hurled into the floor were you were moments previously, gouging out a great hole.

You realise the chest will not protect you, but as you rise to run, you see that Darm has taken advantage of Kianmay's attack on you to strike at her. A tendril of greyish mist rises from the ground below her. It has engulfed her and seems to be some sort of barrier. Light appears in Kianmay's hands and forms into a long curved blade with which she slashes at the barrier and slips out in time to received the brunt of a massive lighting bolt cast by Darm.

It crackles over her, pushing her back in the air, but seems to leave her mostly unharmed. Her tail lashes the air in irritation as she streaks forward, shining blade in hand. Darm stumbles back and erects an invisible wall that Kianmay crashes into. She slashes at is with a scream, the magical defence shattering and fiery shards from her weapon striking Darm.

He cries out in pain, and as Kianmay descends on him to deal the death-blow, he pulls out a small black cube and shouts some words of power. A white bolt blasts out of it and strikes Kianmay. She falls from the air like a stone and lands heavily on the floor. Darm looks at the cube in annoyance and tosses it aside. Apparently it is empty now.

He stands over Kianmay and chants, waving his hands until her body transforms back into a woman, although still with tiny wings and a tail. He takes off his fine outer robe and drabs it over her naked body, then in his under robe limps away from her to glare at you.

“That was foolish. You endangered her most of all!”

Kianmay stirs, and starts to rise, holding her head. She looks around in confusion, clutching the robe around her body. Seeing Darm so close, she scrambles to her feet and retreats closer to you. She picks up the remains of her robes and begins to dress herself in them beneath Darm's robe, as if she wishes to cast it aside as soon as she can.

Darm sneers and turns to you, then begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband, turn to **752**

Otherwise turn to **971**

905

You briefly tell the serpent woman about the Diamond Key, King Darm, and your quest to stop him somehow. Her eyes widen as she listens, and you sense that you were right to trust her. When you have finished, she nods curtly.

“Darm is known to us. Many times he has come here, yet with the courtesy of a swine-herder rather than a king! I shall take you to the queen and you will make your case. I hope that she will assist you.”

She moves off and you follow after her, the four serpent-guards forming up around you. The main path through the gardens winds back and forth, and you notice there are no straight sections anywhere. However, rather than being led to a hole in the ground, the winding path leads to a great palace of red and gold. There is a marble slope rather than a stairway, and the serpent-people slither up it, while you walk up uncomfortably. The guards peel off to the sides and disappear, while the woman leads you through an open archway into a large rectangular chamber with a pair of closed doors at the far end. There are some large ornately carved chairs against the walls and you are invited to sit.

You take a seat and admire the painted paper lanterns that hang from the ceiling. It is only a few minutes later when a gong sounds, and the doors open. A pair of serpent-guards emerge. Their snake parts are black scaled, and they have ornate gold breastplates inlaid with rubies. They carry banded rods in their hands, and wear circlets on their heads.

“Traveller!” booms one. “You have come to the court of Queen Shimishis!”

“Enter and pay your respects!” booms the other in turn.

You stand and nervously approach, passing between them. You enter a throne room with a ceiling high above. A balcony edges the upper levels, and you see many serpent-people staring down at you, most with unfriendly faces. The walls are hidden in the darkness behind the supporting pillars of the balconies, except for the wall ahead, upon which is mounted a huge golden disc, inlaid with jade, alabaster and onyx forming a spiral of three serpents. Underneath is a slope-edged dais, and on top is a set of painted silk screens, behind which you can vaguely see some movement.

The carpet you are walking on ends several yards before the foot of the dais and you instinctively come to a stop there.

Silence pervades the air for several moments, then a voice comes from behind the screen. It is a soft and quiet voice, yet it carries a sense of unbelievable strength. This is one who never needs to shout, for all will bend their ear to hear the briefest word she speaks.

“Why does a warrior come to my hall?”

You swallow nervously and take a breath to tell her about your quest against Darm.

Turn to **846**

906

You stand up straight. “I will offer my life to save Darm from his evil.”

The unicorn says nothing, but walks over to you and raises her head. You see a flicker of white flame sprout from the tip of the horn and float up into the air like a snowflake. It drifts downwards and lands on your head. Cold white fire flows down over your body. You watch with wonder as the fire eats away at your flesh, dissolving you to nothing within seconds.

Your spirit floats above the ground, and you see your bones and armour dissolve into smoke as well, leaving nothing but a black circle on the floor with the Diamond Key sitting in the centre. The unicorn turns from where you were and faces Darm. It says nothing, but its horn starts to glow softly.

In response, Darm’s skin starts to sparkle. An look of wonder fills his face, but then an expression of grief contorts his features, and he falls to his knees and starts to

weep. The glow fades, but he continues to cry like a child. The unicorn turns into white smoke, which breaks apart and disperses towards the ceiling.

Many minutes pass, and finally Darm stands. He looks more at peace and stares at Kianmay with a smile. "I do not know what has happened to me. But I remember all your words, and now they resonate within me with the ring of truth. Before I was too afraid to even listen to you. From whence this courage? This lifting of blindness from my eyes?"

Kianmay cannot answer him.

You start to drift away, and cannot hear whatever else is said. You depart from the mortal world and start to plunge down into darkness.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

907

You take out your weapon and give the hut a kick, making it shake. "Hey! Give me whatever items of power you have, or I will smash your hut to pieces and then you!"

"Please! Leave me alone! I have nothing!" the creature cries pathetically.

Unmoved, you begin to smash the hut, pieces falling off at every stroke. Eventually you kick the hut again, and it falls over in pieces. The creature is huddled there, hands over his head, chanting away. You level your weapon, but before you can threaten him, you feel the air buzzing with magic, and the creature starts to grow. You stumble backwards as it swells and expands over your head. The yellowed skin grows fur that thickens and darkens, claws sprouting on the fingers.

In moments you are faced with a giant yellow-eyed bear that roars and rushes at you. You must fight it.

Giant Bear Skill 12 Stamina 35 DB 10 Armour 2

If you win, turn to **789**

If you are killed, but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **992**

If you are just killed, turn to **309**

908

If she can help you to escape, you can always abandon her later. "You can come with me," you say, giving her a smile.

She claps her hands in excitement. "Wonderful!"

"How long will it take you to pack your things?"

"I may take nothing with me," she replies, closing her eyes and beginning to wave her hands. Then her body sways. It looks like she is dancing, except you can feel the air around you begin to move, and tingling fills your body. She moves forward and puts her arms around you, pressing herself close, then she sensuously wraps her serpent part around you and her human part. As the coils rise higher, you begin to get nervous, but something is flowing through you from her and you find that you cannot speak, or move.

You start to panic, but you are soon enclosed and the tingling feeling becomes all you can feel, until there is an unpleasant sensation not unlike something sliding down your throat.

Eventually the sensations fade, and when you can see again, you are standing as before, but the serpent princess is nowhere to be seen. You try to turn your head to look around the room, but you cannot. Your arm raises by itself, and your head bends to look at your arm. You then begin to walk, jerkily at first, but then with increasing confidence.

You are a passenger within your own body. Your body goes back to the doorway and opens it carefully. Peering out, you and your body see that there is no one there, so you move quickly with soft steps towards the narrow corridor where you entered.

A few minutes later you have left the palace and are in the gardens. To your great consternation, your body tiptoes through the gardens with exaggerated steps, as if you were walking on dried leaves instead of grass. You notice serpent-guards in the distance, but your body only glances at them and does not seem alarmed, but continues its silly soft-stepping.

It takes over half an hour, but you eventually arrive back at the shrine. During your journey you have learned that the serpent guards obviously have poorer eyesight than you, and cannot see over the distances you can. You also reason that somehow running footsteps will draw them, which is why they were able to track you while you ran. The soft steps meant the serpent-guards could not sense your passing.

You do not know why it is so, but your body walks triumphantly into the shrine, whistling a tune. It steps into the stone circle and a luminous white mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm.

You stand there and wait for your body to move off, but it does nothing. Experimentally curling your toes, you feel them move, and you realise you are now back in control of your body. Thankfully, you take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You do not know what happened to the serpent-princess, and you examine yourself as best as you can, but can see no differences. However, make a note that you have been joined to a serpent-women.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

909

You nod slowly. "This explains many things."

Darm smiles warmly. "And will you give me the Diamond Key?"

If you have a fake Diamond Key and you don't really believe him, you can offer the fake key as a way of getting close to him. To do this turn to **102**

If you do believe him and want to tell him where the Diamond Key is concealed, turn to **786**

Otherwise you will have to tell him that you don't really believe him, turn to **957**

910

If you have sworn an oath not to reveal the Wolf's secret, turn to **887**
Otherwise turn to **929**

911

Carrying the box of gems over to the centre of the design where the serpents heads meet you consider which combination to try:

Grey-ruby, black-sapphire, white-emerald; turn to **648**

Grey-ruby, black-emerald, white-sapphire; turn to **754**

Grey-sapphire, black-ruby, white-emerald; turn to **793**

Grey sapphire, black-emerald, white-ruby; turn to **813**

Grey-emerald, black-ruby, white-sapphire; turn to **830**

Grey-emerald, black-sapphire, white-ruby; turn to **953**

912

As Darm begins to cast his spell, you see Kianmay take out the silver scarab you gave to her. She closes her eyes and begins to concentrate. Sensing something, Darm stops his incantation and spins around to face her.

An aura of coloured light appears around Kianmay, and an expression of great peace and joy appears on her face. She opens her eyes and looks at Darm and then you. It is not Kianmay you are looking at. It is the White Goddess! You blink. She has Kianmay's, skin, and face and hair, dressed in the same white robe, but everything is also different, more...radiant.

The White Goddess looks back at Darm and an expression of sadness fills her eyes. Darm falls to the ground and starts to weep. The White Goddess glides forward and reaches down, drawing him upwards and holding his hands.

Darm looks at her, eyes wide with amazement. "I don't want to die," he says.

"It is not yet your time," the White Goddess replies. "This place is not good for you. Free your son, and we will go."

