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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

ADVENTURE 13 GAMEBOOK

Gates of Death



By Terry Phillips

0-88038-433-6

CHARACTER STATS CARD
GATES OF DEATH



NAME: Wyn the Younger

CHAR. CLASS: Paladin

AGE: 21

SKILL POINTS:

Fighting: 3 + _____ = _____

Wisdom: 2 + _____ = _____

Perception: 2 + _____ = _____

Dexterity: 2 + _____ = _____

HONOR POINTS: 4 _____

EXPERIENCE POINTS:

8 _____

HIT POINTS: 27 _____

TIME LINE (DAYS):

0 1 2 3 4 5 6



IN THE MOUNTAINS OF SHADOW

You and your cleric companion, Julian, have made your way up the forbidding slopes of the Mountains of Shadow in your search for the hidden entrance that will lead you to your goal—the fabled Gates of Death themselves!

Before you now stands a large cave opening, completely covered by vines, at the back of a wide mountain ledge. And what you see tangled in the vines makes your blood run cold.

Several dead bodies lie wrapped in the encircling vines, their lifeless shapes in grotesque positions and varying stages of decay. It's as if a gruesome curtain of death hangs in front of the cave's mouth!

Suddenly the vines spring into life! Like a living creature, they snake across the rocky ledge toward you!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **26**. If it is 10 or less, turn to **56**.

Whatever the outcome, only your decisions, and the luck of the dice roll, can lead you to the
GATES OF DEATH

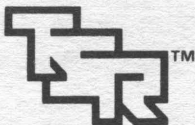


An **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®**
Adventure Gamebook #13

GATES OF DEATH

By Terry Phillips

**Cover Art by Carl Lundgren
Interior Art by Jan Duursema**



TSR, Inc.
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To Dezra, Jonathan, and
Rhiannon, who put up with
a lot for this book to happen

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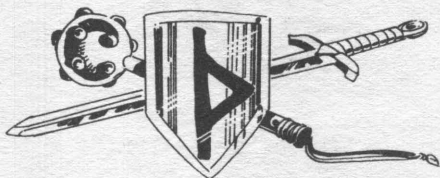
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All characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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AN EXCITING NEW EXPERIENCE IN BOOKS

Welcome, you who dare approach the Gates of Death, to an exciting new concept in role-playing gamebooks.

Based on the popular **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** Game, this adventure requires two standard six-sided dice, an ample supply of luck—and, most of all, your skill in making decisions as you play the game. If dice are unavailable, a simple alternative, requiring only paper and pencil, is explained on page 12.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Adventure Gamebooks have been designed to read easily, without complicated rules to slow down the story. Once you have read through the simple rules that follow, you should seldom find it necessary to refer back to them. Your options are repeated clearly in the text at each choice point, with occasional reminders about additional options you may wish to consider to improve your chances. Your adventure reads like a book, plays like a game, and offers a thrill a minute—with YOU as the hero!



YOUR CHARACTER

In this book, you are Wyn the Younger, a youthful paladin. Paladins are a special class of warrior considered to be champions of law and order wherever they go. As a paladin, you will always strive to do what is right and just. In this way, you enhance your honor, which, together with good works, is the lifeblood of a paladin.

Only two short years ago, you were initiated into the holy order of Tellaidan, the principal religious sect in your home kingdom. Your youth, strength, agility, and fiery temper made you especially suited to be one of the order's warrior champions. You were invested with paladinhood and admonished to rise to the utmost levels of your profession. Since then, your piety and prowess have served you well. You have risen through the ranks and attained the rank of a Defender of the Realm. You have had some experience in adventuring, pursuing various quests for the king or the high priest of your order throughout the kingdom.

But you still have much to learn, especially about wisdom and tolerance. The fiery temper that serves you so well in battle has gotten the better of you on several occasions. As an aspiring paladin, you are about to learn that you have to be very careful how you represent yourself—and your order—in public.



PLAYING THE GAME

ESTABLISHING YOUR CHARACTER

YOUR Wyn will be different from someone else's because YOU will help to create him.

Carefully tear out the removable **Character Stats Card** at the beginning of this book. This card is your record of what Wyn the Younger is like. It also doubles as a book-mark.

Since we hope you will play this adventure many times, we suggest that you write on the card in pencil only. That way, your character stats can be erased and changed easily when you are ready to play again. If you have access to a photocopier, you may wish to make several photocopies of the Character Stats Card before you fill it in. Permission is hereby granted by the publisher to make photocopies of the Character Stats Card *only*. Another alternative is to reproduce the card by writing on a 3" X 5" card or a slip of paper.

You are now ready to round out Wyn the Younger's individual identity by establishing his strengths and weaknesses. Wyn's name, age, and character class have already been entered for you. Before you fill out the rest of the card, you need to understand the game's scoring system.

SCORING

Playing the game requires that you keep track of four kinds of points—**hit points**, **skill points**, **experience points**, and **honor points**—on the tear-out **Character**

Stats Card located at the front of this book. Also, since your quest in this adventure has a specific time limit, you will need to keep track of the number of days since your quest began on a **Time Line**. An explanation of each of these follows.

HIT POINTS

Hit points represent your health, or life strength. Your training as a warrior champion has left you in good condition for one of your age and experience, as represented by your 27 hit points.

Whenever you are injured, either in a fight or an accident, you lose hit points. The book will tell you when you lose hit points and how many you lose. Keep track of how many points you have left. If your hit points ever reach 0, you die. Except for one exception that will be explained in the story, your adventure ends immediately, whether the story has finished or not.

On rare occasion, you may have opportunity to recover hit points by being healed by your cleric companion, who accompanies you throughout your adventure. The book will tell you how many you recover. It is important to remember that you can never recover more hit points than you started with. During the game, do not erase your original number of hit points, since you may need to refer to this record if Wyn is healed.



SKILL POINTS

In this book, you have four basic skills to help you during your adventure—**fighting**, **wisdom**, **perception**, and **dexterity**. These skills, and how to use them, are described below.

A number, called your **skill score**, represents your ability in a given skill. The higher the number, the better your skill. You must help determine what your strengths are. Your base skill scores are already written on your Character Stats Card, but in addition, you have 8 more skill points to add to your scores. You may divide the 8 points any way you like, with the following exceptions:

- 1)Your fighting skill score must be higher than any other skill score.
- 2)Your fighting skill score may not exceed 6.
- 3)You must add at least 1 additional point to each of your four skill scores.

With the exception of the above guidelines, there is no right or wrong way to divide up your skill points. Study the skills below before deciding, then fill in your final skill scores on the Character Stats Card. Each time you undertake a new adventure, you may experiment with a different combination.

Fighting

Your **fighting** skill score determines your skill with weapons, your physical strength, and, to a lesser degree, your awareness of danger in threatening circumstances.

The book explains when to make a fighting check. To make the check, roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total equals or exceeds the number given in the text, you are successful.





Wisdom

Your **wisdom** skill score reflects your ability to use the knowledge you have gained during the course of your lifetime in a way that will work to your advantage.

The text will tell you when to make a wisdom check. To make the check, roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is the same as, or more than, the number given, you have succeeded.

Perception

Perception is the ability to perceive, or sense, things. In addition to the usual ability to notice things with his senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, etc.), a paladin is also capable of detecting evil in people and in certain objects. This is more a result of living in accordance with the rules of his order than it is a gift from his deity. Wyn may call upon it when he feels the need to determine the hidden nature of a person, being, or object.

The book will tell you when to make a perception check. To make the check, roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total equals or exceeds the number given, you are successful.

Dexterity

Dexterity is a measure of the physical speed and agility with which you react to things.

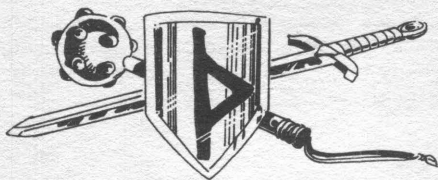
The text will tell you when to make a dexterity check. To make the check, roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is equal to, or larger than, the number given, you have succeeded.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

As in real life, experience sometimes increases your chance of success because you encountered a similar situation before and understand the possibilities that may occur. Experience points can help turn poor dice rolls into successful ones. You begin this adventure with exactly 8 experience points.

To use your experience points, first decide how many points you will spend *before* you roll the die, then add those points to the result of your die roll. No matter how the roll turns out, the points you used are gone and must be deducted from your total.

Use your experience points wisely, saving them for what you consider to be crucial situations.



HONOR POINTS

Honor and good works are the lifeblood of any paladin. As a paladin, you should conduct yourself as one. If you do not, your honor may suffer. In this book, you will have the opportunity to either gain or lose honor points at a number of places in the action. The text will instruct you when, based on the decisions *you* make. Make them wisely, because you will find that your honor is increasingly important to you as you progress in your adventure. You begin with 4 honor points.

TIME LINE

As you will discover early in your adventure, you must succeed in your quest in six days or less, or else it is doomed to failure.

At the bottom of your Character Stats Card is a Time Line. Keep track of the number of days you have spent on your quest by drawing a line to the end of each day as it comes to a close. The text will instruct you when to do so.

PLAYING WITHOUT DICE

Should you ever wish to play the adventure when dice are unavailable, there is a simple substitute that requires only pencil and paper. Simply write the numbers 1 through 6 on separate slips of paper and mix them up in a container. Without looking, draw one of the slips, note the number, and place it back in the container. Each draw represents one roll of a die. If only one die is called for, draw only one number.

Your character—Wyn the Younger—is now complete, and you are ready to begin your adventure. Turn to page 13—and good luck!



"And penance must be done, young warrior, if you are to maintain the high standard of the order. A paladin, representing the gods and the kingdom of Tellaidan as he does, cannot have his name and honor besmirched by the follies of youth."

The voice of the high priest rings sternly in your ears. For almost an hour, you have been kneeling in the center of his chamber as he has reviewed your behavior and lectured you on the error of your ways. Who would ever have thought that you, Wyn the Younger, aspiring paladin, would find yourself being reprimanded, even called to do penance, for such a stupid mistake? How were you to know that those ruffians were just trying to goad you into starting a brawl? How could you, a champion of the order, let them say such things about your beliefs?

Well, it *had* happened. And, as the high priest has so pointedly reminded you for the last hour, some things can only be learned with greater age and wisdom. But would he never get to the actual penance? Just what were they going to do to you? You have heard that sometimes only a reprimand is handed down. Other wrongdoers have suffered banishment and loss of face and name.

That thought brings beads of sweat to your forehead. You concentrate on the high priest's words to clear your mind.

"Now let me reassure you, young Wyn, that it is not my intention to make your path to paladinhood impossible. You have chosen a very difficult road in life. Our vast kingdom needs more like you to help maintain the law. But, our order is very exacting in its requirements of those that represent it. So look upon me, Wynn, and hear the penance that you must perform!"

You raise your eyes slowly, and nervously look the high priest in the face. He does not seem as old as you believe he must be. No trace of beard covers his face. His hair, though streaked with gray and white, is neatly combed and braided in the manner of those of the order. He looks nothing at all like the archdruid you have seen about the castle of late. *A wild man, indeed, our archdruid*, you think distantly. His hair in mad disarray, his robes all askew, perform-

ing strange rites in the wilds as often as not, the archdruid was the exact opposite of the man standing before you now. How could two such different men live and work in the same kingdom?

Your thoughts return to the present as you see the stern lines of the high priest's face soften and a wide smile spread across his lips.

"It has been determined, Wyn the Younger, that you are to remain with us as a champion of our order," he pronounces warmly. "Though you will be left without the fullest aid of the gods for the period of your penance, they will not leave you entirely. You will not be banished for defending your beliefs."

Your sigh of relief is clearly audible as the impact of his words reaches you. Your family name and honor will not have the stain of banishment smeared upon them. Maybe this wasn't going to be so bad after all.

But the high priest is not finished yet. An edge of steel returns to his voice as he continues.

"You must, however, perform the penance stipulated for your misdeed." Then quietly and gently he adds, "And that penance may well cost you your life."

You stare at him in disbelief. The shock of his words causes you to forget your station.

"R-R-Revered sir," you stammer, "is that not a very high price to pay for merely starting a brawl?"

"Hear me out, young Wyn," he replies sternly, the edge in his voice returning to remind you of your place. "Arise and sit here beside me. I will explain all to you."

Somewhat unsteadily, you rise from your knees and take a seat on the low bench in front of the chamber's large, open window. A cool, refreshing breeze comes through and helps steady your racing thoughts as the high priest sits next to you. He speaks softly and seems to be suddenly very tired.

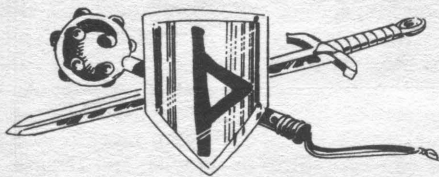
"Wyn," he begins, "there is a situation here in Tellaidan that is unknown to many but is of vital import to all who live and rule here."

He pauses for a moment, as though thinking through the problem and how best to tell it. He slouches visibly as the burden of his thoughts weighs heavily upon him.

“It is best that I tell you directly,” he begins quietly. Then he straightens his back and turns to look at you. “Wyn, the Princess Rhiannon, the only heir to the throne of our king is dying. She is suffering from a mysterious malady that is destroying her heart. You have been chosen to bring us the means to save her.”

You gasp in amazement. Your brain is immediately bombarded with a barrage of confusing thoughts. *So the rumors surrounding the princess’s long absence from court were true after all, you think. And the high priest has chosen me to help save her. What an honor! But how can I, a young paladin, hope to measure up to this task?*

Your expression surely mirrors your confusion as these conflicting thoughts race through your head. You try to comprehend the implications of what the high priest has told you. The princess was certainly the king’s only possible successor. He was old and, though his mind was still strong, his body would soon falter. His wife, the blessed queen, had long since died, and he had not remarried. He would have no more children. He had raised his daughter to follow in his footsteps, to continue to rule the kingdom and uphold the law. A beautiful and wise young woman, she would make the perfect sovereign—one you would be proud to serve—when her father’s reign was over.



The high priest reaches out a reassuring hand and touches your shoulder. “Wyn,” he says, “there exists something of great power that can aid us and the princess in this time of need. It is called in legend the Breath of Life. We do not know just what it is or what it looks like. If the legends speak truly, however, it can save the princess. The way to it lies beneath the Mountains of Shadow and across the

fabled Gates of Death. You must find the way to the Gates, cross them, and return to us with the Breath of Life.”

He pauses for a moment to let his words sink in before he continues.

“You should also know that many have traveled the Mountains of Shadow, never to return.”

You hear his words but are unable to believe your ears. The Gates of Death. A cold pall rests on your mind and freezes your thoughts. Their legendary name had been known to cow even the stoutest heart; the high priest—and apparently the gods as well—want you to go there to save the princess’s life. It all seems too unreal.

You think of some of the kingdom’s great warriors and hang your head in disbelief and uncertainty.

“How,” you begin slowly, “can you expect *me* to succeed? Why was I chosen when there are so many older and greater than I?”

“Do not worry on that account,” the high priest cautions. “This is a matter between you and me and the gods. I sense that there is something about you—an internal strength and commitment—that will carry you through to your goal. I believe you would even lay down your life for the princess, and that may be required of you as I have said. This quest is well suited to you at this time.”

He pauses again, staring out the window at the sky for some moments, seeing something, perhaps, that you cannot see. After a short while, he continues.

“I have seen you—and none of the others—in a vision, traveling the treacherous paths of the Mountains of Shadow. Parts of the vision are cloudy. Those are the times when your own actions will determine your fate. But I have also seen you returning to us with the Breath of Life. In this way know that the quest can be fulfilled, that you can do it. It remains only for you to go and prove it to yourself.”

He returns his gaze to you and smiles benevolently as you look up at him. “There are only a small number of ways we can help you,” he says. “The way to the mountains we can tell you. A horse and supplies are at your disposal. There is even a long-forgotten lay that may be of some assistance to you. It is little, but may help you find your

way to the Gates of Death.”

He hands you a tiny scroll and you unroll it. On one side is drawn a map depicting the route from the capital city of Tellia across the wilderness and into the Mountains of Shadow. The other side of the scroll contains a short, simple poem:

Shun light and sun, march into the Shadows
If to Death's Gate you wish to travel.
The Way of Death is fraught with strife;
It will, at the end, cost you your life!
Buried you'll be, under Earth and Water,
But along the way you must not falter.
Climb the black heights that have no sky—
Meet faceless Death—"Tis here you'll die!
Pass Judgment straight with Soul unriven;
The Breath of Life at last be given!

“The map and poem were found after much painstaking research,” continues the high priest. “For days my most trusted acolytes and I searched the oldest histories and compendiums in the archives of the order's library. At long last, we came upon a minor reference to the Gates of Death and the Breath of Life. It was not much to go on, but from it we were able to draw the map you hold in your hand. But you will be hard-pressed to find your way to even the entrance of the ‘Way of Death’ mentioned in the lay. It could be that many of the old landmarks are gone, if they ever existed.”



He pauses and gazes out the open window with a heavy sigh. “For that matter,” he mutters, “the Gates may not exist either.”

You look at him curiously. This is the first evidence of

doubt you have heard him express. After long moments, he squares his shoulders and turns to you with a smile.

“Be of good cheer,” he admonishes, seeing the look of concern on your face. “I believe they do exist and that the Breath of Life lies through them. But belief is not knowledge, as you know, and we are putting much hope in this quest of yours. Pay close attention to the lay. It is cryptic, as are most such writings, and could prove treacherous if wrongly interpreted. But it does contain some helpful clues. For example, we have surmised that this ‘Way of Death’ is some sort of trial or obstacle that precedes and protects the Gates and the Breath of Life. You will have to enter and pass through the Way before you can successfully fulfill the quest.”

He turns his back on you as though preparing to end the interview. But, as he gazes out over the city of Tellia and the lush gardens beneath his window, he motions you to his side. As you draw closer, you can see that his face has hardened again.

“Wyn,” he says quietly, almost whispering, “it would be extremely unfair to let you leave on this quest without another word of warning. I want you to know that there are other forces at work that may make your task more difficult.”

Turn to 11.

2

A swelling certainty grows inside you to fill every part of your being and mind. You look at Julian. Your eyes meet and you know that he feels it, too.

You have reached, at long last, the final leg of your quest. Across this stone bridge are the fabled Gates of Death. Through them, within the pillar, you will undoubtedly find the Breath of Life. Your joy and exultation are unbounded. You throw your arms about Julian’s shoulders and lift him into the air.

You turn again to gaze at the warm glow pulsing in the unseen heart of the smooth pillar. It consumes your thoughts. *That light must come from the Breath of Life itself*, you think. Without another thought, you charge



across the bridge toward the archway and portcullis. You'll surely figure out some way to get past the Gates. *After all, you reason, didn't we make it through the Way of Death to this point? No mere portcullis is going to—*

Suddenly, a tremendous force slams into your chest. It plucks you off your feet and throws you backward into Julian. The two of you crash down onto the bridge and roll to the archway landing, stunned. Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total. If that leaves you with zero or less hit points, turn to **67**.

A hideous bellow resounds from the center of the bridge. Before your amazed eyes, a vaguely humanoid creature materializes out of thin air.

It is the most fantastic beast you have seen on the quest so far. Horribly misshapen and deformed, its hunched back and torso are twisted wrecks of meat and bone. Its entire body is covered with short, coarse hair, and it stands on squat, twisted legs that are easily twice as thick as your own. Great long arms, rippling with muscle and sinew, dangle almost to the surface of the bridge from its warped shoulders. And resting on top of those shoulders is the least deformed yet most inhuman part of its whole body: the head of a raging bull.

You pick yourselves up and stare in disbelief at the beast. *A minotaur?* you think incredulously. *A creature of myth and legend, a fable.*

But your "myth" shakes its horned head and bellows a definite challenge at you. It waddles back and forth across the width of the bridge on its short, stunted legs, dragging some sort of blanket or cloak behind it. Every few moments, it stops and bellows its challenge again.

Turn to **203**.

3

The tunnel leads straight and true toward the distant, eerie glow at its end. You reach that end and step out of the tunnel into one of the strangest places you have ever seen.

The sight leaves you both awestruck for many moments. Julian is the first to find his voice.

"I never would have believed this if I hadn't seen it with

my own eyes! This has got to be it! This is the beginning of the Way of Death!" You continue to stand dumbstruck at the sight before you.

You are standing in an immense underground cavern. Its ceiling stretches more than 100 feet above you. All of the cavern is well lit. It seems to be coated with some sort of phosphorescent lichen or mold that emits a soft glow, illuminating the entire place.



But the floor of the cavern is even stranger than the sight overhead. Because of the weird phosphorescent lighting, a strange, ghostly garden grows here, deep under the earth.

Toadstools; mushrooms; pale, sickly white rose bushes; thorny vines and stumps; fungi and molds in a rainbow of colors and sizes; odd little puffball plants—all these and many more that defy description greet your shocked eyes. From far off, the sound of a rushing brook reaches your ears.

The only normal things in this cavern are the paths that meander about, starting from where you stand. One of the paths winds its way off to the left, skirting the garden and climbing the cavern wall. Another leads off to the right and into a tunnel. The third path heads straight into the unearthly foliage before you. Which path leads to the Gates of Death—or do they all?

If you choose to go left, turn to **78**. If you go right, turn to **111**. If you decide to continue straight through the garden, turn to **114**.

4

You drop back defensively and your hands move swiftly to your weapons as the door swings quietly open.

Through the door steps a woman of indescribable beauty

and your hands fall uselessly to your sides.

You stare at her, dumbstruck. She is indeed an alluring woman. Thick, dark hair flows in comely disarray down from her head, brushing her shoulders and neck and framing her pale, oval face. Sparkling blue eyes that are filled with an unmistakable innocence offset her pale complexion. She is draped in a wispy, deep-blue dress that leaves little of her winsome physique to the imagination. Soft leather sandals are strapped to her shapely legs. She is about your height.

"Welcome to my home," she says in a soft, warm voice. "I am so very glad you have arrived at last."

Her voice breaks your gaping rapture. You look to Julian for some sort of advice, but he is still staring.

"Why, uh, yes," you stammer. "I, uh—I guess we have arrived. But how is it you are expecting us?"

She breaks into warm, melodious laughter at your look of confusion.

"I have known you were coming since you stepped into my cavern," she replies comfortably. "Unfortunately, the Way here is fraught with much strife, and my home is the only respite you will find. So please, don't just stand there. Come in. Sit and talk with me. I get so few visitors here. I always like to have them stay a while—as long as possible."

Her reference to the Way of Death reminds you of the poem the high priest gave you and the trials you have yet to face. You grab Julian, shake him out of his stupor, and accept her invitation.

"Of course," you respond gallantly, still overcome by her beauty. "It would be less than polite to refuse your hospitality."

She smiles graciously at your politeness. Turning, she leads the two of you into the house's large front room and asks you to sit on some cushions around a low, jade table. Wrapped up in her comeliness as you are, you almost don't notice the many statues standing about—or the two curtained archways in the back wall of the room.

She goes to a shelf on the wall between the two archways and brings down a crystalline decanter. "It is customary in my house to share a draught with visitors and new

friends," she says gaily. "Will you share one with me now?"

You are suddenly troubled; an uneasy feeling creeps into your heart. A short visit is one thing. But you really have neither the time nor the inclination to stay for a drink. "... along the Way you must not falter," the poem read. You have to be on about the quest. Yet, to refuse would be very impolite. If you offend this lady, she may not be willing to allow you passage through her home.

If you accept her offer of a drink, turn to 70. If you refuse, turn to 43.

5

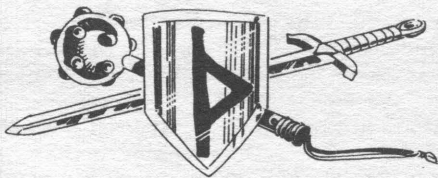
The whistle of an arrow in flight screams in your ears. Then another, and another, and another still.

As you dive for the horses, you feel a tearing pain rip into your legs and lower back. Shot from short and powerful mountain bows, the arrows stop you where you stand. You look up to see Julian stagger and spin with three arrows sticking out of his body. He gasps in pain and tumbles to the ground beside you.

Suddenly, an ominous rumble resounds above you. You look up to see a mass of huge boulders rolling down the mountain. They gather speed and more boulders as they tumble wildly in your direction, fast becoming a landslide that thunders toward the tunnel opening.

You struggle on your elbows toward the wounded priest. He is not moving, and blood drools from his mouth. With all your strength, you try to drag him to cover, but your legs won't move. You just can't feel them any more.

You look up one last time before darkness takes you under a crushing heap of stone and dirt that becomes your grave. Your quest has ended. ✠



6

Julian is right. The decision is yours and you now make it. You have learned by sad, hard experience not to ignore the little bells or voices in the back of your mind that warn you of trouble. That small voice is clamoring for your attention now, letting you know that even though you can't put a finger on it, there *is* a problem.

"Julian," you say, at once disappointed but determined, "I don't think we should stay at the inn tonight. I don't know why, but I've got the feeling we need to avoid being seen by anyone. We'll sleep under the stars instead. You should enjoy that, knowing these wilds as you do."

You look over at your companion and see one of the most forlorn faces you have ever seen on a human being. Julian's pitiable expression is almost funny in its extremity.

"Knowing and enjoying are two different things," he grouses. "But then, mine is but to serve."

"Buck up, priest," you say cheerfully, "if all goes well, we'll be sleeping in our own warm beds in less than a week. Let's find a place to camp for the night."

Your comforting words do not seem to ease Julian's disappointment, but he offers a weak smile as you spur your horses into the wilderness. It isn't long before you find a clear spot in a grove of trees a few miles past the inn. It is far enough off the beaten track to escape easy detection but close enough to the road to let you hear anyone passing. You quickly set up camp, eat a cold supper, and settle in for a night's rest. It's been a long day. Tomorrow promises to be longer.

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom score. If the total is 7 or more, turn to **64**. If it is 6 or less, turn to **29**.

7

The rock island of the gigantic pillars is much larger than it appeared to be from the shore. And well it need be to support the awesome monoliths of black stone that now tower above you.

The pillars are indeed huge: At least a hundred feet in diameter at their bases, their tops lost in the swirling mists high above you. The bridge, eight hundred or more feet up,

is barely visible. You walk between the pillars to get a better look at the bridge, but your eyes are drawn to the ground by a gruesome sight.

Lying in a spattered heap between the pillars, crushed beyond recognition, are three bodies.

You and Julian kneel beside them. As the priest utters a silent prayer for the dead, you take a closer look at the corpses. They were clearly men and obviously fell from some great height. You look wonderingly up at the distant bridge. One of the bodies apparently fell farther than the others, for its remains are far more ruined and scattered. The bodies are otherwise unrecognizable, except for one thing.

They are all wearing the brightly colored clothing of the gypsies in the archdruid's service.

If you are not too concerned about disrespect for the dead and want to search the bodies, turn to **76**. If you would rather not disturb their rest, turn to **118**.

8

Your fighting sense comes to your aid once more. With shield held aloft to ward off the arrows, you turn to your companion.

"Julian," you shout above the rumble of the tumbling boulders, "fall back. It's an ambush!"

But the young priest is already aware of the danger. Swiftly, he pulls his own shield from his saddle and covers himself—just in time, too. An arrow glances off his shield and skitters down the stairs.

"Watch the horses," you call out urgently. "They could panic . . . uhh!!"

Too late! A cascade of rocks hits before you can finish. They slam into you and force you up against the cliff face.

With shields overhead, you and Julian glue yourselves to the side of the cliff. The rocks pound you mercilessly, and several make it through your hastily devised defense. Your horses rear up and neigh in terror as the stones fall among them. By some miracle, they turn and make their own way down the slippery stairway to safety.

You and Julian are not so lucky. Earth and stones con-

tinue to pummel you. More stones wound you. But slowly, you inch your way down the stairway. Arrows from above fly at you, but none of them make it through the shower of dirt and rocks.

Soon, the rockslide stops. You look up to see a veritable wall of earth and rock across the stairway above you. Occasionally, an arrow whistles your way from overhead, but it is too dark for the assassins to see you clearly.

By sheer strength of will, you and Julian are still standing on the stairway. Bruised and bleeding, you carefully—and quietly—make your way down the stone steps. From above, you can hear coarse laughter. Your attackers, whoever they are, have triumphed. You will not be able to get into the mountain this way. Not only that, but you have been wounded. That means you will need to rest a day, maybe two, before continuing the quest. *More precious time lost*, you think miserably. But it is all you can do.

You make your way to the bottom of the stairway. Painfully, you find a small cave and make yourselves comfortable for the night. Julian sees to your wounds as best he can. The quest is not going well, but you are alive and you still have the horses and supplies. Things could be worse.

Subtract 6 points from your hit point total for the wounds you got in the rockslide. Now roll one die. If the result is 4 or less, turn to **52**. If the result is 5 or 6, turn to **74**.

9

“I want to head for that house at the end of the cavern,” you tell Julian. “Straight across the bridge is the only way left.”

“Well, then,” Julian replies, “let me cross first. If this old thing has any weak points, maybe I can find them. Then I can guide you across.”

Cautiously, the priest steps out onto the bridge, leading his horse by a tight rein. The ancient, 60-foot span seems to shiver at each step. You anxiously watch him pick his way across the old wooden structure, and hope his long-unused thief’s agility and skill in finding traps will serve him well now. On several occasions, he stops. Then he continues, carefully stepping around some weak board or tie. Finally,

he makes it to the other side of the bridge.

"Come on ahead," he calls, shouting above the roar of the river below, "and listen to me closely. There are several places that could be dangerous. We don't want you falling in that river, do we?"

Tightening your hold on your horse's reins, you take your first step out onto the bridge. Julian begins calling instructions to you, but it is hard to hear him above the thundering swirl of the river.

Turn to 171.

10

Standing before the monolithic pillars, you remember that time is of the essence. The climb up the right tower will be smoother and quicker. Besides, if it does not lead you to the Gates, you can come quickly down and try the other tower.

Gesturing for Julian to follow, you start your trek up the stairs. The going is easy and you make good time. You are about five or six hundred feet up when you stop to take a short rest and look ahead. Just another couple of hundred feet and you will gain the bridge. You look up and see it now, clouds of roiling mist billowing about its silhouette.

Suddenly, a gasp from behind you grabs your attention. You turn to see Julian, his face as white as a sheet, staring and pointing back down the stairway. You follow the line of his pointing finger and forget to breathe.

The smooth, straight stair you have ascended so easily to this point is slowly disappearing into the tower!

Turn to 50.

11

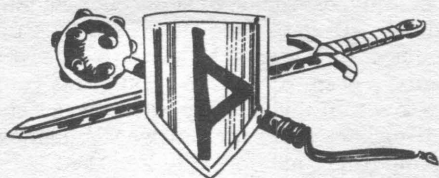
The high priest turns to you as you stand. "Revered sir," you ask slowly, "how could things be more difficult for one having to cross the Gates of Death?"

He answers quietly but intently. "There is a faction in our government that would change the lawful and orderly way we are trying to live. The archdruid is seeking to impose a greater degree of balance, as he puts it, on our way of life. He knows our king is old and will soon go the way of all the world. If the princess does not succeed to the

throne, there could be political chaos. That could prove to be just the opportunity the archdruid needs to bring his plans to the fore. Though I am sure he has had nothing to do with the princess's illness, I am not so sure he wants her to regain her health. If he finds out about your quest, I fear he may attempt to delay or stop your efforts. He knows the land and the Mountains of Shadow very well. He seems to have eyes and ears everywhere."

