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Advance Dungeons & Dragons®

ADVENTURE 14 GAMEBOOK

TRAIL SINISTER



By James Brumbaugh

0-88038-453-0

CHARACTER STATS CARD
TRAIL SINISTER



NAME: Kardel Arthur Dolan

CHAR. CLASS: Fighter

AGE: 20

SKILL POINTS:

KARDEL

Fighting: 10 + _____ = _____

Presence: 8 + _____ = _____

Perception: 6 + _____ = _____

PROBMER

Stealth: 14 + _____ = _____

LANGOR

Wisdom: 13 + _____ = _____

GOLD PIECES: 350 _____

HEALING POTION DOSES: (3) (2) (1)

HIT POINTS:

KARDEL 32 _____

PROBMER 22 _____

LANGOR 15 _____

RPG 160

CHALLENGED BY A DEADLY WYVERN!

You and your companions, Probmer and Langor, traveling to Mt. Vernot in search of your father's Crystal of Knowledge, approach the house of Fluglash the Wizard.

You scan the grounds for anything that indicates danger. Then your hunter's eye spots movement, something large shuffling quietly behind the curtain of willow branches.

As you wait, whatever it is starts getting restless and the willow branches swish gently as it pushes them from behind. You hear the soft clatter of metallic scales. It's big, but not big enough to be an adult dragon.

Suddenly, the willows part and rushing straight at you, teeth bared, poisonous stinger held high, is a large, lizard-like wyvern. Its sharp claws rip the ground, trying to gain traction as it accelerates across the green turf.

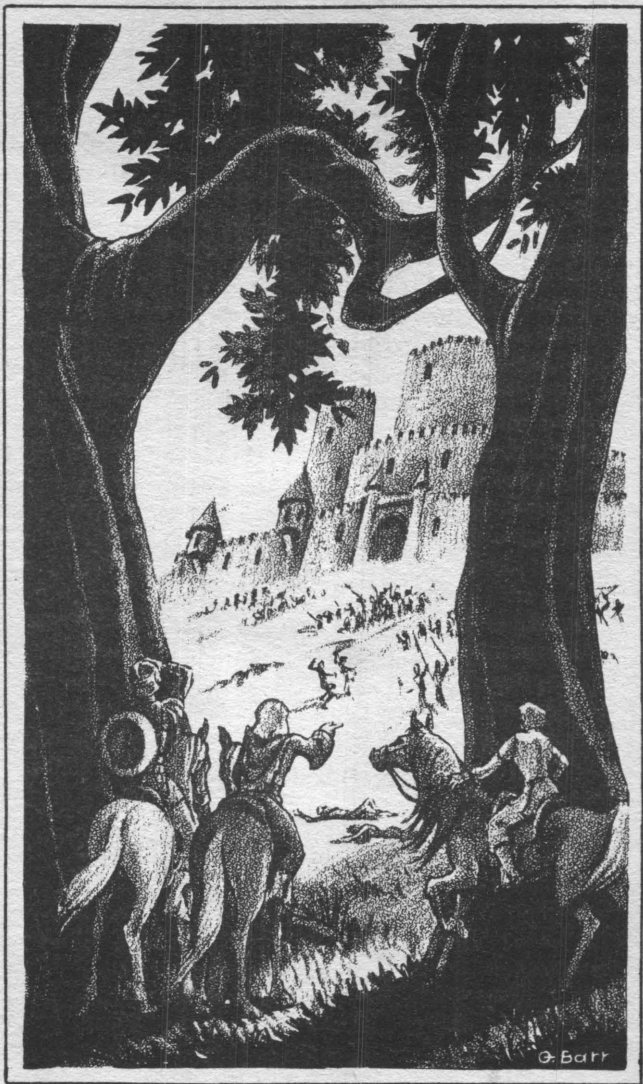
Your sword snaps out as reflexes take over. Langor, too, is ready and his incomprehensible mutterings start to draw on the magic energy that sorcerers command.

Will you survive the wyvern's charge?

Roll two dice and add the total to Langor's wisdom score. If the total is 19 or more, turn to **64**. If it is 18 or less, turn to **5**.

Whatever the outcome, only your decisions, and the luck of the dice can help you survive along the

TRAIL SINISTER



G. Barr

An **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS**[®]
Adventure Gamebook #14

TRAIL SINISTER

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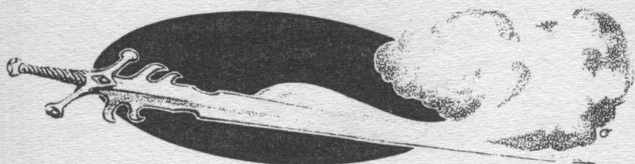
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AN EXCITING NEW EXPERIENCE IN BOOKS

Welcome, you who dare approach the Trail Sinister, 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 14.

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 Kardel Arthur Dolan, fighter and nobleman, heir to the Duke of Pembroke. You are twenty years old, strong, self-assured, and skilled with sword, lance, and bow, though you are short on actual combat experience. You believe that duty and honor are all-important, and that awareness separates you from the commoner.

You have left Pembroke Castle on the trail of a stolen family artifact, five magic plaques that trigger the appearance of the "Crystal of Knowledge." Your father desperately needs the crystal to discover the strategy being used by a deadly army of trolls that threatens the Dukedom. Accompanying you are two men—strangers who answered your father's call for volunteers. They are a thief named Probmer Slank, and an arrogant magic-user named Langor Margonier, who brings not only his spell-casting abilities, but also a potion of healing. With these two companions and 350 gold pieces, you have gone to recapture the family treasure.

PLAYING THE GAME

Your Kardel Dolan will be different from someone else's because YOU help create him.

Carefully tear out the removable Character Stats Card at the beginning of this book. This card is your record of Kardel's character makeup, as well as that of his companions. It also doubles as a bookmark.

Since you will probably be playing this adventure many times, we suggest that you write on the card lightly and in pencil only, so that your character stats can be erased easily when you are ready to play again. If you have access to a photocopier, you may wish to make photocopies of the Character Stats Card before you fill it in. Another alternative is to reproduce the card on a 3" X 5" card or slip of paper.

You are now ready to complete the individual identity of Kardel Arthur Dolan. Your character *name* (Kardel Arthur Dolan), *age* (20), *character class* (fighter), and *gold pieces* (350) have already been entered for you. Before you fill out the rest of the card, it is necessary for you to understand the game's scoring system.



SCORING

Playing the game requires you to keep track of four things—hit points, skill points, gold pieces, and the number of doses in Langor's healing potion—on the tear-out *Character Stats Card* located at the front of the book. An explanation of each of these follows.

HIT POINTS

You, Probmer, and Langor each have a specific life strength, represented by *hit points*. Once a character's hit points are gone, that character ceases to exist. If this happens to Kardel, the adventure has ended, whether the text has come to an end or not.

The characters lose hit points each time they fail, through the roll of the dice, to hit an enemy, because their opponent strikes them back. As a result, they must deduct a stated number of hit points from their hit point totals.

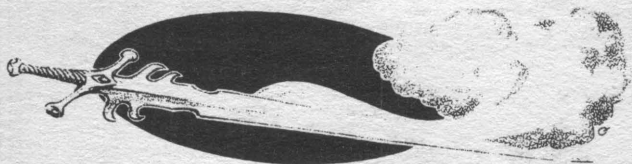


Kardel Dolan, as a strong, young fighter, starts out with 32 hit points, plus one random chance to improve his score. Roll one six-sided die and add the total to 32 for your total hit points. Record this number in the blank space labeled "hit points." During the course of the game, do not erase the original number of hit points, since you may need to refer to it at certain times when your character is "healed." A character may never be healed of more hit points than he had at the start of the game.

Probmer and Langor, being lesser characters in physique, experience, and ability, have their hit points assigned at 22 and 15 respectively.

Guard your characters' hit points carefully, but use them when the goal seems worthwhile. At times

throughout the adventure, you will be given the opportunity to use a dose of Langor's healing potion. This allows you to roll one six-sided die and add the result to your hit points. In addition, there are places in the text where natural healing occurs and a stated number of hit points are recovered. However, it is important to remember, *you can never recover more hit points than you had at the beginning of the adventure.*



SKILL POINTS

Now you are ready to determine the *skills* of your character.

Skill points allow you to increase a character's chance of success by adding the score for a specific skill to the dice roll. In this book, Kardel has a base skill level for each of his three skills, *fighting* (10), *presence* (8), and *perception* (6). You will be asked to divide 9 optional skill points in any way you want for Kardel, provided you give him at least 2 optional points in each of his three skills, and *fighting* must be the highest or equal to the highest, and *perception* must be the lowest or equal to the lowest. These optional points are added to his base skill points and the totals recorded in the blanks provided on the Character Stats Card.

Probmer, as a thief, has *stealth* as his only skill and it is assigned 14 points. Langor, as magic user, has

wisdom for his skill with 13 points assigned. These skills are the only ones that play a part in the game choices of this book.

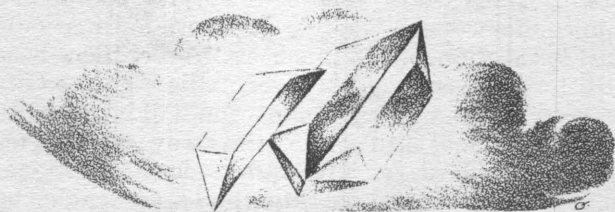
An explanation of the five skills used in the book—*fighting*, *presence*, *perception*, *stealth*, and *wisdom*—follows.



Fighting

A character's *fighting* skill score increases his chance of success in combat.

When you fight an opponent in this book, roll two dice and add the sum of the dice to your fighting skill score. If the result is equal to, or larger than, the number required to "hit" (given in the text), you are successful.



Presence

Your *presence* skill score increases your chance of success in convincing others to act as you wish. It is a combination of dress, noble bearing, and charisma.

To use your presence skill, roll two dice and add the

sum of the dice to your presence skill score. If the total equals or exceeds the number given in the text, you are successful.

Perception

Kardel's *perception* skill score increases his chance of success of noticing important details about his surroundings or the people around him. It is helpful when looking for hidden objects, traps, spies, and the like.