Darm nods. He turns and waves his hands, the marble arms imprisoning you sliding down and flowing back into the floor. The king turns back to the goddess with a smile. The goddess smiles at him, then takes off one her slippers. The slipper grows and transforms into a great dragon of deep red and radiant gold. The White Goddess takes, Darm's hands and they step up onto the back of the beast, which lifts itself effortlessly into the air.

The White Goddess looks down at you and speaks. "Beware. Your heart is on a precipice."

The dragon then flies away, passing through the ceiling. In moments all is still and quiet and you are alone.

Turn to **900**



913

Surrounded by a heavy carved wooden frame, a small panel at the bottom of the painting says: *The Battle of The Front*. It is a battle between human warriors mounted on horses against all manner of beasts, including a large-breasted woman who is a serpent below the waist. She wields a sceptre and directs other serpents, with human heads, to attack.

If you read the note in the locked box in the sorcerer's apartment, then you know something about this painting. Use the alpha-numeric key below to find the number corresponding to the single-word codeword from the letter. Once you have your number, multiply it by 15 and add 9. This will give you the reference you need to turn to.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Otherwise you can:

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

If you have an amethyst condor amulet, you can study the books by turning to **618**

Or you can leave this room and go back into the hall to proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

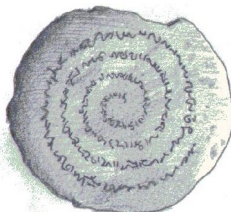
914

Trying to ignore Darm, you concentrate on the gauntlet. You feel invisible tendrils emerge from it and reach out, searching for something. The tendrils reach down into the earth far below and connect with massive streams of power there, the veins of the earth. The thread-like tendrils suddenly swell with power, becoming as thick as tree trunks and feeding the torrent into your hand. You feel like your arm is going to burst, and will the energy to shoot out of your hand.

You feel like your arm is being torn apart, and shield your eyes from the blinding light as your magical attack roars and crackles. After all is still, you open your eyes and check first that your arm is still there before looking at the path of destruction extending out from your shattered cage.

The floor has been gouged out, the edges of the carpet on fire. Most of the wall opposite is gone, a tunnel torn through several rooms and out of the palace, even smashing through the citadel wall. Through the hole in the wall you can see distant rooftops ablaze, and hear shout and cries in the night. Of Darm and Kianmay there is no sign.

Turn to **700**



915

The lightning bolt strikes you in the chest, knocking you backwards. But apart from the physical shock there is no pain as your magical protection absorbs the energy of the spell. You roll to your feet and face Darm once more.

The sorcerer-king raises one eyebrow. "So you have some magical ability after all? Interesting. Perhaps you will provide a challenge! I am a sorcerer now, and you will not best me without magic! Let us have a contest. Or will you be wise and give me the Diamond Key? Dare you match your pitiful skills against me?"

"I will not give you the Diamond Key," you say firmly.

"Many a fool is used for entertainment!" Darm snarls, but then calms himself. "Very well! I shall let you go first. Do what magic you will to attack me!"

What magic will you perform?

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **725**

Fireball, turn to **814**

Lightning, turn to **832**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Fungus, turn to **938**

Revelation, turn to **861**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **903**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

**916**

Once more you spin the rope and let the hook soar upwards. To your delight the hook sails through the opening and rattles loudly above. You pull the rope until it is taut, then begin to climb upwards.

Once you are halfway up you hear a cry of triumph from the wall below and turn your head to see a group of guards looking at you. The next moment an arrow cracks into the wall beside you. The guards make a disappointed cry. You are being used for target practice.

Test your LUCK. If you only have one arm, you must add 3 to the dice roll since you are not able to climb as fast as you could with two arms.

If you are lucky, turn to **620**

If you are unlucky, turn to **947**

917

As Darm is casting his spell, you inhale to shout the name of the King's Champion. But as you open your mouth a blaze of light streaks across the room and strikes Darm in the chest, sending him sprawling, his robes if not his flesh in flames.

The king cries out in pain, and rolls along the floor trying to extinguish the flames. As he rolls about, you see a glowing figure step into view. It is the King's Champion. The tall, dark skinned warrior clad in crystal breastplate and helm spares neither you nor Kianmay a glance, but looks with surprising loathing on his monarch.

Darm extinguishes the flames, and rolls over just in time to see Jamar Zi towering over him, just before he plunges the crystal spearhead of his weapon into Darm's chest. The crystal blazes, and Darm opens his mouth in a silent scream as his insides are burnt away.

The king slumps dead to the floor. Jamar Zi turns away and approaches you. "To think I could have slain him so easily at any time. Yet I did not. You and your courage, even in your weakness, has shown me the way to freedom. I thank you."

He gives you a bow, and another to Kianmay before leaving the room.

Turn to **800**

918

You take out the spell for lightning. You set your stance, extend your hand, and read the spell in a loud, clear voice.

Have you been joined to a serpent-woman? If so, turn to **791**
If not, turn to **935**

919

You try to lose your pursuers by tracing a path that makes no sense, even back tracking on yourself. But whatever you do, you see them in the distance, always drawing directly towards you. It soon becomes clear that they can't see you when you see them, and you are perplexed as to how they can draw towards you so unerringly. As the distance gets too close for comfort, you give up your strategies and run directly towards the shrine.

You run with all your might and reach the shrine safely, bounding up onto the circle. As soon as you are back in the circle, radiant mist begins to obscure the gardens around you. You see several serpent-guards only paces away and realise you have made the slimmest of escapes. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You pause to rest for a few minutes, then take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

920

The queen's aim is accurate and the ball of energy smashes into your chest, sending you flying backwards, with a burning pain surging through your body from the impact point. You barely feel it as you smash into the now hard floor, sending your plunging into blackness

You awake some time later severely battered and in pain (reduce your current SKILL by two points, and halve your current STAMINA). You are still lying on the floor in the queen's chamber, but the other figure present is not the queen. It is a rotund little man no higher than your knee. He smiles, and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "That's it! Up you get. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature turns and begins to walk away. Groggily you stand and stagger after the small creature. You start to feel better as you move along. You look around for the queen, but she is nowhere in sight. By the time you reach the entrance of the bedchamber, the creature is gone, but the doors at the end of the hallway have been left ajar. Taking a deep breath, you make your way inside.

Turn to **727**

**921**

Darm points at you, and you feel your skin tingle as magic is laid upon it. You see Darm relax with a smile. You move forward to smash him, but you find your body so stiff you can only move a few inches. Your flesh is rapidly hardening. As your eyes harden your vision disappears, and your other senses disappear as well.

You have been turned to stone, and your soul soon flutters away to find a new place to roost.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

922

You battle against the skeletons, but cannot clear your escape before the others skeletons surge towards you and join the battle. You retreat to a cluster of

stalagmites, smashing down a few skeletons that are trying to clamber through to get you. The footing is slippery on the slick stone, but at least they cannot come at you easily of all at once.

In the following battle, the skeletons can only come at you 3 at a time. When one of the first 3 falls, replace it with the next skeleton on the list. Good luck.

SKELETON 1	SKILL 7	STAMINA 9	DB 6	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 2	SKILL 6	STAMINA 8	DB 4	ARMOUR 1
SKELETON 3	SKILL 8	STAMINA 5	DB 8	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 4	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6	DB 6	ARMOUR 1
SKELETON 5	SKILL 5	STAMINA 8	DB 20	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 6	SKILL 7	STAMINA 7	DB 8	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 7	SKILL 7	STAMINA 9	DB 14	ARMOUR 2
SKELETON 8	SKILL 10	STAMINA 7	DB 10	ARMOUR 1
SKELETON 9	SKILL 5	STAMINA 5	DB 8	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 10	SKILL 5	STAMINA 10	DB 6	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 11	SKILL 8	STAMINA 6	DB 4	ARMOUR 1
SKELETON 12	SKILL 7	STAMINA 8	DB 8	ARMOUR 0

If you are killed, but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **863**

If you win, turn to **729**

If you are killed, turn to **309**

923

Swinging the firesword, you cut through the marble fingers holding you and break your way out. You charge at him, but he still does not seem afraid. He waves his hands once more, and you are hoisted up into the air, you continue to drift forward, and soon come to a stop in the air a few yards away.

You slash about with the firesword, but your blade meets nothing. Darm smiles at you, and begins to wave his hands. Kianmay suddenly shoves him, breaking his concentration. You fall to the ground, and despite landing awkwardly and twisting your ankle, you jump forward, swinging the destructive blade. Your ankle is healed by the second step and you leap at Darm, whose eyes open wide in fear, words of power springing to his lips.

But it is too late. The hot blade cuts him in two, setting fire to his robes. The cuts are seared, so there isn't even any blood. Darm tumbles to the ground in two pieces. The smell of burnt flesh fills the air as he dies on the floor.

Turn to **800**



924

Turning away from the pool, you take the nearest turn. You have only taken a few steps when you hear a scrapping sound, as if something is being dragged swiftly along the ground. You catch a glimpse of movement through the trees ahead.

If you want to run off the path and hide to see who is coming and what they are dragging, turn to **941**

If you would prefer to wait and confront them, turn to **994**

925

As Darm begins to cast his spell, you see Kianmay take out the silver scarab you gave to her. She closes her eyes and begins to concentrate. Sensing something, Darm stops his incantation and spins around to face her.

An aura of coloured light appears around Kianmay, and an expression of great peace and joy appears on her face. She opens her eyes and looks at Darm and then you. It is not Kianmay you are looking at. It is the White Goddess! You blink. She has Kianmay's, skin, and face and hair, dressed in the same white robe, but everything is also different, more...radiant.

The White Goddess looks back at Darm and an expression of sadness fills her eyes. Darm falls to the ground and starts to weep. The White Goddess glides forward and reaches down, drawing him upwards and holding his hands.

Darm looks at her, eyes wide with amazement. "I don't want to die." He says.

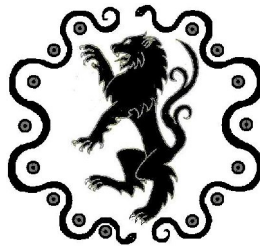
"It is not yet your time," the White Goddess replies. "This place is not good for you."

Darm nods, and the goddess smiles at him, then takes off one her slippers. The slipper grows and transforms into a great dragon of deep blue and radiant gold. The White Goddess takes Darm's hands and they step up onto the back of the beast, which lifts itself effortlessly into the air.