You look about nervously, half-imagining that wild man listening to your whole conversation from some peep hole. The high priest chuckles softly at your visible distress but continues with the same intense whisper. "You have nothing to fear in these chambers," he says, "but this you should also know. The archives were robbed last night. The tome containing the lay of the Gates of Death is now missing. We have yet to discover the culprit, but we have very strong suspicions that it was the archdruid or one of his henchmen.

"So be careful, Wyn," the high priest concludes. "Though



the gods will watch over you, they will expect you to make use of all your own skill and resourcefulness. And be on your guard. The archdruid is a crafty man. He probably knows all about your quest and may use the most unlikely means to waylay you."

Before you can answer, there is a knock on the chamber door. A young acolyte enters reverently and delivers a message to the high priest. After reading it, the high priest mumbles a few words to the acolyte and turns to you.

"I must leave now," he says. "The king needs me to attend his daughter. Go as soon as you can. All has been prepared for your journey. Have faith, young Wyn, and gods' speed. Perhaps we can talk again before you depart

on your mission.”

He leaves abruptly, and you are left to ponder his warning. A formidable task lies before you. Is it too great? Yet to deny the challenge would be unthinkable to a dedicated young paladin.

The gravity of your quest weighs heavily on your mind as you hurry to your quarters to prepare your equipment for the journey.

Turn to **39**.

12

You stare at the old man in disbelief.

“How is it you know of our business?” you ask him incredulously.

“Don’t let that concern you,” he replies. “I have my ways, and the less you know of them the better. Suffice it to say, I know you seek the Breath of Life and must cross the Gates of Death to find it. I know these Gates exist, though I’ve never crossed them. You’re indeed brave men to pursue such a course, if even half of the things I’ve heard of the Way and the Gates are true.”

“Well,” Julian says, “is there any way you can help us?”

The old man eyes you for a short moment before he answers.

“Only this,” he says. “There’s a tunnel up the mountain-side here that will lead you to the Way of Death. If you go by that route, it will save you some time. Beyond that, I can’t help. Now, I suggest you sleep for the night and start in the morning. Things will be clearer then.”

Relieved to know the entrance is so close, you follow his advice. As you drift off to sleep on the ground by his campfire, the old man—mage—renews his vigil at the edge of the fire. Mark one more day off the time track and turn to **143**.

13

“Julian,” you begin, gazing to the north, “it seems that the northern path leads to that cliff. That’s got to be the most difficult way in. Seems to me an entrance to the Way of Death might be hidden up there. Let’s head north.”

The priest wearily nods his head in agreement. Soon you are plodding along the mountain trail leading up to the mist-shrouded cliff.

After an hour's ride, the trail opens onto a wide, flat plateau. Directly in front of you, rising at least a hundred feet or more, is the cliff you saw from the fork in the path. Its hard, black granite face looks virtually unscalable.

As you look up the face of the cliff, you see a large, rocky shelf extending out from the mountainside. There is a cave mouth up there as well. Near the base of the cliff is another, smaller cave opening. Out of it rushes a small river that cascades down the remainder of the cliff face and continues on toward the west. A great fog of damp mist shrouds the little waterfall.

Julian rides up alongside you and whistles softly. "You don't seriously think we can scale the face of that cliff, do you?" he asks. "It must be at least a hundred feet to the ledge up there. And there's no telling whether the cave goes anywhere or not. I did some climbing in my days as a thief, but nothing that could get us up that."

Soberly you survey the cliff, realizing that the young priest is right. A fall from those heights would spell your doom—and the end of the quest for the Breath of Life. Can you afford to risk it? Maybe there is another way up. Dare you take the time to look?

If you think this route is a dead end and want to go back to the fork in the path, turn to **37**. If you want to stay here and try to find a way up the cliff to the cave, turn to **79**.

14

You wade along and watch the little geysers and whirlpools in wonder.

"Julian," you remark, "what do you make of the strange currents and eddies in the water here?"

"Not much," he grumbles, still piqued by his little adventure with the geyser that tossed him around. "And I don't see that it makes any dif—AHHHH!"

His cry barely registers in your ears when an amazing thing happens. The bed of the lake beneath your feet disappears—completely!

Suddenly, a whirlpool of inescapable force surrounds you. It is so strong and swift that there is no way you can fight free of it. You are sucked under the water—and *underneath* the lake bed—with barely time to grab a lungful of air.

Down, down, down you go. The maelstrom has sucked you into some sort of rough tube. You bash into its walls as the swirling suction tosses you about and pulls you downward. Somewhere below you, Julian is receiving the same treatment. You hope he's still alive.

Interminable seconds pass. Your underwater descent into the bowels of the earth continues. *This has got to take us somewhere*, you think desperately. Your lungs are burning in your chest. Your body and mind scream for air—and a miracle.

Your downward descent ends as the tube bottoms out. You are jostled through an upward curve and begin to rise. All around you a faint light becomes visible. Faster and faster you rise, pounded mercilessly against the walls of your underwater prison by the speed of your ascent, but you don't care. You are going up!

The light gets brighter, and you can make out Julian's shape above you. Soon you think you can see the surface. Your lungs are about to burst. Can you hold out just a few . . . more . . . seconds . . . ?

Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total for your trip through the tube. If this reduces your hit points to zero, you are dead; turn to **67**.

If you still have hit points left, turn to **210**.

15

The witch woman laughs a deep, throaty laugh. She knows you are without hope.

The potion has made its way up your back. With tears of rage and frustration in your eyes, you make one last attempt to avenge yourself. You grasp your sword hilt and try to pull it free of its scabbard. Julian already has his mace in hand.

But your efforts are in vain. Your struggles just speed the potion's effects. Even as you free your weapons, your arms and neck crystallize.

Now virtually a statue yourself, you feel your head solidify. An opaque gray mist clouds your vision. The last thing you see is the beautiful woman, dressed again in blue, leaving you to your fate. She has a smug smile on her face as she goes to await her next "guests."

You have now joined a long line of travelers whose quests have failed. ✘

16

You ponder that question for only a few seconds before an idea comes to mind.

Rapidly, you pull a torch from your saddlebag. Striking stone to flint, you light the torch and advance cautiously toward the vines. *This had better work, you think desperately, or I'll be dinner for sure.*

After a tense minute, your gamble pays off. The animated vines, feeling the heat from your torch, begin to crawl away from you. The curtain of death they form parts before the fire!



"Julian," you cry, "bring me four more torches from the saddlebags!"

Hurriedly, Julian obeys your command. As each of the torches is lit, you toss it toward the cave opening. Soon you have a wall of flaming torches holding the vines at bay.

Carefully avoiding the burning torches, you walk your horses through the cave mouth into the tunnel beyond, never taking your eyes off the deadly vines.

The tunnel is long and dry. Lighting two more torches to give you light to see by, you continue walking until you are out of range of the vines. But as you walk down the tunnel, you begin to notice something strange. The light around you is growing brighter. An eerie glow shines from the far end of the tunnel.

You quickly put out your torches. The pale glow gives you plenty of light to see by. Satisfied to at least be inside the mountain and out of danger—for the present—you mark the passing of another day (check it off on your time track) and bed down for the night.

Luckily, nothing troubles your sleep, even though you have camped out on the very doorstep of the Way of Death. After what seems like just a few short minutes of rest, you awaken automatically, more than anxious to continue. You eat a short, hurried meal, gather your things, and lead your patient horses down the tunnel to find the source of the eerie glow.

Turn to 3.

17

The thought of a soft bed for the night is very appealing. Besides, your backside is sore from riding, too. A good meal, good company, and a good night's sleep will do you both good. It will make tomorrow better, too.

"Well, then," you say after a moment's thought, "let's go on down to the inn, Julian. We could use the rest. But try to remain as inconspicuous as possible. The fewer people that know we're here, the better I'll like it."

Julian's smile almost splits his face and you laugh again. Spurring your horses, you set off at a quick trot toward the inn. Turn to 120.



The wide ledge you and your horses are standing on is perhaps fifty feet square. Just as you thought, the wall of vines and undergrowth conceals a large cave opening in the mountain at the back of the ledge. But what you see tangled in those vines is horrifying.

Several dead bodies draped in vines litter the ledge near the cave entrance. Traces of bones and skulls are wrapped in viny strands. A gruesome curtain of death hangs in front of the cave mouth.

As you move closer, you see that one of the bodies is not as decayed as the others. It is still wearing the colorful, garish costume of the local gypsies. Its head is nearly severed from its body, one of the inch-thick vines still wrapped around its throat.

Suddenly, the vines spring into life. Like an animal, they snake across the ground and through the air, trying to reach you.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **26**. If it is 10 or less, turn to **56**.

Something about the geysers and whirlpools brings to mind a lesson from your school days. You call Julian to a halt and watch the surface of the lake carefully.

“What are we looking for?” the priest asks.

“If I’m not mistaken,” you answer, “there’s a cycle to the movement of the little geysers and whirlpools we’re seeing. We need to be careful. I believe the geysers erupt from somewhere underneath the lake. The whirlpools suck water down into whatever is below us. If we get caught in one of those whirlpools, well . . . we could drown down there.”

Julian whistles softly. “By all means, watch then. I prefer just being wet to being wet *and* dead!”

After a few minutes of observation, you begin to see the pattern of downswirls and eruptions. Cautiously, you make your way across the central part of the lake between the swirling eddies and bubbling geysers.

But as you near the far side of the lake and approach the cave, you feel a distinct tug at your legs. That tug fast becomes an almost irresistible force dragging you toward the cave. You are caught in some sort of undertow!

You immediately fight to free yourselves from its watery grasp, and it'll take every ounce of strength you've got.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to 57. If it is 10 or less, turn to 124.

20

As the archdruid and his alien cohort draw closer, you remember the high priest's words. *If there is a conspiracy, you think, perhaps this is the opportunity to learn something about it.*

You duck quickly into a shadowy alcove. None too soon, either. At that moment, the archdruid and his unknown companion round the corner. They seem to be in a heated discussion.

"But, Excellency," says the foreigner in a voice that is cold as ice, "all I want in payment is the body after she is dead. It would be worth much to certain practitioners of the black arts in my home country . . ."

"Very well," the archdruid replies abruptly, stopping to face his companion, "you may have the body. I do not wish to hear of what foul use you may have for it. But listen carefully. You and your men have served me well in the past, for which we have both been richly compensated. I have a feeling that your excellent services will soon be needed once again. That pompous young pup of a paladin, Wyn the Younger, is being sent on some kind of quest. Even now, the high priest's lackeys are preparing a horse and supplies for a long journey."

He turns and begins to pace the hallway thoughtfully. "I have reason to suspect the purpose of this quest," he continues, "and I have an uneasy feeling it will do me and my plans no good."

The archdruid stops abruptly in front of your alcove. He stares intently into the shadows for a moment as you cringe back, then turns to the foreigner.

“You see,” he says slowly, “that fool of a high priest may put some stock in the old legends surrounding the Gates of Death and the Mountains of Shadow. He may think to find some way to help Princess Rhiannon by sending the young paladin there. It would be just his luck that the legends are true. If that is the case, Wyn must be stopped. I cannot afford to have *anyone* tampering with the princess’s ebbing life force at this time.”

By the gods, you think, outraged, this heinous villain is intent upon stopping me and destroying the princess! Can I stand here any longer and listen to their treachery? Hate and disgust flare inside you and urge you to confront them right now.

But a burst of cool reason quiets the flame. Maybe you should abide their foul talk—wait, listen to their plan, and turn it upon the archdruid at a more opportune time.

If you think you should stay hidden and hear the rest of the plan, turn to **60**. If you have heard all you want to hear and would rather confront the archdruid and his henchman now, turn to **62**.

21

The statues are not following you! They wander aimlessly back and forth across the back veranda of the stone house. The witch woman stands at the edge of the veranda, cursing you to a fate worse than death, but she does not pursue you, either. It is as though none of them can move any farther than the house. The stone statues resume their stoic immobility, freezing in various poses on the veranda.

You watch and wait for several minutes, not trusting your good fortune, but nothing happens. You make camp, but the house remains as still as a tomb. At last you decide to relax. Since you entered the Way of Death that began at the cavern of the garden, you have had nothing but trouble and surprises. Now, having barely escaped the witch’s stone automatons, a feeling of momentary peace and tranquility fills you.

So overwhelming is your fatigue and relief that sleep soon follows. Mark another day off the time track and proceed to **200**.

22

The ghouls have surrounded you. They dance madly about you and the animals. The horses neigh in terror and lash out with their hooves.

Julian's mount scores a hit. One of the hunger-crazed ghouls sails down the tunnel and slams into a wall. It slumps to the floor and is still.

Inspired by your noble steeds, you gather your strength and attack. Your sword and Julian's mace weave vicious circles of destruction about you. A ghoulish head is split, an undead arm cut off. Julian dives under a lunging ghoul and crushes its chest with a blow from his mace. It crumples to the ground in convulsions.

You spin around to deal with the last of them, but your animals are taking care of it for you. You cheer with delight as the last ghoul is trampled into slimy mush under your horses' hooves.

You breathe a sigh of relief and clean your weapons of the putrid rot that now coats them. Then you turn your attention to the most pressing problem you have faced on your quest to find the Gates of Death. You have to find a way out of this maze. Turn to **82**.

23

The weeds in front of you explode into motion. They are no longer weeds at all, just one very large and horrendous creature.

The beast heaves its great bulk out of the roiling, weedy water. Its long, snaky neck stretches above you out of a hard turtle shell. Huge, clawed feet burst out of the water and come down hard on either side of you.

Your heart almost stops in your chest. Julian is momentarily petrified with fear. You are face-to-face with a dragon turtle! You know immediately that this will be a fight to the death, for dragon turtles are born tenacious fighters.

The surging body of the turtle causes a wave that hits you hard. You struggle to keep your balance, and snap out of your brief trance as the water washes over you. Weapons drawn, you crouch into your fighting stance, ready to dodge at the first attack. Turn to **66**.



You lie on the ground, helpless. The assassins have you at their mercy . . . and you're sure that they have none.

Suddenly, you hear a whistling sound followed by a dull thud. One of the assassins drops to the ground, twitching in his death throes. Before the other assassin can react, a dark, howling shape flies through the air and slams into him. He is knocked, stunned and shaken, to the ground. The unknown combatant twists in the air and lands on his feet scant inches from where you lie. As the remaining assassin scrambles to his feet, your rescuer rushes to the body of the now-dead assassin and retrieves his weapon. It is a small footman's mace, a priest's weapon! Julian has come to your aid!

He looks at you and winks. Then, with an expertness you have rarely seen, the young priest begins to whirl the mace in his hands. He turns to face the surviving assassin. By now, the mace is spinning so fast it whirs. The assassin stands his ground for only a few seconds, but he doesn't have the stomach for a fight with the priest. He turns and runs for his horse.

Julian watches him for a moment, chuckling.

"Let's help him along, shall we?" he says to you.

"Certainly," you croak, gasping around the pain in your leg, "help him along!"

With a flick of his wrist, the priest hurls his mace at the retreating villain. It hits him squarely in the rump. With a yelp, the assassin scrambles onto his horse and gallops off down the road.

Seeing the grimace of pain on your face, Julian bends down to tend your wound. Words of thanks are not necessary. He binds your wounded leg and casts a healing spell on it. It begins to recover immediately. You hobble back to camp as he assumes his watch at the edge of the grove.

Luckily, you have no more problems for the rest of the night. Mark one day off your time track. But some questions nag at the back of your mind. Where are the other horsemen? Where are they going? When will they spring on you again?

The wound in your leg is not healed completely by the

healing spell. Subtract 4 hit points from your total. Because you faced the assassins in honorable combat, add 1 honor point to your total. Now turn to 71.

25

The flickering light in the distance to the south makes you uneasy. Walking into a trap is not what you want to do tonight. You turn your horses around and head back to the fork in the path.

About an hour later, you reach it. The trail up the mountain is still there, but there seems to be a strange, faint glow coming from the wall of vegetation above.

You stare up the northern path to see if there is any change there. There is none, but it looks pretty formidable in the darkness.

You look at Julian and he looks back, shrugging his shoulders. You are both so tired that camping out under the stars tonight is starting to look good.

But you must get inside tonight, if one of these paths leads to the Way of Death at all!

If you take the trail up the mountain, turn to 49. If you decide to try the northern path, turn to 13.

26

Your battle-trained reflexes serve you again as you dodge out of the way of the deadly grasping vines. They rattle and shake. They strain after you as you roll out of their reach. Slowly, now that you are out of range, they slide back toward the cave mouth.

“Well, that’s just wonderful,” grunts Julian glumly. “How are we supposed to get by those vines without becoming their dinner?”

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the result is 9 or more, turn to 16. If the total is 8 or less, turn to 46.

27

The two spires capture your entire attention. They draw your eyes alternately, playing a tug-of-war with your vision.

The one on the right is a smooth, flawless cylinder that rises a thousand feet or more toward the ceiling of the cavern. It could reach to the very top of this cavern for all you know, but its topmost point is lost in the white, glowing mists above you. Its seamless surface is broken only by a set of marvelously smooth and even steps that circle upward about its circumference. The stairs stretch higher and higher in an unending spiral that seems to vanish in the misty heights.

The cone-shaped spire is a different matter altogether. Though it seems to reach to the same height as the cylindrical spire, it is far from smooth. Its entire surface is marred with jagged points of rock and pocked with fist-sized holes. It reflects no light because there is not a single smooth spot on it! There is no apparent way to ascend, except to climb. *That would be a devil of a climb though, you think.*

Yet climb you must. You can find nothing to show that the Gates of Death are down here at the base. If the Gates are anywhere, they must be near the top of one of these spires. But which one?



You turn to Julian, who is standing silently beside you, gazing upward. He senses your glance and answers your unspoken question.

"I don't know which to climb," he says thoughtfully. "There's nothing down here, which means we have to go up. That bridge above us obviously stretches between the spires. There may be Gates at both ends of the bridge or only one. We don't even know what the Gates look like, for that matter. It seems we have to get to the bridge to find out, and that's at least an eight-hundred-foot climb."

"Fine, but which pillar do we climb?" you ask petulantly.

All you get is a shrug in reply.

You glare at him for a moment, then up at the enigmatic bridge, and finally at the spires. The smooth one looks easy, but that could be misleading. The hazards of climbing and falling from the rough pillar are obvious.

If you decide to climb the smooth tower, turn to 10. If you want to chance the rough one, turn to 69.

28

Steel clashes against stone as you try to fight off the statues. They are brittle and break easily, so you manage to cut off the heads and arms of some of them. Others you simply knock over. They shatter when they hit the marble floor.

But more keep coming. There are too many of them, and they fight tirelessly. Even the beheaded ones keep fighting.

Slowly they pound you down. Your arms grow weak. Your sword is just too heavy. You drop your guard. Soon a blow gets through. Then another, and another, and . . .

A beautiful stone female warrior stands before you. Her crystalline sword thrusts and slashes at you. She knocks down your shield, then your sword. With one cold, vicious stab, she buries her blade in your body.

The last thing you see before death's darkness takes you is that beautiful stone statue standing over you in triumph, as the witch's cackling laughter fills your dying ears.

Your quest is over. ✠

29

Sleep comes easily after the long day's ride. You soon drop off, but your sleep is haunted by disturbing dreams.

You dream of dark shadows stalking you on a moonlit night. They surround you. You cannot escape. The faceless shadows grow longer and longer as they circle you and draw in closer. Soon they touch you and overwhelm you. They lay cold hands on you and shake you violently. You can't take any more. You try to lash out, but are bound by some invisible force.

Turn to 34.

30

Scrambling and sliding down the rocky mountainside, you at last make it back to the fork in the trail. It is definitely dark now, and the remaining trails are very hard to see.

The trail to the north is still there, but you can barely see it in the darkness. It would be hard going now, with no assurance of what lies at its end.

You stare down the southern path to see if there is any change there, but it still looks to be the easier of the trails.

"Well . . ." you begin, your voice full of fatigue.

"Don't ask," Julian counters before you can even finish. "I'm so tired right now that camping out under the stars tonight is starting to look very attractive. You decide. But whatever you do, let's make it quick."

An overwhelming desire to sleep right here creeps up on you, but you resist it. You must get inside tonight, if one of these paths leads to the Way of Death.

If you take the trail to the north, turn to 13. If you try the southern path, turn to 2.

31

As the archdruid and his foreign cohort draw closer, you remember the high priest's words. *If there is a conspiracy, you think, perhaps this is the chance to do something about it. Besides, it would not do for me to hide from such a man as the archdruid.*

Almost immediately, the archdruid and the foreigner round the corner. You quickly recognize the foreigner's colorful gypsy robes. The two seem to be locked in a hushed but heated conversation and do not see you right away.

"But, Excellency," says the foreigner, his voice like ice under his thick accent, "all I ask in payment is the body when she is dead. It will have great worth to certain practitioners of the black arts in my homeland."

"Very well," the archdruid replies, "you shall have it. But listen carefully now. Your services may be needed . . ."

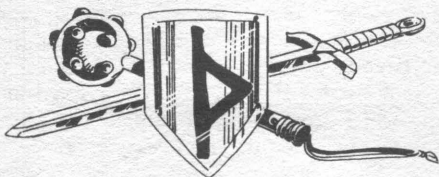
"Hullo," you shout, stepping out from a side alcove. "And how is the great archdruid today? I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting your friend, have I?"

Your sudden and robust greeting causes the other two to

literally jump in their tracks. The archdruid immediately scowls and eyes you suspiciously.

“Well,” he growls, “it occurs to me that my acquaintances are not the business of the likes of you. Since when do the kingdom’s paladins make a habit of skulking about in corridors, eavesdropping on the private conversations of others? Ah, but this is a new breed of paladin, if I am not mistaken—one that takes to brawling in the streets. I heard about your little incident of the other day, Wyn the Younger. You should be banished.”

Your pride and honor are piqued by his false accusations, but you know what he is trying to do. Your recent interview with the high priest helps you to keep a cool head in the face of his provocation.



“The business of the kingdom’s paladins is far beyond the scope of such as you,” you reply tightly. “Besides, it will please you to know that the high priest has issued me a penance that may prove far more severe than banishment.”

You immediately regret your words as an evil light gleams in the archdruid’s eyes. He looks at you sidelong and smiles slyly.

“And what, young Wyn,” he asks evenly, “would the high priest have such a young and valuable warrior risk his life for?”

Once again the high priest’s recent influence comes to your aid. *He is looking for information, you think. He’ll have none from me.*

But the archdruid’s blatant attempt to get that information is so apparent that you can’t help but chuckle. As he eyes you curiously, you reply patronizingly, “My business,

or that of the high priest's, is really none of your affair, good archdruid. You would do better to stick to your bushes and berries."

The archdruid's curious gaze turns instantly to a hot glare at your jibe. It seems you scored a hit on a sensitive area. You think for a moment he may try to strike you. Instead, he says something unintelligible to his cohort and turns to leave. Suddenly, he stops and looks at you again.

"Very well, youngster," he snarls. "Keep your counsel to yourself. But remember, when the princess is gone and things are running the way they should in this kingdom, our roles will be reversed. Then you will beg to tell me everything you know. As for our respective businesses, they may cross far sooner than you think. Good day."

Now it is your turn to glare as you watch them retreat down the corridor. *The archdruid's heartless proclamation of the princess's doom very nearly cost him his life*, you think. You turn to go to your room, reminding yourself to be on the lookout for the archdruid's gypsy henchman as you travel. Add 1 honor point to your honor point total for confronting the archdruid. Then turn to **96**.

32

The moment of hesitation before the witch woman's command is all you need. In a flash, you both dive to the floor and roll through the ranks of statues. Stone swords, maces, and daggers cut through the air with murderous intent—and hit nothing!

Like snakes, you slip by the final two or three statues and make a stand against the back wall. Now they are all in front of you. This is a bit better.

But the witch woman calls out another command. Again as one, the statues turn around and face you. They move to attack once more. The fighting begins in earnest!

Thrusting and parrying, you do all you can to keep them at bay, but there are just too many of them. Slowly, they start to hem you in.

You have one last chance. Remembering the archways in this wall, you call to Julian, "If we can make a fighting retreat through one of these openings, we may find a way

out. Follow me on my signal!"

If you try for the right door, turn to **73**. If you go through the left door, turn to **106**.

33

Those tunnels are of no use to you. Best to go back to the main cavern and try one of the other paths.

After another long but blessedly uneventful walk, you make it back to the gaudy garden of strange plants. If you want to make your way straight through the garden, turn to **114**. If you prefer to try the path to the left and up the cavern wall, turn to **78**.

34

Suddenly, the dream becomes all too real. A painfully solid blow jolts your head. You are immediately wide awake. The dark shadows of your dreams become real men!

Three of them grab you and wrestle you into a sitting position, binding your hands with stout rope. Another four tackle Julian. He had awakened sooner than you, but not soon enough to prevent your capture. He struggles gamely, fighting to get free. One of his captors raises a club. His struggles end in a dull thud.

You start to struggle as well, but it is hopeless. Your captors drag you to your feet. The thug who clubbed Julian walks over to where you stand and calls for a torch. It is lit and brought over quickly. In its sputtering, flickering light you see a swarthy man with a twisted face. He eyes you for a short moment and starts to laugh.

"Who would have thought," he chortles wickedly, "that you two would have been such easy prey—especially him." He points his club at Julian's inert form. "I've been after him for some time. He was pretty good . . . 'til now."

With that he laughs again, and the others join with him. Something about him is familiar . . . his face, his voice, his . . .

Suddenly, it comes to you. He has the same accent as the archdruid's henchman in the castle corridor!

"Who are you, and what do you want with us?" you ask him tightly, trying to restrain your anger and humiliation.

"Oh, just a friend," he says evenly, "someone who thought it a shame that the two of you should be deprived of the party we threw at the inn tonight. It was just for you, you know. We wouldn't want you to miss it."

His cohorts laugh as he quickly pulls out a leather flask and thumbs out the cork.

"Here," he says, "drink some of this. It'll get you into the party mood."

You pull your head away, but one of your tormentors grabs you by the hair and pulls your head back sharply. Slowly, they force the foul liquor into your mouth and down your throat. It burns horribly as you swallow. Then they let you go and stand back.

You lunge for the ringleader, but somehow he is not there. You stagger past him and spin around to face them again, but your spinning doesn't seem to stop. Soon the whole grove is spinning. Your legs buckle beneath you and you fall to the ground. A cloudy haze obscures your sight as the drugged ale enters your bloodstream. From a foggy distance, you hear the ringleader's voice.

"There, that should do it. Take 'em off and dispose of their bodies. That ought to take care of their little quest and whatever plans the high priest had for 'em. The arch-druid will be pleased. I think we'll be seeing some new times ahead in this little kingdom."

The assassins hoist you off the ground and fling your now-limp body over a nearby horse. As you pass out, you know that all is lost. The princess will die without the Breath of Life and the kingdom fall into anarchy. Your quest has failed. ✕

35

Your mind races. *Pure water*, you think enthusiastically. *My waterskin!*

You reach for your waterskin, but your arms will not move. Already, the potion is hardening your back. Bending your entire mind and will to the task, you force your arms to move. With a jerk, you pull the flask off your belt and rip the stopper loose. Tearing pain arcs through your arms as you raise the waterskin and guzzle a mouthful of the spar-

bling, clean water. But will it work in time? You can only hope.

There—yes! You begin to feel a release. As feeling and freedom return to your body, you stagger over to where Julian stands, barely able to move. You push the lip of the waterskin into his mouth, and squeeze. He sputters and gags, but swallows a mouthful. *Did he get enough?* you wonder. *Will he make it?*

Julian begins to move his arms again. His eyes light up in relief. *Yes! He will make it!*

Now free from the potion's effect, you reach for your sword. A paladin knows how to deal with the likes of this evil sorceress.

But strange words reach your ears. The witch is not idly watching you free yourselves. She is uttering a spell! Even as you and Julian advance, her gravelly voice rings out.

"Now, my lovelies," she grates, "show these miserable upstarts what we do to unwelcome guests!"

You wonder whom she is addressing, until the statues around the room move to attack you!

Turn to 48.

36

Your hand and arm lash out with blinding speed. Can you . . . ?

Yes! Your warrior's reflexes do not fail you. With a sudden, joint-popping jerk, you grab hold of one of the beams beneath the planks of the bridge.

Dangling high above the river, you pause for just a second to get your breath. You glance down to see slabs of board from the bridge hit the water below. The current sucks them under instantly.

You break out in a cold sweat. That could have been your fate! And will be if you don't get yourself up onto what's left of the bridge.

Shaking slightly, you begin to pull yourself up, but your armor weighs you down. You try again to no avail. Your arm is starting to get weaker, your grip slipping. You've got to do this.

You concentrate hard, thinking of the quest and the prin-

cess lying sick and dying in Tellia. You can . . . not . . . fail!

With a prodigious heave, you hoist yourself up and grab one of the remaining beams. Struggling gamely, you climb on top of it. You are safe!

Julian quickly tosses you a rope to help you cross the rest of the bridge. *Why didn't we think of this in the first place?* you think foolishly. *A rope would have saved me being scared out of ten years of life.*

Soon, you arrive at the other end of the bridge. After resting a few moments to collect yourself, you and the priest mount up and ride down the rest of the sandstone path toward the distant end of the cavern, where the strange, templelike house awaits.

Turn to 133.



37

The black granite cliff is impassable. There's no sense in getting yourselves killed on its stone face. You turn your horses around and head back to the fork in the path.

About an hour later, you have returned. The sun has set and the mountainside is dark. The trail up the mountain is still there, but there seems to be a strange glow coming from the wall of vegetation above.

You peer down the southern path to see if there is any change there, but it still looks to be the easier of the two remaining trails.

You look at Julian and he looks back, shrugging his shoulders. You are both so tired that camping out under the stars tonight is starting to look more attractive.

But you must get inside tonight, if either of these paths leads to the Way of Death.

If you want to take the trail up the mountain, turn to 49. If you decide to try the southern path, turn to 2.

Even though your curiosity urges you to look into the wooden structure, you want to hurry on, and the huge lake doesn't look too bad. Beckoning Julian to follow, you climb in. The water is warm and fairly clear, and varies in depth from waist to chest deep. The bottom is mostly solid stone, devoid of slippery moss, which makes the wading easier. Occasionally, a large clump of weeds sprouts out of the deeper parts of the lake. You simply avoid those.

Almost three-quarters of the way across, you feel the bottom begin to rise until you are wading in ankle-deep water. But in front of you lies a very wide and deep patch of weeds. It's going to take you some time to get through or around them.

Suddenly, the water below the weeds begins to bubble. You watch curiously, wondering what sort of natural phenomenon this could be. Turn to 23.

You think a few more seconds about riding off half-cocked on such a dangerous and awesome journey. *That isn't right, you think. I need to take some time to prepare myself for the quest—to pray and pack some things. Then I will depart.*

You leave the high priest's chambers and head for your rooms, pondering the cleric's words. Though it is midday and the sun is shining, the castle halls are full of cool shadows. An occasional ray of sunlight beaming through a narrow window pierces those shadows. Through the flickering light and dark, your feet follow a sure path toward your quarters.