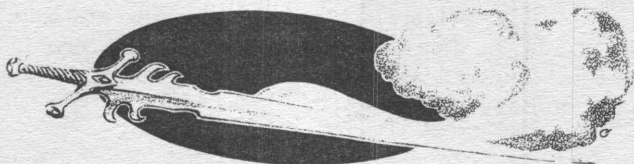
To use your perception skill, roll two dice and add the sum of the dice to your perception skill score. If the total equals or exceeds the number given in the text, you have succeeded.



Stealth

Probmer's *stealth* skill score increases his chance of success when performing acts of thievery, including hiding, moving silently, picking locks and other like tasks.

To use his stealth skill, roll two dice and add the result to his stealth skill score. If the total is equal to, or greater than, the number given in the text, you are successful.



Wisdom

Langor's *wisdom* skill score increases his chance of success when performing feats of magic. It combines his intelligence, reasoning, and memory for the purposes of this book.

To use his wisdom skill, roll two dice and add the total to his wisdom skill score. If the total is equal to, or greater than, the number given in the text, you have been successful.



GOLD PIECES

This is the amount of money you have to purchase items you need during the course of this adventure. You will need to conserve your gold to the best of your ability so you do not run out before the adventure is over. However, do not be afraid to spend the gold when it seems necessary. Whenever you spend money, deduct the number of gold pieces (abbreviated **gp**) given in the text from your total, and record the new balance.



HEALING

Langor has made known that he carries a potion of healing. It contains only three doses, which you will have the opportunity to use at various places in the text. To use a dose of the potion, roll one six-sided die and add the result to the injured character's hit points. This may be used by any of the three characters in your party. Deduct one from the number of doses remaining each time the potion is used, and remember a character can never gain more hit points than his original total.

MAGIC USE

While Langor is indeed a wizard, he jealously guards his powers and will never reveal what spells, nor how many, he can use. He is vain about his abilities, and though he will freely use that power, he seldom asks for advice. He usually decides what spells to use and when, although there may be times when he seeks your counsel. Therefore, the text will define Langor's spell use at the appropriate time, and you will have to act within that framework.



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. Then draw one of the slips, note the number, and place it back in the container. Mix up the numbers and draw a second time. Each draw represents one roll of a die. If only one die is called for, draw only one number.

Your characters are now complete, and you are ready to begin your adventure. Turn the page—and good luck!

The dust kicked up by your horse's hooves makes you choke. You try to stifle it but a hoarse cough results. The thrill of adventure has long since died after three endless, boring days in the saddle. The dirt road stretches ahead. Tall, leafy green trees wall either side and obscure the lane as it curves away to the left.

"How much farther?" asks Langor Margonier in his high-pitched, boyish voice.

Head high, you turn and look at him. A thick coat of dust covers his regal, magenta robes, and he looks more like a beggar than the powerful mage he claims to be. You can't help chuckling softly to yourself before you answer. "Only around the next bend."

"I've been thinking," says Probmer riding next to you. "I'm not questioning your judgment, but how do you know we're heading in the right direction?"

You look at the plucky thief expecting to see a smirk of jest, but instead you find him looking back at you in total seriousness.

"You know we caught the thief who stole the plaques?"



Probmer nods, and with a quick glance behind, you see that Langor is paying attention, too.

"My father questioned him with the help of the High Cleric, and every time the thief lied, my father knew. Eventually, the thief tired of questions and told us the truth. He sold all five plaques to people on

a caravan bound through Ironton to Mount Vernot.”

“You didn’t torture him?” A glimmer of fear flickers across Probmer’s eyes.

“My family has more honor than that,” you snap, and a smile and a nod show that Probmer is relieved with this news.

The conversation dies, and you let your horse plod on. Your mind turns to your father, the Duke of Pembroke, and his predicament—the reason you are so far from home. A thief stole the five magic squares of marble that singly are useless, but when interlocked and the keyword spoken, create the powerful Crystal of Knowledge. Your father desperately needs them, and now they are in the hands of ignorant commoners, sold by the thief before he was caught.

At least you have the names of the five people who bought the plaques. In your mind you run down what little you know of them. There’s Stout Snout and Stoneclash, both fighters of some type; Araquat, a merchant, most likely; Fluglash, who was dressed as a spell-caster; and the mysterious Lolita Gig. You must find each of them, and by some means, get back all five magic plaques. The task seems tough enough, but what makes it worse is that there is so little time.



Overwhelming numbers of trolls have been gathering around Pembroke and may already be launching their attack on the castle. And there’s something strange about the trolls, somehow you know they are getting outside help—their tactics are too subtle, their efforts too well coordinated. Your father must have the Crystal of Knowledge to plan his defenses;

he needs its powers to see through the trolls' allies and stop them.

You wish the King of Pittland would have honored your father's request for aid—or at least have offered the use of Trollbiter, his magic sword with the power to permanently kill trolls, but the king said he was busy fighting some border war and couldn't be bothered. Every last one of your father's men is committed to stopping the trolls, but without the crystal they'll have little chance.

And what of *your* chances? You look at your two strange companions. All the duke's forces are needed in defense of Pembroke, and these two are the only ones who came forward when your father tried to hire adventurers from the populace. There's Langor, self-proclaimed wizard, with his rich dress and haughty air. You don't know what his powers are except that he has a healing potion. Then there's the practical, leather-clothed thief, Probmer Slank, who says he's seeking honest work but has spent a lot of time in local jails. Between the two of them, they don't seem like much help, and so far they've only found time to disagree on everything.

Will they follow you when the going gets tough? Why did they volunteer? You wish your boyhood companion, Newrick, were here. You miss his strength. It doesn't seem right to be off without him, but your father needs every man at the castle. Before you can think more about it, you round the bend and see the town of Ironton ahead through the trees.

Turn to 6.

2

There are more customers in the inn now that the workday is nearing an end. Many of the wealthier shopkeepers and businessmen have stopped for a mug of ale on their way home. You push your way

through the crowded room to a spot at one of the few open tables. In moments a serving maid is before you.

“Food,” demands Langor. “Lots of food.”

“Where’s your manners?” asks Probmer sharply, but a hint of mirth crinkles the corners of his eyes.

You order beef and ale for the three of you. Before the maid returns, the innkeeper ambles to your table and sits down across from you.

“How was your visit with Araquat?” he asks.

“Never saw him,” you answer.

“Does that mean you will be staying another night?”

“It seems so,” you answer, although you wish it were otherwise. The day has been filled with frustration. Your sense of haste chafes at your mind, but there doesn’t seem to be anything you can do about it.

“The room is still available, I hope.”

“Yes, at the same rate.”

“Fine,” you agree, taking the required coins from your purse. (Subtract the same amount you spent last night from your gold piece count.)

“Think there’s any way to see Araquat tonight?” you ask, handing the innkeeper the night’s lodging.

“I’d say not. He’s very touchy about his private life—once had a man hanged for trespassing when he was too insistent about seeing him at his home. You’ll just have to wait until tomorrow.”

With that, the innkeeper rises. “Try offering the clerks a few coins tomorrow.” He winks and starts for the bar, slipping the money into his pocket.

“Don’t forget my bath,” shouts Langor after him.

“You’re going to wash yourself away to nothing,” says Probmer.

“At least *I’m* clean,” the mage retorts.

You spend a fitful night. Worry makes the hours creep by, but just lying in a fine goosedown bed refreshes your muscles.

If you are below your full hit point total, the night's rest will restore 2 hit points to you and your companions. Remember, you cannot exceed your original total.

The next day, the three of you return to Araquat's office. The same two clerks greet you, and their glum expressions assure you that they'll be no more helpful than yesterday. They barely glance up as you enter before going back to work.

Not to be put off, you march over to the counter and lay your palm flat on the hard surface, letting 2 gold coins clink loudly as you bring your hand down.

"I need to see Master Araquat," you say.

Both clerks turn, now a bit more interested.

Subtract 2 gp from your purse, and turn to **185**.

3

The huge, slavering beast slashes at you, brushing aside your sword as if it were a stick. His foreclaws latch onto you and he knocks you over backward. His weight crushes you to the stone floor, and his back legs begin a churning piston action. His claws rake your armor repeatedly. Most of the damage is deflected harmlessly by the fine iron plate, but each flurry scores hits that scrape off precious flesh. Subtract 5 hit points from your current total.

There is little you can do. However, Langor readies his Burning Hands spell and, while the cat is preoccupied, steps up behind it and lets fly. Twin tongues of flame leap from the magic-user's fingertips. The cat feels the heat and tries to roll away, which will leave you in the path of the fire.

Roll two dice and add the total to Langor's wisdom. If the total is 17 or more, turn to **33**. If the resulting total is 16 or less, turn to **49**.

4

The assassins don't expect you to attack, and your ferocity throws them off guard. Making a half step forward, you bring your splendid blade flashing down to cleave the nearest hand from its outstretched arm. You can practically hear the man's teeth crack as he clenches them in pain, but not a sound comes from his mouth.

By instinct, you know there's another assassin moving in on your back. You twirl the long blade of your weapon a half turn, so it aims behind you, shift your weight back and plunge the sword into his stomach. You turn and see surprise register on his face before he goes limp.