The White Goddess looks down at you and speaks. "Beware. Your heart is on a precipice."

The dragon then flies away, passing through the ceiling. In moments all is still and quiet and you are alone.

Turn to **900**

**926**

The hut is so small that you have to get down on your hands and knees to stick your head inside. Inside is a blanket on a pile of dry twigs and leaves. The rest of the hut is bare.

You are about to leave when you spy something glinting inside the leaves. You reach out to take it, but your hand just passes through the twigs and leaves. The glass

ring stops you from grabbing anything that moves around so much. The ground doesn't move, and so has some kind of permanence for you to rest on.

At least you now know that the creature has something that may be of value to you.

If you want to take off the ring and talk to the creature, turn to **672**

If you just want to leave, turn to **858**

927

Darm shouts words of power and thrusts his hand at you. The air itself rushes towards you, thickening into a spear of force. It strikes you so swiftly and powerfully that the impact is like been hit by a battering ram. Your magical protection unravels the magic, but it only needs a moment to inflict 5 points of damage to your STAMINA

If you are still alive, turn to **654**

If you are killed, but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

If you are just killed, turn to **805**

928

The poison works its way swiftly to your brain and you fall to the ground as your limbs become weak and quivering. Soon you can feel nothing at all as your senses fade one by one, plunging you into a silent, empty darkness.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

929

"As you must know there is a nomadic king in the great tundra who calls himself the Wolf," you begin.

"Yes?" Darm says in a neutral tone, but you see that he is interested.

"It is no secret that he intends to attack this city to take for himself. But he has another secret that I happen to know which will aid you against him."

"Well, what is it?" Darm asks impatiently.

"The Wolf is in fact a werewolf!"

Darm nods slowly, looking at you thoughtfully. "This I knew already, but it pleases me that you speak truthfully to me, now that I hold your life in my hands. Perhaps I should not kill you."

He steps over to a small table next to his throne, where you see an ivory box. He opens the box and takes out a golden pendant on a short chain, just long enough to encircle your neck. Holding it in his hands, he walk down from the throne and approaches you, but stops several yards away.

"Any warrior who serves me loyally is granted one of these. You see my sign." He shows you the pendant, which is oval-shaped, about as large as your thumb and inlaid with onyx in the form of a rampant lion, surrounded by serpents in red

cornelian. "Agree to serve me and I shall give you not only your life, but this pendant, which shall grant you power in battle."

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **841**

You look at him and the pendant dubiously. It might be a trick of some sort, although he obviously has the power to kill you if he wants to. If the pendant does indeed make you stronger you could use it against him, or at least get closer to him.

If you want to take the pendant and put it on, turn to **967**

If you can't trust him, you had best attack him while he is relatively close. Turn to **976**

930

Leaving the cover of the thicket, you carefully creep towards the palace. Moving into the trees that ring the palace, you move around until you see a small door at the top of a narrow ramp. You watch and wait for several minutes, but see no patrolling snake-men.

Taking a deep breath, you hurry out and climb up the ramp. To your delight the door is unlocked and you slip inside into a narrow passage. Inside the walls are black with scenes painted in metallic colours as well as iridescent blues, greens and purples. They all depict serpent-warriors in battle, usually wielding magic against foes of all kinds. Paper lanterns painted in softer colours hang from beamed ceilings, and the floors are polished marble of various hues.

You begin to explore, on the lookout for useful items or information. Reaching a doorway into a larger hall, you pause to check that it is clear, then move out. But your luck has run out. Reaching a door, you consider opening it, when the door pre-emptively any action of yours and swings outwards. You come face to face with a startled serpent-woman.

Unlike the serpent-guards you saw, the woman's face is entirely human, and beautifully so. Long black hair cascades around soft white shoulders, and a decorative white breastplate that reveals more than it covers surrounds her torso. The armour appears to be carved from ivory and adorned with flowers. Her eyes though are a little disturbing, being red; red like her scaled nether part, which is the bright red of a poisonous viper.

She rears up in surprise, bringing her long-nailed hands forward. But the gaze she directs at you is curious more than hostile.

"Human!" she exclaims. "Why are you here? I may kill you merely for seeing me."

You are not sure what she means, but you smile reassuringly at her. "My apologies. I have come to this strange garden by means I do not understand, and have been exploring blindly."

She lowers herself so that her face is level with yours and examines you slowly with her blood-red eyes. "Come with me, human. It is not safe for you here."

She turns around and slithers back into the room from which she came. You step after her, seeing a private chamber. The viper-woman closes the door behind you, then turns to examine you closely once more, even moving close to smell you. She then reaches out and carefully touches your face with her fingers.

Although she is a snake from the waist down, her human part is very attractive, with soft, snowy white skin, and your eyes wander down to her armour-accentuated cleavage. She seems to like you.

If you want to try and kiss her, turn to **782**

If you would rather talk to her, turn to **969**

931

Taking out the eagle-set ring, you slip it onto your finger, hiding it from Darm so that he can't anticipate what will happen; whatever that will be. You concentrate and try to reveal the magical properties of the ring. Darm waits patiently, an indulgent smile curving his lips. You feel the magical heart of the ring, and the power locked within emerges.

You feel your awareness starting to rise from your body. The physical world around you becomes faint, and you see another spiritual world occupying the same space. You are a glowing bird of some sort, connected to your body by a silver cord. Darm is a radiant serpent, coiled tightly around the mound of his physical body. You look at Kianmay, and are surprised to see her looking directly at you. Her spiritual self is the similar to her physical body, but she floats naked and luminous, great glowing wings spread from her back and a serpent-like tail whipping behind her.

Her spirit lifts one radiant arm to point towards Darm. "The ring will transport you to wherever you wish to be. Take you spirit to his side, and your body will follow in an instant. Then you may strike him. May his spirit find peace."

You drift forward and settle beside Darm. You watch him for many moments, but it seems time has been suspended. His spirit does not react to your proximity. You focus on your physical body, trying to reunite with it at your new location

You feel some resistance and push against it. With a sudden rush you feel your body jerked through time and space and you plunge back into your vessel...

Test your STAMINA. If you are strong, turn to **981**

If you are weak, turn to **806**

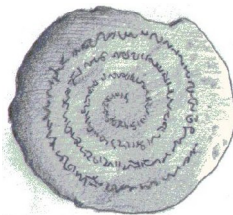
932

"Great King! Please help us by protecting the Diamond Key from the ambitions of men. Even if this one is slain, men seeking immortality cover this world like flies on corpse! Is there anything you can do to protect the Key from such men?"

The giant elephant looks at you for several moments. "There is indeed hope for you. I shall do as you ask."

Do you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest? If so, turn to **576**

If not, turn to **877**



933

At first glance the large chamber appears to be empty. The soft lighting comes from a single light crystal suspended at the top of the dome. The interior of the dome is plastered smooth and painted white. The floor is tiled in marble, laying out an arcane design.

Stepping over to look at the design, you see a triple spiral formed by three serpents. It's meaning escapes your comprehension, so you soon turn away to investigate the rest of the chamber. Moving around the perimeter of the chamber, you make note of two things. One is a polished wooden trapdoor leading downwards, and the other is a small alcove in the wall in which is a golden chest decorated with spirals of serpents.

Wary of traps, you carefully flick the lid of the box open, and find within six large gems: 2 rubies, 2 sapphires and 2 emeralds. You pick up one and feel it tingle in your hands. It is obviously magical. Since the gems are here and not in some strongbox, you guess that their purpose is located somewhere in this room.

Re-examining the triple-serpent spiral in the floor, you see that the eyes of each serpent are gem-sized indentations. Obviously the gems are meant to be placed inside. But just as the three sets of gems are different, so to are the serpents. One is laid out in white marble, another in black, and the last in grey marble.

You consider your options.

To try a combination of gems in eye sockets, turn to **911**

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**



934

The queen shakes her head and smiles. "Anyway, my lot is cast. But you, you have many choices. I urge you to escape. You cannot defeat Darm."

"I must," you reply.

"Are you sure?" she asks softly.

"I am," you state with certainty.

The queen puts down her cup. "Then I must do everything I can to help you. I have a weapon that will aid you. Were I to bear it I would not be strong enough, but you...perhaps you can slay him with it."

She goes to a cabinet and opens it by tracing a rune upon the door. Inside she takes out a lacquered wooden box and carries it over to a low table. She kneels and beckons you over as she lifts the lid.

You see a soft glow coming from within, and step over cautiously to see her draw out a dagger with a blade of glowing crystal. "This will penetrate his armour. Get close to him and you may stab him despite his armour. Then he will die and I shall be free."

She slides the glowing blade back into a plain leather sheath. She holds the crystal dagger out to you, and you take it.

“Go now,” she says. “He will be waiting for you.”

You thank the queen and turn away. You do not look back, but can feel her eyes burning into you with bright hope. You exit the bedchamber and close the door behind you.

Where to now?

To enter the doors at the end of the hall, turn to **727**

If you haven't already, you go through the doors opposite you by turning to **888**

935

You can't help turning your head away as the magical energy shoots down your arm and into your hand, where it bursts forth. You hear your attack roar through the air, and open your eyes just in time to see Darm wave his hands, making the magic unravel and the attack fades into nothing, a few sparks hitting his robe.

“Pathetic!” He declares. “How can a foot-soldier's spell harm me?”

He laughs contemptuously and begins to cast another spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

If not, turn to **971**



936

You approach the massive desk and look first on top, where you see an open book. It is open at a page with a diagram of a triple spiral of serpents. There is a grey serpent with green eyes, a black serpent with blue eyes and a white serpent with red eyes. You put the book down and continue your search.

There are drawers underneath and in them you find papers and ink and pens and blocks of wax for the seal that sit on the desk. You also find two small chests. One is unlocked and is full of gold coins, which you ignore for now. The second has a combination lock in the top. You can't force it open because it is magically sealed and has no crack to force anything into.

There are three wheels with numbers from 1 to 9. If you want to guess the combination, or if you somehow know what it is, you can turn to that passage number

that corresponds to your combination. If that passage makes no sense, you must turn back to this passage.

After you have finished with the box, you put it back into the drawer. The rest of the desk reveals nothing, and you consider your next course of action.