You are wondering how best to pursue your quest when, suddenly, your reverie is broken by the sound of voices muttering in the semi-darkness. You pause in mid-stride to listen. The voices are headed your way, and you can recognize the voice of the archdruid. The other voice has an unusual accent, one you have rarely heard in Tellaidan. The odd, singsong lilt is characteristic of the language of gypsies that roam near the border of Tellaidan with the unholy land of Zanor. You shiver as tales of that terrible country flit through your thoughts. *A fitting companion for the*

archdruid, you think. But what could they be doing here together?

The high priest's words of warning come to your mind. Do you want to risk a confrontation with the archdruid here? Should you stand and greet him, or would you rather avoid him altogether? What if you could hide in an alcove and perhaps listen to their conversation? Your mind whirls as the voices come closer.

If you wish to hide in an alcove and try to listen to their conversation, go to **20**. If you would rather stand your ground and greet the archdruid, turn to **31**. If you want to avoid the archdruid entirely, turn to **75**.

40

The distant, flickering campfire beckons to you like an alluring will-o-the-wisp.

"We have to go see what that is, Julian," you decide. "It could be helpful. If it's a trap, we'll just have to deal with the trappers when we get there."

"Very well," replies the priest, "but let's at least draw our weapons . . . just in case."

You nudge your horses forward, making your way slowly along the trail. The darkness makes your progress difficult. Scrambling over loose rock and sudden obstructions in the trail creates a lot of noise and all hope of surprise is lost.

But still the light continues to burn brightly on the mountainside ahead.

After an indeterminate length of time, you arrive at the edge of the circle of light cast by the fire. It is pitch dark all about you. Dismounting, you move up slowly to look things over. Julian stealthily circles around to the other side of the lighted area to reconnoiter and cover you in case of trouble. Boldly, trusting Julian to help you in the event of trouble, you step out into the light. Turn to **97**.

41

"Julian!" you shout above the rumble of the tumbling boulders. "Fall back, quick. It's an ambush!"

But the young priest has already seen the danger. Swiftly

he pulls his own shield from off his saddle and covers himself, just as an arrow glances off the shield.

"Watch the horses," you cry out, "they could panic when the boulders . . . uh!"

Too late! A cascade of rocks hits before you can finish. It slams into you and forces you up against the cliff face. With shields overhead, you and Julian try to glue yourselves to the side of the cliff. But the rocks pound you mercilessly. Your horses rear up and neigh in terror as the stones fall around them.

Julian grabs their reins, but it is no good. You watch helplessly as the wave of stones carries the horses over the edge to their deaths below. To your horror, Julian is knocked over with them. He could not let go of the reins in time. His death cry is lost in the rumble of stones that fall around you.

The rockslide continues to pummel you. Soon, you are waist deep in earth, mud, and rocks. You are going to be buried alive if you don't get out! As you struggle to free yourself, a large boulder slams into you, shattering your body. The blackness of death engulfs you as one last wave of dirt covers your lifeless corpse. For you, the quest has ended. ✕

42

Your weapon bites into solid flesh and bone, and a scream of pain and agony resounds through the cavern. Your sword is wrenched from your hands. The guardian suddenly becomes visible and falls to the bridge, your sword sticking out of its body.

The minotaur gazes up at you in its death throes, blood frothing on its lips. The gaping wound through its chest bleeds profusely. Slowly, choking on its own blood, the twisted, broken minotaur speaks.

"For many years, I here guard. I fight many, I kill many. So much fight, so much die. But all so stupid. No need fight . . . die. So lonely, so tired. Only need kindness. For just one act kindness, you could pass . . ."

The guardian's sad, wet eyes roll up into its head, it chokes one last time and is still. Somehow, lying dead and

pathetic on the bridge, it does not look so ugly or terrifying.

You blink back your own tears as you realize that you did not need to fight and kill this thing. But you let your temper reign, as you did in that tavern back in Tellaidan, and now . . .

Your heart swells with a sense of loss. As Julian kneels by the beast to offer a prayer, you offer a silent one too, not only for the dead creature, but for yourself.

After a few moments of silence, you turn to face the archway across the bridge. Walking slowly toward it, you watch as the black portcullis swings quietly up and out of the way. You are free to enter the tunnel and chamber beyond.

Subtract 2 honor points from your honor point total and turn to 98.

43

Something is dreadfully wrong. The uneasiness of heart you feel tells you this woman is not what she seems to be.

"Fair lady," you begin, as politely as possible, even though you suspect her motives, "with deepest regrets I am afraid we must reject your offer. We have urgent business and must be on our way. If we could have your leave to pass through or around your house, we would be most appreciative."

Her reaction is no surprise to you. Suddenly, her whole demeanor changes. Her face hardens, her expression becomes more severe, her voice cold and gravelly. She is no longer the warm, comfortable woman that greeted you.

"No, my fine young men," she grates, "you will not have my permission to pass. It was not wise to reject my invitation. Now you have no choice but to stay."

She raises her hands slowly and begins to intone mysterious words. A blanket of power settles over the room. Expecting the worst, you pull out your weapons. She glares at you malevolently before speaking again.

"Now, my lovelies," she shouts, "show these young upstarts what becomes of impolite strangers."

At her words, the statues around the room come to life and begin to advance upon you!

Turn to 48.

Dejectedly, you take one last look at the black granite cliff face. The wall of rock and dirt blocking the path stands as quiet witness of the attempt on your lives. The archdruid's men almost got you. But they failed; you are still alive. You turn your horses around and head back to the fork in the path.

About an hour later, you see the fork. The sun is low behind the hills and the mountainside is getting darker. The trail up the mountain is still there, but there seems to be a strange glow coming from the wall of vegetation above.

You peer down the southern path to see if there is any change there, but it still looks to be the easier of the two remaining trails.

You look at Julian and he looks back, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well . . ." you begin.

"Don't ask!" he replies. "I'm so tired right now that camping out under the stars tonight is starting to look good to me. You decide!"

You empathize with his feelings. It would be so easy to stop now, but you've already lost too much time. You must get inside tonight. You just hope one of these paths leads to the Way of Death.

If you want to take the trail up the mountain, turn to **49**. If you try the southern path, turn to **195**.



The assassin presses his attack. He moves smoothly, calmly, like the professional killer you know him to be.

But he is overconfident. And you, for all your youth, are no newcomer to combat. With speed and agility of your own, you sidestep his attack and lash out. The assassin's right wrist is suddenly locked in your iron grip. With a

strength born of anger and long hours of training, you squeeze that wrist to the breaking point.

The assassin struggles frantically to escape your grip. He is slippery as an eel and comes close to succeeding, but he has not counted on your strength and speed. Quickly you slip behind him, wrap your other arm around his neck, and pin him to your body. It is then that you catch a small movement out of the corner of your eye.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 9 or more, turn to **149**. If it is 8 or less, turn to **136**.

46

You look at the wall of green death and think for several minutes. Nothing comes to mind. You can either brave the vines and hope to fight your way through, or you can go another way—if there is one.

As you survey the bone- and carrion-littered ledge, you make up your mind.

“Fighting the vines is only going to get us killed,” you say softly to Julian. “We’d best go another way from the fork in the trail.”

Julian moans a little in disappointment. “I honestly don’t know which would be worse—fighting the vines or having to crawl back down this path in the dark.”

His feelings are correct. It will be a hard trek back to the fork and another one in whatever direction you decide to go. Slowly, you turn your horses around and head down the mountainside. Turn to **30**.

47

Your sword clangs uselessly against the bridge. You cannot lift your weapon any more. Julian rushes to your side to help.

Suddenly, the guardian appears behind you! Before you can react, the creature’s huge arms have wrapped around you in a viselike grip. Your arms and weapons are pinned to your side, and the minotaur’s immense muscles constrict you mercilessly.

The beast glares at you for scant seconds. Then, with an effortless, almost nonchalant heave, it tosses you over the



side of the bridge.

Your last thought as you plummet downward is of the quest. So close to the end, and now so very, very far. Fortunately, you lose consciousness before your body hits the cold, black stone of the island below. ✘

48

The stone statues move mechanically but resolutely to surround you. You join Julian in your battle crouch, back to back.

The statues raise their weapons, waiting. The witch woman shrieks a word of command.

As one they strike!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 11 or greater, turn to **32**. If the total is 10 or less, turn to **28**.

49

Of the paths before you, the one leading straight up the mountainside seems to hold the most promise.

“Up we go, Julian,” you declare. “It looks like there could be a cave behind those vines up there. If that’s not a way in, we can at least stay the night in the cave.”

Stiffly, you get to your feet and start to scramble up the rocky trail. It’s not an easy climb; the horses can barely make it. Grunting and groaning, you haul and push the horses up to a wide, flat area in front of the dense vegetation. Tired beyond belief, you collapse to the ground. Neither you nor Julian says anything for a while. Only when the horses become skittish do either of you move. Julian turns to see what is causing their unrest.

“Wyn,” he says in a troubled voice, “I think you’d better have a good look at our resting place for the night.”

As you look around the wall of vines, you gasp. It would be hard to imagine a more grisly sight. Turn to **18**.

50

Watching the stairs vanish before your unbelieving eyes cripples your mind for a short moment. So this smooth, easy stair was a trap after all. You should have known that

the Gates would not be gained so easily.

But it's not over yet! you think. You can still make the bridge if you hurry. Maybe you can get there before the stairs disappear beneath your feet.

But even as you start to run up the stairs, you see a solid wall slide out from the satiny finish of the pillar, cutting off the stairway above you.

Still unbeaten, you rush to the black wall and try to scale it, but it is smooth as glass and too high for you to reach the top. You cannot pass. You are hopelessly trapped!

Defeat and failure suddenly weight you down as despair overwhelms you. This hopeless quest was too much for one, even two, men. You turn about to watch the last few stairs sliding away. You know now how those three bodies fell to the base of the pillar. You can see them down below you as the last stair vanishes from beneath your feet and you plummet to your death.

The rocky island below rushes up at you far faster than you thought it would. Then a brief flash of intense pain, and the quest is over. ✕



51

From somewhere in the back of your head, an old saying comes to mind: "The road to destruction is swift and wide. Wretched is he who walks it!"

You freeze in your tracks! Julian halts behind you.

"Again?" he asks quizzically.

"Yes," you reply. You gaze at the path before you, then into the lake a few feet away. The soft warning voice in your mind is whispering caution. "You'd better check out the path in front of us."

The priest moves around you and begins to inspect the path and the wall. For several moments he crouches on the path, gazing at something. Then he stands and scratches his head.

"Wyn," he begins, "there *is* some sort of trap door here, but I can't find the trip mechanism. I don't know what we could fall into if we continue."

"So much for the wide, dry path around the lake," you say. "There's something else, something under or around the trap, that is emanating evil. As much as I hate to back away from evil, I can't fight what I can't see. We'd best return and try something else."

Shortly, you are back at the witch's house. Nothing has changed, and no one appears to threaten you. If you want to wade across the lake now, turn to **91**. If you take the right-hand path around the lake, turn to **189**.

52

Your wounds are not so bad as you first thought. One day's rest is enough to heal you sufficiently to continue the quest, but your fighting ability will surely be hampered. You must subtract 1 point from your fighting skill score from this point on.

A bigger worry to you is the whereabouts of your unknown assailants. After the ambush, they seemed to vanish in the night. You can still see the wall of earth blocking the stairway on the cliff face, but you have seen or heard nothing of your ambushers. It worries you to know they could still be around.

But you must continue. The only thing left to do is go back to the fork in the trail. It is now almost sunset on the day after the ambush. You need to hurry.

Mark off one more day from the time track and turn to **44**.

53

The miles seem to melt away under your horses' hooves. You are making good time, and Julian's cheerful banter helps that time to fly. The young priest seems to have no end of tales to tell about his life. When you stop for your midday meal, he launches into another.

"I used to be a thief, you know," he says while chewing on a piece of dried fruit and watching the horses graze, "until I met the high priest on one of my nightly sorties. I don't suppose I need to tell you how persuasive our high priest can be at times."

You laugh out loud at that. The picture of this ex-thief, any thief, trying to pick the pocket of this high priest was more than comical—it was ludicrous.

"A thief indeed," you reply laughing, "and you agreed to join the order? The high priest must have used some very good arguments to convert you."

"I'd rather not talk about that," says Julian, a deep red flush covering his face. "Let's just say I saw the error of my ways. No, really, I *did* see. And now I'm a priest. I've been granted the use of one or two spells *and* my old skills, for the greater good of Tellaidan. In fact, I'm one of the high priest's sets of eyes and ears."

You like this open and honest young priest. He is sincere, certainly intent upon doing good, and obviously capable of taking care of himself. You are more than pleased with the high priest's choice of a traveling companion.

You finish eating and take to horse again. You cover a good many more miles before the sun begins to set. At last, you approach the only inn you will pass on the road, your last chance for good food and a soft bed. Beyond here, you enter the wilds surrounding the Mountains of Shadow.

As you top a low rise overlooking the inn, you see that there is certainly a festive mood about the place tonight. Bright cloth streamers and banners festoon the old building. A goodly number of customers move steadily in and out the doors. As you sit watching, you can hear lively music rising on the air. Shouts of "Happy birthday!" and "Many happy returns" reach your ears. Someone seems to be having a birthday party.

A party? Tiny warning bells jangle in the back of your mind. Those bells have warned you in the past of dangerous situations, and you've learned to heed them! But what could possibly be wrong with a party? Yet something . . . you turn to Julian for advice.

"Well, what do you think?" you ask Julian. "Do you want

to sleep on the hard ground tonight, or should we risk being seen and have a nice bed for the evening? It may be the last one for a while—maybe forever.”

“Forever?” replies the young priest. “Let’s not be too morose, shall we? I’d like to think our chances of success are better than that.” He eyes the distant inn for a short time. “Besides,” he continues hopefully, “it seems innocent enough, and who could be there who would know us or our mission? Frankly, my backside is a little tender from all this riding. A bed and some warm food would be much appreciated. But the decision is yours, Wyn.”

Well, so much for helpful advice, you think. Will you stay the night at the inn, get a good night’s rest and an early start in the morning? Or do you sleep on the cold, hard ground in hopes of avoiding any chance of detection?

If you decide to stay the night in the inn, turn to **17**. If a night under the stars is more to your liking, turn to **6**.



54

The statue of the Ki-Rin must have the answer, you reason. You hurry across the chamber and begin your search around the statue and the dais.

You soon realize that it is useless. There is nothing near the Ki-Rin that would lead to or open any secret doors or gates. You will have to try the tunnel.

You turn and start back to the tunnel. About halfway there, you stop in your tracks. Did you hear a faint noise, like the last rattling breath of a dying man? The air around you has suddenly become icy cold. A fear like none you have ever felt before slides its frigid claw into your heart and chills you all the way to your bones. And then, before you can take another step, you see a sight that sets you to quaking.

All the little grottos in the tunnel are opening!

The engraved slabs slide back and release the contents of

each narrow crypt. A crippling pall of dread oozes out of each sepulchre as unearthly humanoid shapes crawl slowly out of their resting places and slither down the walls of the tunnel. They are so totally inhuman, it is all you can do to keep from collapsing to the floor of the chamber in a quivering heap of fear. They are all dressed in black tunics, boots, and hoods. Each carries a stout white club.

But the most terrifying aspect of these creatures is their faces. Here is the very essence of your nightmarish dream come to life—or unlife!

They have no faces! Their heads are completely white and without feature: no eyes, no mouths, nothing!

Without a word, the faceless walking dead shamble toward you. They back you into the chamber and start to surround you.

Turn to **169**.

55

You have never fought a more tenacious or terrible foe than this grotesque garden. The vines are the toughest. They are tremendously strong and fast and it's all you can do to keep them from overwhelming you. The puffballs explode beneath your feet, forcing you to continue moving or be overcome by the gas. Thick showers of piercing thorns cascade all over you. It is impossible to tell where they come from.

But the garden has never confronted a more reluctant meal. Your mind is filled with thoughts of the princess lying sick and dying in her chamber. The Breath of Life will save her! You must make it to the Gates of Death! No miserable plants will stand between you and your goal!

You fight with a rage and strength unbounded. Slashing and pounding, you and Julian battle your way through the plants. Your faithful steeds join the fray, too. Their flashing hooves crush the vicious life out of plant after plant. You must fight harder to keep the horses free than you fight for yourselves.

After what seems like several grueling hours of fighting, you begin to see some hope. The plants are thinning. There are fewer of them than before.

"We're getting near the edge," you shout, cutting through a strangler vine wrapped around your waist.

Julian brings his mace down on one of the thorn-shooting archer bushes. "I should hope so," he shouts in return. "I can't take much more of this."

Suddenly, you stumble out onto an open patch of rocky ground. You hurriedly pull your horses through behind you and spin about to face the garden, but the plants do not pursue you. The slimy swath you cut through the garden slowly disappears as the plants retreat to cover the traces of your passing.

You fall to the bare ground exhausted and rest for only a few minutes. Then you rise to bind your wounds and those of your horses. Their flailing hooves helped immensely in your battle.

Relieved, you finally turn to face the end of the cavern, only to be greeted by a sight even more unusual than the garden.

Turn to 133.

56

You try to dodge out of the way of the grasping vines, but it is too late. Somehow, the vines have gotten around behind you. In no time, you are entangled in twisting, sickly green coils of death.

Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total for constriction damage from the vine.

But all is not lost. Your sword arm is free. Calling Julian to come to your aid, you draw your sword and begin to hack at the clinging vines. A viscous, foul-smelling green fluid squirts from the gaping slash you make in one of the vines. It withdraws toward the wall, only to be replaced by another.

You hear a muffled cry. Looking to your right, you see that Julian is fighting for his life as well. His mace crashes down again and again as he fights desperately to escape the vines' deadly embrace.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the result is 12 or greater, turn to 26. If it is 11 or less, subtract 2 more hit points from your total and roll the

dice again. Do this until you either roll 12 or greater or run out of hit points. If your hit point total is reduced to zero, you are dead. Turn to 67.

57

Faster and faster, the undertow pulls you along. You make a desperate lunge to escape its deadly, watery embrace. Surging outward, your powerful muscles force their way out of the undertow. Slowly and steadily, you and the priest slog through chest-high water until you reach the narrow path that winds around the right side of the cavern lake. You cling to the rock wall and offer up a prayer of thanks. Tired, but happy to be alive, you pull yourselves up onto the path.

From your new vantage point, it is easy to see what was happening. The cave is just the opening to still another tunnel. The water from the lake empties swiftly into that tunnel and cascades roughly down into darkness.

Taking a few moments to count your blessings and gather your belongings, you get to your feet and walk down the path to the cave mouth. What you find is not very encouraging.

The path snakes its way down into the tunnel, becoming even narrower inside. Not only that, but it is wet and covered with a slick layer of moss. Still, your decision is easy.

"There's only one way to go, Julian," you say. "Down into the dark."

Turn to 162.

58

Your faith in the power of good and right shines in the midst of this desperate situation. It flows through you like a shining light.

The ghouls cannot stand before your faith. Howling forlornly, they stumble back and cower before you. As you move toward them confidently, they screech in fear and scramble away from you down the tunnel to disappear in darkness.

"Well," you say at last, relief filling your voice. "That's that."

“Not so,” counters Julian. “They’ll be back, and we’ll have to deal with them again, perhaps not so successfully the next time. And remember the crawler. You saw how fast it attacked us. They’re all hungry, and we will be too if we don’t get out of here. Have you got any ideas?”

The gloomy maze about you seems to close in. Julian is right. If you don’t get out of here, and soon, you could end up like those ghouls. Turn to 82.



59

You are soon almost all the way around the cavern. *At this rate, you think, we’ll be through to the end of the quest in no time.*

Just then, you hear a faint click. Startled, you stop in your tracks, causing Julian to bump into you from behind.

“What’s the . . . ?” he begins to ask.

All at once, the cavern wall behind and in front of you starts to move rapidly outward! For some twenty feet on either side of you, the path begins to disappear under the wall! At the same time, the path beneath you drops downward. You scramble to get a hold on the wall, but there is no way to grab its smooth, slick surface and you are dumped unceremoniously into the lake.

To your surprise, you do not hit bottom. Your armor pulls you deeper and deeper into the water.

Fearing the worst is yet to come, you begin to kick for the surface. As you do, you swim past a shadowy underwater cave. From that cave emanates an evil so strong your perceptive sense catches it immediately.

You signal Julian to draw his mace, but before either of you can take weapon in hand, the cave’s inhabitants swim out and attack you! Turn to 85.

Shocked and outraged as you are by the archdruid's perfidy, you control your angry indignation and stand in stunned silence as he continues to instruct his henchman.

"So I want you to keep an eye on the young paladin when he leaves," the archdruid says. "Follow him. See what he is up to. If necessary, delay him—any way you have to. You know what I mean. You have been very handy thus far. See that your usual expertness continues in Wyn's case as well."

The gypsy's colorful, loose-fitting robes billow out in a rainbow cloud of cloth as he sweeps into a deep bow. "Of course, Excellency, of course," he grovels as they turn to go. "We will take care of it. We already know the route he will take and where to find him thereon. We have a party or two planned for this Wyn. Do not worry."

The voice of the foreigner trails off in hollow echoes as he and the archdruid continue talking as they move down the hall out of earshot.

Judicious surveillance of evil-doers to gain information about their activities is acceptable behavior for a paladin only as long as it does not become a constant practice. Though your spying on the archdruid will not cost you an honor point this time, you may not be so lucky in the future. Be very careful.

You wait in the dark a few moments longer, making sure the archdruid is truly gone. When all is quiet, you leave your hiding place and step out into the corridor.

An uneasy knot tightens your stomach. *So the high priest's hunches were right, you think, stunned at the implications. The archdruid is up to no good. Not only is he after me, but his men may know where to find me as well! Now what am I going to do?*

Your thoughts are confused for a moment. You know you should warn someone of the archdruid's skullduggery, but his plans are obviously already in motion. If you don't leave the palace soon, he may be able to interfere with your journey even further.

If you decide to get your horse and supplies immediately and be gone before the archdruid learns of your departure,

turn to **161**. If you still feel the need to go to your room and prepare your things, perhaps leaving a message for the high priest about what you have heard, turn to **96**.

61

The monster lashes out at you with its great head. It is amazingly fast.

You try to dodge but there is no place to go; you are bracketed between the dragon turtle's front legs. You try to slash the beast's neck as it strikes, but it moves too swiftly and you miss.

Suddenly, blinding pain screams through your body. The dragon turtle has hit you! Your own warm blood spills out into the water around you.

Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total. If this reduces your hit points to zero or less, turn to **67**.

If you have any hit points remaining, roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 13 or more, turn to **84**. If the total is 12 or less, repeat this section.

62

The archdruid's perfidious dialogue is too much to bear. You have heard all you can stand to hear. In a rage, you burst out from the alcove to confront the conspirators.

"You foul scum," you bellow. "How dare you speak of doing harm to the princess? You'll pay for your treacherous words before the king. Now, do you come along peacefully, or do I get the pleasure of dragging you bodily before the king?"

You know the answer to that question before you finish asking it. With an animal-like snarl, the archdruid turns to run, shouting some unintelligible phrase to the foreigner. The gypsy grins broadly. With the speed of a snake, he pulls a long, wickedly curved dagger from beneath his loose-fitting robes.

You have just enough time to notice a dark smear along the dagger's edge before he lunges to attack. *That dagger could be poisoned*, you think rapidly. *I'm facing a hired assassin—without a weapon!*



Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 10 or greater, turn to **45**. If it is 9 or less, turn to **90**.

63

The ghouls have surrounded you. On every side are madly shrieking undead monstrosities. The horses are terrified and try to bolt to safety. Their charging about only makes your cause more hopeless.

Suddenly, the ghouls lunge in for the kill. Your sword cuts a vicious arc through the air—and misses!! The ghoul you were aiming at crashes into you and bears you to the ground. He is immediately joined by another. You struggle frantically to fight them off, but it is hopeless.

One foul and filthy claw rakes across your face, and numbing paralysis instantly grips you. You cannot move! Your arm falls useless at your side, your weapon clangs to the ground. You try to cry for help, but no sound comes.

The ghouls on top of you are suddenly brushed aside. Julian is making a last stand over your stiff body. In agony,

you watch as he is borne down under the weight of the four ghouls. Soon, he too lies still at your side.

With screams of fiendish delight, two of the creatures chase after your horses. Slowly, the other two approach you. Your eyes widen in horror as a ghoulish face peers ravenously into yours. Its fetid breath causes you to wretch and gag. As the light of your torch sputters out, you can think of nothing but the horrible fate that awaits you.

You cannot even scream as the undead creature tears the life out of your warm, quivering throat. The quest comes to an end in the cold darkness of an unknown maze. ✘

64

But one last thing requires your attention before you bed down for the night.

“Julian,” you say, “I think it would be wise if we set a guard tonight. I know we should be alone out here, but I don’t want to be caught unaware in case we’re not. I’ll take the first watch and wake you in a couple of hours. Bed down close to those thickets. They’ll give you some protection from the elements.”

Julian looks at you uncertainly but does as you suggest. As the young priest falls asleep, you kick out your small campfire and cover it with dirt. After seeing to the horses, you set yourself in the shadows at the edge of the grove nearest the road. A full moon casts a cold, bright light across the landscape before you. You can see quite a distance up and down the road and over most of the surrounding countryside.

The night air grows chill as you wait and watch, and you pull your cloak tighter about you. Your muscles cramp as you sit unmoving in the shadows. Suddenly, a faint sound tickles your ears. A thrill runs up your spine as you straighten to get a better view from your vantage point.

Horses are approaching at a gallop! Turn to 182.

65

Arrows skip off the rocks around you. Boulders thunder at you from overhead. But the gods are watching over you today. By some miracle, you make it to the horses. Swiftly,

you pull them into the tunnel entrance. Rocks and great chunks of earth fall all around you. Some just bounce off armor and saddles, but others hit hard enough to hurt, badly.

Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total. If you still have hit points left, turn to **77**. If your hit point total is now zero or below, you have died; turn to **67**.

66

Cold, inhuman eyes glare at you balefully. The dragon turtle's neck curls back. It opens its great mouth with an evil hiss and shows you wickedly curved fangs. Small clouds of scalding steam puff from that gaping maw. It pauses a second, then strikes!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If your total is 12 or greater, turn to **84**. If your total is 11 or less, turn to **61**.

67

The high priest sits alone in his chambers. A chill wind blows through the large bay window of the room. He silently ponders the events that are transpiring in the kingdom. The princess lies near death, the archdruid is trying to consolidate his power, and the high priest waits anxiously for his young paladin's return.

Time is growing short. He casts his thoughts over the miles and tries to envision your efforts. Suddenly he stiffens. As if from over a great distance, he feels the mournful passage of a departing soul. He sits bolt upright, trying to sense who or what it is that has captured his attention. Then, in shock and distress, he slumps back into his chair.

For a moment, his mind is numb. Then, as his thoughts return, his eyes fill with hot tears. His heart sinks. At length, he stands and crosses to the window. As he looks out over the kingdom, he offers up a quiet prayer for you. He must now think of some other way to save the princess and the kingdom—if he can.

The quest is over. Go back to the beginning and try again—if you dare. ✕



68

The assassins begin their dance of death. They split up immediately to get on either side of you. You try to keep your back to the grove to cover your rear.

But these two are good—maybe too good. Soon, their feinting and weaving have maneuvered you into the open. They can get you from any side now.

Suddenly, one of them whistles shrilly. Startled, you crouch and move, expecting a sneak attack from one of them. Instead, you hear the sound of horses' hooves. The horsemen on the road are coming!

You turn your head to try to see them, but they are nowhere in sight. *They must be moving around behind me*, you think wildly. You peer into the darkness, trying to catch their movement.

That is a mistake. Your concern about the horsemen causes you to drop your guard. The assassins see their opening and charge. One of the assassins jumps high, aiming a blow at your head. His dagger gleams in the cold light of the moon. You throw up your sword and parry the blow that would surely have sliced your neck open.

But a burning pain lances up through your body from your leg. You reach down to feel warm blood well out of a savage gash in your thigh. The other assassin has sneaked in and laid his dagger across your right leg behind your armor!

Your wounded leg buckles beneath you. With a cry, you fall to the ground. The assassins close on you like wolves for the kill.

Turn to 24.

Something about the smooth pillar and its straight, easy steps gives you an uneasy feeling. You decide to scale the rough pillar, despite the apparent difficulty.

“Julian,” you say, gazing up at the intimidating tower, “as foolish as this may seem, we’re going up this behemoth here. The points of rock and the holes should ease the climb, and I’m counting on some of your past experience to help us out—and up.”

The priest smiles and answers, “I was hoping you’d choose the rough one. The smooth one just looks too easy. It feels like a trap.”

You strip off all unnecessary or encumbering equipment. Taking only a torch, your weapons, and light packs, you set hand and foot to the craggy surface of the conical pillar and steel yourself for a hard climb.

Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 9 or more, turn to **113**. If the total is 8 or less, turn to **134**.

The young woman awaits your reply. *My, she is pretty*, you think. *Just a few minutes in her company will do no harm*. You look to Julian, but he is enrapt in her beauty as well. No help from that quarter.

Casting aside any concern over such weighty matters as the princess’s life, the Way to the Gates of Death, and the Breath of Life, you make your decision.

“We would be honored to share a draught with you in your home, lady.”

She smiles warmly and fills two crystal goblets with dark, honey-scented liquid. Filling one for herself, she offers you a toast. “To my two tired and thirsty guests. May this small draught mark the beginning of a long acquaintance and quench your thirst to the end of your quest.”

She lifts her goblet and drinks. You raise your own goblet to your lips to follow suit.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **142**. If it is 10 or less, turn to **104**.

Your second day of travel begins well, with an early start and a good pace. You push your horses to a steady gallop that eats up the final leagues to the foothills of the Mountains of Shadow.

That, however, turns out to be the easy part. Finding the entrance to the legendary Way of Death that leads to the equally legendary Gates of Death proves to be difficult indeed. The map the high priest gave you isn't much help. Most of the landmarks mentioned on the map are no longer around, and probably have not been for decades—or centuries. You spend the next several hours, the hottest part of the day, searching for a single path that might lead up into the highlands of the Mountains of Shadow. So far, all that you have to show for scrambling about the craggy bluffs and brush-laden slopes is a great collection of cuts and bruises and some very tired mounts.

Finally, well into the afternoon, Julian's knowledge of the region saves the day. He comes upon an ancient flagstone marking a faint, narrow trail.

"This has to be it," he exults. "Look at the scribing on the flagstone. I can't decipher it, but it looks ancient enough to mark the right trail."

"Well, it had better be," you answer in exasperation. "We're running out of daylight."

You begin a long, hard climb up a steep, rocky path. At times, it snakes around the sides of mountain cliffs with only the barest ledge to lead the horses along. Other times, the path disappears altogether. You waste even more time clambering back and forth to try to find the path again.

Then, toward sunset, just when you thought you were headed in the right direction, the trail splits.

Standing in the middle of a three-way fork in the trail, you cast your eyes heavenward pleadingly. "Well, now what?" you shout, throwing your arms up in frustration. "It's almost dark and we still haven't found an entrance to the Way of Death—if it's even here at all!"