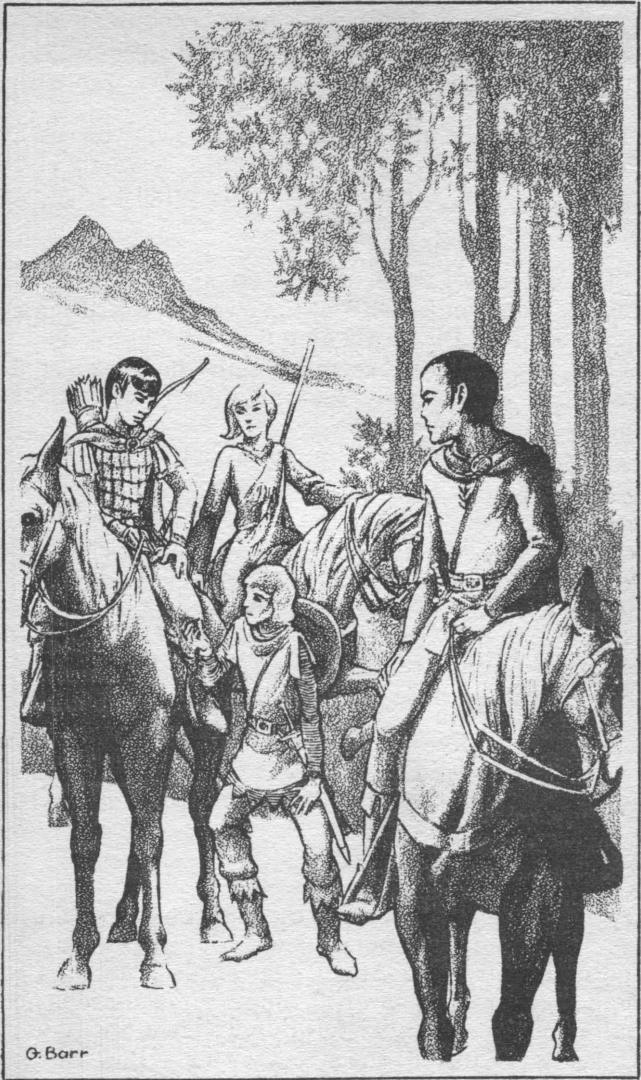
Langor has been busy, too. A fan of flames leaps from his hands. His invisibility is lost, but another black figure writhes and crumples, his clothing ablaze.

Others move in from behind crates and boxes. Leading the second wave is a thinner, unusually proportioned figure who moves with a strange feline grace. A woman! Even in the heat of battle, you know it must be Lolita Gig. Another attack is coming. You drop everything from your mind to meet the rush of two more dark figures, noting as you do so that the woman has stepped back.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or more, turn to **32**. If it is 19 or less, go to **56**.

5

Quickly you dash into the street followed by Langor and Probmer. You look first one way, then the other. Down the road leading out of town to the north you see a man's dark silhouette running as fast as his short legs can carry him. Immediately you grab your horse and start after the disappearing figure.



G. Barr

A few seconds later you hear Probmer's and Langor's horses behind you, and the three of you thunder out of town, gaining on the stranger with each stride.

Before you're a quarter-mile out of town, you catch up with the wheezing runner. He stands warily eyeing you as you surround him, his breath rasping heavily.

"Why are you fleeing?" you ask.

"I'm not sure I want to talk to you," he says, putting his hand on the hilt of his sword. "But if it's a fight you seek, I'll surely give it to you."

"But, sir," you start, trying to calm the unexpected hostility, "we are only seeking information about some friends. Stoneclash—"

"I am Stoneclash, and I'm sure I don't know you." Angrily he draws his sword. The jerky motion tells you he is no master swordsman, yet his readiness shows he's been in a fight or two. You've come for the plaque, though, not a fight. Perhaps you can bargain first.

Mustering all your natural charm and confidence, you smile, letting your sword arm drop to show you mean no harm.

"Good Stoneclash, you misunderstand our business with you. I've come to talk of profit, not death."

Roll two dice and add them to your presence skill score. If the result is 17 or higher, turn to **25**. If it is 16 or less, turn to **118**.

6

A renewed energy courses through your tired muscles. You urge your horse down the narrow street leading into Ironton. At the edge of town you pass a silent guardpost, apparently empty since there is no challenge. Ahead, only a few hundred feet, the lights of a two-story inn fill the street with a yellow glow.

You pull up in front of the heavy log structure and jump from your horse. Before the others are off their mounts, you've tied yours to the hitching rail and started up the stone steps to the front door.

"Aren't you gonna take your valuables?" asks Probmer, as you reach the top of the stairs.

"For once, I've got to agree with him," adds Langor.

"What valuables do I have worth stealing? You're thinking too much like a thief, both of you. Besides—" You nod toward a short, armored figure half hidden by the shadows of the inn—"the sheriff there will keep an eye on our goods."

The sheriff's deputy nods from his station. "We keep an eye on everyone's goods here in Ironton."

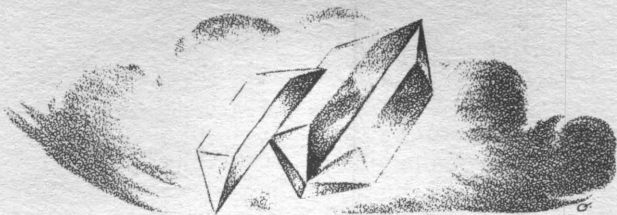
You remember now hearing that Ironton has a large force of dedicated halflings who made sure it was safe for honest folks.

By this time, Probmer and Langor are pushing past you to get into the Ironhorse Inn. You turn and follow them through the solid wood door.



You find yourself inside the large main room of the inn. The high ceiling is supported by visible, hand-hewn beams of solid oak twelve inches thick. Everything is clean, and though the floor shows signs of spilled beer, and maybe a few old blood stains, this establishment is better cared for than many you've seen elsewhere.

Behind the bar is a short, squat, barrel-chested



man. He doesn't look busy tonight, but his expression remains unreadable from across the room.

Without hurrying, you guide your small group into the inn and take a careful look around before deciding where to sit.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the result is 15 or more, turn to **20**. If it is 14 or less, turn to **27**.

7

The crowd has swelled tonight because of the appearance of a traveling bard known for his fantastic music, and there's hardly a place to stand. But somehow, even among the throng, you notice a dark figure propped against one of the thick, rough-hewn upright beams, who turns away the moment he sees you notice him.

Looking away casually, you glance down to the tankard of ale cupped in your hand. "Probmer," you say into the drink, "see the weasel-faced fellow wearing dark clothing leaning on the beam near the bar? He's watching us—I think."

"Yes, you're right. I spotted him, too." Probmer is careful not to look toward the suspicious stranger.

"I think you're both imagining things," says Langor, glaring at the suspect patron. "He's here for the music, just like everyone else." The magic-user downs another gulp of the smooth ale.

At that moment, the dark stranger slips from his partially concealed position and heads for the door.

Probmer tenses.

"Follow him," you command, and the thief needs no second request. He's already a soft blur, moving through the packed audience.

Turn to 43.

8

Just as Fluglash's hand reaches out, your sword catches him in the back. There is a heavy thud as steel meets bone. Probmer hits with his daggers before you can draw back for a second strike, and even Langor lands a blow to the wizard's head with his staff.

Fluglash staggers under the onslaught. How can he still be standing? He steps back, his right hand reaching up inside his billowing left sleeve. As he withdraws his hand, you see part of a black rod clutched in his white, gnarled fist.

Turn to 103.

9

Carefully you examine the ground around the body. Near it, the blood has soaked into the dirt where some great hunting beast has ripped it with its claws. The ground is torn up so badly that you can't find any clear tracks. You try moving a bit farther from the corpse in hopes of finding a trail where the beast returned to the forest.

Probmer stands patiently by the horses, who have taken an instant dislike to the smell of whatever predator killed Stout Snout. Langor, on the other hand, is busy casting a spell. You hope it is to aid in the search for the plaque.

Then you see it, a trail of large catlike prints leading straight into the woods.

"Over here."

"I'll lead the horses," says Probmer. "They're

afraid to enter the wood.”

You turn to follow the spoor between the thick trunks of towering trees when Langor says, “A moment, if you will.” You see him scanning the ground, fingers outstretched as if divining for water.

“What is it?”

“You’re right,” states Langor. “Some powerful magic has passed this way not long ago.”

“The plaque,” says Probmer.

Langor looks at him and says sarcastically, “Very good.”

“No bickering, you two. Let’s go.” You turn and start again down the animal trail. Silently you wonder what beast steals magic items.

Turn to 24.



10

Time seems like a millstone. The closer you get to Pembroke Castle, the faster you push the horses. You thunder along the road with all possible speed. The troll forces may already have toppled your father. You can’t let another minute be wasted.

“Wait a minute,” says Langor, catching up to you for the moment. “Someone’s coming.”

He points ahead to a lone horseman approaching from the south. Like you, The newcomer seems bent on making all possible speed, and he’s riding head down as fast as his horse will go. You stop and wait for the approaching rider.

“I’ll have a Fireball ready if he means us any harm. I’m tired of risking my life when I don’t have to.” You catch the acid in Langor’s voice, but it means noth-

ing. Only the plaques and your father hold your thoughts.

Still a hundred yards away, the rider looks up and you immediately recognize him. It is your lifelong friend, Newrick Rothmar, now one of the duke's personal guards. He waves enthusiastically and gallops forward.

"Kardel," he shouts even before he stops his horse, "the trolls have the castle under siege and the duke can't hold out much longer."

"It's as bad as I feared," you say grimly. "Then we must be off."

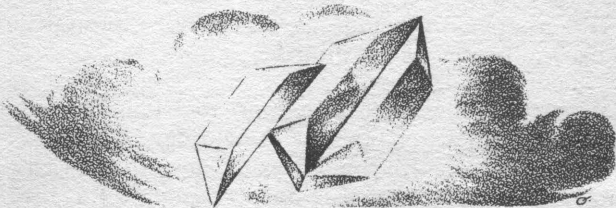
"I'll lead. I've been scouting for several days and know the main troll positions well. The secret tunnel is as yet undiscovered."

If you have all five plaques, turn to **140**. If not, go to **41**.

11

Now, battered and weary, you see Probmer's shadowy form sneaking behind the berserk Stoneclash. With your last strength you manage a heavy slash, not hoping to score, but just to give Probmer a chance. He's edging closer, dagger ready, and still you've got Stoneclash's attention.

Roll two dice and add the result to Probmer's stealth skill. If it is 19 or better, turn to **160**. If it is 18 or less, turn to **36**.



12

You look over to the corner table where Jake is pointing. The corner is dark, not lighted by any lamp or candle, and it takes a minute for your eyes to adjust.

Roll two dice and add the resulting total to your perception skill. If the total is 15 or more, turn to **96**. If the total is 14 or less, turn to **107**.

13

It's taking Probmer a long time, you think. Then, suddenly, he's there sitting next to you. Perspiration covers his face and worry darkens his usual bright expression.

"You okay?" you ask.

"It was a trap. They ambushed me. Pros, I think."

Langor looks up from his book. "Why would anyone want to ambush you? Poor sot that you are."

"They're watching *us*, you idiot," returns the thief.