What do you want to do?

Look at the bookshelves? Turn to **896**

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, leave this room and go back into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)



937

Knowing that you are too far away from Darm to be able to charge him before he can cast a spell, you look for another option. If you had something to throw at him. Your hand goes to the purse at your belt...

If you have no coins, turn to **843**

If you have less than 10 coins, turn to **968**

If you have more than 10, turn to **973**

938

You pull out the parchment from your pack, while Darm waits with an indulgent smile. You set yourself, clear your throat and read the spell in a loud clear voice. The words of power ring through the chamber, and as the last echo dies, the paper in your hand starts to swell up. You drop the paper and watch as it grows takes root and starts to grow upwards. It looks like a mushroom, and eventually you are confronted with a growth as tall as you. The stem is creamy white, and the top brownish with blue spots scattered over it.

Darm chuckles. "A sorcerer with a sense of humour perhaps?"

His smile fades as he begins to cast a spell. He shouts words of power and flings his hand at you. A great bolt of lightning shoots out towards you. But it curves in its path, drawn towards the mushroom. It strikes the mushroom and the fungal growth explodes, showing you with smoking pieces.

When all is quiet, Darm looks surprised. "Odd, but effective."

He gestures for you to take your next turn.

What magic will you perform?

Read a scroll:

Arcane scroll, turn to **725**

Fireball, turn to **814**

Lightning, turn to **832**

Null-magic, turn to **889**

Revelation, turn to **861**

Use a silver gauntlet, turn to **849**

Use an eagle ring, turn to **931**

Use a topaz-set gold ring, turn to **903**

Use a Diamond Wand, turn to **866**

If you have no magic, you will have to run at him by turning to **837**

939

You reach out and touch the large breasted woman. As you do so, the canvas stretches inwards, and you feel a small bump there. You press it and something clicks. The next moment the painting is swinging back and you jump out of the way.

Revealed is a small room. Curious, you stick your head in and see a narrow stairway leading upwards to the side, parallel to the wall of the study. Stepping inside, you look up the stairway, seeing it is lit at intervals by light crystals. Glancing back you see there is a switch on the wall next to the panel that is the back of the painting, and confident you can open the panel again, you pull it closed.

Turning, you climb the stairs until you reach a trapdoor. Carefully you push on it, opening a crack through which you peer to see a dim chamber. You push the door further upwards, the hinges creaking in the silence. You step up into the room and lower the trapdoor back into place before looking around.

Turn to **933**

940

“Great King! I am in the service of the light against this servant of evil! Give me the strength to match his magic!”

The giant white elephant looks down at you for several moments before the great voice speaks. “Whatever service you give to goodness is momentary and conditional. Your heart will easily waver in the face of true challenge. Unfortunately this one will never give you the chance to run. You shall be destroyed before cowardice can drive your heart. In truth the outcome of this battle between you is of no relevance. Whether either of you are immortal or not will not change the world, even if you rule the entire world as king. People will still live and die and live and die again, each soul ascending or descending as before. Whether one king or many rule the world this will not change, unless a man of true worth has a crown placed upon his head. Neither of you are such men.”

“But...he will rule beyond his allotted time!” you protest.

The great voice replies sadly. “One petty king ruling for a thousand years is no different to 20 petty kings ruling for a thousand years. A bound soul will be rewarded and punished regardless of whether its wheel turns swiftly or slowly. The goodness you serve is but temporary. How can I who sees across eternity aid you?” Before you can answer, the elephant continues. “I shall aid you because of this priestess here, who has within her heart the ability to built something eternal. For her sake I will aid you. If you are wise, you will heed her advice.”

The elephant reaches out with its trunk and touches you on the forehead. You feel energy rushing into your body. You may increase your initial skill by 2 points, your initial STAMINA by 5 points, and your LUCK by 2 points. You may also raise your current statistics to these levels.

The elephant withdraws its trunk and turns to Kianmay. “Farewell, priestess.”

The great white body suddenly turns to mist and disperses up through the air. You and Darm look at each other in uncertainty. The King seems shaken. Kianmay steps forward. “Turn away from evil, your majesty. You see how the gods look upon you. They do not intervene because the greatest harm you do is to your own self!”

Darm shakes his head, a sneer curling his lips. “The gods do not understand us! They will never sicken and die! Why should I listen to them? I am sick of hearing your words!” Darm looks back at you, a malicious gleam in his eye. “You have worked your magic! Now it is my turn once more!”

He casts a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

Otherwise, turn to **971**

941

You quickly step off the path and push your way into the dense branches of a bush, where you crouch down and wait. The scrapping comes closer and you see the figure responsible for the strange sound. Rather than worshipping serpent-people, the garden is populated by them.

The patrolling guard is a broad-shouldered man in a steel breastplate, with shining helm and spear. Below the waist he is a brown-scaled snake as thick as a tree-trunk. His body and tail snakes for several metres behind him as he patrols. You catch a glimpse of his face, hairless and with large slit eyes and almost no nose at all. His tongue even flickers in the air.

As soon as he reaches your position, he grinds to a halt, and lifts his face, as if tasting the air with his tongue. He grips the spear as if he is preparing to use it.

It appears you may have been detected.

If you want to rush out and attack him, turn to **785**

If you want to remain quiet and still in the hope that he will move on, turn to **886**

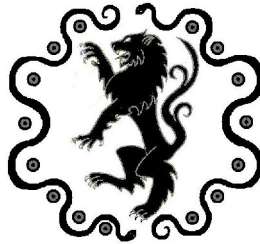


942

Darm shields himself from your hail of coins, then points at you with a savage grin. As you feel your skin tingle you realise you have timed things poorly. You move forward to smash him, but you find your body suddenly stiffen. You fall over as your legs can't keep up with your momentum and you crash to the floor. Your flesh is rapidly hardening. As your eyes harden your vision disappears, and your other senses disappear as well.

You have been turned to stone, and your soul soon flutters away to find a new place to roost.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE



943

Slowly the light fades, and you float in darkness. The Diamond Key beats within you like an eternal heart, and soon you rise up once more towards the light...

You open your eyes and climb to your feet. Darm and Kianmay are both nearby, and the king spins about as you stand.

“You have that Diamond Key!” he exclaims. “Give it to me now!”

Rather than answer, you pick up your weapon and charge at him again. With an annoyed expression, Darm makes a gesture with his hand and the floor rumbles. You stagger and nearly fall as four lumps appear in the floor. The white marble rises up and giant humanoid arms start to form. Before you can move away, they suddenly lash out and grasp you by the arms and legs, lifting you up with your limbs stretched helplessly out, hoisting you off the floor. You try to pull free, but the grip of the marble hands is painfully tight. You cannot even move your hand enough to strike one with your weapon.

“There we are,” Darm smiles. “Now we can be civilised.”

You realise that you are helpless. When he does not find the Key on your body, there will be no way for you to prevent him from cutting your chest open and taking it out that way.

Darm starts to wave his hands, and you look desperately at Kianmay...

If you gave Kianmay a silver scarab, turn to **912**

If Jamar Zi promised to assist you, now is the time for him to intervene. Turn to **834**

If none of these apply to you, turn to **970**



944

All of your magical items are too precious to you. “Isn’t there something else I can give?”

The voice behind the screen is silent for a time, then speaks. “Your pettiness is tiresome. Yet I will grant you what you ask. When you return to your world, you will have a new arm, though you never know what has been lost. Sessimass, take him away. Extract the penalty, restore his arm, then release him back to his world.”

The serpent woman with the tray bows to the screen, then takes your arm, leading you away. “What is the penalty?” you ask the screens as you are pulled away.

But there is no reply.

Turn to **706**

945

You tense your self, then when Darm is in the midst of his spell, you charge forward...

Test your SKILL and your LUCK. Roll 4 dice. If the total is the same or less than the sum of your current SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **901**

If the total is higher, turn to **995**

946

The sensation reaches a peak, then dies down. You wait expectedly, but nothing happens.

You look helplessly at Kianmay then Darm. The king smiles and begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

Otherwise, turn to **971**

947

You desperately pull yourself upwards as arrows crack into the wall around you, and glance off your armour. Suddenly, one strikes you in the back of the neck, and you feel the rope slip through your grip. You plunge downwards and smash onto the paved surface of the balcony.

The stars above spin as you slip into darkness.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your body, turn to **745**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

948

Creeping over to a tree with dense foliage, you climb as quickly and quietly as you can, until you can see the serpent-men moving below, looking the size of normal snakes. You settle into a comfortable position and wait. The serpent-guards search about the thickets for some time, but eventually move off. You wait for a very long time just to make sure they have gone before you slowly climb down again, ever watchful of more guards.

When you reach the ground, you peer about carefully, and regard the red and gold palace nearby. Since the serpent-men seem to be able to sense you somehow, venturing further within might not be a good idea.

If you think it is best to go back to the shrine and get on with your mission, turn to **878**

If you are determined to explore further, turn to **930**

949

You fish around inside your pack until you find the scroll you want. You set yourself, glancing up at Darm who is looking down at you with an indulgent smile. You consider the scroll in your hands. What does the Revelation spell do? Are you supposed to cast it on Darm, or maybe yourself...?

To cast the Revelation spell on Darm, turn to **821**

To cast the spell on yourself, turn to **991**

To cast the spell on Kianmay, turn to **784**

950

Giving yourself some room, you imagine a foe standing opposite you, and extend your hand. You close your eyes and concentrate, trying to feel the power in your hand. You settle yourself with deep breaths and soon you begin to feel your hand connected to thin tendrils that reach out, searching...

All too suddenly they make contact with the ground far below. The tendrils which were like threads, suddenly swell to the size of tree-trunks as power flows into your hand. It bursts out, and you feel like your hand has been torn off as a great roaring and crackling sound is accompanied by blinding light and heat. You fall to the ground as there is a loud smashing and crashing sound and you shield your head with your hands, fearing that the palace is falling down around you.

There are a few more crashes and the sound of glass tinkling as things settle, as well as cries of pain and alarm both close and distant. Slowly you look up and gape at the destruction wrought by your hand. The wall that once housed the stained glass doors is gone, bookshelves and all, as well as a fair portion of the ceiling and floor. There was a balcony beyond that now has been gouged out by the passage of the energy cast from your hand. The wall of the Castle of Eternal Light has a huge hole in it, with the battlements above falling into the gardens and courtyard below. Through the gap you can see rooftops on fire.