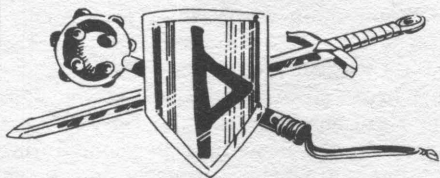
The sun is setting behind you as you look to Julian for some sort of answer. He is just as perplexed as you.

"I honestly don't know what to do now," he says quietly,

fatigue making a ragged whisper of his usually robust voice. "I want to find shelter before nightfall, too. I mean, there's no telling what might jump us if we stay the night out here. But your guess is as good as mine at this point. I got us this far. You'll have to get us in. It's your choice."

"Thanks," you grumble, looking about. The rock-strewn path in front of you leads straight up the steep mountainside. In the fading light, you think you can see a low wall of dense vegetation in front of a dark space—a cave maybe? A second path leads south, curling around the mountainside to disappear in the twilight. That way looks clear and easy to travel. The northern branch of the fork hugs the mountainside to your left, but it appears to lead to a distant cliff or huge promontory of rock. There seems to be a heavy shroud of mist up there as well.

Do you go north? Turn to 13. If you decide to go straight up the mountain, turn to 49. If you want take the southern branch of the path, turn to 195.



72

This is no time to think about the past. The faceless minions are closing in on you. You must try to turn them!

Desperately, you reach inside your tunic and pull out your holy symbol. The medallion of the order gleams brightly in your hand. Holding the medallion earnestly before you, you cry out.

"Hold, foul minions of death! I am a knight and paladin of the Order of Tellaidan, here on a holy errand. I command you to depart and impede me no further!"

To your relief, they all stop moving. Shuffling about, they turn their faceless heads to one another as if perplexed, but they do not back away. Have you turned them or not?

75

Suddenly, a sound reverberates through the chamber. It is soft but deep and rattles the very stone beneath you. It is difficult to understand for a few moments. Then, you begin to hear words. As you listen, you hear something that strikes fear into your heart.

"Meet faceless Death—'tis here you'll die." The disembodied voice is reciting the last part of the old poem the high priest gave you at the beginning of your journey. You whirl about to try to find the source of the voice, but there is nothing in the room but you and the statues and the faceless undead.

The undead! You spin about too late. Already they have raised their gleaming clubs to strike. You have no further power over them.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 9 or more, turn to **145**. If the total is 8 or less, turn to **89**.

73

The deadly statues begin to close on you again.

"Julian," you shout while relieving a rather attractive female statue of its head, "make for the portal on the right. If that isn't a way out, we're done for."

By sheer brute strength and will power, you bash your way to the right portal, hack aside the final statues standing in your way, and forge into the room. Julian holds the small opening against the statues while you examine your new surroundings.

It seems to be a sitting room of some kind. Large blue pillows are scattered about the floor around two or three overstuffed chairs. Light blue tapestries hang on the walls.

There is another curtained portal right across from you. The window beside that door shows you the cavern beyond is filled with a sort of lake. You have found a way out!

"Julian," you cry, "forget them. Through this door . . . NOW!"

The priest dispatches one last statue. Then with a burst of speed, you both race out the portal and into the next cavern just as the remaining statues crowd their way into the room. You run across one hundred feet or more of

bedrock before reaching the edge of the lake that fills this cavern. A quick glance behind you brings a surprise.

Turn to 21.

74

Your wounds are worse than you first thought. Two days' rest is barely enough to heal you sufficiently to continue the quest, and your fighting ability will be hampered. You must subtract 1 point from your fighting skill score from this point on.

But a bigger worry to you is the whereabouts of your unknown assailants. After the ambush, they seemed to vanish in the night. You can still see the wall of earth blocking the stairway on the cliff face, but you have seen or heard nothing of your ambushers. It worries you to know they could still be around.

But you must continue. The only thing left to do is return to the fork in the trail. It is almost sunset two days after the ambush. You need to hurry.

Mark off two days from the time track and turn to 44.

75

The voices are almost upon you.

This doesn't seem to be the time or place to deal with the archdruid, you think in a panic. Best avoid the man and get on with my task. I can deal with him when I return . . . if it's necessary.

You quickly find a convenient side hall and duck down it. As you do, the archdruid and his companion round the corner. They stop just at the end of your corridor, embroiled in a hushed but heated conversation. You creep down the dark hall away from them, clinging silently to the shadow-washed wall until you are out of earshot. You can see the archdruid's foreign companion is indeed a gypsy, for he is wearing the colorful robes of the gypsy tribes of the borderlands.

But that is all you see of the archdruid and his mysterious cohort. Your corridor carries you around a bend and out of sight. Their voices fade completely as you turn and make your way to your rooms via this detour.

Avoiding an opponent like the archdruid may seem prudent, but it is not a very paladinlike thing to do. Though you got around the archdruid, it has cost you 1 honor point. Subtract the honor point from your total and go on to **96**.

76

As mystified as you are by the gory remains, your practical side comes to the fore, and you carefully begin to search the bodies. Your search is rewarded when the body in the worst condition yields up a surprise.

In a small pocket on the inside of its tunic, you find a letter carrying the archdruid's seal.

Hastily, you tear it open and read its contents as Julian watches curiously. When you finally hand the letter to him, your mind is aflame with indignation.

"It's all there," you growl hotly, "the archdruid's whole plan to stop us and murder the princess. And these," you point to the corpses, "and their accomplices were supposed to waylay us. It seems someone or something took care of them for us."

Julian finishes the letter and folds it carefully. "I would keep this," he remarks, handing you the incriminating letter. "When we get back to Tellaidan—if we get back to Tellaidan—it will undoubtedly spell the end for our 'beloved' archdruid."

You take the letter and put it in your tunic. Then you turn to look at the enigmatic pillars.

Subtract 1 honor point from your total. Even though your search was productive, rifling the bodies of the dead is not something a paladin should do. Turn to **27**.

77

The rockslide caused by the assassins crashes down and starts to cover the tunnel entrance. But you make it inside—alive!

The air in the tunnel reverberates with the crashing of earth and stone. Dust fills the air. You struggle for breath as you stagger down the tunnel away from the landslide.

Soon the thundering stops and the dust begins to settle. In the pitch darkness, you fumble about for torches. Once



they are lit, you can see the outer end of the tunnel is a ruin of boulders and dirt. If you had stayed there, you would surely have been crushed to death.

Now, with only one direction left to go, you make your way down the tunnel toward the intersection you passed earlier. If you want to go straight down the tunnel with the strange glow at the end, turn to **133**. If you decide to go to the right into darkness, turn to **105**. If you go left back to the beginning of the garden cavern, turn to **33**.

78

“The path to the left leads to higher ground along the wall,” Julian remarks. “It might be a good way to go and get a better view of things.”

“A good idea,” you agree, “and if we don’t like what we see, we can always come back here and try another path.”

About five hundred feet around the left edge of the garden, the path leads to an old stone stairway carved into the wall of the cavern. The sandstone steps have seen better days and are crumbling. They are barely strong enough and just wide enough to support you and the horses. Slowly, you make your way up the steps. Soon you can see out over the entire floor of the cavern. Turn to **159**.

79

To go back now would be nothing more than a further waste of time. You decide to stay and hunt for a way up.

Sure enough, even in the gathering dark, you find one. A close search of the base of the cliff reveals an ancient stairway cut into the stone. The stone stairway is so well crafted that it is almost hidden from view. Only someone looking

intently would ever find it.

Luckily, it is wide enough for you to lead your horses. Slowly, you begin your ascent, but it is not easy going for, over the years, a thin layer of moss has grown on the steps. Coupled with the mist from the waterfall, the moss makes the going very slippery.

At length, you near the top. The stairway rounds the face of the cliff directly over the river formed by the waterfall. You look up to see how far you have to go. What greets your eyes freezes you in your tracks.

Dark shadows are silhouetted against the dusky sky. At the top of the stairs, one of the shadowy figures stops. You hear an evil chuckle as the shadow man raises his arm. Then, with a shout in a language you do not understand, he drops his arm.

Suddenly, you hear the whistling of arrows and the thud of falling stones from above. You barely have time to pull out your shield before they start to fall about you. You have walked into an ambush!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 12 or more, turn to 8. If it is 11 or less, turn to 41.

80

Wounded and bleeding, the creature makes one last lunge at you, but it moves too slowly. You aim a vicious slash at its neck as Julian brings his heavy mace down on its head.

The beast has no chance. As its crushed head falls away from its severed neck, it heaves up into the air and comes splashing down, belly up.

You and Julian tend to your wounds as fast as you can and hurriedly move out of the bloodied water. There can be no telling if blood might attract more such creatures.

Luckily, nothing else approaches you. Forging onward, you soon reach the rock island of the pillars. Turn to 7.

81

The assassins begin their dance of death. They split up immediately to get on either side of you. You try to keep your back to the grove to cover your rear.



But these two are good—maybe too good. Soon, their feinting and weaving in and out have maneuvered you into the open. They can get you from any side now.

Suddenly, one of them whistles shrilly. You immediately drop into your battle crouch, ready for their attack. Then you hear the sound of horses' hooves. The horsemen on the road are coming!

You turn your head to try to see them, but they are nowhere in sight. Relieved, you let down your guard a little, and the assassins charge in to take advantage of your mistake. One of the assassins jumps high, aiming a blow at your head.

But now you take the offensive. Dropping your guard was only a feint to cover your attack. You have sucked them in for the kill.

You swiftly duck under the high blow of the first assassin; it is just a diversion. From the crouch, you sidestep and spin. Your sword cuts a vicious arch through the air just below waist level and meets the second assassin as he

sidles in to deliver a sneak blow to your unprotected legs. His head pops off his shoulders with a spurt of blood, and his body falls twitching to the ground.

Now it is one-on-one. The remaining assassin curses in some foul language. He recovers from his jump and moves out into the open. Your back is to the grove once again. In the moonlight, you can see his body tense as he prepares for his next attack, a real one this time.

But then, just as he is about to spring, the undergrowth behind you rustles. Someone is sneaking up on your back! Turn to **132**.

82

You are lost in the maze! Dealing with the ghouls has only made it harder to find your way out. You manage to find the first corpse you encountered, but from there, you cannot remember where you came in. It will take every bit of your wisdom and experience to get out of this alive.

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 15 or more, turn to **156**. If your total is 14 or less, repeat this section. If you are forced to repeat this section five times in a row, mark one more day off the time track. For every five times that you have to repeat this section, mark another day off the time track. If at any time you roll 15 or more, turn to **156**.

If you run out of days on your time track at this point in the adventure, turn to **125**.

83

The potion advances slowly but inexorably through your body, petrifying you as it goes.

But your mind races. *Pure water, you think. Could that be what's in the old mage's vial? He said we'd know when to use it.*

Painfully, you force your arm to move your hand to remove the vial from a pouch at your belt. Bending your mind and will to the task, you open the vial and take a small sip. Julian may need some too, if it works.

And it does! Immediately, the effects of the potion are reversed. Aching in every bone, you limp over to Julian. He

is nearly completely converted to stone. Only his head and neck are free. Quickly, you force the rest of the vial's contents down his throat. In a moment, he smiles. He, too, is free!

Drawing your weapons, you turn to face the witch woman, but she has not been idle. Seeing your moves to free yourselves, she began to intone a spell. As you advance upon her, her gravelly voice rings out.

"Now, my lovelies," she cries, "show these miserable upstarts what we do to unwelcome guests!"

For an instant, you wonder whom she is addressing, until the statues in the room move to attack you!

Turn to **48**.

84

The dragon turtle's vicious head slashes out at you. Your doom seems imminent.

But this beast is young and inexperienced, and the gods are with you. Its attack goes wide as you dodge.

The thrill of battle courses through your veins. Your muscles galvanize, and you lash out angrily at the creature's neck.

Your sword slices across the soft underside of the dragon turtle's throat. A deep gash spurts steaming blood into the water around you. Julian fares as well, bringing his heavy mace down with crushing force on the beast's skull.

The young dragon turtle rears back, hissing in pain. Its neck is badly cut, its head bashed soundly. It is hurt and it is mad! Blinded by animal rage, it strikes out at you again!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 10 or less, turn to **61**. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **80**.

85

You watch in startled horror as no less than ten reptilian humanoids swim out of the cave toward you. They look like a perverse cross between men and large lizards. Green-plated scales cover their entire bodies, from the ends of their lizardlike snouts to the tips of their long, snaky tails. Webbed hands and feet that propel them through the water



at incredible speed end in sharp talons. Their dark, beady, reptile eyes gleam coldly. Each carries a cruel-looking spiked club.

You hastily unsheath your weapons only to have them yanked out of your hands. The lizardmen have you surrounded! You desperately renew your attempts to reach the surface of the lake, knowing you can only hold your breath a few moments more. You need air!

But the lizardmen know that. From out of nowhere, a weighted net settles over you. You struggle to free yourselves, but it is useless. The more you struggle, the worse you are entangled.

Grasping the ends of the net, the lizardmen head for their underwater lair with you as their prizes. You can't hold your breath any longer. With a choking gasp, water fills your lungs, but before you fall into merciful unconsciousness, you get one last look at your captors. By the hungry looks on their faces, you know what your fate will be. Lizardmen are known for making horrid feasts of their human captives. Your quest has ended with your lives. ✘

86

Fear is the enemy of faith, and right now you are so full of fear that no amount of faith can help you turn these undead horrors. The ghouls, with one voice, scream in derision and launch their attack. You barely have time to draw your weapons before they hit you. Howling and shrieking, ravenous for your living flesh, they fight like demons.

In desperation, you fight with equal fervor. You can barely keep between them and your horses, which they would consume with the same relish that they would feast upon you. A lesser man might think to sacrifice the horses to the ghouls' hunger, but you are a paladin, and the beasts are in your care and protection.

But your fear is working against you. It saps your strength, spoils your aim. Soon, the ghouls are forcing you backward and trying to surround you.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **22**. If the total is 10 or less, turn to **63**.

"Praise the gods!" you shout ecstatically. "Look at them burn."

Your blazing brands have seared the grasping vines and bushes and puffballs. As if in pain, the plants shiver and shake and move out of your way as they try to escape the burning flames. But there is no escape from the fire.

Julian returns to your side. He has retrieved two more torches from his saddlebag. With the reins of your horses clamped tightly in your teeth, the two of you begin to burn a path through the ghastly garden. A sickening smoke begins to rise about you. As the plants burn, years of carrion stench is released—an almost overpowering wave, it's all you can do to keep moving.

But move—and fight—you do. Occasionally, a vine breaks through your fiery defenses, but you dispatch it with a swift slash or smashing blow.

After a long while, with muscles aching and eyes watering from the foul, acrid smoke, you manage to fight your way to the edge of the crazed garden-forest. Once through, you turn wearily and survey the damage you've done. You are justly proud to see a wide, smoking gouge snaking its way across the garden from the spring. It will be a long time before those plants can molest travelers again.

Tired but elated, you turn to see what awaits you at this end of the cavern.

Turn to 133.

You move cautiously down this tunnel toward the strange glow at the end. Julian carefully checks the walls and floors for traps while you watch the area behind. In view of what you've run into so far, it seems unlikely that the going will be easy.

At the tunnel exit, Julian stops. "Nothing," he says to you, "nothing at all. No traps or hidden doors or anything. It looks like we're home free."

"Well," you reply, "there's nothing coming at us from behind either. We'd better get a move on before our luck changes."

Cautiously, you step out of the tunnel into the glow and look around. You are in a very large cavern. As you walk out onto the bedrock of the cavern floor, you see on your left a weird forest of plants that occupies most of the cavern in that direction. You can make out a trail or path high on the far wall of the cavern. It crosses an old bridge and meanders down the wall to the bedrock floor on the other side of the cavern.

The ceiling at this end of the cavern drops to only ten feet above the cavern floor. There is a spacious opening here some thirty feet wide and fifty feet deep. It seems to lead directly into another huge cavern beyond. The next step along the Way of Death to the Gates should be an easy one.

And it would be if the entire width of the opening were not blocked by a most fascinating and beautiful building.

Turn to 163.



89

The faceless horde closes its circle of death around you. You are trapped!

Your mind screams fear and panic. The lay races through your mind.

“Meet faceless Death—’tis here you’ll die!
Pass Judgment straight with Soul unriven;
The Breath of Life at last be given.”

But how can you die and succeed?

The minions give you no time to ponder. You barely have time to unsheath your sword before the first reaches you.

It is a nightmare of a battle. Uncounted faceless visages appear before you as you whirl about in a dance of death. One after another you cut them down.

But they do not stay down! They rise again and again to attack you. You cannot kill what is already dead. In panic

and desperation you fight on, but it is hopeless.

Soon you are exhausted. You cannot hold your sword up any longer.

Immediately, the faceless ones pounce on you and pound you mercilessly to the stone floor. The darkness of death is a welcome relief from the horror of a battle you could not win.

You have died in panic and fear, despite all your training as a paladin. Subtract 2 honor points from your honor point total, then turn to **127**.

90

The assassin lunges at you, his knife hand a blur of motion. You sidestep quickly to avoid the blade. A mere scratch could mean your death. But even as you dodge, the assassin flicks his knife to the other hand! Your sidestep carries you right into the knife's path! His dagger bits into your side. Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total and turn to **107**.

91

The cool, clear water of the lake does look incredibly inviting. Besides, wading across will wash the filth of the last few days' journey off your bodies.

"Julian," you say at last, "we're going to wade across the lake to that cave on the far side. Not only will it be faster, I think, but the water will do us some good."

He smiles broadly. "I was hoping you'd say that," he replies. "I'm in desperate need of . . ."

"Yes," you respond, holding your nose in mock disgust, "I know!"

You both laugh and gather up your things. Then, with only a moment's hesitation, you step boldly into the lake. It is indeed cool and refreshing, and only comes up to your waists. After splashing about a bit to get used to the water, you start to forge across.

But the lake does not appear as placid from inside the water as it does from the shore. Every so often, a small geyser erupts from the water's surface. One of them, in fact, catches Julian by surprise, and for a few anxious moments,

he bobbles about helplessly in the water. You also notice that at various intervals small, powerful whirlpools appear in the water around you. This natural oddity is altogether mystifying.

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **19**. If the total is 9 or less, turn to **14**.

92

The roar of the rushing river thunders in your ears as you look at the old bridge.

“Julian,” you decide, “that bridge would be the death of us for sure. I think we should try the tunnel here and hope it takes us to the house.”

“But, Wyn,” the young priest counters, “I’m sure that the breeze in this tunnel is coming from outside.”

“Well,” you ask, “do *you* want to try that bridge?”

His face clouds up as he looks at the obviously decaying wooden structure.

“No,” he says at last, shaking his head, “we stand a better chance in the tunnel. Let’s go.”

Leading your horses, you enter the tunnel. It cuts into the sandstone wall and curves a little to the right—a good sign. But after a few hundred feet it begins to curve back to the left, away from the direction you want to go. The walls are damp and slick now, and a faint rushing sound reaches your ears.

Then, not a hundred feet from the last curve, the tunnel splits. One branch continues on the left. Moisture drips down its walls to form puddles on the granite floor. The other fork bears off to the right and seems to be drier . . . and goes in the right direction!

If you go left, turn to **135**. If you head down the right fork, turn to **152**.

93

“Very well,” you whisper intently, “we’ll choose the ‘better part of valor’—this time. But, I have my misgivings about sneaking about this place like a thief.”

Julian casts a sidelong glance at you and smiles at your

comment. "Ah, yes," he remarks, "the paladin's virtue is his honor. 'Never run from an enemy' and the like. It must be very hard to live that way, to have to make those kinds of decisions."

You look at him with a new respect. Not very many people appreciate the difficulties of your lifestyle.

"It is hard," you reply. "And there are days that I'd rather not have to make those decisions. But enough of this talk. We have a quest to finish, and I want to get away from this place. Let's get going."

Very cautiously, the two of you approach the left corner of the stone house. You find it odd that no one has greeted you or confronted you so far. Could it be that the whole place is just an empty shell?

As you peek around the corner, you see that Julian was right. There is a space between the house and the cavern wall here that seems to run all the way into the next cavern.

Returning to the horses, you quickly and quietly remove supplies and torches from your saddlebags. But still something bothers you. An oppressive pall has settled around the house. You can almost feel it.

What is wrong? you think. *It feels like the place knows we're here.*

With one last comforting word to the horses, you mount the steps and slide into the gap. Soon you'll be one step closer to the end of your quest, and that's all you can think about for the moment.

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 15 or more, turn to **206**. If the total is 14 or less, turn to **180**.

94

You watch the serving boy leave, catching his glance. It troubles you.

"Julian," you ask thoughtfully, "did you notice anything strange about that boy?"

"Not at all," the priest replies, already drooling over the food. "Should I have?"

"Yes," you answer, chuckling, "if you could get your mind

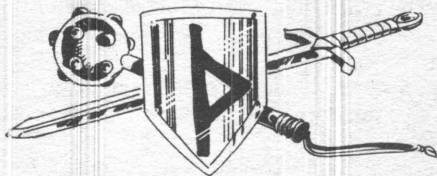
out of that plate for a while. I would feel ever so much better if you'd bless and purify this meal before we eat it."

He looks up at you in surprise. A look of understanding slowly crosses his face. He ponders for a short while, then casts a purifying spell over the food and drink on the platter. That done, you both dig into a delightful meal.

In a short while, you hear a faint knock at the door. You open the door to see the serving boy that brought your meal. He looks at you in shocked disbelief for a moment. Then he smiles and sighs, as though relieved of some burden, and takes your empty tray from the room.

You watch him retreat down the hall and smile to yourself. You feel that somehow you have undone something that could have meant the end of your mission. The thought comforts you as you return to your room for a good night's sleep.

Mark one day off the time track. Then, climb in bed and turn to 71.

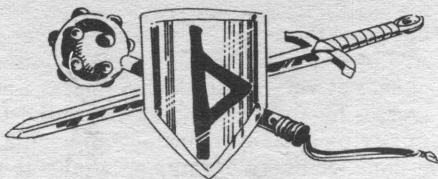


95

Too late! The stone slab drops to the floor of the tunnel with a tremendous thud. You think you hear a distant cry of alarm or pain from Julian. Is he all right?

There is no way to find out. When the second sound of trouble reaches your ears, you whirl about just in time to see another slab drop down in front of the door at the end of the tunnel. No way out there now, either.

The third sound spells your doom. A gravelly, grating sound comes from overhead. Quickly looking up, you see that the ceiling is slowly descending upon you. Several hundred tons of stone quickly bring your quest and your life to a definite end. ✕



96

Your encounter with the archdruid makes you speed your steps toward your quarters. There is no telling what he may have in store for you. You aren't going to wait any longer to find out.

You race down a few more corridors before arriving at your room. Preoccupied with your thoughts and plans, you reach into your tunic and draw out the iron key to your chamber, but you stop when you see that the door is ajar!

That door was locked when you left. Someone has been—or still is—in your quarters.

You cautiously advance to the door and try to peek through the crack. The faint glow of candlelight is coming from the dimly lit room. Perhaps you can catch the intruders by surprise.

The opening in the door is wide enough to give you a fair view of the inside of the room. All seems to be in order, except . . .

Sitting at the small wooden desk on the far side of the room is a brown-robed figure. Its back is to you, and a hood covers its head. It does not move and appears to be sleeping. A lit candle flickers softly in the candlestick on the desk. Propped against the candlestick is what looks like an envelope marked with the royal seal. It was not there when you left your room this morning.

And neither was this person, you think hurriedly. What am I going to do now? It looks like one of the priests of the order, but what if he's one of the archdruid's men in disguise? How did he get through a locked door and into my room?

Suddenly, the figure makes up your mind for you. It stands, grabs the envelope, and begins to stuff it into the folds of its robe.

That is all you need. You burst into the room and lunge at

the intruder. He is caught by surprise as you tackle him from behind. But then it is your turn to be surprised. For a moment, the intruder struggles in your grasp. Then, in an instant, the robed figure reaches up with his hands, grabs your tunic at either shoulder, bends at the waist, and tosses you over his shoulder into the air. With a shout, you crash onto the wooden desk. It shatters beneath you, depositing you in a heap on the floor.

You are up on your feet in less than a second, but the robed figure makes no move to press his advantage or make his escape. He just stands there in the middle of the room—waiting. Even more bothersome is his low, throaty chuckle.

You are about to tackle him again when he holds up his hand and finally speaks.

“Hold, please, Sir Wyn,” he says quickly, rubbing his arms where you grabbed hold of him, “I have enough bruises for one day. And if my feelings are correct, you and I will be getting more bruises from others than we need to be giving each other.”

With that, he throws back his hood. He is a lad of about your age, perhaps a little younger, with a plain face and light-brown hair. He is not as tall as you and does not seem to be as powerfully built. *But then*, you think, *those robes hide much*. The bruise on your backside is proof of that.

One other thing impresses you about this young man. As you gaze at his face awaiting an explanation of his presence in your quarters, you notice his eyes. They are filled with the gleam of reassurance and self-confidence. They virtually shine as he returns your gaze.

He extends his hand in the manner of your order and says, “I’m Julian. I’ve been sent by the high priest with a message of grave importance. It seems your quest has just become more difficult.”

Turn to 126.

97

You walk out into a tiny clearing amidst a circle of rocks. As you step into the light, you are immediately aware of a strange sensation, like stepping through a thin veil of

force. But more interesting is what you see in the light.

Sitting cross-legged by the fire is an old man in tattered robes, who sits up as you step into the light. Never taking his eyes off the flames, he addresses you. His voice is old and thin and grates like the rasping of a rusty hinge, but there is a rod of steel running through it that makes you wary.

"My patience is wearing thin with all these interruptions today," he says angrily. "You'd better have good reason for bothering me. If not, I'll send you to the farthest corner of the world—or someplace worse."

He stands and raises his hands menacingly. Magical lightning crackles between his fingertips and crawls up his arms. He turns toward you.

Turn to 129.

98

As you approach the archway, you are stopped by a hand on your shoulder. You turn to see Julian standing behind you. His eyes are wet but shine with hope and gladness.

"Wyn, my friend," he begins haltingly, "the time has come for us to part ways."

You stare at him uncomprehendingly. "But how can you leave?" you counter. "The high priest said you were to be my companion on this quest. We're almost there. Just down this tunnel and it will be all over. You have saved my life many times on this gruelling journey, priest, and shared its hardships. You *must* share in its glory, too."

The young cleric breathes a heavy sigh. "Such is not to be, Wyn," he answers. "I was commanded by the high priest to accompany you to the Gates, if they existed. But passing through them, taking the final step, is yours to do alone. That is the only part of your penance-quest I cannot help you with. You must finish it alone. I will stand here and witness what you do. If you live, I will journey back with you, with all speed and joy! If you fail, I will be living testimony of your attempt, your courage and determination. Go now, the tunnel and the end of the quest await. The princess's life is now, more than ever, in your hands."

You look at him one last time. You can tell he is sincere but realize, too, that he is right. You have known it all along. You must finish this by yourself. It is *your* penance and *your* quest. Time now to face the inevitable.

You are a paladin of the Order of Tellaidan. You have trained long and hard for hardship and danger. You will not quail now before the chance of death. Locking Julian in a final warriors' embrace, you turn and enter the tunnel.

Behind you, silent and ominous, the black portcullis slides shut, leaving Julian outside. He grasps the bars as they drop and begins his hopeful vigil.

Turn to 122.

99

As you travel up the right side of the wider tunnel, you pass many more tunnel openings. They all look alike and . . . and . . .

There it is again, you think. What is it that's so bothersome about this place?

A foul stench assails your nostrils, adding measurably to your mental discomfort. Suddenly, the edge of your torchlight illuminates a tunnel opening quite different from the rest.



Lying in the stone archway, you see a dead body. It is decayed beyond recognition and stinks horribly. Shredded rags that once might have been fine clothes do nothing to cover the moldering, putrid heap.

But worst of all is the obvious fact that this corpse has been serving as a meal for something—maybe many meals for many somethings. Large gouts of rotting flesh have been torn away from the body, and many of the bones are broken. An arm lies to one side, covered with teeth marks. The entrails are scattered about and dried and the cracked bones have been sucked dry of all their marrow.

“What,” you ask with poorly masked horror, “would butcher a corpse like that?”

A light touch on your shoulder nearly scares you out of your skin. You spin around to see Julian standing behind you, his own face a mask of fear.

“Ghouls,” he says in a quivering voice. He swallows hard to keep the contents of his stomach in place. “Only ghouls could do that. Or carrion crawlers, though they don’t usually leave dinner laying about. Either way, we’ll have no end of trouble if we run into them before we get out of here.”

“Then let’s leave,” you begin. But as you turn to go, you notice something that escaped your attention before. Not only are the tunnel openings all alike, but each is spaced the same distance from the last.

At last you realize what has been bothering you. The tunnel openings, the stench, and the corpse finally add up to one terrible conclusion.

You are in a maze!

In a panic, you run back down the wider tunnel, passing several of the openings before you stop.

“Julian,” you whisper harshly, the gut-wrenching feeling inside you putting an edge in your voice. “Do you know which of these openings we came in by?”

He looks at you for a confused moment. Then, slowly, the horrifying implications of your question spreads across his face. His eyes wide with alarm, he shakes his head. “No! No, I don’t!”

You spin about again and run down the tunnel, poking your head into each of the smaller openings you pass. Some of them reek of carrion flesh, and you realize all too well what that means.

Turn to **199**.

100

You inch your way across the ancient bridge, listening carefully to Julian’s shouted instructions. Slowly, ever so slowly, you near the end of the span.

The last few feet of the trembling bridge finally pass beneath your feet. As you lead your horse onto firm

ground, Julian applauds your efforts loudly.

"Well done, Wyn!" he cries enthusiastically. "I knew you could do it if you just listened to me!"

You smile weakly. You don't feel like telling him how many times you didn't hear him clearly and trusted to blind luck. The bridge crossing was a harrowing experience, to say the least.

But that is soon forgotten. The wide trail continues down the cavern wall toward the strange house at the distant end of the cavern. You waste no time before heading in that direction. Turn to 133.

101

You thought you had seen the worst of the Way of Death. You were wrong! Inching along the tunnel ledge above the rapids is the hardest thing you have ever done. Your whole body aches. Taut, cramping muscles refuse to move. Your fingers are torn and bleeding. Fatigue clouds your thinking, and you cannot go on like this, not even a few more feet.

Despairing thoughts bombard your brain, defeating you on the most dangerous level. They break your concentration and snap the force of will that drives your muscles and sinews. The quest, the Breath of Life, the princess, all fade from your mind. You can't hold on any longer.



Suddenly, your foot hits a treacherous patch of slick moss. That's all it takes. With a moan, you tumble headlong into the roiling rapids.

Startled, Julian makes a vain attempt to grab you, but you are already gone. Turn to 140.

102

As the assassins approach, you make up your mind to deal with them on the spot. You utter a silent prayer and emerge from your vantage point.

"Well, gentlemen," you say loudly, "a pleasant night for a walk, isn't it? Can I help you find anything?" You hope Julian back at the campsite hears you. You also hope that the sound doesn't call the other horsemen up from the road.

But you really don't have time to worry about them. The two in front of you immediately freeze in their tracks. They glance at each other for a split second and nod. The sound of steel sliding from scabbards rings in the night air as they draw their weapons.