"Maybe they're after my money," you suggest.

"How is killing Probmer going to get your money?"

You look at Langor. He's probably right. They must be trying to kill you—all three of you. But why?

"We'll have to find out who 'they' are," you say.

"Find the Assassins' Guild and you've got 'em," says Probmer.

Turn to **21**.

14

"I'll create a diversion," says Probmer. "Something to draw off some of the guards."

"Good," you answer.

You walk your horse to a concealed vantage point where you can watch both the drawbridge and the cluster of men on the hilltop. Newrick rides to the castle, determination set on his face. Langor and Probmer both move off to their stations. Then you can

only wait while hate—and a little fear—seethes in your guts.

Soon you see a mass of mounted knights dash from the castle and charge into the bulk of the troll forces. That's your cue. You move cautiously to a concealed position farther up the side of the hillock where the circle of men remain, their attention on the battle below.

Waiting for Probmer's diversion draws every nerve taut, but you force yourself to be patient.

Then, from their immediate right, you hear a crackle of flames, and some indistinguishable shouting. It's Probmer; he's started a fire almost under their feet! If all goes well, a couple of the henchmen should be sent to quell the blaze, giving you an opportunity to attack Sir Segwick and the flaming sword before he knows what's happening.

Now there are shouts of men and the thunder of horses galloping toward the fire. It's time to strike. Sword out, you charge out of the trees, straight at their backs.

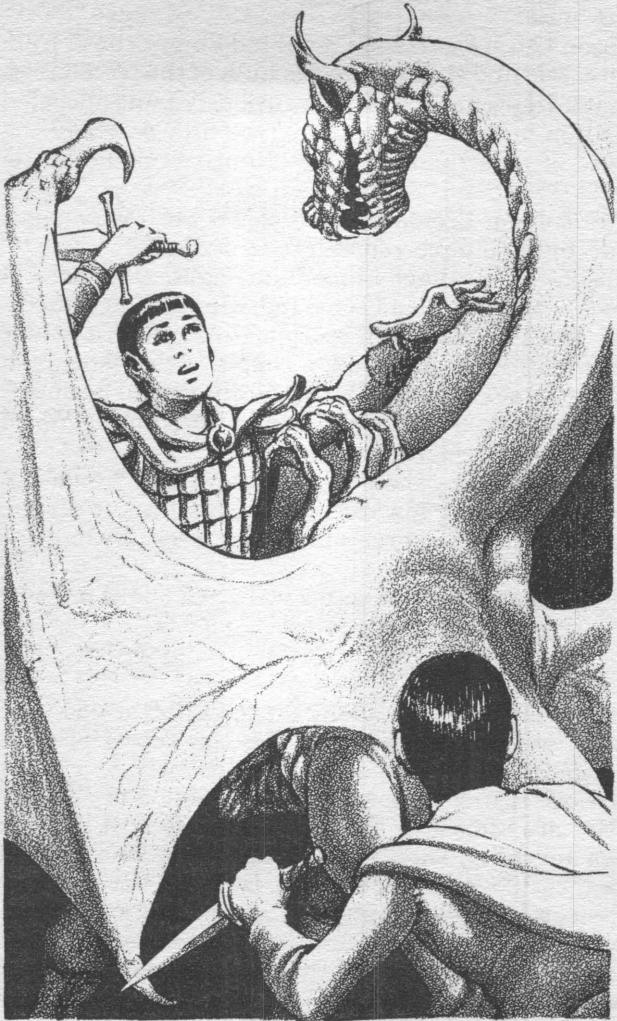
Probmer's diversion gains you a +2 bonus on your *next* fighting roll. Turn to 190.

15

It is deathly quiet. Silent shadows flicker upon the walls; nothing moves. Outside, the snorts of your horses filter into the silence. Cautiously, you move forward, trying to look in every direction at once.

You are almost to the back wall and still haven't seen anything. Then, from a ledge above your head, a great catlike creature springs, its fangs bared, claws outstretched. It leaps straight at you. For an instant, your eyes lock with its, the beast seems frozen in mid-air, and you see an evil, hate-filled intelligence in those yellow feline orbs.

G. Barr



Its massive weight crashes into you, rolling you over backward, its claws raking you, its fangs clamping onto your shoulder. Your plate mail deflects most of its vicious natural weapons, and with a screeching of claws on steel, you swing your torch into its face.

It leaps back, startled by the fire. You stagger to your feet. Sharp bursts of pain tell you that some of the claws found flesh. You force that awareness out of your mind, reflexively drawing your sword.

Cautiously, the beast circles you, wary of the length of shining steel in your right fist. You toss the torch aside so that both hands can grip the sword. You step around a chunk of loose rock. The cat retreats, giving you a chance to look around.

On one side, Probmer circles around behind the beast. On the other, Langor is furiously searching for something in the numerous pockets of his robes.

Subtract 5 hit points from your current total for the deep scratches. Turn to **89**.

16

Before you can act, the nearest black-clothed attacker lunges in with what seems like a clumsy knife attack, but as you move to parry, his blade twists deftly away and slices neatly between the plates of your armor. Immediately you recognize the work of a professional assassin. (Subtract 4 hit points from your total.)

Others are moving in to surround you. Leading the group is a thinner, unusually proportioned figure that moves with feline grace. A woman! Without giving it much thought, you know this must be Lolita Gig. Another attack is imminent, and you clear your mind to meet the rush of two more deadly figures.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **56**. If the total is 20 or less, turn to **134**.

17

You find yourself standing in a tiny alcove. To the right is a set of stairs—

. . . And just inside the stairwell, partially hidden by the shadows, are three men, dressed in black. Even their faces are wrapped in black cloth. Your sword is already out before they realize you are there. You slice at the nearest one, cutting his shoulder. The razorlike edge of the blade splits through the leather shoulder plate as if it were paper.

Langor has a spell ready and before the other guards can react, sticky threads are spiraling from his fingertips to cover the hallway and the men. Within seconds, they are hopelessly entangled in the thick fibers, wrapped so tight around the head and neck that they are unable to yell for help.

Turn to 81.

18

The initial charge washes over you. You brush aside the first two attackers, but a third leaps at you, slashing wildly at your face. Too late to block, you try to sidestep. The assailant's weight slams into your right shoulder while you are off balance, and it is all you can do to keep your feet. The knife in his hand slashes you from ear to chin. A wash of crimson spills over your armor.

You shove your attacker back, trying to gain working room for your longer sword. As you maneuver for an advantage, you catch glimpses of your companions. The thief has been tackled and is wrestling on the floor. Langor is battling with his staff to ward off a cluster of assassins.

Subtract 9 hit points from your current total. Turn to 83.



Wasting no more time, you leave Fluglash's house and mount your horses, heading for Mount Vernot. You ride as fast as you can without overtiring the horses, but a full day passes before you finally reach the city.

Mount Vernot is considerably larger than Ironton or any of the other towns near Pembroke. After passing a heavily fortified guard tower, you come to numerous houses squeezed in on both sides of the main road, and side streets angle back into a residential maze.

Soon you reach the corner of a wide, well-traveled road where you find a tall, regal structure, with "Castle Inn" chiseled into the stone facade over the doorway. The stone front of the building resembles a castle, but it's a false front for a wooden building.

"Pretty neat," says Probmer, intrigued by the inn's disguise.

"More like a cheap trick, I'd say." Langor wrinkles his nose.

"Either way, this is probably where we'll stay—for tonight at least." This seems like a good place to start your search; it's at the intersection of the two largest roads passing through Mount Vernot.

You halt your tired horse in front of the inn. Strange, you don't see any stables nearby. Tying the horse to a post, you mount the stairs to the front door.

Immediately upon entering, your eyes are drawn to a heavy-set, chubby-faced man behind the counter.

"Good day, sir. I'd like to know where the nearest stables are located. My horses are in need of rest and food."

"Well," the fat man says cheerfully, "if you're staying here, I can arrange for them to be quartered at the freight company stables across the street."

"And if I'm not staying here?"

“Then you’re on your own.”

While you are wondering if perhaps you should go elsewhere, Probmer and Langor come trooping in, sacks and baggage in hand. They grab the nearest empty table and drop everything, looking firmly entrenched.

“For now, give us three ales at the corner table. I’ll let you know in a few minutes if we’ll be staying.”

With that, you walk to the table and take a chair that allows you to survey the entire room.

Turn to 51.



20

Your eyes scan the interior of the inn, searching for anyone who appears suspicious. You look more closely at the bartender, who’s dressed in clean garb of common cut. He’s probably also the proprietor, and judging by the newness of his clothing, he appears better off than many innkeepers.

Sweeping farther around the sparsely filled inn, you see several small groups of humans and an occasional dwarf. You know Ironton is a mining free town, and you’d say by their dusty work clothes, that many of those present are off-shift miners. None look noteworthy.

Then your eye falls on a lone individual, seated nearly hidden in a dark corner. He is dressed in rusty chain mail that if shiny would be fit for a nobleman, but it has fallen into disrepair, as has the scabbard of the sword at his side. A small, round shield leans against the near wall with what’s left of a blue fox-

head emblem centered on it.

“Let’s have a little something to get the dust out of our throats,” says Langor, at your elbow. “We can question the innkeeper while we’re at it.”

You glance back at the solitary swordsman, and wonder if he might have information more suited to your quest.

If you decide to have an ale and talk to the innkeeper, turn to **61**. If you’d rather question the stranger in chain mail, turn to **135**.

21

Surveying the room, you spot no curious characters, no one who seems likely to know what you’re after. Deciding that you’ll have to question anyone, even commoners, to find out who Lolita Gig is, Probmmer suggests starting with a couple of working men seated in one corner. Having no better alternative, you agree.

A few discreet questions asked in the right places and augmented by a coin or two, and soon a young man stands before you in the alley back of Castle Inn.

“Well, speak up. You know what we want,” says Langor.



“A few gold pieces to assure you our intentions are honorable,” you suggest and pour out some yellow coins into the palm of your hand.

He grabs a couple. “Lolita’s Guild Master—Assassins’ Guild, that is. It’s over the book-and-scroll store, across from Eagle Tavern. It backs on the river,

and many a corpse's been washed away downstream from that place."