You look at your own hand, finding it numb, and blackened with soot, but otherwise fine. You recall once more that the book told you the gauntlet would tap

into the power of the earth, and also that Kianmay once told you that Arantator was one place where the veins of power in the earth met. No wonder the power was so great.

The door to the study opens, and you spin around, extending your arm threateningly. But the small creature standing there does not seem threatened. He is only as high as your knee, but quite rotund. He smiles and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt as he looks over the destruction you have wrought, unafraid of the arm you have pointed at him. "There's no need for that. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature holds open the door and gestures politely. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

Lowering your arm, you force a smile at the creature. "You first."

The little creature just smiles and bows, then disappears through the door. Slowly you follow, peeking out cautiously before stepping out into the hall. The creature is making his way up the hall towards the far end, and does not look back to see if you are following or not. You follow reluctantly and see the creature go through the door at the far end. He disappears inside, but leaves the door ajar for you. You reach the large polished wood doors about a minute later. Taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

951

You step over to meet the youthful avatar of Darm. You set yourself and raise your weapon. If you are using a firesword, Darm's magical armour will be fully effective against it.

KING DARM SKILL 12 STAMINA 24 DB 10 ARMOUR 8

If you win the battle, turn to **45**

If you are defeated, turn to **254**

952

Pouring a cup of spiced wine, you carry it over to her. She takes it and points to a seat. You obediently sit down.

She lifts the cup behind her veil and sips from it. "You are here to kill the King, aren't you?" She asks.

"I am here to rescue a priestess he has captured," you reply.

"He is a powerful sorcerer," she replies. "How do you hope to defeat him?"

"I don't know, yet."

"You are not the first to come here, trying to destroy him. Champions have come from near and far. All more powerful than you. Your priestess will not come to harm, so do not fear. Darm is not so petty as to harm a woman. He was once a noble king."

“How did you come to be his queen?” you ask, hoping to get her talking.

“I am the daughter of the wizard Hagantaro. Darm wed me so that he could gain favour with my father.”

“But Hagantaro died hundreds of years ago,” you say in confusion.

“He disappeared hundreds of years ago,” the queen corrects. “But he is indeed dead now, and I suspect Darm’s hand in the matter.”

The queen seems very sad. “Are you trapped here?” you ask.

“Trapped?” she raises one eyebrow. “Perhaps. I can certainly leave, but where shall I go? What shall I do?”

“You can go anywhere,” you tell her. “Even if you have no money, you can stay in a temple, or—”

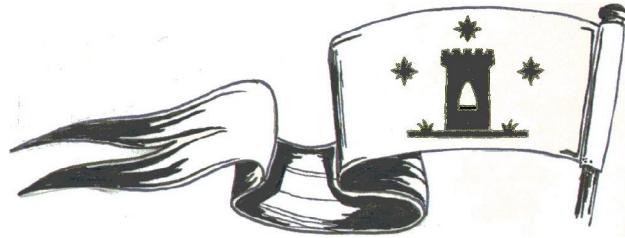
“A temple,” she muses with a small smile. “I once wished to be a priestess. But my father said that devotion was the path of lesser power. Now Darm hates even the sight of any holy statue. He smashed all my statues of the White Goddess...”

Do you have a statue of the White Goddess you would like to offer her?

To offer her a statue of jade, turn to **721**

To offer her a statue of crystal, turn to **799**

Otherwise, turn to **934**



953

Putting the gems in place, you pause before setting the last into its socket. Immediately the gems all begin to glow as you hasten to leave the circle. But before you have taken a step the serpents below you start to dance, and the chamber around you begins to disappear. A white mist surrounds the circle of dancing serpents, and you feel powerful magic sweeping you up.

The sensation fades after a moment, and you find yourself standing upon the same circle inside a shine that sits in the centre of a landscape of flowering gardens, towering trees and shimmering ponds. Yet you are sure this is some magical plane, for the sky above is pale green, with a trio of golden suns glowing softly above.

You step slowly off the circle and out of the shrine. A pathway leads away from the shrine and winds its way between the flowerbeds, ponds and groves. Cautiously you follow the path, wary of any inhabitants.

The path leads you to an intersection, in the centre of which is a large round pool filled with lilies. In the centre of the pool is a bronze statue of a large-breasted woman with long flowing tresses. But below her voluptuous hips the woman becomes a snake, sitting on the scaled coils of her own body. On her head she wears a crown and in one hand holds a small pot, out of which a stream of water pours. In her other hand she holds a sceptre.

You wonder what sort of people would worship a serpent-goddess. Looking down into the water you see several metallic objects sparkling there. Coins and gems and cups and other precious objects. This can only be an offering pool.

A diamond as big as your fist catches your eye. If you could take that alone back with you, you would never have to work again. On the other hand, stealing from the pool could be a bad idea. Perhaps you should make an offering instead.

If you want to snatch the diamond, turn to **779**

If you would like to make an offering, you can throw in a few coins by turning into **807**

If you would rather keep exploring, turn to **924**

954

The pain that fills your body is incomprehensible, but lasts only for a few moments as you feel everything inside you twisting. You are dead before you fall to the floor.

Shocked into action, Palliumi unleashes her father's magic, which kills Darm where he stands. Palliumi has no interest in ruling, and so she leaves with Kianmay to become a priestess. One of Darm's generals takes the throne. But days after his elaborate coronation ceremony the Wolf attacks Arantator and deposes him.

As for you, your body is taken and buried next to the temple of the White Goddess. A shrine is built over the site and Palliumi and Kianmay make offerings of gratitude to you every day, blessing your spirit.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

955

You shake your head at the woman's arrogance, and turn away. You do not hear the woman speak or move, but before you reach the doors of the bedchamber, they open of their own accord, and you see standing there a small creature no higher than your knee, with a fat little pot belly. He smiles and hooks his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. "Ah, here you are. His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me."

The little creature holds open the door and gestures politely. For a moment you consider smashing the little creature. But despite the polite invitation from Darm, it is probably an order, and if you refuse it, a larger minion might be sent to fetch you.

"You first."

The little creature just smiles and bows, then disappears through the door. You look back, but do not see the Queen. Slowly you follow, peeking out cautiously before stepping out into the hall. The creature gone, but the central doors now stand ajar. You step towards them, then taking a deep breath, you enter the room.

Turn to **727**

956

Your eyes dart over the approaching throng, and you see that the shambling undead are each coming directly towards you, heedless of each other. They do not work together to seal off your escape.

Remaining still for a moment to let them gather closer together in the centre of the chamber, you suddenly dash to the side, scrambling desperately over slick limestone. You slip and fall, but manage to climb to your feet again. You are faced with only three skeletons between you and the exit, but the others are approaching fast.

Fight the following skeletons for 5 rounds.

SKELETON 1	SKILL 8	STAMINA 7	DB 6	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 2	SKILL 6	STAMINA 6	DB 12	ARMOUR 0
SKELETON 3	SKILL 7	STAMINA 8	DB 4	ARMOUR 0

If you destroy 2 skeletons in 5 rounds, turn to **815**

If you are still fighting 2 or more after 5 rounds, turn to **922**

If you die within less than 5 rounds but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **863**

If you just die, turn to **872**

957

"I don't believe you," you inform him.

"She is a demon!" Darm says incredulously. "How can you trust a demon?"

"I trust her," you say. "Be she a demon, then I trust a demon."

"I see," Darm says angrily. "This is your last chance. Will you give me the Diamond Key of your own free will?"

"I will not," you reply.

Turn to **790**

**958**

Proceeding towards the glass doors, you open them carefully and peer out. You see a large balcony. It is just above the level of the wall of the citadel, so you step out

cautiously. The balcony is bare and empty, but there is a break in the rail to one side, and you step over carefully to see a stairway leading down to a private garden.

Descending the stairway will take you within sight of anybody patrolling the citadel wall. Do you want to risk it?

To descend the stairs, turn to **777**

Otherwise you can return to the study and:

Look at the bookshelves? Turn to **896**

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Go through the stained glass doors? Turn to **958**

Or, go back through the study and into the hall to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

959

You try to think of something that will stay Darm's hand. Hopefully you are not too tired or wounded to think of something good...

Test your STAMINA. Roll 4 die. If the total is the same or less than your *current* STAMINA score, turn to **796**

If it is greater, turn to **989**

960

"I want power," you announce.

The woman's smile fades as she looks at you with pity. "If that is truly your wish I shall take you to make a petition. But I warn you that you will find more goodness in your simple life than you will in a life of power. Rarely do those who come here have any peace or happiness in their lives."

She moves off and you follow after her, the four serpent-guards forming up around you. The main path through the gardens winds back and forth, and you notice there are no straight sections anywhere. However, rather than being led to a hole in the ground, the winding path leads to a great palace of red and gold. There is a marble slope rather than a stairway, and the serpent-people slither up it, while you walk up uncomfortably. The guards peel off to the sides and disappear, while the woman leads you through an open archway into a large rectangular chamber with a pair of closed doors at the far end. There are some large ornately carved chairs against the walls and you are invited to sit.

You take a seat and admire the painted paper lanterns that hang from the ceiling. It is only a few minutes later when a gong sounds, and the doors open. A pair of serpent-guards emerge. Their snake parts are black scaled, and they have ornate gold breastplates inlaid with rubies. They carry banded rods in their hands, and wear circlets on their heads.

“Traveller!” booms one. “You have come to the court of Queen Shimishis!”

“Enter and pay your respects!” booms the other in turn.

You stand and nervously approach, passing between them. You enter a throne room with a ceiling high above. A balcony edges the upper level, and you see many serpent-people staring down at you, most with unfriendly faces. The walls are mostly hidden in the darkness behind the supporting pillars of the balcony, except for the wall ahead, upon which is mounted a huge golden disc, inlaid with jade, alabaster and onyx forming a spiral of three serpents. Underneath is a slope-edged dais, upon which sits a set of painted silk screens, behind which you can vaguely see some movement.