"No help needed," one of them snarls. "We seem to have found just what we're looking for."

The gauntlet is cast, the challenge issued . . . the fight is on!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 9 or less, turn to **68**. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **81**.

103

The old man watches you closely, blue lightning writhing up and down his arms. You, in turn, observe him, your sword at the ready. You hope and pray that your ability to detect evil has not left you.

And it hasn't! As you gaze at him, a familiar feeling of warmth and reassurance washes over you. You know there is nothing evil about this old codger.

You straighten from your battle crouch. With both hands, you turn your sword point down and drive it into the ground in front of you.

"Good sir," you call out to the old man, "we have no intention to harm you or interrupt your nightly vigil here. Julian, come out. We have nothing to fear from this venerable stranger."

As Julian steps out from behind the rocks on the other side of the clearing, the old man's gaze upon you softens. He watches Julian walk a wide circle around him, hands

outstretched and empty of weapons, a universal sign of peace. At last, with both of you in front of him, he lowers his arms, and the blue lightning fades away. He heaves a sigh of relief before speaking.

“Good evening and well met,” he says at last. “I’ve already had to dispose of two others who disturbed me earlier today. They weren’t so civil as you . . . but then, assassins are never really civil. I don’t think you would wish to hear their fate.”

He stands a little taller, straightening his back as much as he can. With a knowing twinkle in his eyes, he continues.

“My name is Djen-Eric. And, though I’ll never understand the reason for such a quest, I know why you’re here. I think I can help you find the path into the Way of Death!”

Turn to 12.

104

The rich color and succulent smell of the deep red fluid in your goblet is most inviting. You lift your goblet in acknowledgement of her toast and take a drink.

She smiles appreciatively. Too appreciatively, you notice. Suddenly, the smile broadens into a maniacal laugh. Before your startled eyes, she begins to change. Her face hardens, her expression becomes more severe. Even her dress begins to change color, becoming black and more revealing. Her voice, once warm and comfortable, turns cold and gravelly.

“I am so glad you have decided to stay, my fine young bucks,” she grates. “I know you’ll like it here, even though there won’t be much for you to do but stand around—like the others. But, I will certainly enjoy your company . . . for a long, long time.”

In horror, you realize what has happened. Soon, you will be as stiff and solid as the surrounding statues. Now you know why they are so lifelike. They were once travelers like you!

You feel the effects of the potion she has given you taking hold of your legs. You struggle to your feet, but the feeling creeps up your thighs. “We will find a way to stop this,” you

proclaim defiantly, “or die trying.”

“Then die you must,” she chortles, “for the only cure for this potion is a draught from the purest water in the world, from the spring in the middle of the garden. I doubt you will be able to get any now.” She laughs wickedly again.

If you received a vial from the old mage, turn to **83**. If you filled your waterskin at the spring, turn to **35**. If you have neither vial or waterskin of spring water, turn to **15**.

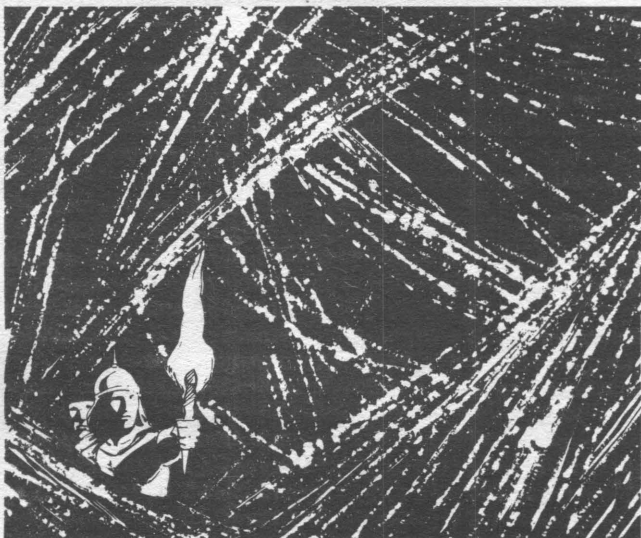
105

Something about the dark tunnel is both intriguing and challenging. And you are not one to back down from a challenge.

“Julian,” you announce, “we’re going in. I want to see what’s down there.”

Julian rolls his eyes heavenward, knowing from your tone of voice that you’re off to conquer some challenge.

Your torches pierce the darkness as you enter the tunnel. The dust covering the floor is deep and thick, and undis-



turbed. Nobody has been down this tunnel for many years. The walls are clean and dry for the first twenty or thirty feet, but gradually, you begin to run into cobwebs crisscrossing the tunnel. Soon, the cobwebs form virtual walls that block the tunnel from wall to wall and ceiling to floor.

You stop the horses and stare down the tunnel. In the distance, past several layers of cobwebs, your torchlight dimly reveals what may be a door. You dismount and hand your horse's reins to Julian. "I'm going in there—alone—to see if that door is what I think it is. No sense in both of us risking our lives. Just be ready to get me if there's any trouble."

"Wait . . ." Julian begins to protest, but you are already moving. With torch in hand, you reach out to sweep aside the first wall of cobwebs.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **138**. If the total is 10 or less, turn to **119**.



106

The deadly statues begin to hem you in.

"Julian," you call out as you relieve another statue of its sword arm. "Make for the left archway or we'll be surrounded again!"

Hacking and slashing, you fight your way to the left portal, forcing your way through the statues and into the next room. While Julian holds the statues at the doorway, you whirl about to check your escape route.

It's a dead end! There's no way out but up, and the walls are just too high to get over. You grimly turn to face the statues crowding the door. You're going to have to fight your way out and try the other portal. Without a second's thought, you call to Julian and charge the archway, into the stone weapons of the statues.

But they do not give way so easily, and you are wounded before you clear the door. Subtract 2 hit points from your

hit point total. If your hit point total drops to zero, you have died. Turn to **67**.

If you still have hit points left, roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If your total is 13 or more, you make it out of this room without any further damage; turn to **73**. If the total is 12 or less, you must repeat this section.



107

A blaze of agony streaks across your senses as the assassin's knife finds your flesh. Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total. You spring back from your attacker. He grins evilly and starts to circle you, waiting for another opening in your defenses.

Your own warm blood flows from the assassin's cut. You watch him cautiously, waiting for the poison to cloud your mind and freeze your body. *Why does he continue to press his attack?* you think in confusion. *He has already killed me.*

Oddly, you feel none of the haze or chilling numbness usually caused by poison. Suddenly, a flood of relief washes over you. Perhaps his blade is not poisoned after all!

No time to think. Your foe senses your relief and renews his attack. In a flash, he springs on you again.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 12 or more, turn to **45**. If the total is 11 or less, repeat this section.

108

The old man's effortless subdual of Julian is quite impressive. A frontal assault would only net you the same fate. You decide that a different approach is called for.

Taking your sword hilt in both hands, you drive its point into the ground. Add 1 honor point to your honor point total for responding to your wisdom's promptings.

"Old man," you begin humbly, "I must apologize for our rather hostile intrusion. We have good reason to suspect strangers in these parts. And our mission here must not—cannot—be delayed."

The old man stares at you a moment. Then, oddly enough, he smiles. He lowers his arms and the blue lightning fades away. Julian stumbles forward, freed from the bonds of the holding magic.

"I suspected you'd think better of attacking me," the old man croaks. "I knew you to be a good man even as you stepped into my firelight. You see, you crossed a little spell of mine when you came in here. Why, I not only know what type of man you are, but I know why you're here."

You look at him suspiciously. He catches your glance and cackles heartily.

"Oh, don't get your hackles up. I'm not going to tell anyone. Besides, who's there to tell? And who do you think would believe me? Everyone knows that anyone looking for the Gates of Death is a fool."

Turn to 12.

109

Julian is waving his arms frantically. Too late, you see horror painted on his face. Too late you shift your weight, and your armored foot comes down and continues down, through rotten boards that splinter beneath you.

Suddenly, the whole section of the bridge begins to collapse. You grab for the inside railing, but your horse is spooked by the sudden shift of the planks beneath her. She neighs in terror and bolts past you to the other end of the bridge.

That only makes matters worse for you. Her charge rattles the bridge even more and it begins to slide away from the wall, boards falling into the water below with distant splashes.

Backward you go! You crash through the splintering boards and begin to fall toward the river. You grab desper-



ately for a solid beam. If you can just reach it . . .

Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **36**. If the total is 9 or less, turn to **193**.

110

You step through the narrow archway at the top of the hidden stairway onto a wide, flat landing. Thrusting out from the landing across the space separating the two gigantic pillars is the bridge you have struggled so long to reach.

The bridge itself is jet black and smooth as glass. Its long, flat span is surrounded by swirling mists that boil about the bridge though they are blown by no apparent wind. You notice that it is cooler here, and the light is different as well. It seems to be clearer and more brilliant. Looking up, you see the reason for all these strange differences.

The ceiling of this great cavern is covered with a thick layer of ice. It glistens a pure white as it reflects the phosphorescent glow of the cavern walls. The coolness of the air creates the swirling mist that prevails up here.

But all that you observe is immediately tossed to the back of your mind as your eyes come to rest upon what lies at the far end of the bridge. For there, barred by a dull black portcullis, is another narrow archway. The tunnel behind the black gate enters the smooth pillar, from within which pulses a warm, red-orange glow.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **187**. If the total is 9 or less, turn to **195**.

111

The tunnel to the right seems to be the easiest way to go, and indeed it is. Once inside, you travel behind what must be the right wall of the cavern, the tunnel neither turning nor twisting. Your torches light the way quite nicely.

After a long, boring march, you come to a fork where the tunnel splits into three others. One of the passageways bears off to the right, ending in what seems to be a distant light. A cool breeze blows softly down this tunnel, smelling of the out-of-doors.

The path in front of you leads off into darkness. It appears to be as straight and true as the one you came down, but it is pitch dark.

The tunnel that bears to the left terminates in an eerie glow. The color of the light reminds you of the light in the main cavern.

If you want to go right, turn to 167. If you go straight, turn to 105. If you decide to go left, turn to 88.

112

The four other gypsies join you at the table. They are all pleasant enough and certainly caught up in the festive spirit of the occasion. The first gypsy waits for your acceptance of his offer.

“Well, of course,” you shout, “certainly we will drink with you. A toast to your health!”

He smiles broadly as he tops off your tankards from his flask. “Your health!” he proposes in return and tips the flask up to his mouth.

Soon your tongue is wagging freely. You blithely tell the gypsy and his friends all about your mission and destination. They nod knowingly, offering advice on the dangers of the Mountains of Shadow.

“And most of all,” says the gypsy leader, “avoid strangers in the mountains. They can be no end of trouble.”

But your head is nodding, your mind moving so slowly that you can barely comprehend what he is saying. It sounds so reasonable, though. *Avoid strangers on the road, sure . . . cause trouble, certainly . . . but, aren't all of you straaa . . . ?*

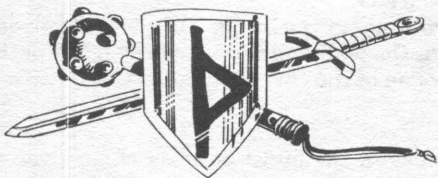
Your head hits the table with a loud thump. Julian's is already there. You don't feel a thing, not even the strong arms that lift your unconscious bodies and carry you out of the inn. Turn to 144.

113

You lean against the rough surface of the pillar and congratulate yourself silently. You've made it up a hundred feet without falling. The slant of this conical monolith coupled with the rocky handholds makes the climb much

easier than you thought it would be. At this rate, you should soon reach the distant bridge between the pillars.

Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 8 or less, turn to **134**. If the total is 9 or more, you have scaled another hundred feet. Repeat or return to this section until you have successfully climbed a total of eight hundred feet. Once you reach eight hundred feet, turn to **160**.



114

Something about the towering toadstools and strangely colored vegetation challenges you to enter this weird, subterranean forest. You decide to go straight ahead.

“Besides,” you reason out loud, “it looks like the quickest, straightest path to the other end of the cavern.”

“If it leads to the other end of the cavern,” Julian counters uncertainly.

“But of course it does,” you respond. “Where else could it lead?”

Julian silently prods his mount forward in resignation.

You are mildly surprised by his lack of response. *What's his problem?* you think. *He's usually not reluctant to follow my lead. Is something bothering him—something about this place—that he's not telling me?* Curious, you spur your mount forward and follow him closely into the multicolored garden. Turn to **186**.

115

The Ki-Rin's judgment is based on your honor point total. If you have 0-1 honor points or none, turn to **148**. If you have 2-3 honor points, turn to **173**. If you have 4 or more honor points, turn to **153**.

116

The gravel path crunches under your feet as you emerge from the tunnel. The cavern's phosphorescence glows about you, lighting the bridge on your left and the path back to where you started to the right.

"The bridge," Julian asks tentatively, "or the garden?"

"Or that tunnel over on the other side of the cavern?" you finish. None of the alternatives look very promising.

But then, anything called the "Way of Death" wasn't meant to be easy.

If you want to try the bridge, turn to **9**. If you decide to go back down the wall and try one of the other paths leading to the far end of the cavern, turn to **128**.

117

You flounder in the midst of a sea of carnivorous plants. Shriekers assail your ears with piercing sound. Violet fungi inject your flesh with rotting spores. Archer bushes shoot innumerable thorns that prick your body. The vines slash and tear.

Too many wounds, you think wearily, and too many plants!

Julian has long since gone down. You have not seen him rise. With a vine constricting your throat, you fall to your knees. Feebly, you reach up to pull off the vine, but it is no use. Your suffocating brain cannot drive your actions any longer. As you fall to the ground, all goes black.

Mercifully, you do not see or feel the hungry plants leech the very life out of your dying body.

Turn to **67**.

118

The gory remains lying between the two spires are most unsettling. You feel no compulsion at all to examine them or get anywhere near them. Besides, no self-respecting paladin would disturb the rest of the dead. More important to you right now is how they got there. That, of course, turns your attention to the pillars.

Add 1 honor point to your honor point total for respecting the dead and turn to **27**.

You sweep aside several layers of cobwebs as you stride boldly to the end of the tunnel. Your torchlight reveals an intricately carved door with a brass doorknob. Below the doorknob, a keyhole glows with a dim red light. You reach out, grab the doorknob, and twist. It doesn't move.

Your first hint of trouble is a sound, a deep rumbling noise coming from behind you. You spin around to see a huge stone block drop across the tunnel between you and Julian. Immediately, you forget the door and charge toward the slab. Maybe you can get under it before . . .

If ever you needed your trained reflexes, now is the time! Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **146**. If the total is 9 or less, turn to **95**.

The sun is setting behind the low hills to the west as you approach the inn. Riding slowly toward the inn's gate, you see a rather thin and frazzled man leaning against the gate post. He is wiping his brow and breathing heavily as you ride up.

"Ho, there," you shout when you are near him, "can you help us? We're looking for a room for the night in yonder inn. If you know the innkeeper, would you direct us to him so we can make arrangements?"

He looks up at you with weary eyes and a very tired expression.

"If you seek the innkeeper, you have found him, though I am not my usual self this evening. If you seek a room, that I can give you as well. If you seek peace and quiet, I'm afraid you're out of luck."

You and Julian both laugh as you dismount and lead your horses through the gate. The harried innkeeper still retains his sense of humor—and business sense. You quickly secure a secluded room in the back of the inn. The innkeeper talks as he takes your money.

"Here's the key. Your room should be far enough away from the commotion to allow you a good night's sleep. If you like, go inside and join the festivities. I'm sure my daugh-

ter and her friends would be honored by your presence. I'll be back to keep an eye on things shortly. Right now, I'd best take care of your horses."

As the innkeeper heads off to the stables with your tired mounts, you look at Julian. It is obvious he wants to join the party. You do too, if the truth were known. But still . . .

If you go directly to your room, turn to **155**.

If you decide to join the guests at the party, turn to **168**.



121

Moving to one side, Julian shows you what he has found. It is a tiny metal box. The wires spanning the tunnel enter the box through incredibly small holes in its side and top. On the side of the box closest to you, you can see a small, hinged glass dome. Under the dome is a keyhole that glows with a dim red light.

"This seems to be a rather elaborate warning system or trap to keep out unwanted visitors," Julian remarks thoughtfully. "I wonder what is so important that it needs this kind of protection."

"I have the same question," you answer dryly. "Perhaps the Gates lie at the end of this tunnel, or the Breath of Life itself. But that matters very little if we can't get down the tunnel to see what it might be. How do you propose to get by this little obstacle?"

Julian rises and looks at you.

"To be perfectly honest with you," he begins, "I don't. This is certainly beyond anything I have ever seen or overcome." He stops and looks again at the box before he continues.

"It would seem we need a key," he concludes.

If you have met the old mage and received a key, turn to **151**. If not, turn to **196**.

As soon as you enter the tunnel behind the portcullis, you know you are in a hallowed place. This is indeed where you will find the Gates of Death.

The tunnel is dimly lit by the soft red glow emanating from the chamber beyond. As you walk slowly and respectfully down its forty-foot length, you note that the walls of the tunnel are honeycombed with shallow, hexagonal grottos about two feet across and one or two inches deep. A smooth, unbroken slab of unfamiliar material forms the back of each grotto, and a name is carved into each slab. The whole place reminds you of a mausoleum, and you feel certain you know what lies behind the slabs.

Suddenly, one of the small grottos catches your eye. It is about halfway up the left wall at the end of the tunnel and is clearly visible in the light. It is different then all the rest because it is a good six feet deep. And it is empty.

Waiting to be filled, you think morosely. This one will be mine if I fail.

As you stand before the empty crypt, the light grows brighter. You turn to face the chamber and see at last the source of the illumination.

You are standing at the edge of a circular room about fifty feet across. Looking up, you are astonished to find that there is no ceiling. The chamber seems to rise above your head countless feet to open sky. But it is a sky like no other you have seen. Its orange and mauve swirls defy description, and the sun that shines in that sky burns with a brilliant red glow.

Sky? Sun? You try in vain to comprehend what you are seeing. You are in a chamber inside a tower, in a grotto, under a mountain, and you are looking up into a skyscape from another world. How can this be?

Something tells you that you are no longer really in the Mountains of Shadow. By passing through the portcullis, you must have crossed some kind of dimension door. You may be standing at the gate to myriad planes of existence.

As if to confirm your suspicions, your gaze falls on an object standing at the far wall of the room. You never

thought you'd live to see one of these.

Turn to **190**.

123

You raise your sword and begin to circle around the old man. At the same time, you whistle shrilly. *No need taking any chances, you think. Let's make sure this old man doesn't do anything foolish.*

On cue, Julian charges out from behind the rocks on the other side of the fire, his mace whirling in his hand.

The old man never takes his eyes off you. Instead, he twitches his fingers and one of the tendrils of blue light leaps off his arm and arches across the clearing. Just as Julian is about to leap, the blue light wraps and slithers around his body, lifting him slightly into the air. Then, it returns to the old man's arm, leaving the young priest frozen in his tracks.

"Well," the old man says, continuing to gaze at you intently, "that was foolish. Now, what are you doing here and what do you want with me? Be quick. And I hope, for your sake, your confederate's belligerent attitude isn't one you share."

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the number is 8 or more, turn to **108**. If it is 7 or less, turn to **139**.

124

Faster and faster, the undertow pulls you along. You make a desperate lunge to break free of its grasp, but it is too late. You and Julian rush toward the pitch-dark cave at breakneck speed.

The roar of rushing water reaches your ears. Suddenly you realize what is happening. The cave is just the opening to still another tunnel. The water from the lake empties swiftly into that tunnel, leading to the gods only know where. That rushing water forms . . .

"... Rapids!" you manage to shout. "Julian, hang on. We may be able to ride . . ."

Your words are drowned in the roar of the rapids that suck you down the long, dark tunnel. Turn to **140**.

You lean wearily against the stone wall of the tunnel and slide slowly to the ground. Weeks of searching have led you nowhere at all. You are hopelessly, irretrievably lost in the maze. Time and time again you have passed the decayed and rotting remnants of some other lost soul unable to find his way out. Some looked as though they had been partially eaten. *More of the ghouls' handiwork*, you think, shuddering.

You have run into them a few times since your first encounter. Sometimes they fled from your holy symbols; other times you had to fight. Was there no end of them? You've killed so many, but then, anyone killed by a ghoul becomes one, a self-replenishing supply.

Julian begins to prepare the last of your food supply. You hated to do it, but the horses had to be sacrificed to your hunger as long as there was any hope of completing your quest. That hope has long since run out. The princess never received the Breath of Life, and you will soon join her, perhaps to serve her in death more successfully than you did in life.

When the ghouls attack for the last time, you are too weak to even stand before them. The end is mercifully quick. ☩



You stare at the young priest in disbelief.

"More difficult?" you whisper harshly. "Now what?"

Julian pulls out the envelope that he had stuffed into his robes. "I'm commanded by the high priest to give this to you personally. I was just going to leave for the stables,

thinking you may already be headed that way. The high priest says you're to read this immediately and leave at once."

As he hands you the note, you eye him suspiciously. He catches your glance and starts to chuckle again.

"Still suspicious, are you?" he asks. "Well, set your mind at ease, Wyn. If I had intended to steal anything, you would never have caught me in the first place."

Unless you intended to get caught, you think. I'm going to keep my eye on you, Julian.

Quickly you take the envelope. As you thought, it is indeed marked by the royal seal. You tear into it eagerly, anxious to learn what news is going to make your already difficult task even more so. The note is in the high priest's handwriting and has his seal at the bottom. It reads:

Esteemed Wyn,

I send you greetings and salutations via my personal and most trusted messenger, Julian. Do not let his sudden appearance startle you. He is there on my command.

Things have changed drastically. Your quest has now become a race against time. The princess's condition has worsened. She will die if we do not have the Breath of Life in our hands in six days' time!

You stop reading and slump into a nearby chair.

"Six days' time," you gasp, looking up at Julian. "How can he expect me to return with the Breath of Life in six days? I don't even know the way . . ."

Julian holds up his hand to stop you.

"Read on, Wyn," he counsels, "your questions will be answered."

The rest of the note reads:

I know this must seem like an impossible task to you, Wyn, but do not despair. My vision of your success still persists. And I am sending you some help. Julian will accompany you on the quest. Please do not attempt to reject his help or counsel. This is in

accordance with the laws of penance of the order. He is familiar with the Mountains of Shadow, having spent many soul-searching days in them. This quest will also serve as part of his initiation into the order.

You already have the map that will lead you to the Mountains of Shadow. It shows the most direct route we know of and will carry you through a large part of the wilderness. The "X" marks the end of the trail as we know it. We believe there are at least three entrances to the Way of Death mentioned in the lay. They may or may not be hidden. Regardless, you *must* arrive there in two days, find the Breath of Life, and return it to us before midnight of the sixth day.

Leave immediately. I know of the archdruid's plans to delay you. You see, I have eyes and ears everywhere myself. All has been prepared for you and awaits you in the stables.

Faith and good speed. Our hopes ride with you.

The note ends with the high priest's distinctive signature. *No chance of forgery there*, you think. This Julian must be the real item.

"Well," you sigh resignedly, "it appears as though we have quite a task before us, Julian." You look up at him and see that he is watching you intently. His eyes glisten with anticipation.

"I say that we'd best be off, then," he says excitedly. "I have no wish to delay any longer."

Something in his eager tone and attitude lifts the full burden of your task from your shoulders. You begin to feel a certain camaraderie with this young priest. His mood is infectious.

"Then let us be off!" you shout, standing and marching for the door. "It appears that all is ready for us to go on. To the stables!"

"Aye," he cheers in reply, "to the stables . . . and then to the Mountains of Shadow."

You reach the stables in no time. All is in readiness for you—food, horses, armor, weapons, everything. Soon you

are galloping out of the castle courtyard and across the drawbridge. But as you reach the road leading away from the castle, you cast a quick look over your shoulder at your rapidly diminishing home. You see that Julian is doing the same. As he turns his face to look forward, you see your own troubled thought mirrored in his expression: will we ever see our home again? Turn to 53.



127

You are dead.

This thought enters your mind as a simple statement of fact. Oddly enough, it doesn't concern you overly much. Perhaps that is because you are intimately aware of all around you, more so than you ever were in life. In a very real way, you don't feel dead.

But I must be, you think. I can see my own body lying dead in the center of the chamber of the Ki-Rin! You are looking down as if you were floating above it. The faceless minions have returned to their grotto crypts, leaving your physical body alone there. You can hear/feel their tortured thoughts in their strange, undead sleep.

All seems strangely dark and dim. The red glow that previously lit the room is gone. As you float in this ethereal limbo, you become aware of a person—Julian?—standing nearby at the end of a tunnel. He seems to be calling your name, but it is hard to hear him clearly. Soon his voice disappears altogether.

You look about you and see nothing but darkness, though you can still feel the room and the tunnel beyond. Then you look up. You seem to be in a tube or well of darkness. High above you is a light. Even as you see it, you begin to move toward it. Looking back, you see your body receding below you. Soon it is out of sight. You return your gaze to the light, much closer now and taking on a definite color.

Suddenly you burst out into the light. Immediately, all

movement ceases. You find yourself standing on a featureless dreamlike plain that stretches to infinity in all directions. Above, blazing brilliantly in a sky of orange and mauve swirls, shines a red sun.

It is the same sky you saw in the chamber where you died. You have crossed the Gates! But to where? And how do you find the Breath of Life?

Turn to **150**.

128

You get the definite impression that this way is a dead end. The tunnel doesn't lead off in the right direction and the bridge would probably collapse if you so much as stepped on it, to say nothing of the horses. Then you'd end up in that river and . . .

No. Better just to go back to where the garden starts and try something else.

The walk back doesn't take long. Now, if you want to go through the gaudy garden, turn to **114**. If you think the right-hand path into the tunnel (another tunnel!) is the better way, turn to **111**.

129

As the old man turns to face you, you call your perceptive abilities into play. This old man could simply be a harmless illusionist, or he could be a very powerful mage. He may hinder you, or he may not.

Things are not always what they seem.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If it is 8 or less, turn to **123**. If the number is 9 or more, turn to **103**.

130

Inching along the narrow ledge above the rapids is the hardest physical task you have ever done. Your whole body aches. Your muscles are taut, hands and calves cramped, fingers torn and bleeding. You fear you cannot possibly go any farther.

But years of training come to the fore now. *I am a paladin of the order*, you remember. *The high priest is counting on*

me. The princess's life depends on me! I will not fail them or the quest! You put your entire will and strength to the task of staying on this ledge and making it through!

After a seemingly endless ordeal, the light around you increases. A strange glow, like that in the previous caverns, reveals the end of the tunnel. Only a few more feet and you will make it out of this hellhole!

You finally emerge from the end of the tunnel and collapse to the ground. It is many minutes before either of you is aware of anything but your pounding hearts and aching muscles. When your eyes finally register your surroundings, you gape in awe. You are in a wonderland beyond your wildest imaginings.

Turn to 178.

131

Try as you might, you can think of nothing but outright battle. And the plants don't give you much time to think. Ravenous and hungry, they attack you fiercely. You fight to deny them their meal. It's a hard, desperate fight, the most desperate you have ever fought. It is one you must not lose!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 13 or less, you have been wounded by the deadly plants. Roll one die and subtract that number of hit points from your total. If the total is 14 or more, you are not injured, but must continue to fight the plants.

Repeat this section four more times, then check your hit point total. If you run out of hit points during your fight in the garden, turn to 117. If you have any hit points left, turn to 55.

132

The assassin also hears the noise from the grove. He does not wait to see what it is, but springs in to attack.

Whoever or whatever is in the undergrowth will have to wait, you think. I've got to deal with this assassin now!

A drastic maneuver flashes into your mind. Without a moment's thought, you lunge forward and feign a stumble. The assassin howls with delight and leaps at you as you fall.



But your fall becomes a somersault. Up comes your sword to ward off the assassin. Too late, he sees his mistake. He cannot stop, and runs headlong into its sharp point! His own momentum drives the blade through his chest and out his back.

Impaled on your sword, the assassin glares at you malevolently. With one last reflexive jerk, he tries to bury his dagger in your throat. The blow lands wide, and the blade quivers in the ground by your head.

You swiftly plant your foot under the dead assassin's rib cage. You heave his limp body up and over your head, extracting your blade at the same time. There may yet be time to deal with the attack from behind you in the grove.

You spring to your feet and twist to face your new assailants. To your surprise, a robed figure steps out of the grove, clapping his hands softly. It is Julian.

"Well done, friend," he says, hardly able to contain his praise. "I have never before seen anyone dispatch two assassins like these with such skill and flair. I could not have done better myself. Congratulations. Tell me, where did they come from?"

You quickly explain to him about the riders. He looks troubled.

"Your idea to post a guard tonight was good. I'll take my

turn now. Relieve me in two hours, but don't sleep too heavily. I may need your expert assistance before the night is through."

Mark one day off your time track. Luckily, you have no more trouble this night. *But where did those other horsemen go?* you ask yourself. And will *they try to ambush you later?* Those nagging questions do not let sleep come to you very easily.

Facing the assassins in honorable combat—and dispatching both of them—has earned you 2 honor points. Add them to your honor point total, then turn to **71**.

133

You take a short moment to congratulate yourselves. A feeling of elation fills you as you walk out onto the wide stretch of open bedrock. You somehow know that you are past the first deadly section of the Way of Death. You've gotten this far alive!

But curiosity soon pushes your elation aside as you take in the sight before you. The cavern ceiling drops down dramatically here, leaving an opening that is twenty or thirty feet wide, ten feet high, and at least fifty feet deep. It appears that this large, spacious tunnel leads to another cavern beyond. The next step along the Way of Death to the Gates should be easy.

And it would be if the entire opening were not blocked by a most fascinating and beautiful building. Turn to **163**.

134

As you climb, your foot misses a projection and the weight of your body breaks your handhold on the sharp rocks. Luckily, the slant of the conical pillar and its rough surface give you something to catch yourself on, but you've slipped down the pillar's unforgiving surface. You rest a moment to assess the extent of several painful bruises and cuts.

Subtract 1 hit point from your hit point total. If this reduces your hit points to zero, turn to **67**. If you still have hit points left, roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 9 or more, turn to **113**. If it is 8 or less, repeat this section.

The damp granite tunnel gets damper and brighter as you walk. You reach the end and step out into bright sunlight.

"What did I tell you?" Julian says testily. "The breeze was . . ."

"Yes, I know," you reply tersely, a little put out at him, ". . . 'coming from the outside.' You were right."

You are standing on the side of the mountain on a large ledge overlooking the northern slopes of the range. Behind you, the mountain rises into the clouds high above your head. At your feet, the cliff drops straight down a hundred feet or more. Near the bottom of the drop, almost lost in its own mist, is a waterfall—the outlet of the river from the cavern inside. Trying the bridge looks even more uninviting now that you know where you could end up.

But this route has gotten you nowhere as well. Disappointed, you turn around and start back down the tunnel toward the underground cavern. Soon you arrive at the fork you passed earlier.

If you want to try the other fork in the tunnel, turn to **152**. If you'd rather go straight back to the garden cavern, turn to **116**.

You see a quick flicker of movement from the assassin's left hand. Immediately you realize your danger. He has a second blade up his other sleeve!

In panic you grab for that wrist, but he is too fast for you. He lashes out with his left hand. Hot pain springs to your arm as blood spurts from a deep gash across the back of your hand.