He gives a frightened look around and takes off. Probmer starts to give chase, but you grab his arm. "We've got what we want."

"True," he says with a smile.

Subtract 5 gp from your total, and turn to **48**.

22

Cautiously, you lead your little group onto the grounds of Fluglash's mansion. A thick, fortified stone wall surrounds the wide expanse of trimmed lawn dotted with decorative shrubs, ornamental pine trees, and sprawling oaks. Two huge willows block your view of the right side of the grounds.

"Pretty high class for a wizard," whispers Probmer.

"I admire the man's taste in gardeners." Langor tries to make his high voice sound haughty, but it comes out almost comical.

"This is serious," you snap. "We aren't looking at paradise! Now keep alert." In the back of your mind you have a strange feeling this seemingly easy entry is too good to be true.

Roll two dice and add them to your perception skill score. If the total is 16 or more, turn to **74**. If it is 15 or less, go to **53**.

23

You walk your horse to a concealed vantage point where you can see the castle drawbridge and still be close to the men on the hilltop. Newrick rides toward the castle, determination set on his face. Langor has moved off to a station near the bottom of the hill where he can magically intercept the troll reserves if they start to charge you.

Patiently you wait, soothing your horse to keep it quiet. It isn't long before you see a mass of mounted



knights dash from the castle and charge into the bulk of the troll forces. That's your cue. You circle closer to the command group on the hillock. You gather your courage, reminding yourself that your father is counting on you. You steady your shaking hand, unsheath your sword, and mount your horse. One last look at the brave knights defending the castle, and you charge toward Sir Segwick and the flaming sword.

Turn to **190**.

24

The trace is clear now, and your many hunting trips have made tracking easy for you. The huge prints zigzag through the forest, crossing a small creek and running ever deeper into the dark, thick forest of leafy trees. Eventually you follow the trail to a cave. Its dark mouth, partially concealed by dark pines, opens ominously in a rocky hillside. The opening is considerably taller than you, and wide enough for two men. You can see nothing in the impenetrable darkness. What creature waits inside? Is the plaque here, too?

You sneak to the entrance, glancing carefully into the trees on either side. You light a torch from your supply sack and inch forward, but you still can't see much.

"Are we going in?" asks Langor, his voice tinged with fear.

"You know another way to get the plaque?" Probmer glares with contempt.

"Shh," you hiss in irritation.

Langor casts a Continual Light spell on a short piece of dead wood and holds up his magical torch. Probmer has a torch lit, too, and the three of you slip into the lair.

You enter a single chamber about a hundred feet in diameter, with a high ceiling that arches domelike overhead. Everywhere are rocks, jumbled haphazardly, some mere stones, some huge boulders that could hide a horse. The shadows cast by your flickering torches dance and quiver, making the room seem alive. The cave floor shows a myriad of prints, but you can't make sense out of them.

You have a strong feeling that hiding here somewhere is Stout Snout's killer.

Roll two dice and add them to your perception skill score. If the total is 17 or more turn to **29**. If it is 16 or less, turn to **15**.

25

Stoneclash looks at you, squints, and cocks his head. "Profit? Whose, mine or yours?"

"It'll be a profit for you if you'll listen. I seek a small, gold-inlaid, marble plaque that was stolen from my father, the Duke of Pembroke. I know you didn't steal it, but you bought it from a thief who has since been caught. Of course, I could have you put to death as receiver of stolen royal property."

You pause to let this sink in. "However, I'll give you the 100 gold pieces you paid for it plus another 10 for your trouble if you turn it over to me. You can go on your way with a profit, and I'll have my property back."

"How do I know it's not just an underhanded trick to see if I have this thing you're after?"

Now your eyes narrow to slits. No one insults the honesty of the Dolan family. "You've traveled a bit. You must know the Duke of Pembroke sires no liars!"

“Yes,” says Stoneclash, thinking a minute. He measures the three of you, then makes his decision. “It’s a deal.”

Sheepishly he hands over the plaque as you count out the gold pieces. You return the precious square to the special, soft leather case made for it. It nestles perfectly into one of the five individual pockets and you fold the case and return it to its hiding place inside your armor. (Deduct 110 gp from your purse.)



“A pleasure, Stoneclash, and since you’ve been such a help, perhaps you know of these others we seek on similar business. The names we have are Stout Snout, Araquat, Fluglash, and Lolita Gig. Know any of them?”

“Of course,” he answers as if expecting a test. “Araquat is one of the wealthiest merchants in Mount Vernot. Stout Snout is an ugly half-orc guard working for Mayor Bartilo of the same city. I don’t much care for ’im, but the mayor favors him highly. Fluglash lives off the road up yonder,” Stoneclash says, pointing north along the road, “and a meaner wizard you’ll never meet. It gives me the creeps just to pass his little side road. It’s before the river.”

Now Stoneclash pauses. “Never heard of no Lolita nothin, though. Now if you don’t mind, I’ll be going on my way.”

You’ve learned all you’re apparently going to, so you wheel your horse north along the road, Probmer and Langor behind you.

“What about staying at the inn?” Langor asks with a wistful note in his voice.

“No time for it, we’re heading for Mount Vernot and we’ve no time to lose,” you snap over your shoulder, pushing your horse into a canter.

Turn to **170**.

26

From where you stand, sheltered in the mouth of the alley, the building looks ordinary. The deserted street doesn’t look at all sinister, but Probmer hasn’t been wrong yet.

“Now what?” the thief turns to you.

“We go in.” You motion toward the building.

Probmer creeps up to the back of the store. The flat, featureless wall shows no sign of a door, until you get to a certain spot where Probmer points to a faint vertical seam in the boards.

Suddenly you pause. To get this plaque you are about to enter a den of master killers!

Probmer looks expectantly at you. “Do you want me to open it?”

If you want Probmer to try to open the secret door, turn to **68**. If you want to think this through again, turn to **72**.

27

Your eyes scan the interior of the inn, searching for anyone who looks interesting. Behind the stout oak-en bar you see the bartender and probable proprietor. He’s dressed in clean, pressed clothes of common cut, and judging by their newness he is better off than many innkeepers.

Sweeping farther around the inn, you see scattered groups of men mixed with an occasional dwarf. You know that Ironton is a mining free town and assume by the look of their dusty clothes that many of those

present are off-shift miners. None look noteworthy.

“Let’s have a little something to remove the dust from our throats,” says Langor, at your elbow. “We can question the innkeeper while we’re at it.”

Since there doesn’t seem to be anyone else here worth questioning, you move toward the bar, hoping to get some information on the people you’re looking for.

Turn to **61**.

28

You surge forward. Your two-handed strokes overpower the assassins, whose lighter armor and weapons are no match for your heavy blade. Another man falls dead as you split open his mid-section.

You have your sights on Lolita, who has remained beyond the fray. You slash your way through the last man separating you from her. A snarl parting her lips, she pulls a short sword to match the dagger already in her other hand.

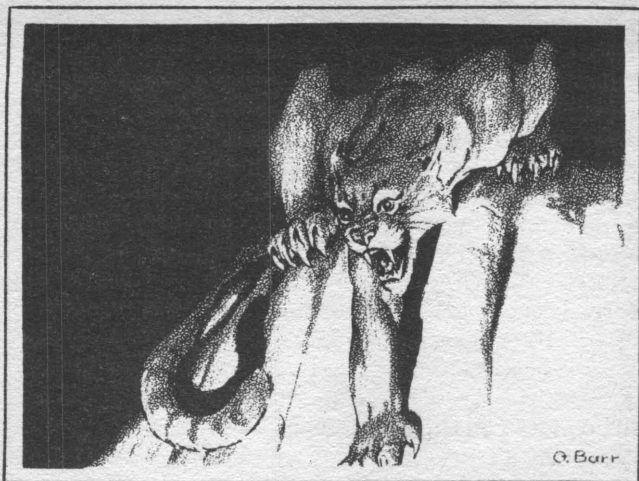
Behind you, Langor, having dispatched his last opponent, is working up some kind of spell.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or more, turn to **98**. If it is 19 or less, turn to **130**.

29

There it is, hiding in the deep shadows across the cavern. It crouches on a ledge about fifteen feet above the floor, its belly pressed against the stone, its massive head staring directly at you. In the light of the torch, you see two hate-filled, yellow eyes with black vertical-slit pupils. The creature’s mouth hangs slightly open and the light reflects back to you from rows of gleaming yellow teeth. Its powerfully muscled forelegs ripple beneath shaggy light brown fur.

Slowly, trying not to startle it, you lay down your



torch and slip your bow off your shoulder, nocking an arrow in the same movement. Inch by inch you raise the arrowhead until you're sure of your aim. The bow twangs and the arrow leaps away. As quickly as you can, you have a second arrow out of the quiver. Nock, aim, fire.

Roll two dice and add their total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, turn to **101**. If the result is 19 or less, turn to **111**.

30

Your first strike is a vicious overhand cut that is only partially parried by Sir Segwick. His enchanted sword may have magic in it, but not the kind useful against a good swordsman. Your blade glances off his and slices through his right arm. A gush of bright blood spurts over his dark armor. His fingers seem to loosen on the hilt of his sword, but only for a moment,

and before you can take advantage he is ready to meet your next thrust.

You hack at him again, continuing the original arc, but he stops it with expert deftness. You rein your horse back, ready to defend, but you see him falter and know he'll have to kill you quickly or the torrent rushing down his arm will sap his strength. The look in his eye tells you he knows it, too, and you prepare to meet a berserk onslaught.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 19 or more, turn to **155**. If the total is 18 or less, go to **66**.

31

The more you think about the open door, the more it seems like a trap. Any other way Probmer can find to enter will be better than walking in where you are expected.

"Okay, see if you can find another way in. Langor and I will keep our eyes open for trouble."

Silently, Probmer inches around the cold, stone wall to the back of the house. He tries several windows on the near side of the house, but has no luck. You follow him around to the back, peering through the windows to see if Fluglash has heard the noise you can't avoid making. There is no sign of the mage, and you begin to wonder if he is at home.

Probmer finds the back door securely locked. He quickly searches through his bag of thieves' tools.

"You'll never open it. The wizard's sure to have a magical lock on it," says Langor with his usual disdainful air.