The carpet you are walking on ends several yards before the foot of the dais and you instinctively come to a stop there.

Silence pervades the air for several moments, then a voice comes from behind the screen. It is a soft and quiet voice, yet it carries a sense of unbelievable strength. This is one who never needs to shout, for all will bend their ear to hear the briefest word she speaks.

“Why does a warrior come here to seek power?” the hidden queen asks.

If you only have one arm and want to ask to have the missing one restored, turn to **717**

If you want to tell the Queen about Darm and request her assistance, turn to **846**

To say that you want to become a sorcerer, turn to **990**

961

With a final stroke, you finish off the hideous beast, which collapses at your feet with a stinking gurgle, steaming black blood spreading over the floor. You step around the beast and approach Darm.

“Is that all you’ve got?” you goad breathlessly.

Darm chuckles. “Impressive. But this grows tiresome. It is time to get what I want.”

He waves his hands and shouts words of power. The floor rumbles and you stagger to keep your balance. Four bumps appear in the floor and in moments swell upwards, taking on the form of thick arms, complete with grasping hands that suddenly lash out and grab hold of you by your arms and legs, lifting you up into the air and stretching you out helplessly.

Darm stands and descends from his throne. “I have a friend here who can get your corpse to tell me anything I want to know, so in truth I need not keep you alive or even whole. So will you tell me where the Key is, or shall I have you torn apart?”

You struggle against the bonds, but you cannot move. Darm takes your silence as defiance and starts to wave his hands. You look desperately at Kianmay...

If you gave Kianmay a silver scarab, turn to **912**

If Jamar Zi promised to assist you, now is the time for him to intervene. Turn to **834**

If you want to call on Palliumi, turn to **816**

If none of these apply to you, turn to **970**



962

The ball of magic hisses past you, stinging your skin as it passes. The queen frowns then begins to wave her hands once more.

“Your Majesty!” calls out a high-pitched voice.

The queen stops what she is doing and looks down. Standing there is a rotund little man no higher than your knee. The queen floats back down to the ground, then waves a hand towards you. “Take him, then. But he will give the King no trouble!”

The little creature turns to you and smiles, hooking his thumbs in the belt of his kilt. “His Majesty is eager to meet you. He invites you to come to his presence at once. He also informs you that Lady Alyn Mei is with him. Please follow me.”

The little creature turns and begins to walk away. Carefully you step back down onto the floor, finding it solid once more. Reassured, you step after the little creature. As you pass the queen, she says: “Now your fate is sealed. How can you hope to defeat Darm?” You see the anger in her eyes, and you see that she wishes that someone would destroy him. Not knowing what to say, you continue on your way.

By the time you reach the entrance of the bedchamber, the creature is gone, but the doors at the end of the hallway have been left ajar. Taking a deep breath, you make your way inside.

Turn to **727**

963

“It would be my honour to wed you,” you reply. The serpent-maiden smiles and kisses you again. A minute later you pull back and ask: “What is your name?”

“Sessimass,” she replies. “Come, I must introduce you to my mother.”

She takes you by the hand and leads you back towards the doorway. Trying not to appear reluctant, you keep up her side as she slithers happily along. The two of you move out into the passageway and begin to travel along it. You see ahead the narrow side passage that you entered through, and thoughts of escape fill your mind.

If you want to make a run for it, turn to **836**

If you want to stay and meet your future mother-in-law, turn to **982**



964

“Isn’t there another way?” you ask.

The disembodied voice takes on an edge. “You are as mundane as I expected, as I feared you would be. The other way is for me to show mercy, which I shall do.”

A red spark dances up the horn of the unicorn and flicks through the air, striking you. It penetrates deep inside you and a pain fills your entire being. You crumple to the ground with a cry. The pain only lasts a few moments, and you soon climb to

your feet again, but feel much weaker. Your *initial* SKILL and LUCK have been reduced by 3, and your *initial* STAMINA by 5

Darm appears amused. He stands up. "Not many men have enemies in other planes of existence. You should feel special. Now it is my turn!"

He begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **752**

Otherwise turn to **971**

965

Turning to the red, scaly demon, you watch it twirl the knife in its long claws for several moments. It notices you watching and turns slowly to you before you can speak. Its deep purple eyes are surprisingly calm, rather than the raging monster you were half expecting.

"Hello," you say at last.

The demon has been examining you and opens its tooth-filled beak to respond. "You are a mere mortal, not bound by the magic that holds the rest of us. Why are you here?"

"I am here to stop King Darm committing a great evil," you reply, confident that this one will harbour no love for his captor.

You see the eyes light up with hope. "Then well-met indeed, mortal. I am Krishkaracinilamaren. Lord of the Seven Lower Seas of Ragandoramanar. The Once-King Sorcerer Darm has indeed grown powerful. His reach extended even down unto hell and bound me here to serve him. Yet he is a mortal still, and shields a fragile body within a strong armour of magic. Even you, warrior can destroy him, with my aid."

"You will aid me?" you ask.

"Indeed," Krishkaracinilamaren replies. "If you aid me. The Once-King bound us here to serve him. Simply free us and his power will be greatly reduced. To do this, simply tear asunder the parchments that are sealed to each chair in this accursed dining hall, and we shall be free. Thus in one stroke you will free me and aid yourself in your own struggle. But be warned, the Once-King will certainly feel your disruption. Thus you must act quickly to free us, and then stand ready for his response."

If you are wearing a jade ring, turn to **787**

If not, turn to **865**

966

Darm reaches for the key-shaped diamond. You let him take it, and drop one hand back to your belt. You grip the hilt of your dagger and draw and thrust it at his side in one swift movement.

The blade strikes his side, but you feel it slide off some sort of mail hidden under his robes. Darm staggers back, clutching the key-shaped diamond. You lunge at him

again, this time aiming for his throat. Darm avoids the blow by letting himself fall to the floor, and shouts words of power.

As you make to leap on him, you feel the air thickening about you...

Are you wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband?

If so, turn to **818**

If not, turn to **868**

967

You lower your weapon and walk forward. Darm smiles, and holds out the pendant to you. You reach out carefully and snatch it away from him. You feel the pendant tingle powerfully in your hands and gloat inwardly at the thought of the power within that you can use to destroy the foolish king. You put the chain around your neck and fasten it. You then give the king a sneer and raise your weapon. But then the anger and defiance you feel fades away, to be replaced by...contentment. Everything is the way you would like it to be. You look at Darm, the great King! He smiles at you and you feel rush of joy at his approval.

“Now, where is the Diamond Key...?”

You deliver the Diamond Key to your new master and find peace in life as Darm’s servant. He keeps you close to him and you serve him faithfully until your throat is torn out by a werewolf a few weeks later.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

968

Sweeping out your weapon, you also reach a hand into your purse and fling a handful of coins at Darm. The heavy pieces of metal interrupt his spell casting as he shields his face. You charge forward, and Darm begins to cast a new spell...

Test your SKILL and LUCK. Roll 4 dice. If the total is the same or less than the sum of your current SKILL and LUCK scores, turn to **853**

If it is greater, turn to **942**

969

Stepping away to discourage her attentions, you say: “Tell me about this place.”

The serpent-maiden rolls her eyes. “It is boring! There is nothing to do here. My mother is queen and I must stand ready to rule after her, which will not happen for millennia! I want to learn about your world. Tell me about it!”

“Well, there is lots to tell,” you say. “What are you interested in?”

“Everything!” she exclaims.

“Everything would take a long time.”

“I have nothing but time,” the princess exclaims.

“I do not,” you say. “I must leave this place soon and go back to my world, I have duties there that cannot wait.”

Rather than be disappointed, a crafty look plays across the princess’ face. “I see,” she says. “Then I will come back to your world with you! But we must keep it a secret. My mother has forbidden me to travel to other worlds, but I have learnt the method in secret. All I need is for you to agree.”

You wonder how she will fare in your world, but with her assistance escape is assured.

Do you want to agree to take her back with you? If so, turn to **908**
If you want to refuse and leave, turn to **978**

970

Kianmay lunges at Darm and tries to stop him casting his final spell, but he pushes her away and completes his incantation. The stone hands tighten their grip on you and begin to pull you apart.

Fortunately for you, Darm is merely interested in obtaining the Diamond Key, and not in torturing you, so the stone hands tear you into pieces at an efficient pace that sends you plunging into merciful darkness after only a few moments of excruciating pain.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

971

A small lightning bolt arcs from Darm’s hand and strikes you in the chest, blasting you backwards with pain coursing through your body and limbs. You are knocked to the ground (minus 10 STAMINA).

If you survive, turn to **874**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest turn to **943**

If you are just killed, turn to **983**

972

Hoping you are not about to betray yourself to one of King Darm’s allies, you pull your hand from Sessimass’ grasp and step forward once more. “Your Majesty! In my world there is a man, a king, who has become a powerful sorcerer. He seeks power for he fears death. Thus he seeks a treasure from our world called the Diamond Key. This object has great power, and if a man bears it, he is granted immortality. Yet if it is planted within the earth, it brings prosperity to all who dwell upon the land. I have travelled with a priestess who sought to place the Key in the Earth, but she has been captured by Darm. Now I must rescue her and somehow put his schemes to rest.”

The queen continues to stir her concoction, and you wait hopefully.

After a moment she speaks. “The Once-King Darm well known to us, and he displeases me. He has demanded many things of us. I do wish that you would

succeed in your quest, yet I cannot allow your crimes here to go unpunished.” She stirs for a few moments more. “I sense that you are one who values material objects. Thus I shall take these from you. After all, you do have many magical items which are of use to us.”

The queen gives a signal to the guards who come forward to search you and your pack. They take all of your magical items, but leave you with your armour and any scrolls you may have been carrying. If your weapon is magical, they take that as well.

The queen continues. “You may feel sorely the loss of these items, but in truth, you will need only what I give you to defeat Darm.” She turns to one of her attendants. “Take him and prepare him to be joined!”

The queen returns to her cauldron, and a black-scaled woman with red hair and a short green coat approaches you. She bows and invites you to follow her. You do not know what is happening, but do as you are asked, glancing back at Sessimass. The viper-maiden is already sullenly slithering from the room, and does not even look at you.