A red haze of shock clouds your vision. You stare dumbly at your bleeding hand as the chuckling assassin easily steps out of your already slackening grip. You look up to see him sliding a tiny, razor-sharp blade back into a hidden sheath in his sleeve. The poison was there!

Your legs and chest slowly go numb as you slide to the floor. The last thought you have as you watch the assassin leave is that you will be crossing the Gates of Death far sooner than you had suspected. The quest is over before it

even started. Go back to the beginning of the adventure and try again. It is to be hoped that you will be a little wiser or more skillful this time. Good luck! ✕

137

The stairs, the marble veranda, and even the bedrock in front of the house are littered with dozens of crystalline statues. They are exquisite and incredibly lifelike. *Why, only a real human body could be more perfect*, you think. They are carved in various poses and seem to represent adventurers of all types, both male and female.

You and Julian ride slowly through the collection of statues in amazement. Leaving your horses at the bottom, you carefully mount the wide, shallow steps to the veranda, doing your best not to disturb any of the statues.

When you reach the top, Julian quickly trots over to the left side of the house. You watch him curiously as he disappears around the corner. Soon, he reappears to report.

"There seems to be a gap at the left end of the house, between the building and the cavern wall. I went down it a short way and it's big enough for us to slide through. Unfortunately, we will have to leave the horses here. It doesn't look like they could make it through. There seems to be a large body of water in the next cavern."

"But what's wrong with approaching the door?" you ask him pointedly.

"I was afraid you'd ask that," he grumbles. "Look, until we know exactly what lives here, discretion might be the better part of valor. Besides, these statues make me uneasy. They are just too . . . well, too . . ."

"Too human," you finish for him. "Yes, I agree. This is all very strange. It may be wiser to try to avoid the house altogether. But still . . ."

If you decide to go around the left end of the house, turn to **93**. If you go through the door, turn to **154**.

138

Even as you reach the cobwebs, a faint shiver crawls up your spine. The cobwebs, the tomblike stillness, it all feels so very odd. Almost as if . . .

Your hand freezes as it touches the cobweb wall. "Julian," you command sharply. "I believe we may have some trouble here."

He dismounts quickly and comes up beside you.

"Perhaps you could examine the tunnel here and see if there are any unexpected surprises awaiting us," you whisper, pulling your hand back very carefully and trying not to break a tiny strand of webbing that is stuck to one finger.

Julian, calling on the old thieving skills from his past, begins a very careful inspection of the tunnel around you. After a few short minutes, you hear him chuckle.

"Come here, Wyn," he calls. "Take a look at what we could have stumbled into."

As you draw closer to him, he says, "Look here, and here, and here. Hidden among the cobwebs are several hair-thin wires running from one side of the tunnel to the other. If I hadn't looked, we'd have hit them for sure. They seem to be strung randomly across the whole opening. They couldn't hurt us, but they might trigger something."

Cautiously, Julian follows the hair-thin wires to one side of the tunnel. He stops, mumbling to himself. Then he kneels and begins to brush the dust away from something near the floor of the tunnel.

"Well, well," he mutters. "What have we here?"

Turn to 121.

139

Seeing Julian so callously treated is beyond bearing. And this old codger has the nerve to ask your business here!

"My purpose here is none of your concern," you answer brusquely, "and I am not afraid of what you say you can do, either. Now release my friend, old man, and we will be on our way."

The old man's hackles are up now. He bristles visibly and answers you in kind.

"You'd do well, young whelp, to have more respect for your elders and the privacy of others. If you come barging in here and interrupt my meditations, do you expect me to just sit back and take it? I've already taken care of two others who weren't so civil earlier today—not that assassins

are ever really civil. But if you don't want the same treatment, you'd better start talking."

His audacity pushes your anger to the breaking point. "I *will* start talking," you retort, "but with the edge of my sword!" And with that, you attack him.

If cooler heads had been involved, things might have turned out differently. But both of you let your tempers flare, and so . . .

You dodge and feint left, hurling your dagger at the same time. The mage flicks one of his lightnings at the hurtling blade. Then you twist right and charge in for the attack.

Amazingly, the mage's first lightning catches and holds the flying dagger in mid-air.

His second one catches you.

The blue light arches across the distance between you. Before you can dodge or react, it touches you squarely in the chest.

Your whole body is suddenly jerked taut as a bowstring. Your muscles contract as one in a blaze of pain. You are paralyzed! A blue haze enfolds you and you feel light and airy. Time seems to slow and all you want to do is go to sleep.

And that you do. Subtract 1 hit point from your hit point total. Losing your temper and attacking an old man for no good reason will cost you 2 honor points. Subtract them from your honor point total and turn to **188**.

140

This journey down the rapids could be the end of you and the quest. Roll one die and subtract the result from your hit point total. If this leaves you with any hit points, turn to **165**. If your hit point total is reduced to zero or less, you are dead; turn to **67**.

141

The prickly feeling at your back and Julian's wild signaling can only mean one thing. You are being attacked!

You roll over to face a weird, watery apparition. It looks like a large snake made up entirely of water. It races across the rushing current, jaws agape, intent on striking and holding you in its fangs.



You know what it is: a dreaded water weird. All it has to do is bite you and you are finished.

It lunges at you as you try to roll and scramble to your feet. You make a grab for one of the broken, narrow beams nearby, but you're just too tired. Your body does not respond. The wet stones and swift current knock you off your feet.

A strange, numbing sensation shoots through your body. You look around to see the water weird's fangs locked onto your leg. You try desperately to pound on its fluid head with your fists, but it only grips you tighter. You grab for a stone, but it yanks you toward the water. Stones from overhead land all around you as Julian tries to hit it too, but they do no good.

Slowly the freezing sensation creeps up your body. You cannot move. The weird pulls you easily into the stream to feast off your ebbing life force. The last thing you feel is the

cold, rushing water as it closes over your head. The quest for the Breath of Life is all over for you. Maybe Julian will succeed . . . ✕

142

The rich color and succulent smell of the shimmering, deep red fluid in your goblet is most inviting.

But as you gaze into its red depths, those voices in your mind begin to sing danger, immediate and deadly danger!

As if the goblet were some sort of foul beast, you fling it across the room. It bursts against the wall. Julian, shocked by your action, drops his goblet in his lap.

Instantly, you spring to your feet and confront your hostess, who appears shocked by your behavior.

"I do not know what you intend," you growl menacingly, "but I feel you mean us no good. Julian, I think it's time for us to leave."

The woman breaks into tears and turns her back on you. "I only wanted you to stay a short while," she weeps. "A simple drug to make you a more permanent guest is all there was in the drink." She continues to weep, mumbling other unheard words.

Your anger abates for a moment. Perhaps she is only a lonely woman needing some company.

Before your heart can fully relent, you feel a blanket of power descend upon the room. Instinctively, you reach for your sword. To your surprise, you hear a cold, gravelly voice say, "Now, my lovelies, show these young upstarts what happens to those who reject my hospitality."

The woman spins around. A devilish change has come over her. She is now a haggard, evil caricature of the lovely woman who greeted you. As she raises her arms, the statues in the room start to move. Weapons in hand, they attack you! Turn to 48.

143

Morning dawns cold and crisp. You and Julian awaken bright and early, anxious to thank the old mage for guarding your sleep. Then, you will be on your way.

But, to your surprise, the old man is gone. You search the

area for signs of him, but you find nothing. Suddenly, a cry from Julian brings you back to the campsite.

"Look here," he says, beaming. "I found it over by the fire."

He hands you a small pouch with your name on it. You open it to find a key, a tiny vial of liquid, and a short note. The note reads:

Young men: I bid you farewell. My duties and desires call me elsewhere. But I wish you good luck and gods' speed on your quest. Remember the cave and tunnel I told you of and accept these little gifts—the key and the warding potion—as tokens of my esteem. I know something of the place, so believe me, you will need these. You will meet some very nasty things in there. I trust you'll know when to use my gifts. Adieu,

Djen-Eric

Smiling, you hand the note to Julian. He reads it quickly and returns your smile.

"Let's be off then," you shout. "I'm anxious to be going."

"I am too," echoes Julian, bending to gather his things after reading the note. "And I hope the old man is right about knowing when to use his gifts."

Soon you have your gear together. With key and vial tucked in the pouch at your belt, you lead your horses up the mountainside. Sure enough, the cave and tunnel are there. You light your torches and step inside.

Your gut tightens. After all, this *is* part of the Way of Death, isn't it? You will need to be especially cautious.

The tunnel leads you straight into the mountain. Oddly, there are no twists or turns, no obstacles, no traps to beset you, nothing to impede your progress.

Until you reach the fork. Turn to **197**.

144

A brilliant flash of pain lances through your groggy mind. It shoots up and down your whole body, jarring all your senses. Slowly, you begin the sluggish rise through levels of unconsciousness until you are barely awake.

"Where am I?" you mutter groggily. Your only answer is gruff laughter. You lift your heavy head to see a gypsy standing over you. He grins wickedly and grabs you by the hair. Painfully, he jerks your head up and pours a vile, bitter drink down your throat. He laughs again as you gag and sputter. Then he slams your head back down against the stirrup of a horse's saddle.

As he moves away, you try to survey the situation. You are strapped face down across the back of a horse! Your hands and feet are tied together beneath its belly. As you look around, you can see bits and pieces of mountain landscape. You seem to be in a barren mountain pass. An icy wind bites through your tunic. Your armor and weapons are gone and you are almost naked.

You look back to where the gypsy has gone and see Julian. He is strapped to a horse just as you are. The gypsy



deals him a solid slap across the face and pours the same bitter drink down his throat. Then he stands back and looks at you both, grinning evilly.

"Where are you?" he asks, repeating your question in a heavily accented voice. "Why, you are in the passes of the Mountains of Shadow. That is where you were headed, isn't it? Unfortunately for you, your destination has changed a little. We are going on a short trip across the mountains to the slave markets of Zanor. Well, I should say you two are going to the slave markets. I know that there are many in my country who can make good use of such fine specimens—I mean, young men—though I really hate to think about the uses they will find for you. But do not worry, my friends. The drink I gave you will keep you

sleepy and content 'til we arrive in Zanor."

You can't believe your ears. The slave markets of Zanor. Your eyes widen in horror as tales of the atrocities committed there come to mind. You look back at Julian and see the same horror-stricken look in his face. You try vainly to escape your bonds, but already the drugged drink is coursing through your veins. Your struggles dwindle to little more than useless jerking. Soon your head collapses against the side of your horse. Your mission, and the life of the princess, are ended. With a start, the gypsy urges the horses onward, carrying your unconscious bodies to some unknown fate beyond the Mountains of Shadow. ✠

145

The faceless horde closes its circle around you. Each featureless head emanates waves of pure fear, all concentrated on you. You turn around in mindless dread looking for a way out. Your paladin's vows are forgotten. You cannot stand in the face of such overpowering evil. You fall to your hands and knees ready to beg for mercy and freedom from this wretched horror.

The faceless minions stand over you and lash you with cold terror. You shrink farther and farther into ruination.

Then, as if from some great distance in the very depths of your battered mind, arise the words of the old poem the high priest gave you at the start of the quest.

" . . . Meet faceless Death—"Tis here you'll die!
Pass Judgment straight—with Soul unriven;
The Breath of Life at last be given!"

At once, a peaceful calm fills you, sweeping aside your dread like fog before the morning sun. You understand at last what must happen. You realize how the Gates of Death are to be crossed. You must face overwhelming odds, odds that cannot be beaten, and suffer death. It is, perhaps, a test of character, something to show the gods the depth of your conviction. Whatever the case, it is the ultimate test of faith. Do you believe what the high priest told you, all that your faith teaches you, or do you not? Can your faith

override even the horror of death?

You have little time to ponder. As one, the dire minions raise their gleaming clubs to strike. Quietly, you raise your sword in salute. Then, with the strength of your faith singing peace to every fiber of your mind and body, you lay that sword down at your feet.

The end is painful but swift. The faceless ones pounce on you and pound you steadily to the stone floor. A solid blow cracks you near the temple and you feel no more as the darkness of death takes you.

You have sacrificed your life for a noble cause. Add 2 honor points to your honor point total and turn to 127.

146

Your reflexes do not fail you! Gathering your muscles, you spring in a diving lunge toward the dropping slab. If you miss the timing on this . . .

You hit the ground right under the great stone slab, but your momentum carries you into a scrambling roll. *Got to make it!* you think.

Something grabs at your tunic. A split second panic washes over you. *I'm caught on the stone, you think wildly. I'm a dead man!*

Suddenly, you're jerked through the air to come down with a hard thud in a great cloud of dust. When the dust settles, you look up to see your horse's snout descending to nuzzle you gently.

You are alive! You made it!

Julian walks casually over to where you lie. "Sorry to have to toss you around like that," he says chuckling, "but I thought you'd prefer a bruised behind to a crushed head. I hope I was right."

You slowly stand and begin to brush off the dust. *Just like the priest, you think. Somehow he's still able to make light of my mistakes and this perilous situation.*

"Thanks," you reply. "It seems I owe you my life."

"Think nothing of it," he answers. "It's part of my job. This place is proving to be too deadly for just one man to attempt. I wonder how many poor souls have tried to get through here alone and died in the process."



The same thought crosses your mind as well. You wonder, too, if even with two of you you can make it through.

In any case, you're alive. The tunnel behind you is now blocked and useless. Leading your horses, you return to the tunnel intersection. Now you have three choices again. If you go left, down the tunnel with the breeze, turn to **167**. If you go right, down the tunnel with the strange glow at the end, turn to **133**. If you want to go back to the main chamber and try another route altogether, turn to **33**.

147

Your headlong rush through the strange but deadly forest has saved your lives. You burst out into a fairly small clearing, rein in your horses, and take a quick look around.

A huge spring gushes from the solid rock floor of the cavern here. It runs swiftly into a deep channel that years of erosion have carved into the cavern floor and rapidly disappears into a small tunnel in the rock wall on your far left.

The solid stone bedrock extends ten to fifteen feet on either side of the spring and its channel. Bordering the stone is a narrow space of dirt and mulch upon which your horses are now nervously prancing. All around outside of this small safe area near the spring are the plants.

Here, at the center of the garden, the flora has made no attempt to hide grisly and nauseating sights. The fringes of the bizarre garden are littered with rotting flesh and bones. Remnants of rusting swords and armor and reeking carrion of past victims of the garden's voracious appetite lie strewn haphazardly about, deposited here by the mobile plants to hide their grisly handiwork from future unsuspecting travelers.

The stench is indeed tremendous. It forces your gorge up into your throat. Dismounting quickly, you and Julian rush to the spring and gulp down several mouthfuls of water. It is clean and pure and settles your stomach immediately. In fact, as you gaze into the spring, your perceptive sense tells you that here, flowing from the midst of this grotesque and evil garden, is perhaps the purest water you will ever encounter. You hastily pull out your waterskins and fill them with the cold, clear liquid.

Suddenly, a loud rustling draws your attention from the refreshing spring. You wheel about to see the path you came in on closing behind you. The plants are moving!

All around the spring, the plants inch slowly but surely across the narrow border of dirt toward you. As soon as they reach the edge of the stone, the vines—and who knows what else—will be in range to attack you. You will soon be trapped!

You search frantically about, trying to find some way out of your predicament. You certainly can't go back the way you came. The river channel offers no escape, either, at least not alive.

You pull out sword and mace as the plants hem you in, but you seriously doubt you'll be able to fight for your lives and guide your horses through the plants at the same time.

"Do you have any plans?" Julian mutters, nervously eyeing the creeping undergrowth. "I'd dearly love to avoid the



fate of those poor devils whose bones lie about us."

The plants reach the edge of the bedrock. The vines are grasping for you hungrily while the puffballs renew their dance around your horses' feet. You search your brain furiously. There must be something that will get you through this forest of living death unscathed—or, at least, alive.

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **157**. If it is 9 or less, turn to **131**.

148

The warm purple glow surrounding you suddenly turns cold and harsh. Caught in its stringent embrace, you are helpless. You can see only the Ki-Rin standing in terrible majesty before you. When it speaks again, the soft music of its voice is gone.

"Warrior," it says, "I have seen all that you have done to

get here. It is a wonder you arrived at all. But you are not the first unworthy to show up here asking for that which your lack of honor plainly says you do not deserve. You will be treated no differently than the others. Because you have sacrificed your honor, you will be bereft of it for eternity. You will serve here, as one of the faceless ones who guard the passage to the Gates. Perhaps there you will find service that is more suited to you."

The purple light around you grows to an intense white as the scene before you begins to change. The orange and mauve sky dissipates, and the Ki-Rin vanishes.

You are in the tunnel leading to the chamber of the Ki-Rin. In front of you, you sense the empty grotto crypt. You can no longer really see your resting place, which is just as well. You do not know why or how you got here. All you know is that you must guard this place. You will be called forth when your service is needed.

You think of nothing else as you crawl into the crypt. No thought of princess or high priest or quest enters your mind—ever again. You lie down and feel the mournful thoughts of many others around you. They sadly, silently, greet a new brother in arms.

Your quest has failed. You were warned to guard your honor carefully. Go back to the beginning of the book and try again. This time, remember that a paladin's lifeblood is his honor. ✘

149

That flicker of movement is all you need. Before the assassin can get his tiny blade out of its hidden wrist sheath, your steely grip locks onto that wrist as well.

A sudden surge of anger explodes within you. You twist his knife arm in front of him and slam him up against the wall of the corridor. His knife hand is pinned between his own body and the wall. You crush him into that wall with a vengeance. His wrist bones crack as you tighten your grip on them. He has got to let go of those blades soon.

Suddenly he stiffens. He coughs—once, twice, a third time. The third choking cough spatters blood on the wall. Then he slumps in your arms.

Suspecting a trap, you press even harder, but he does not move. You feel something warm flowing over the hand that is pinned under the assassin's limp body. Alarmed, you release him and spring to the other side of the corridor. But the assassin only falls to the ground and rolls over.

His own knife is sticking out of his belly.

You lean against the other wall and try to sort out your thoughts. The high priest was right. The archdruid is out to stop you and see that the princess does not live! His plans are already in motion. Turn to 161.

150

A voice behind you impels you to turn. It is full of the sound of wind chimes in a soft breeze. Its musical quality is soothing and calms your thoughts.

You turn to see the Ki-Rin. No longer a rigid, lifeless statue, it walks toward you, eyes shining a bright violet. Its mane wafts about in a soft, ethereal breeze. Its golden flanks glisten in the odd red-orange light.

The Ki-Rin approaches you slowly and stops a mere foot away from you. You can look each other directly in the eyes. After a few seconds of quiet contemplation, it speaks, its melodious voice entering your head effortlessly.

"Welcome, young warrior. I am the Gatekeeper. It is I that must grant passage to those who seek the Gates of Death. I, too, am empowered to endow those worthy with certain gifts. Tell me, why have *you* sought to cross the dreaded Gates?"

You know there will be no deceiving this noble creature. Carefully, you tell the Gatekeeper of your penance and quest, how the life of the noble Princess Rhiannon hangs in the balance, and why you seek the Breath of Life to restore her.

The Gatekeeper listens gravely to your tale. When you are finished, it gazes at you intently before it speaks again.

"You seek the most precious of the gifts to be found here. The Breath of Life is without equal and cannot be given to just anyone. The fact that you are here, that you have crossed the Gates of Death and stand before me, says much for you. But there is one last test, a judgment, that you



must now submit to. If you are found worthy, the Breath of Life is yours. If not . . . well, that remains to be seen.”

With that, the Ki-Rin’s eyes begin to glow more brightly. A warm purple light shines out from them and enfolds you. As it does, you feel your mind and thoughts open up to the creature. Your life, the journey, and your passage through the Way of Death, are all exposed in minute detail to the Ki-Rin. In an interview more intimate than any you have ever experienced with the high priest, your very soul and honor are revealed. Turn to 115.

151

A key, you think. Where are we going to get a key?

With a start, you remember. Quickly, you pull out the pouch with the old mage’s gifts and extract the little key he left you. Kneeling by the metal box, you carefully lift the glass dome covering the keyhole and insert the key.

It slides in smoothly. So far, so good.

You try to gently turn it to the left. No luck. The key will not move. *Uh-oh.* you think. *It fits but won’t open the box.*

You try to turn the key to the right, and breathe a sigh of relief as it turns easily in the keyhole. As the key turns, the light shining from the keyhole changes from red to green.

Then an amazing thing happens. Before your startled eyes, the light inside the box begins to travel along the hair-thin wires. Soon the network of wires crisscrossing the tunnel is all aglow. Not only that, but another wall of wires beyond this one begins to glow. And another and another, until the whole length of the tunnel before you is alight. So strong is the light shining from all these wire webs that you can clearly see all the way to the end of the tunnel.

There stands an intricately carved door.

Suddenly all the glowing wire webs begin to part before you. They swing open one after another like hinged doors.

Leading your horses, you and Julian hurry to the door. It, too, has a keyhole, but this one is glowing green.

Again you insert your key. It turns easily to the left. Oddly, the light shining from the keyhole turns red. Immediately, the green light from the webs behind you dies. As their glow fades, the wire webs swing silently back into place, setting up their stealthy trap once again.

At the same time, the door in front of you swings open.

Turn to 170.

152

The dry floor feels good beneath your feet. It feels even better to be heading in what feels like the right direction. It won't be long before you'll be at the end of the main cavern and can continue.

Soon, the tunnel you are in ends at another, wider tunnel, forming a "T." To the left and right, the wider tunnel curves around gently into darkness. And, oddly enough, you see many other tunnel openings branching off the wide tunnel.

"Which way shall we go?" you ask quietly, more to yourself than to your companion.

"Well, certainly not to the left," Julian pipes up, startling you. "The right-hand tunnel curves off in the direction we want to go."

"Well, certainly not . . ." you mimic, copying his bright tones exactly. He puts on a sour face. Chuckling at his

expression, you continue. "Let's go to the right then, eh?"

But, as you step out into the wider tunnel and start off to the right, something begins to bother you, something you can't quite put your finger on.

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 13 or more, turn to **166**. If your total is 12 or less, turn to **99**.

153

The iridescent violet glow emanating from the Ki-Rin's eyes grows more intense. The light is becoming almost unbearably bright, but you stand in the midst of it sure and unshaken. You know your honor will stand the test and you confidently await the outcome.

At last, the glow dissipates. Free of its embrace, you see the Ki-Rin gaze at you with something akin to admiration. Then it speaks, its melodious voice singing congratulations and praise to your mind.

"Hail, brave and noble warrior," it declares triumphantly. "Never have I encountered a more noble and honorable warrior than you. You are a credit to your order and yourself. You have maintained your honor despite many temptations to forsake it. You are indeed worthy of the Breath of Life. Prepare your heart and mind to receive it."

The Ki-Rin inclines its head slightly. You watch in wonder as the tip of its golden-pink spiral horn lightly touches your chest above your heart.

Suddenly, an explosive, all-consuming expansion of light springs to life inside you, filling every corner of your being with knowledge and power. You immediately sense its source and its purpose.

You have become the living receptacle of the Breath of Life!

Your eyes gleam with the light of this newly acquired gift as the Ki-Rin addresses you again.

"Go, young Wyn. The gift of life, a gift from the gods, is in you. Your princess's life is now quite literally in your hands. Upon your return, place your hands on her head. The gift will flow to her and she will be healed."

"But can I return in time?" you ask, remembering the



high priest's deadline. "It has taken longer to get here than we had hoped."

The Ki-Rin's soothing voice quiets your concern. "Do not worry, Wyn. I have the power to grant you one wish. I don't believe I have to guess what it might be. In fact, I will be honored to personally transport you and your companion back to Tellaidan."

You hesitate as the Ki-Rin drops to one knee to allow you to mount. You climb up on its back and, with a short leap, the Ki-Rin is floating upward through the ethereal air. Julian miraculously appears behind you. Momentarily panicked, he grabs you for support, but he soon relaxes and enjoys the ride. You do not have to tell him what this all means. He knows, and his jubilant spirit bursts into joyous laughter.

In no time, you break through an iridescent mother-of-pearl cloud. Below you, turrets gleaming with the first light of day, lie the towers of Castle Tellia. You are home!

Turn to 213.

154

Try as you might, you cannot picture yourself sneaking around the house just to avoid any trouble. Your conscience will not allow it.

"No, Julian," you say out loud, "we'll approach by the front door. Besides, there may not be anyone home."

Julian slaps his open palm against his forehead and gestures pleadingly with the unseen heavens. Nevertheless, he moves along toward the door at your side.

But much to your surprise, as you approach the door, it begins to open! There *is* someone home after all. Add 1 honor point to your honor point total for being true to your paladin code and not sneaking around the house and turn to 4.

155

The invitation to attend the party is tempting, but peace and rest call to you.

"Good sir," you begin apologetically to the innkeeper, "we have had a long day's ride and look forward to another one tomorrow. If you would kindly bring our supper to our

room, we will simply spend the night there." Once again, Julian's expression is most pathetic, but he gives in to your decision.

The innkeeper understands and says that dinner will be brought soon. He heads for the stables as you make for your room. Neither of you sees a swarthy, garishly dressed man stagger drunkenly out of the inn's back door and cast a quick glance around the courtyard. After a moment, he hurries—not so drunkenly—back to the party inside.

Later, as promised, you hear a faint knock at the hall door of your room. A serving boy brings in a sumptuous dinner. As you eagerly sit down to eat, the boy glances warily at you, then leaves.

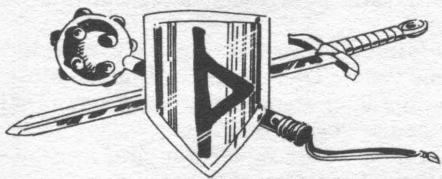
Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 7 or less, turn to **183**. If it is 8 or more, turn to **94**.

156

You stand in the middle of the large tunnel with the maze-like openings. Slowly, you calm your troubled mind and force yourself to think rationally. Julian comes up beside you and watches gravely. He recognizes how much is riding on your ability to find the way out.

After a moment of meditation, you open your eyes and carefully try to retrace your steps. Since the floor of the tunnel is firm stone, you have left no tracks. You are working purely by intuition and—you hope—inspiration.

You walk down the tunnel only fifty feet and stop. On your left is an opening. It looks just like the others, but somehow feels different. Could that be a hint of moisture blowing faintly out of this opening? The horses nicker con-



tentedly. That decides it! Trusting their instincts, and sending a short prayer heavenward, you motion Julian to follow you into the opening.

Soon, you come to a familiar intersection. Peeking around the corner, you feel the dampness coming from the granite tunnel you passed before. With a shout of triumph, you charge on down the tunnel to the left. Its gentle curves lead you into the main cavern.

Turn to 116.

157

Julian is already using his mace to pound ferociously at the attacking vines when inspiration comes to you.

"Of course," you howl in delight. "The torches! Hold them off just a few moments more, Julian. We *will* get out of this!"

"Hurry!" he shouts, crushing a green tendril that had wrapped around his leg. "I can't keep this up forever!"

You hurriedly dismount and pull two torches from your saddlebag. Julian valiantly struggles to defend you while you get them lit. After what seems like an eternity of fumbling, you manage to strike tinder to flint. A small spark catches on one of the torches. It spreads to the other. Now you have a new weapon!

Swiftly, you edge up beside Julian and thrust the burning brands at the attacking vegetation. Will it work?

Turn to 87.

158

The cold, dark dream passes slowly as you regain consciousness. The gray mist that clouded your vision leaves your eyes, and the strange light of the cavern slips in. Shaking your head to clear the cobwebs, you look around.

You are lying on your back on a low marble table in a large, stone room. There is no ceiling. Against the back wall is another long, stone table. At either end of that table is a curtained archway.

Standing next to the table, watching you intently, is a young woman of indescribable beauty.

Long, dark hair flows in comely disarray from her head down past her shoulders, framing a pale, oval face with deep blue eyes. A gauzy, dark-blue dress hangs from her shoulders to drape itself lusciously about her winsome figure. Soft leather sandals adorn her feet.

"Ah, you are awake," she says in a voice that is soft and sweet. "I am so sorry you walked into my little trap, but a girl has to protect herself somehow in an abysmally lonely place like this."

Apparently, you can do nothing but stare at her, for she laughs gaily and approaches you. As you try to rise, she helps you up to a sitting position. Then she moves to help Julian. When you are comfortable, she brings a decanter of wine from the table and pours you each a shimmering goblet full. She hands you the goblets and offers a toast.

"To my two new friends and adventurers. May this goblet solidify our friendship and quench your thirst for the rest of your quest."

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **142**. If your total is 10 or less, turn to **104**.

159

You are amazed by the immensity of what you can see from your vantage point on the wall of the cavern.

The garden, with its weird rock formations and plants, is huge—at least a thousand feet wide and probably three times as long. The beautiful but strange phosphorescent light from the roof illuminates everything with a sickly greenish glow. At the far side of the cavern, there appears to be an old stone house or temple. You can dimly make out the columns supporting its overhanging roof. The rushing sound you heard when you first entered the cavern comes from a massive spring that erupts from the ground and forms a pool in the center of the garden. Bursting from that pool is a swift-flowing river that, over the years, has carved a deep channel in the rock floor of the cavern. The river rushes out of the cavern through the wall you are now climbing. Where it goes, you can only guess.

A short distance ahead, the sand and gravel path you are

standing on is joined by another path which exits through a tunnel in the wall on your left. The path you are on continues until it reaches an ancient wooden bridge that crosses high above the river.

As you approach the split in the path, you feel a cold breeze coming from the tunnel. As you look at the bridge, you can see that it, like the stairs you climbed to get here, is suffering the ravages of time.

If you cross the bridge and proceed toward the house at the end of the cavern, turn to 9. If you decide to check out the tunnel, turn to 92. If you don't like this path through the cavern at all, turn to 128.



160

You have climbed almost eight hundred feet up this pillar. It has been a long, grueling climb. Your shins are bleeding, your hands and fingers are cut and torn, but only thirty or forty feet now separate you from the bridge. You look back at Julian. Like you, the young priest is doggedly determined to make it to the span, but he is showing signs of fatigue.

You cast your gaze up again and scan the bridge. From this distance, you can see it more clearly because the light from the cavern walls and ceiling is reflected off the clouds of mist. The bridge does cross between the two spires. At the end directly above you, you see a dark archway in the pillar. At the other end, in the cylindrical spire, is another archway. It seems to be blocked or barred by something—a portcullis, perhaps, or a . . . gate!

"Julian," you cry ecstatically, "it is there. I can see the Gates, I think."

He looks up wearily and follows the direction of your gaze. A great smile spreads across his face and he cheers. Soon, very soon now, you will have reached your goal.

You renew your climb with high hopes. Suddenly, just a few feet above you, you see something that sends thrills up your spine. You almost can't believe your eyes as you scramble up to get a closer look. Then you let out a whoop of joy.

You have discovered a ledge, cunningly carved into the face of the pillar, crafted so as to be invisible from the ground. You crawl over the lip of this ledge and drop a few feet onto a narrow, hidden pathway that follows the circumference of the pillar.

With Julian right on your heels, you follow the pathway around the spire and through a small, dark archway. Lighting your torches, you enter the archway and follow the path into the very heart of the pillar. There you find a narrow chamber and a flight of rough-hewn ancient steps. They lead upward—perhaps to the bridge!