"Nope. He's got a real fine set of locks, but nothing I can't open." Probmer doesn't look as confident as he sounds, though. "One way or another, I'll know in a minute."

Roll two dice and add the resulting total to Prob-

mer's stealth skill score. If the result is 18 or more, turn to **59**. If the total is 17 or less, turn to **69**.



32

Again your sword slices into its target. He goes down with an ugly gash across his chest, the cold steel splitting his leather armor like so much paper. Now, out of the corner of your eye, you see Langor unleash a flurry of glowing magic missiles. They buzz past you and unerringly stab into the armed group around you. Another opponent topples under the barrage of magic shafts.

Immediately you are into the pack again, your sword arm hewing at their clustered bodies. Another screams as your blade carves a chunk of flesh from the side of his head and he falls to the stones, dead.

Suddenly, there are no more men standing. Several are moaning, nearly unconscious, but none threaten you.

Langor steps to the nearest survivor and waves his hands as he murmurs some arcane words, casting a Charm Person spell. A look of recognition crosses the bespelled man's face as Langor bends over him.

"You, friend, why did you attack us?"

The man looks up at Langor. "Honest, I'da never done it if I'd known it was you. Lolita gave the order, she said we had to kill the nobleman who's with ya. Said he'd been after her for revenge. Really, I didn't know it was you."

"Sure," says Langor, and he pats him on the shoulder. "Where is Lolita now?"

The man nods to his right. "Over there. I think ya

kilt her." His head rolls back and he's gone.

Turn to **212**.

33

Langor's magic finds its mark, and the fire strikes the cat, bringing a berserker madness upon it. It leaps off you, twisting and snapping, trying to get free of the fan of fire. The fire dies away, and the cat eyes Langor. The fire having taken its toll, the beast is moving slower. You feel pain, too, but your mind blanks it out. You step between the large feline and the wizard, your sword ready.

The snarling monster rushes, but you chop down with the sword, halting it in mid-stride. It hunches down, ready to spring again.

Turn to **131**.

34

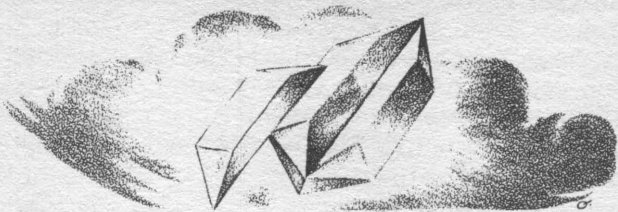
Almost before Probmer can get safely behind the first barrel, the rest of the gang are after him. The thief dodges behind a crate, but they've seen him. A deep, gruff voice sends the others after him.

Probmer slips into an opening between a stack of heavy boxes and the back of a building just as the tramp of heavy feet comes up behind him. But it's no good. They've surrounded him.

The first thug stabs straight into Probmer's hiding place. He sidesteps easily, and the dagger point thuds harmlessly into a crate. But the thief has moved into range of another thug. Soft flesh parts before the honed edge and Probmer groans in pain.

Still, if he can escape, get back to the inn— Another thrust, and another. Too many to avoid, and over and over his body is pierced by deadly iron. Blood flows away in little riverlets. Probmer slumps against the dirty back wall, his life runs out without a sound.

Turn to **163**.



35

“Describe this plaque you seek.” The merchant’s cold, dark eyes never stray from your face.

“It’s thin, about this long.” You hold up your hands to indicate its length. “Looks like marble and has strange gold-inlaid designs. There are no other pieces like it.”

“Yes,” he says, suddenly more amicable. “I have the plaque. Unique it is, and thus very valuable to me.”

“But it doesn’t belong to you.”

“Oh, but it does. I paid for it. However, profit is my first concern. I’ll sell it for 250 gold pieces.”

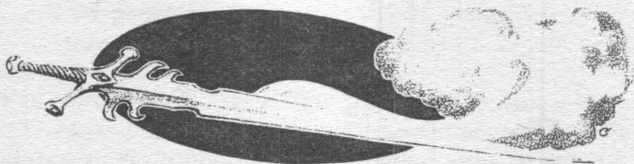
His tone sounds final, but that is an extremely high price. If you decide to pay the 250 gold pieces, turn to **45**. If you don’t have that much left, or don’t want to pay such a high price, turn to **88**.

36

Somehow, Stoneclash has detected Probmer’s stealthy advance. At the last moment he spins, slashing down heavily at Probmer’s out-thrust dagger. The deadly knife clatters harmlessly away. Another wicked slash sends Probmer frantically backward. Now he’s defenseless, and Stoneclash moves in to finish him. For now you are forgotten.

37

You hack at the last man between you, preventing you from reaching the leader. He tries to defend but is panic stricken. Your stroke cuts deep into his neck, and he falls in a wash of blood. The follow-through from your attack leaves you open and Sir Segwick brings the flaming sword crashing down on your left shoulder. The magic edge cuts through your plate



mail, sending a searing pain up your arm. You rein your horse back, trying to get feeling back in your shoulder. (Subtract 4 hit points from your total.)

A look of berserk rage fills your enemy's eyes and you prepare for his rush.

Turn to **66**.

38

You push on, searching the rest of the room and all the treasure held dear to Fluglash. Langor, awed, repeatedly emits gasps of delight as he discovers some rare spell component, but you and Probmer are intent on finding the plaque. First you check the open shelves and unlocked drawers. Then you begin opening cabinet doors, until you come to one that resists your determined tugs.

"Probmer, give me a hand with this."

Probmer is next to you instantly.

"Oh, I see. The lock is reversed. A neat trick, but I can get it."

With a twist of a thin strip of iron, Probmer clicks

the lock and throws the cabinet open. There, in plain sight, on the second shelf, is the plaque. You grab it and slide it into its place in your father's special leather case. You start to close the cabinet, but a thick, red-velvet cloth lying in the dark bottom catches your eye. The bulging form of a sword is partially revealed beneath the cloth. Gingerly you move one corner of the cloth. An ornate hilt of gold and steel inlaid with rubies gleams up at you.

Wait a minute. What's a magic-user doing with a sword? Maybe it's magic—or cursed! The temptation to pick it up is strong, but you hesitate. Should you risk it?

If you decide to pick up the new sword, turn to **73**. If you'd rather not take the chance, turn to **19**.

39

The guards already inside move quickly to dispatch you. They fan out, making attack from any direction possible. Probmer backs into a corner so he has to defend only one direction. Langor has his back to the magically held door. A dagger bristles in each of Probmer's hands, and Langor readies his staff.

To your right, a sudden movement catches your eye. You whirl, expecting to meet a thrust. Instead, the attack comes from your exposed side, while you face only a feint. As pain shoots through you, you see that Probmer has also taken a vicious gash from one soldier when he fell for the feint of another.



Langor, on the other hand, has been engaged directly by a single man. The two of them trade blows evenly, though the short sword has nicked the magician once or twice.

These common ruffians are cooperating, while the three of you are fighting as individuals, and you are losing. Backing away from the attack on you, you move to help Langor. If you can free him from combat long enough, he can use his spells. You take another slight wound while disengaging, but it seems the only workable plan.

Subtract 6 hit points from your total, 3 points from Probmer's total, and 1 point from Langor's hit points. On your next fighting roll, subtract 1 from the result due to your undisciplined first defense.

Turn to 55.

40

Scanning the pub visitors, you look for someone who seems friendly.

"Probmer, get the horses to stable. Langor, keep watch for any suspicious activity, while I question that fellow at the bar." You point to the one talkative commoner.

Not waiting for an answer, you move to the stool next to the boisterous drinker. He's simply dressed, and judging by the calluses on his thick, strong hands he does heavy work, perhaps mining.

"Sir, it seems I'm in need of help. Just a small bit of information. Perhaps you'd share an ale with me and tell me what you know of some people I have to find."

"You buying?" The words seem to slobber out of the drunkard's mouth.

“Certainly.” You motion to the innkeeper for two ales, and his sour look doesn’t change much even when he sees the color of your gold. The ale is hearty and good though, and its warmth heightens the glow on your new companion. In a mood to talk, he starts telling you about the mine where he works. You listen for a minute, then change the subject abruptly.

“I’ve been told there’s a group with some valuables for sale, but I don’t know how to find them. I’ve been told they were either in Ironton or Mount Vernot. Perhaps you’ve heard of one or more of them.” The miner looks annoyed at being interrupted, but you carry on. “They may be connected in some way, I don’t know, but the list includes folks by the names of Stoneclash, Araquat, Fluglash, Stout Snout, and Lolita Gig.”

The miner stares slyly into the bottom of his empty glass. An old trick, you think, but you order another ale anyway.

When it comes, he guzzles a long drink and then says, “Well, Lolita Whatever, I never heard of. The rest of ’ems pretty well known, so’s I don’t see no harm in telling ya ’bout ’em. Stoneclash is a two-bit sword for hire, easy to identify, always carries a shield with a blue fox’s head on it. Fact is, he was sittin’ in that corner, but left a while ago.”

You glance around, but the corner sits dark and empty.

“Araquat and Stout Snout are both from Mount Vernot. Mr. A’s a big-shot trader who’s always runnin’ somethin’ through Ironton. Sometimes travels with his caravans, sometimes not.”

“Was he here lately?”

“Yeah. Caravan went by yesterday. Him and Stout Snout both was on it, though they ain’t friends. Porkface works for the tax-happy Mayor of Mount Vernot, and that don’t make Mr. A too happy.”

“Okay, what about Fluglash?”

“Bad news. He’s *real* bad news. Evil wizard who lives on a little road branchin’ off the road to Mount Vernot, just before the river. Don’t go there! Folks don’t come back that visit him.”

“How do you know that?”

“I saw him once. He came into Ironton for somethin’ and the look in his eyes could turn ya to stone. I could see the evil in ’em.”

“Did he bother anyone while he was here?”

“No, but even wizards are afraid of the sheriff. Ironton is no place to be on the wrong side of the law.”

When you pause a moment to think about what you’ve heard, he suddenly puts his head on the bar and starts to snore. But that seems to be about all the useful information he’s got, and you’re anxious to be on the trail.