You are taken to a small chamber and told to undress and bathe in a small tub. You reluctantly do so. When you are finished, two serpent woman, heedless of your nakedness, come to take you and your belongings into another chamber.

This chamber is round and the black stone walls are covered in sinuous runes painted in gold. The serpent women take brush and pot, and cover your body in runes also, then ask you to stand in the centre of the chamber.

They leave, and you stand naked and shivering for several minutes. Eventually the doors directly in front of you open once more, and you slithering towards you a viper-maiden similar in appearance to Sessimass. Her snake part is blood-red, her skin soft and white. Long black hair flows down around her slender shoulders. Her eyes are red and look at you dully, as if she is entranced. Her entire body is covered in runes, painted on skin and scale alike. She slithers towards you, and abruptly presses her body against yours. She wraps her arms around you, and you bring your arms up to clasp her soft, cool body. She begins to coil her serpent part around the both of you, sealing off the outside from the ground up. As she shuts out the light, you feel the tingling of powerful magic and she starts to chant.

You feel innermost core being opened up by powerful magic and you feel something slipping inside you. But then you are plunged into unfeeling blackness. Eventually you start to regain sensation and you are dreaming. But they are not comfortable dreams and you soon awake.

As you eyes open, you see a smooth, white-plastered dome above you, a single light crystal hanging there. The ground beneath you is hard and uneven. You sit up, finding yourself lying on the triple-serpent-spiral. You have been returned to your world. You stand and stretch, finding yourself whole and unharmed, except for a few aches from sleeping on hard stone. Glancing out the window, you cannot determine how much time has passed; the night is as thick as it was when you entered here.

You remove the gems from the eyes of the serpents, and place them back in their box, which you replace in the alcove. You then consider what to do next.

Although you can't see any difference yet, make a note that you have been joined to a serpent-woman.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

973

Sweeping out your weapon, you also reach a hand into your purse and fling a handful of coins at Darm. The heavy pieces of metal interrupt his spell-casting as he shields his face. You charge forward, flinging another handful at him, then grip your weapon in earnest as you close the final yards.

With no time to cast a spell, he falls back and snatches up a long broadsword that sits in a stand next to his throne. He brings it around just in time to fend off your blow. He sets himself and meets your attack. Thanks to your successful magical attacks, Darm has been weakened considerably.

KING DARM SKILL 10 STAMINA 10 DB 10 ARMOUR 10

If you win, turn to **998**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **943**

974

You wake up, finding yourself in a large chamber where several serpent women are gathered, though your eyes are drawn first to the serpent-guards that are coiled by the doors, clad in golden breastplates inlaid with rubies and bearing twin-bladed spears.

The chamber appears to be a laboratory of sorts, the walls lined with shelves filled with jars and boxes and books. Small tables scattered with tools and measuring jars and scales ring the centre space, at which a viper-woman stirs a cauldron.

The serpent-women attending her are scaled in deep green on their serpent-parts, the human part being dusky skinned with black hair worn loose, ornate breastplates of copper covering their torsos. The viper-woman has soft white skin and red eyes, and is powerfully and sensuously built, reminding you of the statue you saw in the gardens. She wears nothing to conceal herself, but bejewelled ivory bands encircle her arms and an intricate neckpiece of gold and pearls is draped around her shoulders. Her hair is wound up onto her head and held in place by an ivory comb adorned with diamonds.

She does not look up from her concoction as you slowly climb to your feet, but speaks in a voice soft yet undeniable. A woman assured in her power who does not need to shout, for all will bend their ears to hear.

“You are no sorcerer, yet you have strange powers indeed to resist death.”

“I do,” you reply, not sure what else to say.

“From where comes this ability, immortal?” She asks.

Do you want to tell her about the Diamond Key and Darm? If so, turn to **780**

If you think it is best to make up some other story, turn to **996**

975

“Isn’t there another way?” you ask.

The disembodied voice takes on an edge. “You are as mundane as I expected, as I feared you would be. The other way is for me to show mercy, which I shall do.”

A red spark dances up the horn of the unicorn and flicks through the air, striking you. It penetrates deep inside you and a pain fills your entire being. You crumple to the ground with a cry. The pain only lasts a few moments, and you soon climb to your feet again, but feel much weaker. Your *initial* SKILL and LUCK have been reduced by 3, and your *initial* STAMINA by 5

Darm appears amused. He stands up. "Not many men have enemies in other planes of existence. You should feel special. Now it is my turn!"

He begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **927**

Otherwise turn to **855**

976

You decide to risk everything on a final charge at Darm...

Are you wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband? If so, turn to **875**

Otherwise turn to **937**

977

You try to lose your pursuers by tracing a path that makes no sense, even back tracking on yourself. But whatever you do, you see them in the distance, always drawing directly towards you. It soon becomes clear that they can't see you when you see them, and you are perplexed as to how they can draw towards you so unerringly. As the distance gets too close for comfort, you give up your strategies and run directly towards the shrine.

You pound the ground with your feet, but you hear the swift slithering grow rapidly behind you. Just as the shrine comes within sight, something cuts you down from behind and you fall to the ground with a cry, tumbling to a stop in a flower bed.

Two serpent men appear above you and stab at you, swiftly ending your life.

If you have a Diamond Key inside your chest, turn to **974**

Otherwise...

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

978

"That wouldn't be a good idea," you say. She tries to convince you, often pleading like a child, which just makes you more firm in your decision. Eventually you realise that you cannot say anything to convince her, so you turn to leave.

"How dare you turn your back on me!" the princess screeches and then begins a chant that makes the hairs on the back of your neck rise. You glance back just in time to see the lighting bolt that arcs from her fingers and pounds into your back, sending

your sprawling. You slide across the floor and your neck snaps as you slam painfully into the wall head-first.

If you have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **974**

Otherwise:

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

979

Darm sees your coming, his warrior reflexes still sharp. He twists aside and staggers back, clutching the key-shaped diamond. You lunge at him again, this time aiming for his throat. Darm avoids the blow again by letting himself fall to the floor, and shouts words of power.

As you make to leap on him, you feel the air thickening about you...

Are you wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband?

If so, turn to **818**

If not, turn to **839**

980

The hook sails through the window and rattles on the floor within. You wince at the sound, but hear no shouts of alarm. Pulling back the rope, you let the hook catch and jerk the rope to test it. It holds firm and you begin to climb.

Halfway up the wall you look over your shoulder and catch a glimpse of the shadowy figures at the fire. They do not seem to react, so you keep climbing as quickly and quietly as you can. Reaching the window frame, you pull yourself inside and clamber to your feet, looking around at the chamber within.

Turn to **933**

981

You are slammed back into your body and stagger, disorientated. Your eyes come back into focus and you see yourself standing next to Darm's throne, the king on his feet only two yards away, already spinning to face you.

Without pausing even to draw your weapon, you leap at him and the both of you go tumbling down the stairs to the floor below. You give Darm a good punch to the jaw, then sweep out your weapon and bring it down on his head. At the last moment you see his eyes wide with fear.

The blow lands, splitting the king's head open. He slumps back dead.

Turn to **800**



982

The narrow passage passes and you watch it go with longing. Once it has gone you feel resignation settle heavily onto your heart. Sessimass leads you through opulent hall to a large chamber where several serpent women are gathered, though your eyes are drawn first to the serpent-guards that are coiled by the doors, clad in golden breastplates inlaid with rubies and bearing twin-bladed spears.

The chamber appears to be a laboratory of sorts, the walls lined with shelves filled with jars and boxes and books. Small tables scattered with tools and measuring jars and scales ring the centre space, at which a viper-woman stirs a cauldron.

The serpent-women attending her are scaled in deep green on their serpent-parts, the human part being dusky skinned with black hair worn loose, ornate breastplates of copper covering their torsos. The viper-woman is obviously Sessimass' mother, having the same soft white skin and red eyes, but is more powerfully and sensuously built, reminding you of the statue you saw in the gardens. She wears nothing to conceal herself, but bejewelled ivory bands encircle her arms and an intricate neckpiece of gold and pearls is draped around her shoulders. Her hair is wound up onto her head and held in place by a ivory comb adorned with diamonds.

The queen does not look up as Sessimass drags you up to the cauldron.

"Mother!" She exclaims in excitement. "This human has asked me to marry him!"

"That I doubt very much," the queen replies without even looking at you. Her voice is soft and quiet, but moves with the inexorable weight of a mountain. This is a woman firmly grounded in her power.

"He does," Sessimass insists, then turns to you. "Tell her!"

"I will respect your mother's wishes if she believes I am unsuitable," you say.

Sessimass opens her mouth, but falls silent as her mother speaks. "This human also killed one of our brothers. And despite his presence here, he is not a sorcerer. It seems he has stumbled into this place. Extract the penalty from him and let him go."

"Mother, please!" Sessimass pleads. "He loves me!"

The queen says nothing and Sessimass slumps in defeat. She then begins to leave, dragging you away.

If you want to let her extract the 'penalty' and release you, turn to **706**

If you want to tell the queen about Darm and request her assistance, turn to **972**



983

The lightning bolt smashes into you, electricity coursing through your body, ripping and burning. You fly backward, bouncing and rolling along the ground until you come to a stop, burnt and broken.

You try to stand, but what isn't in pain is numb and does not respond. Slowly the light fades and you are plunged into darkness. But unlike Darm, you are not afraid. It will be good to rest. And so at peace, your soul slips into the warm embrace of death.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE

984

Leaving the gems behind you go back to the window and peeking out see that the darkened figures at the nearest watchfire have their backs turned. You carefully climb back down the rope and alight on the balcony. You are unable to dislodge the hook, so you are forced to leave your grappling hook and rope behind.

Going back into the dining room, you make your way back to the hallway where:
If you haven't already, you can go through the door opposite by turning to **719**, or move further up the hall by turning to **609**

985

Darm reaches for the key-shaped diamond. You let him take it, and drop one hand back to your belt. You grip the hilt of the magical dagger and draw and thrust it at his side in one swift movement...

Test your SKILL.

If you are skilful, turn to **835**

If you are unskilful, turn to **979**

986

You start to descend the stairs, when you see a guard patrolling along towards you. You try to keep a casual step, but the guard suddenly calls out in alarm and raises his bow.