But the layer of dust that has lain here for centuries is broken by a single set of footprints leading up the steps.

Drawing your weapons, you and Julian follow the footprints. Soon, you emerge from another archway. The strange light from the cavern walls shows you a sight you will never forget.

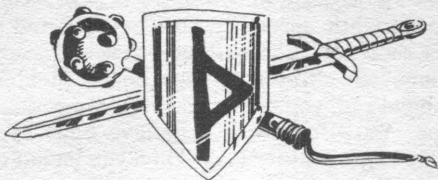
Turn to 110.

161

Your encounter with the archdruid and his henchman has chilled your heart. To stay any longer would be foolishness. The time to leave is NOW!!

You turn decisively and head for the stables, hoping that the high priest has thought of everything you'll need for your journey.

You quickly make your way to the castle courtyard near the stables. As you approach the stables, you are pleased to see that the high priest and his acolytes are very thorough people. From across the courtyard, you see not only a horse and supplies, but your weapons and armor as well. A fine suit of mail, helmet and shield, a goodly long sword and



lance, tunic and cloak with your family crest—it's all there, ready and waiting. Your horse is a sturdy young gelding of medium build, strong and even tempered. It prances eagerly on its tether, awaiting the start of the quest.

But holding that tether is someone you did not expect to see here—the high priest. He is deep in conversation with a young priest in simple brown robes. As you draw near, the high priest looks up and greets you.

"Wyn," he says, a note of relief in his voice, "you are here at last. I did not intend to send you off personally but I have some grave news for you—news that will have a great effect on your quest."

His serious tone troubles you. *More problems*, you think. You listen anxiously as he continues.

"I have just come from the princess's quarters," he says. "Her condition is deteriorating rapidly. I fear that if you do not return with the Breath of Life within six days, the princess will die!"

You stare at him incredulously, unable to believe what your ears have just heard. For the second time in one day, you forget your place.

"Revered sir," you begin, "you know that I would never shirk a task given me by our order. I am resolved to do the penance assigned me. But six days, sir? I don't even know how to get to the Gates, let alone find a way across them, if such a way exists. How can I . . . ?"

He raises his hand to stop you.

"Wyn," he cautions sternly, "do not let your youthful temperament and lack of understanding mar the beginning of this quest. You can see that I have taken care of how you are to get there. On the small map I have given you is clearly marked the straightest route for you to follow. That

route will take you through much of the wilderness areas of the kingdom. There is only one inn where you may rest along the way. The trip out should take you just two days. That leaves you another two days to find the Gates and the Breath of Life and a final two days to return. I can only pray that it will be enough time."

You touch the tiny scroll as he continues.

"However, once you get to the Mountains of Shadow, we can help you no longer. The "X" on your map marks the end of the trail as we know it. As far as we may guess, there are at least three entrances to the Way of Death, the legendary subterranean passage that will take you to the Gates. Those entrances may be hidden or not. To say the least, it will be very difficult to find the way in. There may also be other dangers along the road, dangers too great for one person to handle. Therefore, though this quest is *your* penance, I am sending a traveling companion with you—someone to talk with, to aid you on the journey, to fight by your side if need be."

You are about to protest. The trip will be hazardous enough for one person, more so for two. Besides, the quest is *your* penance. It seems only fitting that you pursue it alone. But even as you open your mouth to speak, the high priest stops you.

"There is nothing to be said, Wyn," he interjects. "The decision has been made, and it is in accordance with the laws of penance of the order. Besides, your companion has a certain measure of initiate work to perform still . . . and he is familiar with the Mountains of Shadow. Meet Julian, a priest of the order."

The young priest steps forward. You rapidly cast an appraising eye over him, looking for something to give you confidence that this fellow can handle himself on the quest. He does not seem to be of exceptional build, but the robes could hide much. However, as you look at his face, you note that his eyes shine as clearly as the sun and are filled with a light of reassurance and confidence.

He extends his hand to shake yours. As you clasp hands, you immediately feel his strength. *The robes do indeed hide much*, you think, *if this priest's grip is any indication*

of his strength. I hope his ability to stay alive is as great.

As though reading your thoughts, or perhaps the expression on your face, Julian chuckles.

"Do not worry about me, Sir Wyn," he says brightly. "I've spent many a lonely day of soul-searching in the wilds and in the area of the Mountains of Shadow. I won't be a hindrance to you. In fact, I am to serve you in any way possible, even to the laying down of my life . . . though, I would hope it does not come to that."

You stare at him and then at the high priest. That is some commitment!

"All part of his initiatory training," adds the high priest. "You will find him to be a worthy companion and servant. Do not hesitate to ask his counsel if you have need of it.

"But enough," says the high priest. "It is time to be off! I'm sure the archdruid is already putting some nefarious plan into motion to your detriment."

You gape at him openly. He raises his eyebrows imperiously at your dumbfounded look.

"Yes, Wyn," he says, "I already know of his plans to hinder your quest. Did you think I would not? Our beloved archdruid is not the only one with eyes and ears everywhere. Now mount up, the both of you! Remember to be wary along the way. Faith and good speed!"

You shoot a quick glance at Julian and are surprised to see him already on his horse, smiling down at you.

"Let's get this quest under way," he shouts.

"Very well then," you answer, your own eagerness to get started matching his mood. "So be it."

With a quick leap, you mount your horse. You urge your mount to a quick gallop toward the castle gates, with Julian close behind. You can already feel a certain camaraderie with the young priest.

You cast one last glance around the familiar grounds of the castle keep as you gallop under the outer bailey gate and across the drawbridge. On the road, you look back one last time and catch Julian doing the same. He turns around in his saddle and you see his face. His expression mirrors the single troubled thought that fills your mind—will you ever see your home again? Turn to 53.



162

Lighting torches, you enter the tunnel. It is rough going from the start. The slick, narrow ledge above the swirling rapids is barely wider than the length of your feet, narrower in spots. It is all you can do to inch along sideways, your backs to the rough tunnel wall. Holding torches makes things just that much more difficult. Soon you toss even those into the raging rapids behind you. It's easier to turn to face the wall and feel your way in the dark than to keep your balance while trying to carry the torches.

Now you are barely crawling along, clinging tenaciously to the tunnel wall. A tiny light in the distance marks the end of this nightmarish tunnel ordeal, but it seems so far away. Can you last that long?

Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 10 or less, turn to **101**. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **130**.

163

"There seems to be no end to the wonders we'll run into here," you whisper in awe. "Do you suppose anyone, or anything, lives in this?"

Julian can only shake his head in response. The edifice before him has captured his entire attention.

The house is indeed a wonder. It seems to be made entirely of crystal and semiprecious stone. Parts of it are clear and project strange rainbows in the weird light from overhead. Other parts are translucent and glow only dimly. You can make out whole sections made of various jades, quartz, topaz, opal, and more stones that you cannot name.

Wide, shallow steps stretch across the front of the house. At the top of the stairs is an immense marble slab that stretches through the huge opening and into the next cavern. The slab forms a wide veranda for the front of the house. Six fluted columns of crystal quartz are spaced equidistantly across the outer edge of the veranda, giving the place the look of some sort of temple.

Set halfway back on the slab, the house itself appears to be quite large. Its jade, opal, and topaz walls reach nearly to the top of the cavern opening and seem to grow out of the

cavern wall on your right. They stretch all the way across the marble slab and hide anything beyond behind a curtain of precious stone. The front wall of the house contains a single door. But, as strange as the crystal house is, stranger still are the statues that stand as silent sentinels in front of it. Turn to 137.

164

The ancient bridge trembles under your weight. Your horse nickers nervously behind you while, at the far end of the bridge, Julian continues to shout instructions.

"There!" he hollers. "Now move to the . . ."

The roar of the river below you completely covers his words.

"What was that again?" you shout in return.

"Move . . . the . . . foot!"

Left or right? you think. I can't hear what he is saying. Do I wait, or keep moving?

The bridge shivers beneath you again. You quickly decide to go on—just a bit—to get within earshot of Julian. Slowly, you edge a little to the right. Turn to 109.

165

The rapids are a waking nightmare. Water and stone crush you at every turn. You are thrown through the air only to be slammed back into the water or bounced off a rock. You come close to drowning more than once. At last, your body and mind have had all they can take and you pass out.

Unknown hours later, you come to, lying on your back on solid ground.

You painfully turn your aching head and see Julian kneeling by a small crackling fire. He seems to be praying or meditating. You try to speak but gag on some water still locked in your lungs. You break into a fit of coughing which brings the young priest out of his trance. He turns to help you sit up, but before you can speak, he answers your unasked question.

"I found you floating face down after I came out of the tunnel. You were unconscious, so I cast a healing spell on you and dressed your wounds." Add 4 hit points to your hit

point total for Julian's healing spell. "You've been asleep for quite a while. We lost much precious time, but I feel we're very close now. We must be. Look at where we are."

With that, he lets you look around. You stare in awe at what you see.

Subtract one more day from the time track. If you have any days left—even one—turn to **178**. And good luck.

If you just marked off your last day, your quest has failed. The princess will be dead before you can return to Tellaïdan. Go to the beginning of the book and try again. ✘



166

That bothersome "something" is just enough to set off faint alarms in the back of your mind. You stop dead in your tracks. Julian doesn't even make it into the wider tunnel before bumping into you.

"*Now* what's the matter?" he asks, backing his horse up a bit.

"There's a problem here," you reply. "I feel a distinct sense of disaster. Something about the tunnels or . . ."

Suddenly it comes to you.

"Look around, Julian," you shout excitedly. "All the tunnel openings are exactly the same and spaced the same distance apart. If we were to wander without keeping track of where we came from, we might never find our way back. This is a maze—a maze that could lead to our deaths!"

Julian looks up and down the wide tunnel and whistles softly. Then he looks at you in awe.

"I don't know how you do it," he begins, "but you're right—again. You're going to have to teach me how you do that one of these days—if we survive this place. Now let's get out of here!"

You turn around and head back down the tunnel. Soon you come to the intersection. If you want to take the damp tunnel to the right, turn to **135**. If not, turn to **116**.

You soon find yourselves standing outside the tunnel on the southern face of the mountain. Before you spread miles of rocky foothills. Your little jaunt up the tunnel has gotten you nowhere but outside the Way of Death.

"Well, fine," you shout angrily. "This is just wonderful. Where was this entrance when we were looking for a way in? Maybe I should let *you* lead this quest for all the good I'm doing."

Good-naturedly, the young priest flings up his hands in mock horror. "Don't ask *me* to lead this quest," he exclaims. "Things would probably be worse." He saunters over and claps his hand on your shoulder. "Look," he continues, "we still have plenty of time. Enjoy the view for a bit and then we'll continue."

You turn your back on him and stare out over the rocky landscape. A few minutes of looking at the land before you calms your troubled mind. Soon, you are ready to go again. You turn to see Julian, smiling, waiting by the horses.

And that isn't all you see.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **181**. If it is 9 or less, turn to **194**.

Julian's longing expression is too much. You need no more persuasion to enter the main room and join the party. After all, no one said that penance had to be dull.

You enter the inn's great room and are greeted by shouts of welcome. Soon you are caught up in the festive mood. The patrons are mostly young people your own age, here to congratulate the innkeeper's daughter, whose birthday it is. There is plenty of food and laughter, a pleasant way to end a long day of traveling. No one at all bothers you about who you are or what you are doing here.

Not long after you arrive, one of the guests staggers up to your table. He is an older man and seems to be a little drunk. He pulls a hidden flask out of his tunic and offers to share a drink and a toast with you. He is darker than most

of the rest of the patrons and is dressed in the colorful, garish outfit of a gypsy. He slumps down in an empty chair at your table.

“We three are obviously strangers here,” he says with difficulty. “In the common bond of traveling men of the world, my friends and I invite you to drink with us on this festive occasion.” He motions to a table across the room. You see four other men, dressed as he is, stand and begin to make their way through the crowd toward your table.

Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill score. If the result is 8 or more, turn to **176**. If the result is 7 or less, turn to **112**.

169

The faceless minions move to surround you. Fear and indecision cloud your mind. You could try to fight them, but there are so many. And what of the quest? What good will it do to fight and die without crossing the Gates of Death and getting the Breath of Life? But is there any other choice?

Suddenly, another alternative springs to mind. *I'm a paladin on a righteous quest, you think exultantly. If these are undead, maybe I can make them turn away, leave me alone to continue my search.*

Yet something in the back of your mind is crying for your attention, something that you've heard or read . . .

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 9 or more, turn to **145**. If it is 8 or less, turn to **72**.

170

The ornately carved door leading from the tunnel of glowing cobwebs opens into a beautifully appointed room.

Wondrous walls of translucent jade, topaz, and opal surround you. The center of the room is dominated by a large round bed with a deep blue cover. Plush white fur covers the dark marble floor and hangings of wintry blue drape the walls. In the wall on your left, you see a curtained archway. Another curtained archway leads out of the room through the wall on your right. There is also a window in the right-hand wall, through which you can see another

cavern beyond, filled with some sort of underground lake. Looking up, you see the cavern ceiling as there is no roof over this room. A single mirror adorns the wall.

But, as beautiful as the furnishings are, more beautiful still are the incredibly lifelike statues standing about the room. They are so real you would swear they were human, if they weren't made of stone. The statues are carved in crystal, jade, marble, and many other types of stone, and all with remarkable detail.

You and Julian dismount and enter the room, trying to avoid touching the statues. One of the horses nickers nervously, and as you turn toward it, you bump into a statue and knock it over.

Before you hear it crash to the floor, a bright light transfixes you both. Shining from some unseen source, it freezes you in your tracks. Slowly, you feel your energy melting away. A numbing paralysis creeps up your body. As it reaches your head, a gray mist obscures your vision and you sink into a dark dream in which crystalline men and women come and carry you away. Turn to **158**.

171

Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. Do this four times, once for each fifteen feet of the bridge. If, after any one of these rolls, you come up with a total of 7 or less, turn to **164**. If each of the four rolls gives you a total of 8 or more, turn to **100**.

172

The guardian creature's last bellow pushes your rage over the boiling point. You will not let this . . . this . . . thing stand in your way, not with the princess's life at stake.

The screech of sword sliding from scabbard echoes across the bridge, but your guts are tight and nausea threatens to empty your stomach. The minotaur is easily stronger than you, even if it is deformed. The lay comes swiftly to mind. You are supposed to die, it had said. ". . . Meet faceless death . . ."

But this beast has a face! This is not the faceless horror of your dream, so you must have nothing to fear from it!

Howling your own battle cry, you leap toward the center of the black span. The beast will pay!

The young priest is one step ahead of you. Julian's mace whistles by you and strikes the creature full in the chest before it can prepare to strike. The minotaur shrieks in pain and anger and collapses on the bridge. Suddenly, it throws its cloak over its head and disappears from view.

But you are already standing above where it fell. Going invisible will not help it now. You bring your sword down in a vicious arch.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 13 or more, turn to **42**. If the total is 12 or less, turn to **198**.



173

The warm violet glow emanating from the Ki-Rin's eyes dissipates, leaving you weak and drawn. You stand shakily before the Gatekeeper. For a long time, it scrutinizes you in silence. Cold sweat breaks out on your forehead as you await the Ki-Rin's verdict. You distantly remember waiting for another verdict long ago, in the high priest's chambers.

This waiting is worse.

At last the Ki-Rin's voice enters your mind.

"Young warrior," it begins, "you have done well to arrive here. Your adherence to your principles of honor is admirable. but you fall short of that which is required of one seeking so portentous a gift as the Breath of Life."

You are devastated by this pronouncement. How can this be? Have you come so far only to fail? This is worse than being banished.

You are about to protest in your own defense when the Gatekeeper speaks again.

“No,” it demands, “say nothing! You have not failed, just fallen short—for the moment. Because you have performed so admirably, you will be granted another chance. You will be sent back through space and time to any early part of the Way of Death two days in the past. Your body will be healed of all hurt. Your honor will remain as it is. Seek to improve it. You and your companion may attempt to arrive at this point again. May the gods guide your actions and steps. Remember the worth of your honor.”

With that, the scene begins to change. The orange and mauve skies and surreal plan shift and fade. The Ki-Rin disappears, only to be replaced by a surprised Julian. You suddenly find yourselves standing on the side of the mountain, with your horses, at the center of a three-way fork in the trail. It is near dusk and the sun is setting behind you.

Julian’s dumbfounded expression melts into comprehension as you quickly explain to him what transpired in the chamber of the Gatekeeper. He moans at the thought of having to brave the Way of Death again.

Personally, you are exultant! You have been given a second chance, another opportunity to prove your worth! This time you will maintain your honor despite all odds. And you have two whole days to acquire the Breath of Life.

Three paths branch out before you. The one to the north leads to a large promontory of mist-covered rock. The one to the south disappears around the face of the mountain. In front of you, a rocky trail climbs up the face to a distant cave covered with a wall of green vegetation.

Time to start again! Begin this new attempt with as many honor points as you had in 173. Your hit point total is 27. All else will be the same—maybe. Good luck!

If you want to go north, turn to 13. If you decide to go straight up the mountain, turn to 49. If you try the southern path, turn to 195.

174

The tiny puffballs, the colorful, swaying pattern of the forest of molds and fungi, all seem so entertaining, so enchanting . . . Suddenly the little alarms are sounding in the back of your head.

“Julian!” you shout hurriedly. “Stop your horse.”

The cleric, shocked by the urgency in your voice, reins in immediately.

“What is it?” he asks.

“Look at the puffballs now,” you tell him.

He gasps as he looks down. They have stopped their rolling game. Then you see that the forest is unmoving as well.

“Don’t you see?” you ask. “As long as we move, they move. It’s like the whole place is trying to entice us to . . . well, I don’t know, but I don’t like it. Here, let me try something.”

With the tip of your sword, you prod one of the puffballs. Instantly, it pops open and spews out a cloud of gas and spores. Immediately, from the undergrowth beside the path, several more of the balls roll out and crowd around the remains of the one you burst. You are not entirely surprised, nor does it surprise you that the gas spewed out by the puffball makes you feel a little giddy.

“This is all an elaborate, living trap,” you tell the young priest. “If we don’t get out of here fast, we won’t get out at all. On my signal, we charge out of here—NOW!”

Spurring your horses viciously, you and Julian charge down the path. The forest immediately begins its enticing dance. Hundreds of puffballs explode beneath your horses’ hooves, but you are intent upon escape.

“Don’t look at the colors!” you shout to Julian. “Just close your eyes and give your horse free rein!”

You leave the gas and spores behind. At last, you break out into the open. Turn to 147.

175

That incomplete thought fills your head and you freeze in surprised shock. As you stare in disbelief, more men wearing the colored tunics of the archdruid’s gypsy assassins begin to pop up from rocks behind Julian.

He looks at you curiously for a second, wondering what you’re staring at. Following your petrified gaze, he turns to see what is going on behind him.

Before he can turn all the way around, you hear the ominous twang and whistle of a bowshot. Turn to 5.

The gypsy uncorks his flask and offers to pour. You gaze at him intently, calling to mind your trained perceptive abilities. Something about this man and his offer and his companions is wrong. That small voice at the back of your awareness is screaming again. Its message is very clear.

"I think not," you say quickly. You reach out and grab the man's wrist before he can pour. The liquid in the flask spills over the table. The gypsy growls some obscenity and tries to pull away as his friends close menacingly about the table.

But you are unshaken. A quick sniff of that flask told you what he and his cronies were about. One sip of the drugged liquor he was offering and you would have been out for hours—and at their mercy.

You decide to face them down here and now. Rising to your feet, you force the gypsy to stand. You see four pairs of hands slip inside colored tunics. His friends, pretending to be offended by your actions, are searching for their daggers. Your free hand slides to the hilt of your sword as you pull the captured gypsy closer. With your faces scant inches apart, you make sure he understands your intentions.

"Whoever you are," you snarl quietly, "I suggest you call off your friends right now. If you don't, I will gut you on the spot with my blade. I know what you are up to, and it bodes me and my friend no good. If you want to keep your body intact, I strongly advise you to send your friends out, back away from this table, and leave—now!"

Julian is already standing at your side. He slides aside his robes and puts his hand on the footman's mace that hangs from his belt. The gypsy looks at him and then at you. He seems to shrink a little as he gazes into your eyes. You inch your sword out of its scabbard to show him you mean what you say.

For a moment, you think he may not waver. The four other gypsies move a bit closer. Suddenly, he grunts something in a foreign language. They stop, exchange glances, and back away from the table. Casting angry glances over their shoulders, they stomp out of the inn.

Only then do you release your captive. He glares at you vehemently, then turns to leave himself. But before he

does, he issues a warning.

“You have not seen the last of us, young pup,” he says. “But the next time you do see us will be your last.”

With that, he spins on his heel and stalks out. You hear the sound of hoofbeats as the gypsies thunder away from the inn.

You look about to see if any of the inn’s guests have noticed your altercation with the gypsies. Only the innkeeper catches your eye and he gives you a knowing smile. He seems grateful to have them gone.

After a few more minutes, you and Julian retire to your room. Your sleep is troubled by nothing but good dreams.

You did well to face down the gypsies, though outnumbered. Add 1 honor point to your total.

Mark off one day from the time track on the back of the Character Stats Card. Then turn to 71.

177 -

The crawler and the strange, dancing humanoids face each other for a split second, then charge to attack each other.

As you watch in amazement, Julian’s hoarse whisper snaps you out of your trance.

“By the gods, we’re doomed!” moans Julian. “Those are the ghouls I was telling you about. They’re undead creatures and their touch can paralyze, too! It seems the crawler and the ghouls are fighting over dinner—and we’re the main course. Whichever wins, we’re still doomed!”

Julian’s fear enters you like a hot knife. How can you possibly survive against these creatures and the maze? You really begin to sweat now. Your gut is a tight knot, and you can’t stop shaking.

Then you remember something from your schooling. “Julian,” you cry, “if these ghouls are undead, we can try to turn them, to force them to flee from us!”

He looks at you with renewed hope in his eyes. “Of course,” he replies. “That we can do—if the ghouls win.”

Your attention returns to the bizarre contest. After several minutes of howling, shrieking, shredding, and hissing, the battle is decided. Many of the ghouls are ripped to pieces by the carrion crawler’s powerful claws, but there



are just too many ghouls. The crawler is driven off, torn and oozing, down a side tunnel.

With a blood-curdling howl, the remaining ghouls turn on their wounded fellows. They pounce on them with mad screaming and throaty gurgling, tearing mercilessly at the crushed, quivering, undead flesh. Then, with sudden and menacing silence, they turn to face you. There are only four left, but they are horrifying. Slobbering and gibbering, sensing your warm, living bodies, they crawl through the carnage on the floor toward you.

You recoil in horror. You have never seen anything so disgusting and terrible. You want to beat these things into the ground, but dare you take the risk of being touched by them? Maybe you should just try to run away.

All these thoughts pass through your mind as the creatures approach. You make your decision almost without conscious thought.

“Now’s our chance,” you blurt out. “Maybe, between the two of us, we can turn them. Quick—your holy symbol!”

In an instant, you both boldly brandish the sacred symbols of your order that you wear around your necks.

“By all that is good and right,” Julian cries loudly, “and by the power of the gods that I hold, I command you to turn from us and hinder our course no longer!”

Will your faith and determination be strong enough? Will the ghouls turn, or must you hack and slash your way through undead flesh?

“Turning” undead is something that both clerics and paladins can do, and you and Julian have the same chance of accomplishing it. Roll one die. If you roll a 1 or 2, turn to **58**. If you roll 3-6, turn to **86**.

178

Towering above you rise the truly awe-inspiring walls of this immense underground cavern. You are struck dumb by the sight.

The sheer size of this place dwarfs the other two caverns you have passed through along the Way of Death. It is easily three, maybe four or five times larger in every way. You can barely make out the far end of this cavern. Covering

most of the floor is a huge body of water, almost a small sea. It is surrounded by stretches of solid rock or coarse, sandy beach like the one you are resting on now. The walls rise to a phenomenal height, possibly two thousand feet or more. They are covered with the same phosphorescent molds and lichen that lit the other caverns. It reflects off some pale white, glittering surface at the top of the cavern. It is hard to tell what the reflective stuff is, though. A large, vaporous cloud drifts there and obscures the view. It boils and roils as if blown by some unseen wind of unknown origin.

But, as your eyes and brain try in vain to comprehend the vastness of what you see, they are drawn irresistibly to the gigantic structures in the very center of the underground sea. Turn to 192.

179

That prickly feeling at your back and Julian's frantic gestures tell you something is attacking you from behind!

You whirl about to face a weird, watery apparition. It looks like a large viper made entirely of water rising out of the stream. It glides rapidly through the rushing current, weaving back and forth in the water, its great jaws agape. Long fangs stretch out of that dripping maw ready to bite into you and drag you under.

Not today, weird, you think fiercely. As it lunges at you, you roll, scramble to your feet, and quickly grab one of the narrow, broken beams. You lash out with the beam, and it splashes solidly into the creature's striking head.

Stunned, the water weird reels back into the stream. You take another vicious swing and tear a watery chunk out of its snaky neck. It opens its maw in a strange, silent hiss of pain and starts to sink into the water.

That is enough for you. Heaving your weapon at the sinking form, you clamber up the bank and grab Julian's waiting rope. You start climbing as Julian tries to pull you up.

But the weird isn't finished. It reforms and rises up out of the stream, stretching and stretching, getting thinner as it climbs. All it needs to do is bite into your flesh . . .

You scramble up the rope just as its jaws close—and miss you by inches. Exhausted from overextending, it splashes

back into its watery home and disappears.

Soon, Julian has pulled you the rest of the way up to the ledge. No words of gratitude are necessary. Besides, you are too tired. You slump to the ground, exhausted and aching. But you are alive!

After resting a while, you and the priest mount your horses and continue down the trail toward the distant end of the cavern, where the strange templelike house awaits. Turn to **133**.

180

Thoughts of your impending success drive your mind to daydreams of glory and grandeur. *So close, so close now*, you think. *At the end of this gap, we'll be one step nearer the end of the quest.*

Your daydreams end abruptly.

Suddenly, you are transfixed by a blinding light from some unknown source. Not only does it blind your eyes, it freezes your mind and your body. You are as unable to move as the statues you saw in front of this strange house.

A chilling numbness crawls up your body as you stand paralyzed. It reaches your back and slithers up your spine. Finally, it takes hold of your head. You feel like you are falling into a shivering, dark dream.

In the dream, you think you see men and women coming toward you. They glitter with a crystalline sheen as their cold, hard hands reach out to grab you. Turn to **158**.

181

As you turn and look to where Julian is standing with the horses, you glimpse a multicolored flash out of the corner of your eye. *A bird*, you think curiously. *I haven't seen one like that since we left Tellaiden.*

But another thought comes quickly to mind as you continue to gaze at the spot where you saw the bright colors. You vaguely recall seeing those colors before . . . on the archdruid's foreign cohort in Castle Tellia!

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 10 or more, turn to **204**. If it is 9 or less, turn to **175**.

As you feared might happen, someone is coming down the road—perhaps several someones. The hoofbeats grow louder. And then you see four—no, five—horsemen riding swiftly down the road in your direction.

Perhaps they'll ride on by, you think. It would be a real inconvenience to have to deal with them in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night.

It appears as though your silent prayer will be answered. The horsemen seem intent on riding past your hidden campsite. But, to your dismay, just as they are about to pass, two of them break away from the group, leave the road, and head right toward you. The others rein in their horses and wait.

As they near the grove, the two horsemen dismount, leave their horses, and approach on foot. Their cautious, stealthy, and impossibly quiet movements mark them as trained killers—men to be feared.

Now you have a real dilemma. If you think you should slip back to camp and hide with Julian, hoping they will miss you in the dark, turn to 191. If you want to stand and face them here—and hope their friends on the road don't join the fray, turn to 102.

You put the boy's odd glance from your mind as you and Julian eye the finest repast placed before you. Without a second thought, you begin to eat ravenously. In a few minutes, the tray is virtually empty and the water in the pitcher is gone.

But your heads are nodding. You didn't know you were so tired. It was a long ride. *Better take off my armor first, you think groggily. No, just want to sleeeeeep.*

You slide lazily back into your chair, slowly resting your heavy head on the table. You think distantly that you feel drugged, but that thought soon vanishes in hazy slumber.

In moments you are so far gone you don't even hear the faint knock at your door. Slowly, quietly, it is pushed open. Several figures enter and carry you out the back door of the inn. Turn to 144.

184

As you settle into the little rowboat, it surprises you by pulling away from the pier under its own power! You look up at Julian, standing at the end of the pier, slack-jawed and gaping foolishly.

“Well, don’t just stand there,” you shout, “JUMP! Or you’ll end up swimming!”

The boat has traveled a good five feet before the light of awareness reenters his face. He grabs his gear and launches himself across the water. Once again, his catlike agility and strength come to his aid, and he lands squarely in the rear of the boat.

Julian’s sudden entry tips the rowboat precariously. For a moment, it looks as if you’ll both be swimming, but by some miracle—or hidden magical power—the boat doesn’t capsize. In no time, safe and dry, you reach the rock island of the pillars. Turn to 7.

185

“No, Julian,” you say, your eyes aglow with the sense of near victory. “This has got to be the way. We should proceed. But if you’re not sure, wait with the horses here. I should be back shortly.”

Leaving your horse in Julian’s care, you grab a torch and start off down the tunnel, brushing aside the walls of cobwebs as you go and breaking many of the tiny hair-wires crossing the tunnel. Turn to 119.

186

The underground forest is even more strangely colorful than it appeared from afar. Your mind is bombarded by bizarre combinations of shapes and hues and smells that burst upon your senses. Flowers open their buds and odd-colored plants break through the soil, sprout leaves, and turn as if to watch your passage. Several plants open their fanlike foliage as you pass to reveal brilliant patterns of pigment. The air around you is filled with sweet, intoxicating perfumes.

And the whole forest seems to be, well, moving—undulating back and forth, making the already alluring

pattern of the forest even more captivating and slightly hypnotic. You watch this movement in rapt wonder. You feel no breeze, yet the plants sway. Could they be doing this under their own power?

That troublesome thought hardly has time to register in your brain when you notice some movement on the path at your feet. You look down to see little puffball plants rolling about the hooves of your horses as they walk the path through the weird wood. Sometimes, they roll back and forth in front of your steeds. At other times the puffballs seem to dart in and out of the horses' legs. The tiny plants seem to be moving under their own power. It's like a game they're playing— almost daring the horses to step on them.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 9 or less, turn to 202. If the total is 10 or more, turn to 174.



187

A swelling certainty fills every part of your being. You turn to look at Julian. As your eyes meet, you know that he feels it, too.

You have reached the final leg of the quest at last! Across the bridge are the fabled Gates of Death. Just go through them and into the pillar, and you will undoubtedly find the Breath of Life. Your exultation is unbounded. You throw your arms about Julian's shoulders and lift him into the air.

But as you return your gaze to the glow from within the pillar, something else catches your attention. A tiny tingle in the back of your mind alerts you to some presence between you and the Gate across the way. You concentrate intensely on the bridge. While you can see nothing, your



perception tells you something is there—something invisible in the center of the bridge between you and your cherished goal.