It only takes a few minutes to get your companions moving, and a few more to retrieve your horses from the stable, though it costs 6 gp for board and grooming. Then you are on the road to Mount Vernot. (Subtract the 10 gold pieces spent in this section from your total, if you haven’t already done so.)

Turn to 170.



41

Before you’ve gone many miles, Newrick turns off the road and leads you through the towering forest onto an old short-cut that bypasses the twisting, turning road. It won’t be long before you gain sight of the castle, and your stomach churns with the

thought of what waits ahead.

It is with a heavy heart that you travel the last miles home. Without all five plaques, saving the castle from the trolls is hopeless. You have done your best, but the dukedom is doomed. All you can hope to do now is lend your sword to the battle and bring death to as many of the invading monsters as possible before the end comes. ✚

42

There's no time to be fooling around looking for back entrances. You wave the group forward, ignoring the murmured comments behind you. As you approach, the slight opening looms like the darkness at the gates of hell. Prepared for anything, you step up to the door and gently push it open.

It swings inward without a sound. Curious, yet cautious, you look around the interior of an antechamber. A dark, musty, and clearly ancient carpet has a strange, maroon design that catches your eye, but means nothing to you. Against the near wall stands a tall, walnut cabinet. Ahead is an open doorway, beyond which there is a darkness too heavy to penetrate. To the left is another doorway, but this one is closed by a heavy, iron-bound door of gnarled, deep-grained wood. Carvings of devilish faces stand out in bas relief, with eyes that seem to bulge out of their heads.

Cautiously you step inside. "I don't like it," says Langor to your back. "This place reeks of arcane magic."

"Well, nothing's happened so far," you whisper back.

You creep in farther until all three of you are inside. Probmer lets the door swing shut. Its dull boom sounds like a tomb closing.



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“Intruder! Intruder!” A mouth has magically appeared on the right-hand wall next to the cabinet.

The cabinet snaps open and a dozen magic spears zip out. Before you can move, the spears blast through you, cutting your flesh to ribbons. Somehow they pass through your armor as if nothing protected your body. Behind you, Langor shrieks and falls with a thud. As you fall, too, your eye catches Probmer pinned to the wall by several of the spears that have passed completely through the slender thief. The last breath rushes from your body as you hit the floor. The quest is over. ✕

43

Silently Probmer squeezes between the jostling patrons, following the dark stranger through the door and outside. He watches the shadowy figure until it turns into an alley a few hundred feet up the road. Dashing to the alley opening, he stops and peers around the corner, his head kept low to avoid detection.

Darkness stretches out in front of him, and at first there's no sign of the stranger. Then a movement catches Probmer's eye and he sees the faintest glimmer of shadow slide across a pale yellow window. Already the figure has gained a big headstart. Probmer decides to risk detection in order to gain speed.

Around the corner he runs, headlong down the alley, until the spectral figure is only twenty yards ahead. Now Probmer slows again, using his skill at stealth to remain concealed, determined to follow the spy back to whomever sent him.

Roll two dice and add the result to Probmer's stealth skill score. If the result is 22 or more, turn to **171**. If the result is 21 or less, turn to **183**.

44

Surprised by your boldness, the assassins are slow to react. The nearest feels the bite of cold steel as your lightning-quick strike cuts into him. He falls back, an ugly wound across his chest. Your back swing catches another on the shoulder and sends him sprawling, blood darkening the sleeve of his black tunic.

The regular thud of oak on bodies lets you know that Langor's holding his own in the battle with his staff.

Still, the tough killers fight to overpower you.

Roll two dice and add the results to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to 117. If it is 20 or less, turn to 134.

45

"It seems very high, but I'll pay it. Right now time is more important than gold," you say, trying to maintain a cheerful mood. "Let me see the plaque, before I produce the gold."

Araquat pulls open one of the drawers in his desk and slips out an object wrapped in blue silk. He lays it in the middle of the desk, flips back the edge of the silk, and exposes the plaque.

"That's it," he says. "Now the gold."



You count out 250 gold pieces and stack them beside the plaque. Without waiting for him to count it, you pick up the stone piece, leaving the silk, and put the precious heirloom in the leather pouch made especially for it.

"Thank you," says Araquat in satisfied tones as

you head for the door.

“You *should* thank us,” says Probmer.

Now you have another plaque. Subtract 250 gold pieces from your money supply. You head back to the Castle Inn to decide how to locate Lolita Gig.

Turn to **75**.

46

Like a mongoose dodging a cobra, Stoneclash eludes your blow. In return, he hammers your armor twice more. Each blow racks your body, but you fight to ignore the pain. His next attack batters your helm and the ringing makes your head quake. Is this lone warrior too much for you? Where are Probmer and Langor?

Subtract 4 hit points from your current total and turn to **11**.



47

Langor is nowhere to be seen. Things are getting worse. Already you hear the guttural noises of trolls clamoring up the front slope of the hill, intent on reaching you. Maybe Langor is dead.

There's no more time to waste, the plaques must reach the castle! You spur your horse on, but, before you've barely moved, a huge ball of flame roars at you from the nearby trees. You only have time to recognize Langor's face, a wicked grin on his lips, before the flame engulfs you.

Subtract 18 points from your current hit point total. Turn to **60**.

48

Without waiting, the three of you head for the book-and-scroll store. But you find it already closed.

Probmer stares across the deserted street at the wooden two-story building. "If that's the Guild Hall, they've certainly picked a good cover. I'd never suspect. The assassins have a secret way in, probably around back."

"If it's hidden by magic, I'll have no trouble finding it," says Langor in his usual cocky tone.

You motion them around behind the unpainted square structure. Behind the building is a row of thick shrubs. You can hear the river running by, but the bushes hide it. The building doesn't look like much, but you have a feeling that it is more substantial than it appears. You watch Langor weave his spell, and almost before he's finished he's pointing excitedly to a blank wall right in front of you.

"That's it," he whispers.

"I'll open it," says Probmer. "I can do it so quietly they won't know we're here."

You hold him back as doubt fills your mind. Surely a professional assassins' guild would have a guard or lookout posted nearby. But . . .

Turn to **68**.

49

The cat has outwitted Langor, and he twists in time to put you directly in the path of the searing flames. Intense pain rips through your mind. The flesh begins to burn away under the searing metal of your armor. The cat casts you aside and leaps on the defenseless wizard. Langor's screams fade as the final blackness overcomes you. ✠

Under cover of the confusion caused by Probmer's attempted backstab, Langor has been busy. Already he is mouthing the last words to an incantation that will fire a volley of magic missiles at the embattled mercenary.

Stoneclash, unaware of the forthcoming spell, is still concentrating on Probmer. His short sword swings down again, barely missing the quick-footed thief.

Langor points his outstretched index finger at Stoneclash and lets fire.

Roll two dice and add their total to Langor's wisdom. If it is 18 or more, turn to **160**. If it is less than 18, turn to **82**.



The innkeeper sets three mugs of ale in front of you. He looks your party over and starts to turn away.

"Good man," you begin. He pauses and turns to face you. "We've come a long way on business and now it seems we need a bit of advice. We seek a merchant named Araquat, who is said to possess a peculiar item we'd like to purchase."

"So?"

"Where is he?" blurts Probmer before you can continue.

The innkeeper chuckles and says, "You must be blind. He's practically across the street." He points out the window behind you.

You turn your head, and there, only a few buildings

away, is a huge barnlike structure with a clear sign advertising the freight and trade company of Araquat.

"Thanks," you manage, turning back to the innkeeper. You glance at the sheepish faces of your companions. "I think we'll be staying here in the inn. Have you got available rooms?"

"Yes, I've got a few rooms still available for the night, but this is no second-rate inn and I normally get gold up front."

"Then we'll take the largest room you have left. We'll need three beds and *clean* bedding, and stable arrangements for the horses."

"And a bath," adds Langor.

"And a bath," you agree. "How much?"

"Well," says the innkeeper looking you over more closely. "Meals included—roast beef and ale—twenty-five gold pieces for the three of you."

If you want to take the room at that price, turn to **79**. If you decide to bargain for a better price, turn to **128**.

52

Sitting comfortably in the Castle Inn, you and Langor wait impatiently for Probmer. It seems to be taking a long time. You hope nothing has happened to the plucky thief; you are beginning to like him, though his emphasis on poison gives you pause.

Suddenly, like a wisp of fog, Probmer slides into the seat next to you. Beads of sweat glisten on his forehead and his chest heaves though his breathing is soundless. How does he do it?

"I've found them," Probmer whispers, leaning close. "It's the Assassins' Guild. They've got second-story headquarters over a bookstore and a secret back-door entrance. But I don't know why they're watching us."

"Some intelligence report," says Langor. "Would you care to try again, and this time make sense?"

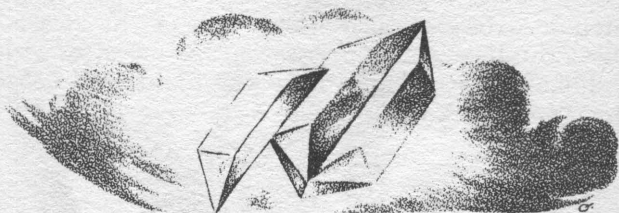
Probmer makes a face, but starts over. "I followed the guy who was watching us. I'm pretty sure he's an assassin. I saw him use a secret door in the back of a book-and-scroll store. He went upstairs . . . but I still don't know why he followed us."

"Are you sure it's the Assassins' Guild?" you ask.

"As sure as I can be, not being a member."

"Maybe Lolita Gig is a member," says Langor with a snicker.

"Maybe." You think about that possibility. A non-descript woman, with money to buy a pretty, but seemingly useless plaque, and no one seems to know who she is. Or at least no one is talking. The more you think about it, the more sense it makes.



"How many assassins could a town this size have?" you ask Probmer.

"Not many. Ten, a dozen."

"I wonder how many are in the building at any one time?"

"Very few. We could handle them." Probmer grins at the prospect.

"Professional killers, are they?" says Langor. "You'll need me for *real* power."

"Good," you say. "Probmer, lead us to the headquarters."

You follow Probmer and Langor out of the bar. The darkest alleys of Mount Vernot swallow you up. Prob-

mer moves with confidence and you quickly find yourself at the back of a sturdy wooden, two-story building. Turn to 26.