You turn and flee back up the stairs, as arrows crack into the steps behind you. You run back into the study and close the doors. You move away from the doors, but no arrows smash through and all seems quiet outside.

What will you do now?

Look at the bookshelves? Turn to **896**

Study the painting? Turn to **913**

Search Darm's desk? Turn to **936**

Or, leave this room to:

Proceed further up the hall (**609**) or if you haven't already you can go through the doors across the hall (**747**)

987

The lightning bolt crackles about you, sending pain arcing through your body as you fly backwards and bounce and roll across the floor (minus 10 STAMINA).

If you are still alive, turn to **857**

If you are killed, turn to **983**

If you are killed but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, also turn to **857**

988

Deciding against risking anything, you simply leave the chamber and climb back up the stairs once more. A lone serpent-guard waits for you, and you see that he is surprised and displeased that you have returned. Silently he moves off and you follow him back through the broken hills. Once you are in the gardens, more serpent-guards appear to escort you back to the shrine. You step inside and a radiant white mist begins obscure the garden. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You take the gems from the eyes of the serpents in the floor and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

989

“Well, I heard that...someone, another wizard! There’s another wizard...nearby. In the city. He wants to attack you and kill you and become king.”

“I see,” Darm replies. He points at you and says a few words of his own. You feel your body stiffen and your skin harden. You lose you sight first, then your other senses all vanish as you are turned to stone. You soul flutters free and seeks elsewhere to roost.

YOUR ADVENTURE ENDS HERE**990**

“I may be a mere warrior, but I seek power. Will you assist me?”

There is silence behind the screen for a time, while soft voices flutter around you from countless discussions in the balconies above. They whispers abruptly fall silent as the hidden queen speaks.

“This request is a tiresome one indeed. Many come here such as you have, requesting, demanding power without any cause beyond their own ambition. Though we are bound to allow your petition, we are unlikely to grant you power without good cause. Tell us then what you would do with such power?”

If you want to tell them about Darm now, turn to **846**

If you want to make up another reason, and try to include something in it for them, turn to **792**



991

You focus upon yourself and read from the scroll, gathering the growing power inwards and bathing yourself in it. You feel your body tingling, until every part of your is filled with sensation...

If you have drunk wolf's blood or been bitten by a werewolf without getting cured, turn to **749**
Otherwise, turn to **946**

992

Some time later, you awaken. You sit up and find that you are alone. Creature, hut, and fire are gone. Only some soot on the ground and the smell of roasting fish are left. You stand up and continue on your way.

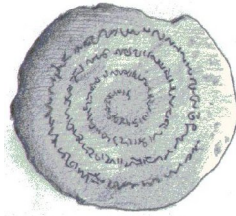
Turn to **858**

993

Darm sees your attack coming. He twists aside and staggers back, clutching the key-shaped diamond. You lunge at him again, this time aiming for his throat. Darm avoids the blow again by letting himself fall to the floor, and shouts words of power.

As you make to leap on him, you feel the air thickening about you...

Are you wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour, or a golden armband?
If so, turn to **818**
If not, turn to **868**

**994**

You take on a casual stroll as you move further up the path, pasting a friendly smile onto your face. But when you clear the bend in the path and see the approaching figure, your smile vanishes into shock. The approaching guard is on patrol, dressed in a steel breast plate and helm with a long spear in hand. But below the waist, there is a thick serpent's body, swerving several metres behind him.

The serpent man is also surprised to see you and rears up and back; then begins to thump the ground with his tail. Noting its aggressive posture you instinctively reach for your weapon, but pause as you hear more scraping sounds approaching.

Getting into a fight now is out of the question. Therefore you can:

Surrender, turn to **869**
Run, Turn to **778**

995

As you run forward, Darm moves his hand towards you and completes the spell. A crackling ball of black energy shoots out of his hand and strikes you at short range...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **823**

If you have no magical protection but have a Diamond Key embedded in your chest, turn to **893**

Otherwise turn to **954**

996

“Well, when I was a babe, I wandered into a goddess’ orchard and ate some of her magical apricots. Thereafter I was given the power to rise from the dead if slain.”

The queen does not react, but waves a hand, at which the serpent guards slither forward and detain you, hoisting you off the ground. “Your immortality was granted to you by the Diamond Key,” she gestures to one side and you glance over, startled to see the Diamond Key sitting on one of the side tables. “I have extracted it. I know not how you came to possess such a thing, but one such as you does not deserve such power. Take him back.”

You struggle and protest, but the guards carry you effortlessly through the palace, then through the gardens and up to the shrine. They cast you back into the circle, and as you clamber to your feet the white mist rises to obscure their sullen faces. You feel worlds shifting around you and soon you are back under the dome in the palace of King Darm. You put a hand to your chest. You feel no different, but now you have lost the Diamond Key, and will no longer receive its benefits.

You sadly take the gems from the eyes of the serpents and replace them in the lined chest, replacing the chest in its alcove.

You then consider your next step.

To leave via the trapdoor, turn to **851**

If you entered by the window and want to go back that way, turn to **984**

997

The sensation reaches a peak, then dies down. You wait expectedly, but nothing happens.

You look helplessly at Kianmay then Darm. The king smiles and begins to cast a spell...

If you are wearing crow armour, silver-studded leather armour or a golden armband, turn to **927**

Otherwise, turn to **855**



998

With a final stroke you slash Darm's neck open and he collapses, to the floor, blood spilling over his front. He looks up at you with fear and horror, before slipping away into darkness, his face contorted as if in great pain.

Darm is dead and his quest to be immortal ended.

Turn to **800**

999

The water certainly looks inviting. You put down your weapons and pack and begin to undress. Once you are naked, you descend into the bath and relish the feel of the water as it rises up your body. You swim out into the water, feeling it tingle magically over your body, purifying your skin. You dive under the surface and feel invigorated.

You find a seat where you can sit and enjoy the sensations of the water. Soon it restores all of your statistics to their initial levels. You relax and doze for some time. You are suddenly awoken by water splashing in your face. You stand up, shaking your head to clear your eyes. Standing on the rim of the bath opposite is a small grinning creature

It is no taller than your knee but quite rotund, dressed in a kilt. It hooks its thumbs in its belt. "King Darm grows impatient! He is waiting for you, and here you are, relaxing in his own bath! Come now. It is time things are brought to a conclusion."

You ignore the creature's chuckles and climb from the bath. You find a towel on a small shelf and dry yourself off before dressing. Once you have put on your boots and the rest of your things, you walk towards the door.

The creature holds the door for you, then gestures for you to enter the central doors, which stand ajar. You take a deep breath, then proceed inside.

Turn to **727**

1000

King Darm has been transformed, and immediately begins to make changes. Though it is still the middle of the night, he rouses his servants and armed men, giving out so many orders you lose track of what he is trying to accomplish.

Darm's subjects obey him with a mixture of fear and confusion, and a small measure of careful optimism. You watch as they work to clean out Darm's quarters and rearrange things, bringing it back to life and banishing the tinge of darkness in the air as he gives up his research into the darker art of magic.

Eventually a servant comes up to you and invites you to follow him to where some quarters have been prepared for you. You gratefully go to your rest. When you emerge in the morning, a servant cheerfully greets you and asks you what for breakfast.

You order some bread and cheese and eggs and ask about the king. The servant smiles and tells you that the King has gone out with a small party to meet with the Wolf. You ask about Kianmay and are told that she has gone with the king, as his new advisor.

You wait nervously until midday whereupon the king returns and summons you to his throne room. As you enter the gilded hall, Darm stands and walks down to the floor to greet you. He still waits for you to come to him; he is still a king after all. As you approach, the courtiers all look at you in confusion, but smile ingratiatingly at you.

Kianmay sits in a throne like chair on the floor, dressed in a fine white robe with a red and gold sash representing her new appointment. She smiles at you, then turns her eyes to Darm with a look of wonder and admiration that makes your heart burn with jealousy.

Another party is gathered near the throne and seeing them you falter in your step. It is a group of bearded man with shaven heads, dressed in chainmail and furs. One stands at the fore, dressed in a white bearskin and smoking from a pipe. It is the Wolf!

You reach Darm, and not knowing what else to do, give him a nod. Darm grins and reaches out to clasp your hand. "This man is not my subject yet!" he booms jovially. "But we shall see what we can do about that! It is to you that I owe the most. And so I would like to offer you the position of Captain of my Royal Guard! What say you? If that is not to your liking, name your heart's desire and I shall seek to grant it to you!"

You glance at Kianmay, taken by surprise. "That would be fine," you reply.

"Excellent!" Darm says. "Then kneel!"

You kneel down on one knee, and a Darm holds out his hand, into which a servant promptly places a fine broadsword with a red silk grip and a pommel carved of jade into a lion. Darm's powerful voice fills the chamber as he touches you with the sword and makes you a Knight, awarding your land and the position of captain of his Royal Guard.

He bids you to rise, presents you with the sword and directs you to stand aside. You do so feeling something close to bewilderment. Darm begins to speak, declaring the changes that will take place, expounding the importance of connecting with neighbours for more than trade, for not allowing old hatreds to pass on to following generations.

As you listen, you feel a hand grasp your own and you look down to see Kianmay has stepped over to your side. She releases your hand and drops her gaze shyly, her creamy skin turning red. "I knew there was great goodness in you," she says quietly.

"I..." you begin, but nothing follows.

Kianmay looks up to you, her eyes bright. "I have been given permission to wear the robe of a priestess, so that I will not forget where I have come from, and so all will see what I stand for. But to accept his Majesty's offer and become his advisor, I can no longer be a priestess."

"You..." Once more you cannot find the words.

Kianmay takes your hand again, but this time her eyes shine brightly as she gazes intently at you.

"Oh..." You smile broadly. You bend down to whisper. "Shall we go to my quarters...?"

Kianmay's smile does not falter, but a disapproving, and utterly unsurprised look comes into her eyes. "Invite me to your bed when it is our marriage bed. I am not a perfumed lady."

You straighten, not disappointed. Perfumed ladies, like many things, are not enough for you any more. Your spirit hungers and only righteous purpose can satisfy

it. You watch the king, not hearing his words as you enjoy gently holding Kianmay's soft, delicate hand in your calloused fist.

THE END