Your joy vanishes in an instant. A cold, clammy sweat breaks out on your entire body. A knot of fear constricts your throat and galls your insides. Your dark and horrifying dream by the lake comes back to mind vividly. *I must meet faceless death here and die, you think. It waits for me there in the center of the bridge. How can I get the Breath of Life if I am to die?*

Suddenly, as though aware of your gaze, a bizarre creature appears out of thin air at the center of the bridge.

It is the most fantastic beast you have seen on the quest so far. Horribly misshapen and deformed, its hunched back and torso a twisted wreck of meat and bone, it looks like a tortured caricature of something vaguely humanoid. Its entire body is covered with short, coarse hair and it stands on squat, twisted legs that are easily twice as thick as your own. Great long arms, rippling with muscle and sinew, dangle almost to the surface of the bridge from its warped shoulders. And resting on top of those shoulders, the least deformed yet most inhuman part of its whole body: the head of a raging bull.

“A minotaur?” you wonder out loud. “A creature of myth and legend. Is this the death I am to face?”

The creature answers your question. It shakes its horned head and bellows in definite challenge. Then it starts to waddle back and forth across the bridge on its short, twisted legs, dragging some sort of blanket or cloak along behind it. Every few moments it stops, looks at you, and bellows its challenge again.

You are going to have to get around this beast before you can get to the Breath of Life. Turn to **203**.

188

Consciousness comes slowly and painfully. It dimly rattles your brain and stirs you to wakefulness.

You find yourself lying in the clearing of rocks where you found the old man: *mage* is more likely. How could you have been so stupid as to attack such a powerful magic-

user is beyond understanding. That temper of yours is going to be the death of you yet.

On the other side of the clearing, Julian begins to stir. "Wyn," he stammers, "look at the fire pit."

Surprised by his tone of voice, you struggle to your feet and stumble to the now-cold campfire. There, in a tiny circle of stones and black dead ashes, you see a small pouch. It has your name written on it in fine script.

Cautiously, you pick it up, suspecting some trap. Opening it carefully, you find a small key, a vial of liquid, and a short note—apparently from the mage himself!

Young men: It seems you are good men on an important mission. We both acted hastily this night and I am sorry. I really could have helped.

Now, I fear I have done great harm. The spell I used on you is one of my own creation. Since it has no known counter, I'm afraid you will sleep through this night and two others. Judging from the information I gathered from your belongings and your semi-conscious minds, that may effectively terminate your quest.

However, if you have the courage to continue, I can offer this. There is a cave and a tunnel not far up the mountainside from here. You can find the Way to the Gates of Death there. I leave you two items that may be of some use: the key and a warding potion. You should know when to use them.

Be of good cheer. All may yet work for the good.

Djen-Eric

You gape in disbelief.

"Three nights!" you shout, handing the note to Julian. "Why, this is a disaster. That means we have only two days to find the Breath of Life and return to the princess. We can't do it in that amount of time."

Julian comes to stand beside you.

"Do not lose faith, Wyn," he says as he clasps your shoulder. "The old man said we might still fulfill the quest if we have courage. 'All may yet work for good,' he says here. Let's not give up yet. Where there's life, there's hope."

Once again Julian comes to your aid. He is right. Soon, you have your gear together and, with key and vial safely tucked away, are headed up the mountain. Sure enough, you find the cave mouth and tunnel. Lighting your torches, you step inside and start down the rough-hewn path. It takes you straight into the mountain and under the earth. Oddly, you encounter no twists or turns, no obstacles or traps. It seems strange that the Way of Death should hold so few surprises. Yet, nothing impedes your progress.

Nothing, that is, until you reach a fork in the tunnel. Turn to **197**.

189

You call to mind the previous decisions you've made in situations like this one. Almost invariably, you remember, the right-hand path has proven to be the most direct route, even if it was difficult or dangerous. Why should this time be any different?

"'Choose the right,' I always say," you pronounce, quoting one of your favorite adages. "Julian, we'll go around the right side."

He smiles. "I'm glad to hear you say that," he says, chuckling. "I thought, for a moment, you were going to have us wading across this lake. I could use the bath, but I'd like to be a little more familiar with the bathtub."

His wry comment causes you to chuckle along with him. Packing up your things, you begin to make your way along the path leading around the right side of the underground lake. But will it lead you safely to where you want to go? It isn't long before you find out. Turn to **201**.

190

Standing across from you, on a raised dais, is a statue of a mystical Ki-Rin, a creature of legend and children's stories. It glows with a golden-red light from the tip of the singular horn thrusting from the center of its forehead to the fringes of the golden-pink hair around its hooves. Brilliant violet amethysts sparkle in its eye sockets.

But as amazing as the statue is, you also notice something odd about the chamber. There are no doors exiting

the place, no Gates of Death to pass through.

The room is a dead end!

"But that cannot be," you mutter incredulously. "Everything points to this place: the stairs, the bridge, the guardian, everything. Else why the mausoleum in the tunnel? The Gates must be here!"

With a frenzy bordering on panic, you cast about for some clue to where the Gates could be, but there is nothing, nothing but the statue and the tunnel.

If you want to inspect the tunnel more closely, turn to 212. If you think the statue of the Ki-Rin holds the answer, turn to 54.

191

As the men approach, you turn and move away from the edge of the grove, sneaking swiftly and silently back to camp. You can hear the strangers enter the edge of the grove behind you.

You find Julian's thicket in the moonlight and move to awaken him. To your surprise, he springs to his feet, cat-like, at your approach. His small horseman's mace is a blur in his hand, his body tense and ready to strike.

"Julian," you whisper harshly, "hold on. It's me, Wyn. We've got some unwanted company."

He relaxes only slightly. "What are we up against?" he asks sharply and evenly.

You quickly tell him of the arrival of the horsemen.

"And they move like assassins," you finish. "I think we should hide in the undergrowth and see what they do when they get here."

"A good idea," Julian whispers. "But let's move fast. I hear them coming."

Sure enough, just as you settle into your frozen stance behind a large tree, two shadows appear on the other side of the clearing. They pause, then the taller of the two signals his partner, who slinks stealthily across the clearing.

Quietly, the assassin creeps forward, not making a sound. He moves and turns slowly to cover all points of sight. Abruptly, near the center of the grove, he stops. Bending slightly, never taking his eyes off the trees around

him, he reaches down and feels the ground at his feet.

He has found the remnants of your still-warm firepit!

Quickly now, he stands and backs toward his companion. Soon they blend with the shadows of the grove and disappear. Shortly, you hear the muffled sound of hoofbeats retreating in the distance.

After some minutes, you both come out of hiding.

"Well, they're gone," you breathe with a sigh of relief.

Julian grunts irritably. "We should have done them in," he growls. "There's no telling what they think they found here. And now they're between us and the Mountains of Shadow."

You reluctantly admit that he is right. You'll have to be doubly careful now and for the rest of the trip.

Disgruntled, Julian takes the next watch, but the night proceeds without incident. Your troubles seem to have passed—for the time being.

It is not at all like a paladin to hide from an enemy. You will have to subtract 1 honor point from your total for your cowardly behavior. After doing that, turn to 71.



192

Towering above you from a small island in the midst of the sea rise two pitch-black, monolithic pillars. From stony bottom to mist-draped top, their blackness is unbroken. One glistens strangely as if no flaw marred its sleek, cylindrical surface. The other, a tall, slender cone, is a dull, matte black that drinks in the light around it. And there, amidst the roiling mist near the top, sometimes visible and sometimes not, is the silhouette of a bridge spanning the distance between the two giants.

The words of the old lay the high priest gave you spring instantly to mind. "Climb the black heights that have no sky. Meet faceless death—'tis here you'll die!"

You can only stare at the pillars. You remember the

dream you had by the lake earlier. Death awaits you when—if—you reach the top of those spires. A wave of nausea and cold fear washes over you as you remember the terrible shaking and beating of your dream. *Will it be as bad as that?* you wonder. *Will the quest really end that way?*

At last, Julian breaks the silence. "It looks like we've reached the last leg of our quest, Wyn." His excitement is clear. "All that remains is to climb the pillars, enter the Gates, and find the Breath of Life . . . simple."

You chuckle at his understatement. *All that remains . . .* you think dourly, remembering again what it is *you* have to face when you get to the Gates.

Julian chuckles with you, realizing the irony of his oversimplified plan.

"Nevertheless," he says, "we have to get to the island. We can wade across, if you like, or we can do some exploring. I think I see a wooden structure poking out into this sea down the beach there. It might be another way across."

You, too, see the wooden structure. It could be worth looking into or just another waste of time. If you want to investigate, turn to **207**. If you decide to wade straight across to the pillars, turn to **38**.

193

Your desperate grab for the solid beam under the bridge fails. Tumbling head over foot, you plummet downward to the river. You hit the water with enough force to rattle your bones. The swiftly flowing current slams you into a large boulder before it swirls you around and sucks you mercilessly toward a small opening in the cavern wall.

But you are not defeated yet. You are a paladin, defender of the realm. You will not be stopped from gaining the Breath of Life for the princess by a mere stream on some diabolical obstacle course.

Rage and determination harden your muscles and your resolve. Flailing at the water furiously with your arms, you start to fight the current. Your feet find the rocky bottom of the stream, and you desperately forge your way toward the shore.

Just at the mouth of the tunnel, you gain the small bank

of the rushing stream. Warily, you drag your exhausted body halfway out of the water up the stone embankment. That is all you can manage for the moment. Luckily the riverbank is not too steep. Several pieces of broken board from the bridge lie about you. You grab onto one of the firmer pieces and try to lever yourself up a little higher on the bank. You look up to see Julian standing high above you at the edge of the bridge. He tosses a rope down to you.

Neither of you sees the pair of watery eyes appear in the stream near the boulder.

The end of Julian's rope falls near you. When you look up again to wave that you are all right, you are surprised to see him jumping up and down and pointing to the stream behind you. A strange, prickly tingling runs up your spine—and you know it isn't a chill from the water.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 12 or more, turn to **179**. If it is 11 or less, turn to **141**.

194

As you turn and look to where Julian is standing with the horses, you glimpse first one, then several multicolored flashes out of the corner of your eye.

How pleasant, you think distantly, moving toward the priest, a flock of birds to grace the mountainside. I haven't seen any like those since we left Tellaidan.

A rattling sound on the mountainside above you draws your attention sharply upward. Julian looks up too. To your amazement, you see several men pushing large boulders down the mountain at you. Suddenly, more men appear behind Julian, some armed with bows.

They all wear brightly colored gypsy garb like the clothing you saw on the archdruid's henchman in Castle Tellia!

Caught by surprise, neither of you react to the ominous twang and whistle of a bowshot. Turn to **5**.

195

"Julian," you say decidedly, "we have to find a way in before nightfall or lose precious time. The southern trail looks easiest and that will speed our travel. We'll head that way."

He nods in agreement. You mount your horses and begin to make your way south. The trail is indeed well marked, as though kept in good repair and used frequently. Even as the sun sets and night comes on, the trail is still visible.

But traveling on a mountain trail in the dark is never a good idea. After an hour's plodding, it is nearly impossible to see. You rein in your horse at a wide spot in the trail and wait for Julian to ride up beside you.

"Well," you begin, "what do you think? We haven't found a way in yet and we can't see where we're going. Should we turn back or keep on?"

He looks at you thoughtfully. Even in the dim starlight you can see his concern.

"I don't know," he replies. "It seems like . . ." Suddenly he stops and exclaims, "Wait, look over there! It looks like a light—a campfire, maybe!"

You turn to look. Sure enough, a small light flickers in the distance, about two or three miles off. It certainly looks like a campfire.

But whose? you think. Memories of your encounter the previous evening make you leary of any campfire out here in the wilds. It could mean trouble. Yet, if it did, why would troublemakers advertise their presence so boldly?

If you think the southern path is no longer the best way to go, you can return to the fork in the trail; turn to **25**. If you want to continue south and investigate the light, turn to **40**.

196

The little metal box with its shining red keyhole sits enigmatically on the tunnel floor, causing you no end of consternation.

"Well, we obviously don't have the key," you snap, peeved that such a device should be impeding your mission. "But that doesn't mean we can't just brave the thing and check out the end of this tunnel. Like you said, Julian, something must be very important to protect it in such a manner."

The young priest looks at you incredulously.

"I can't believe you would hazard such a thing. If this is a trap, and not just some fancy warning system, it could lead

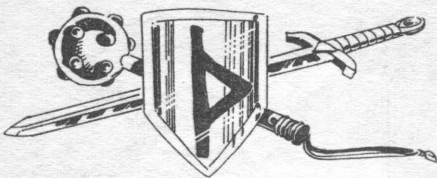
to our deaths, the end of the quest.”

“Yes,” you counter, “but the poem the high priest gave me said that I had to die to get through the Gates of Death. We could be on the threshold of the very Gates themselves.”

Julian continues to look dubious.

“Maybe you’re right,” he replies, “but it seems to me that there should be more to go through before finding the Gates. Perhaps we should go back and try another way.”

You hear him but don’t listen. You seem so close to your goal. It should be just down this tunnel. If you decide to go down the tunnel, turn to **185**. If you heed Julian’s warning and go back, turn to **208**.



197

The tunnel suddenly splits three ways. You stand at the intersection, perplexed. The tunnels in front of you and to your left glow with a distant, eerie light. The tunnel to the right is dark.

If you go down the left tunnel, turn to **3**. If you choose to go straight, turn to **88**. If you go to the right, turn to **105**.

198

Your sword slashes through thin air. The guardian has moved, and you have missed!

Julian rushes to your side and crouches to retrieve his mace. Suddenly, there is a quick flicker of movement at the corner of your vision. You whirl to see the creature materializing again. Julian shouts a warning, but it’s too late. The beast lashes out at you with its huge, meaty hand, and a blow like a sledgehammer slams you to the surface of the bridge. Before the priest can react, the beast has vanished again!



You struggle to regain your feet. Your wounds throb with intense pain and blood runs down your face. You find it hard to breathe and fear a broken rib. Subtract 2 hit points from your hit point total. If this reduces your hit points to zero or less, turn to 47.

I must keep fighting, you tell yourself. The princess's life hangs in the balance, not to mention my own. Trusting the gods to guide your blow, you swing your sword again.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 14 or more, turn to 42. If it is 13 or less, repeat this section.

199

Trapped in a maze! The sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach gets worse as you think of the fate that awaits you. You wonder how long it will be before you end up like the rotting corpse you found.

The answer comes sooner than you think as an odd, rattling noise reverberates through the tunnels. You and Julian immediately drop into defensive battle crouches. Holding your torches high, you hope to be able to see what is causing the noise before it gets too close.

"There," Julian shouts. "There it is!"

Slowly, from out of one of the many tunnels, emerges an incredible creature like a great, bulbous centipede. Each bloated segment of its foul green body moves forward on two clawed feet that rattle as they touch the rocky floor of the maze. The thing's head is another bulbous section tipped with eight waving tentacles. Its huge, multi-faceted red eyes glow in the light of your torch.

It stops and appears to stare at you. Then with a crazed hiss, it lurches forward to attack.

You draw your weapons quickly. "It is an accursed carrion crawler," shouts Julian. "Watch the tentacles; they can paralyze you!"

You begin to back down the tunnel, seeking a better place to make a stand, when a loud shriek splits the air, jerking you to a halt. The carrion crawler stops suddenly, too, and starts to turn around. It literally crawls up the walls to get turned about. And none too soon. For there, in the dim

shadows at the edge of your torchlight, dance several humanoid shapes. They all begin to shriek and shout.

“Now what?” you ask incredulously.

Turn to 177.

200

Your sleep is troubled by dark dreams. You hear a distant voice—the high priest’s?—sternly reciting the Lay of the Gates of Death. At every turn in the Way you are covered with dirt and rocks, nearly buried alive. You claw your way out, only to be buried again. Then, just as you are suffocating beneath the dirt, great gouts of water wash over you, and you are swept into a dark tunnel full of roiling water crashing into stone.

Suddenly, the scene changes. You are flying toward solitary black towers. There is nothing behind them but darkness: no sky, no clouds, nothing. Standing atop those horrible heights, commanding all in view, is a great, terrifying beast. It has no face! It is Death!

The words of the old lay ring in your mind. This is “faceless death.” You must die here!

Fear pierces your very soul, but you cannot fly away. You hurtle straight into its huge, taloned hands. You pull out your sword only to have it plucked away by the beast. It grips you terribly. Pulling out a gleaming white club, it pounds you and shakes you like a doll until you think you will be ripped apart. The pain is unbearable. You weep and plead, begging for release as no paladin has ever done.

You cannot take any more.

You awaken with a start. Julian is crouching next to you, prodding you gently. “Wake up,” he tells you. “You’re having a bad dream. Get up and eat.”



You arise groggily, sweating and shaking. Julian continues, "There's no telling how long we've been asleep. Let's have some breakfast and move on."

Slightly upset for oversleeping, and bothered by your dream, you begin to eat. The rations you brought are cold but satisfying. Once filled, you stand and look around.

Before you is the lake. The water is clear and still, and the plants that peek out from its surface tell you it must be shallow. Across the lake, about a half-mile or so away, you see what looks like a cave. Could that be the next step in your quest? Off to the right, you notice a path that follows the edge of the lake around the cavern wall. It appears to be wide enough to walk on, but for how long? There is a similar path circling the left side of the cavern lake. *The paths seem drier, you think, but wading across the lake might take less time in the long run. Besides, a dip in the water will do us some good.*

If you want to go right, turn to **189**. If you want to try the left path, turn to **209**. If you decide to wade across the lake, turn to **91**.

201

Surely the gods are with you, for the narrow, moss-laden path on the right leads you all the way around the cavern lake to the cave you spotted earlier. But what you find when you arrive is much more than a cave. It is the opening to still another tunnel.

This tunnel or tube drops down at a very steep angle. The cavern lake empties into it at great speed, forming a series of rapids that rush down into the darkness. Apparently none of the light-emitting mass grows in there. The roar of the foaming water is lost in the depths of the tunnel.

"More of the wondrous Way of Death," you remark blandly. "I'm really getting tired of danger. These cursed rapids will be the death of us if we're not careful."

Julian replies with a heavy sigh. "I couldn't agree more, but we don't have much choice. It's either the rapids or the path, which by the way, looks pretty treacherous from where I stand."

You move over to join him and immediately see the cause

of his concern. The path you just traveled snakes down into the tunnel, but the rapids have eroded it to little more than a narrow ledge. Not only that, but it is wet and covered with slick moss. Still, your decision is an easy one.

"I think I'd rather brave this path," you tell him, "than the rapids. In we go!"

Turn to 162.

202

The little puffballs continue their game, dodging on and off the path, in and out of your horses' hooves. The forest's swirling patterns and shapes and colors lend a festive atmosphere to the puffballs' enchantingly cute antics.

You get caught up in the game. Delightedly, you prod your horse onward and succeed in popping some of the puffballs. Small goutts of spores and gas burst into the air. This seems to draw more of the tiny balls. Soon, your horse cannot take a step without bursting more of the puffballs.

This game is lots of fun. You feel great. The patterns and colors remind you of a carnival, and the clouds of gas add to your merriment. You jump off your horse and begin to romp around in the crazy garden. Julian is dancing down the path ahead of you. You see him fall to the ground laughing.

Soon you forget Julian. You forget your quest and the Breath of Life. *This is life. Just have fun.*

Oh, but all this fun is going to your head. You really need to lie down and rest. You find a tiny clearing among the vines and pale white flowers and get comfortable. *A good nap will clear my head, you think. Just need a little . . . are those vines and bushes moving toward me? Ha, ha, what a silly notion . . . just sleeeee—*

You curl up on the ground. The vines and plants seem to snuggle up to you to cushion your rest. You don't realize, as you fall prey to the garden's spell, that you'll never wake up to find out whether the plants were moving or not. ✕

203

You are so close to the end of the quest, and only this pathetic creature stands between you and success.

The absurdity of the situation is almost too much for you

to bear, and the rage inside you begins to boil over. You will not be stopped by some deformed beast. You will sweep it aside by the strength of your own arm and sword!

The beast howls again, sensing your rage, but you hear something in that howl. It has a certain forlorn despair in it. Could the beast be crying out?

You don't have much time to consider. Julian's mace is already whirling in his hands. The beast, seeing the weapon, tenses for an attack. What will you do?

Roll two dice and add the result to your wisdom skill score. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **205**. If it is 10 or less, turn to **172**.

204

Those multicolored splotches mean only one thing to you—the archdruid's assassins have caught you in an . . .

“AMBUSH!” you shout, diving at Julian. You crash into him just as you hear the twang and whistle of a bowshot. The speeding arrow skips off the back of your armor as you tumble with the young priest into the boulders nearby.

With the speed of a striking snake, you are up and ready for battle. A loud rattling sound catches your attention. Looking up the mountainside, you gape in horror. Some of the ambushers are loosening several large boulders up there. They could let loose enough dirt and rock to cover the tunnel entrance on you!

There's no time to lose. “Make for the horses,” you order. “From there we'll make a dash for the tunnel—and pray we make it! We move NOW!” At your signal, the two of you dart out from cover and sprint for the horses.

Roll two dice and add the result to your dexterity skill score. If the total is 10 or less, turn to **5**. If the total is 11 or more, turn to **65**.

205

The minotaur stands poised at the center of the stone bridge, ready for your attack, its gaze never leaving your face. Yet, you see in its eyes a plea—for help, perhaps?

You quickly come to a decision. It's a gamble, but you cannot deny your feelings. You motion to Julian to stop.

"We will *not* attack," you announce loudly, hoping that this creature can make some sense of your words. "Our purpose here is noble, and we are honorable men. We intend no harm to you or what lies beyond. I will walk out to greet you—open-handed—to show my words are true."

The beast bellows threateningly, shaking its muscular arms over its stout oxlike head. Julian looks at you dumbfounded as you begin to walk out to the center of the bridge, hands outstretched and empty.

The twisted creature glares at you balefully and bellows again. Are you making a mistake? You'll soon find out. The bestial being advances, its great hands outstretched and grasping. Turn to 211.

206

Twinges of conscience assail you as you sneak down the gap. *But, you think, this is the easiest and fastest way to get through. That has to count for something.*

Yet, as you slide between the house and the cavern wall, you realize that this is all too easy. You shouldn't be able to just sneak by like this.

"Julian, stop for a moment," you whisper. "Doesn't it seem just a bit too convenient to be able to slip by this way?"

The young priest stops. "You know," he whispers in reply, "you're right. I take it you'd like me to check ahead for unpleasant surprises."

You watch in interest as the young priest and ex-thief begins his work. Almost immediately, he stops and turns to face you, his eyes wide with wonder.

"You are uncanny," he mutters in awe. "We were right on top of this one!" He motions you forward and shows you an ingenious trip mechanism. It is so small that you could easily have missed it—or hit it.

"I have no idea what it might do, but here it is. Do you want me to trip it so we can see?"

"No!" you reply emphatically. "Let's not press our luck. Can we get around the thing without tripping it?"

"Certainly," he says confidently. "I can even remove it to leave us a clear line of retreat if we need one."

You nod your agreement and he proceeds. Soon you are on your way again. Julian carefully scours the last several feet of the passage for more traps, and finds nothing. Shortly, you find yourselves standing in the next cavern.

This cavern is much like the previous one, but contains no garden. Instead, the strange phosphorescent glow from the cavern walls shines down on a large, tranquil lake. There seems to be nothing threatening here at all.

Waves of relief wash over you. Since you entered the Way of Death, you have had nothing but trouble and surprises. Now, as you unpack your gear and rest by the quiet subterranean lake, a feeling of momentary peace fills you. Sleep soon follows.

Subtract 1 honor point from your total. Sneaking is an action best left to thieves, not paladins. Then mark one more day off the time track and turn to **200**.

207

The thought of going into the water does not appeal to you at all. "There's no telling what could be in there," you comment as you gather your pack and weapons. "Let's go down the beach on this side and see what we can find."

Julian nods his agreement and you're off. Your trek takes you down the beach for some distance. Soon, the coarse beach sand turns to solid bedrock. The wooden structure is much more visible now. It certainly appears to be a pier, but is there a boat to cross in?

Another few hundred feet answers that question.

Stretching out about thirty feet into the murky water of the great lake, the old wooden pier is still very solid, and as you walk to the end of the planks, you see there *is* a boat tied to the end of the wharf. It appears to be a simple rowboat, but there are no oars.

There is, however, a large smear of blood on the bottom and side of the boat—an ominous sign.

"That doesn't look too inviting," says the priest, "and how do we get across with no oars? We might as well wade."

"No," you counter, "I won't wade in this lake. If we have to, we can row with our hands." With that, you clamber down off the pier and into the boat. Turn to **184**.

208

You look down the web-shrouded tunnel in complete frustration. Somehow you feel that your goal would be so much closer through this tunnel.

But Julian is right again. To march down a trapped tunnel and hazard your lives and the quest to save the princess's life is indeed foolhardy. There is no recourse but to turn back and try another way.

You make your way dejectedly down the dark tunnel and return to the fork. You can still go down the tunnel to the left, the one with the breeze (167), or the tunnel to the right with the strange glow at the end (133). Or, you can go back to the main cavern and try a different direction (33).

209

You really don't want to get all your things wet by wading across the lake, and the right path looks too difficult.

"Let's go left," you announce dramatically. "I've got a hunch about that direction."

Julian smiles wryly, remembering the uncanny success of some of your earlier hunches. He seems more than glad to follow you that way.

After just a little while, it is apparent that your choice was a good one. The path around the left side of the lake is wide and dry and perfectly safe to walk on. You should reach the cave on the far side of the lake in no time at all . . .

. . . provided, of course, nothing terrible interrupts your trip.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 9 or more, turn to 51. If it is 8 or less, turn to 59.

210

WHOOSH! You are suddenly flying through the air, ejected from the underground tube on top of a great geyser of water. You shoot upward and come down with a splash.

Not more water, you think miserably. You struggle to an upright position and get your head above water, gasping for air. To your surprise, you can stand. The water here is only chest deep. You slowly check yourself over. Much to

your further surprise, nothing is damaged. You hope Julian fared as well.

Julian!! You whirl about, scanning the water. The priest's body is floating face down near you. You swim to his side and turn him over. His heart still beats under your probing fingers, but the pulse is weak and irregular.

Though your head is pounding and your eyes don't want to focus, you look around to get your bearings and dimly make out what looks like a beach. You head for it immediately and drag Julian's unconscious body up onto the coarse sand. Rolling him onto his stomach, you begin to try to revive him. By pressing down on his back and alternately raising his arms, you soon get him to cough out some of the water in his lungs. Only when he is breathing regularly again do you stop to rest and look around.

What you see leaves *you* breathless. Turn to 178.

211

The hunchbacked minotaur continues its advance. Those powerful arms could easily pick you up and toss you right off the bridge.

But you stick by your intuition. Dropping your hands slowly to your belt buckle, you unclasp it and set your weapons carefully on the bridge. Now you are completely unarmed and unable to defend yourself. The moment of truth has arrived.

Suddenly, only a few feet from you, the creature stops. Slowly, its face twists into a horrendous contortion. You think for a moment that your end has come, that it will attack for sure, but it does not. Then an amazing thing happens.

From the corner of its deepset, squinty eyes, tiny tears seep out. You watch in wonder as they trickle down the craggy, convoluted cheek of the misshapen creature before you. Suddenly, you understand the odd twisting of its face. It is smiling at you!

Slowly, it lowers its strong arms and straightens itself as much as its twisted back will allow. Its eyes are wet but shine now with a different light. Haltingly, it speaks.

"For many years I am kept here, chained by magic to this place. No leave, never leave. I guard Gates from those who

would hurt what is in pillar there. Many come. Some fight, get by me. Most die below. You—only you—of all who come, have wisdom to see past ugly face, see my pain. I now free of this place. You, your kindness, have freed me. Go now. Find what you seek.”

A small lump catches in your throat as you watch the deformed creature waddle past you. It seems to be standing a little taller now, freed of an age-old burden. You feel a glowing warmth inside as it passes Julian and disappears into the archway and the darkness beyond.

You shake your head to clear your eyes of tears and turn toward the archway across the bridge. As you approach, the black portcullis slides silently upward. You are free to enter the tunnel beyond.

Add 2 honor points to your total and turn to 98.

212

You sprint back into the tunnel and begin to look into the grottos. You run your hands around several of them only to realize that it is useless. There is no gate or secret door here. You will have to inspect the chamber of the Ki-Rin.

As you turn to retrace your steps, you hear a faint sound, like the last rattling breath of a dying man. It sends creeping prickles down your spine. The air around you is suddenly ice cold and fear like none you have ever felt slips its frigid hand into your soul and chills you to the bone.

You stand there, petrified, your muscles taut and your body shaking. One part of you refuses to look, but an intense fear of death has engulfed you. With morbid fascination, you turn to look that death in the face.

You watch in all-consuming terror as all the little grottos in the tunnel quietly begin to open.

The engraved slabs slide back and release the contents of each narrow crypt. A crippling pall of dread seeps out of each grotto as ghastly humanoid shapes crawl slowly out of their resting places and slither down the walls of the tunnel.

A sickening wave of horror sweeps over you as they turn in your direction, and it is all you can do to keep from collapsing in a quaking heap on the floor. They are all dressed in black tunics, boots and hoods. Each carries a stout white



club. They shamble toward you with the fearsome mindlessness of undead zombies.

But the most terrifying aspect of these creatures is their faces. Your lips quiver and your jaw goes slack as the terrifying vision of Death in your dream becomes living—or unliving—reality before your eyes.

They have no faces! Their heads are completely white and without feature: no eyes, no mouths, nothing!

Turn to 169.

213

The trumpets sound, the fifes twitter, the pipes skirl, and the drums beat lively cadences. The turrets and towers of the castle are capped with bright, flowing banners and pennants. The metal domes of the order's sanctuary have been burnished to a gleaming sheen along with your armor. An air of pomp and panoply abounds and hearts are high. The sun shines radiantly in the sky, and there is not a cloud in the heavens.

It's a perfect day for a coronation.

Dignitaries from all over the realm and beyond have gathered to see the Princess Rhiannon crowned. The old king will set the crown upon her head himself. He handed the sovereignty over to her after her recovery and would now retire quietly to live out his days as her counselor.

From your vantage point next to the throne on the dais of the castle's great hall, you can see all those who have gathered in all their finery. It is a tremendous sight, though not quite as moving, you remember, as the pillars under the Mountains of Shadow.

Your return saved the princess's life. In an unforgettable moment, the healing gift flowed from your being into hers and she was restored. Your return also prompted the hasty disappearance of the foul archdruid. You know that someday he will have to be dealt with, but those are thoughts for another day and time.

The trumpets sound again. Down the long, carpeted aisle of courtiers, guests, and townspeople comes the new queen's entourage. You, the newly appointed captain of the queen's personal guard, snap to attention.

You smile as the young queen appears, dressed resplendently as befits her new rank. As she follows the king and the high priest slowly down the aisle, your eyes meet. Her countenance brightens, and she returns your smile. *Let the rumor-mongers work with that*, you think mischievously.

You chuckle to yourself and set that thought aside as well. Only the future can tell what may befall the two of you. Right now, you are content to let the glory and splendor of her coronation wash over you. The satisfaction of knowing that your selfless efforts helped to bring all this to pass is sufficient reward for the queen's personal captain, a full-fledged paladin of the realm. ✠

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