53

You move cautiously across Fluglash's lawn, cutting between small pine trees that partially obscure the house from view. As you pass the huge willows, there is suddenly a loud rattling of hard scales and a gigantic roar behind the dense, drooping branches. A gigantic mouth filled with razor-sharp teeth clamps onto you.

It lifts you off your feet, and you realize that a wyvern has taken your party from behind. Its bite sends pain racing through your body. Langor, dropped by a sting from the poison tail stinger, writhes on the ground. Probmer is a little more fortunate—he's slipped under one of the nearby pines. But it doesn't matter to you any more, for with a shake of its reptilian head the nightmare beast snaps your neck like a doll's. ✕



54

What is this? you wonder. Langor faces you, clearly preparing a spell. No one else is between the two of you—it's aimed at you! You gauge the distance. It's too far; you'll never reach the magic-user before he finishes whatever it is he's casting. Almost in a blur, you sheathe your sword and have your bow off your

shoulder with an arrow nocked. Langor is frantically flying through the final portion of his incantation, his fingers tracing complex patterns in the air, while holding something which must be the required component.

He raises his gaze to you, and you instinctively aim and release the arrow. The bow sings as the arrow leaps away, and you can trace its flight toward Langor as if it were in slow motion. But, will it get there in time?

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, turn to **102**. If the result is 19 or less, turn to **210**.

55

You spin around and attack the sword-swinging guard closest to Langor. The surprise slash catches him on the left arm and astonishment registers on his swarthy face. Immediately, he brings his short sword across to guard against you and he crouches defensively, awaiting your next attack.

Probmer, you're glad to see, has fought his way out of the corner and is working over toward you. If he can reach you, Langor will have time for another spell, if not . . .

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill. Then add or subtract 1 bonus point as allowed by the previous section. If the overall result is 21 or more, turn to **208**. If it is 20 or less, turn to **158**.

56

Simultaneously they lunge at you, coordinating their attacks. You parry one thrust, only to have another slash at an exposed flank. Dagger blades clang off your armor. You swing with as much force as you can, using powerful two-handed strokes, but your nimble attackers dodge easily, with Lolita using

hand signals to direct the attack.

Langor is busy fending them off with his staff—there'll be no more spells for now—but the long oak staff effectively keeps them at bay. You and Langor are holding your own, but there are seven assassins and their leader. The odds are still too high, and you've got to trim them quick.

Turn to 105.

57

Your sword splits the magic-user's oak staff cleanly. The back swing cuts into Langor's side. You see a small black wand fall out of his robe. He cringes, the pain destroying his concentration.

Again you swing. This time, the full force lands on the injured necromancer's chest and he falls to the ground, dead.

No more time to waste, the trolls are almost on you. Your horse rears back, wide-eyed from fright. Dozens of the evil, clawed creatures race toward you. You dig in your heels, and the horse takes off at a gallop, heading for the castle.

Turn to 119.



58

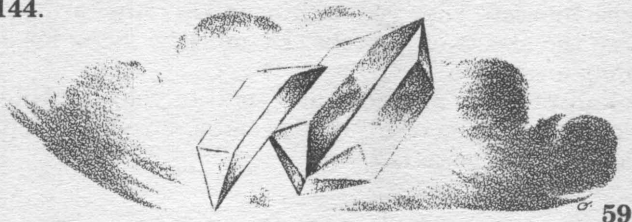
You've let your attention stray. The clink of a dagger blade rammed into your breastplate brings you back from the distraction.

You hack down with your sword, but the nimble assassin jumps back. He fakes a lunge, you step back. Another dagger-wielding attacker jumps at you from

the left, but you hear his footsteps. You block with your mailed arm. There's a thud as your steel arm meets flesh and the dagger misses your face.

The first assailant stabs at you, the dagger point skidding off your breastplate once more. This time it slides up until it catches the crack where the shoulder plates overlap, and the thin iron blade slips up under the armor, digging into your shoulder. A searing pain shoots down your left arm, but you shake it off.

Subtract 3 hit points from your total. Now turn to 144.



With a deftness born of experience, Probmer slips first one, then another of his picks into the heavy, well-made lock. It isn't long before, with a smile of satisfaction, he twists the pick and is rewarded by the soft click of tumblers turning into place.

You all step in, and Probmer silently shuts the door. You are in a kitchen, but one that looks as if it's never been used. Dust is piled thickly over every counter, cabinet, and table and chairs, marked only by rat tracks.

You're in, but the thought of being unwelcome guests in the evil Fluglash's home sends a shiver down your spine. The place reminds you of a tomb. The thought crosses your mind that Fluglash might be a lich, a powerful undead magic-user.

You know you can't go back; you must find the plaque. You wave to your companions to follow you and you start searching the house.

Turn to 147.

60

In an instant the rush of fire is past. Your entire body screams in pain. Somehow you and your horse have survived. Trollbiter is in your hand, and you charge the surprised wizard, the grin gone from his face. Whatever the reason for his treachery, you can't give him time to get off another spell.

You attack with the fury of betrayal. You feint and slash with measured strokes to prevent him from reciting another spell. Skillfully he wards you off with his staff. Then you see him pull his other arm up into the sleeve of his robe. He must be going for a component!

Roll two dice and add their total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, turn to **57**. If it is 19 or less, go to **142**.

61

The innkeeper greets your party with a neutral expression. He isn't overly impressed by your apparent wealth nor the fact that a sword hangs at your side. He waits calmly as you approach, his thick fingers resting easily on the countertop.

"Gentlemen," he says as you stop at the bar in front of him. "What can Jake do for you?"



You pull out your small traveling pouch of gold and clink it heavily on the slab wood bar. You smile warmly, trying to appear important and regal.

Roll two dice and add the total to your presence skill score. If the total is 17 or more, turn to **77**. If the total is 16 or less, turn to **87**.

Your sword arm is cocked, and you rush him, blade ready for a killing stroke. But somehow you've misjudged. Instead of striking him, your blow hits only air as he leans away. The momentum of your heavy blade carries it well past the darting figure. Langor slams his staff into your helm. The snap throws you back in the saddle and the ringing clogs your mind. For a moment you hesitate, trying to regain your battle sense. Behind Langor, you see Probmer racing toward the unsuspecting wizard.

The thief's thin, poison dagger is ready. You swing wildly to keep Langor's attention, but it doesn't even disturb the wizard, who cocks his own dagger, looking for a vital crack in your armor.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 22 or more, turn to **127**. If the total is 21 or less, go to **136**.

Langor's words die away and a blue-white crackle of electricity surges between his hand and the monstrous lizard. The wyvern's head snaps back, stunned by the powerful charge. Before it can regain its senses, you duck under its huge, armored head and slash at the exposed scales of its underbelly.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the resulting total is 20 or more, turn to **200**. If the total is 19 or less, turn to **106**.

Quickly getting over your surprise, you fight back. Your sword whistles through the blackness as you hack at the pack of dark, shadowy killers. Using two-handed strokes too powerful for them to block, you scatter the attackers, making room to fight effectively with your longer weapon.



Langor is still behind you. He pulls out a small stick of wood that burns with a cold, magical light. The white brilliance that illuminates his pale, drawn face lets you see your enemy better.

Surrounding you are seven black-clothed assassins. Standing apart from them is another figure, tall, lithe, movements marked by feline grace; their leader is a woman. It takes only a fraction of a second to realize it's Lolita Gig and her murderous band. Now a lot of things make sense. On that thought you attack.

Roll two dice and add the results to your fighting skill score. If the result is 23 or more, turn to **44**. If it is 22 or less, go to **94**.

65

You push on, searching the rest of the room and all the treasures held dear to Fluglash. Langor, awed, stops repeatedly to take this jar or that bottle. You and Probmer, intent on finding the plaque, check all the open shelves and unlocked drawers. Then you begin opening cabinet doors, until you come to one that resists your determined tugs.

"Probmer, give me a hand with this."

Probmer is beside you instantly.

"Oh, I see. The lock is reversed. A neat trick, but I can get it open."

With a twist of a thin strip of iron, Probmer clicks the lock and throws open the cabinet. There on the

second shelf is the plaque. You grab it and slide it into its place in your father's leather case.

Langor comes up behind you, his search for components at an end. "What did you find?" he asks.

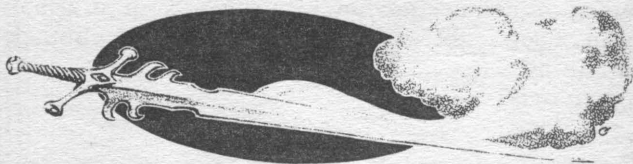
"We found the plaque," says Probmer with scorn. "In case you forgot, that's why we came."

If you haven't used all three doses of Langor's healing potion and want to use one now, roll one die and add that number of hit points to your current total. Remember not to go over your original total.

Turn to **19**.

66

Even though you are expecting Sir Segwick's charge, you are no match for his speed and fury.



His wild strength and the magic in Trollbiter overcome your frantic defense. The magic sword cuts your armor where his backhand strike hits your left bicep. The blade rips the muscle and a heavy gush of blood floods your armor. Slash, hack, chop. Another blow catches you in the ribs.

Desperate, you let battle-lust burn in your mind, maniacal strength surge in your arms.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the result is 21 or more, turn to **86**. If it is 20 or less, turn to **124**.

67

You start to follow Probmer, but before you can move, Langor stops you with his contemptuous glare. "The heroics weren't necessary, you know. Since you

chose to play warrior, perhaps you'd like a dose of my precious healing potion."

He is chastising you for engaging in close combat, and you don't like it. The cat gave you little choice, and Langor certainly could have done more to help! Your frustrations with the haughty wizard are growing, but you may yet need his skills, so you gather your composure for a moment before you speak.

"I appreciate your *generous* offer. In the future, try to remember your services have been bought and paid for. I expect your aid without comment."

A fierce glint flashes in Langor's eyes, but fades immediately. "As you wish," he says.

If you have been injured and want to use a dose of the potion, roll one die and add the result to your hit points, remembering not to go over your original total. Then subtract one dose from the number remaining.

Turn to **80**.

68

"Go ahead," you tell Probmer.

Probmer presses one ear to the door and motions for silence. A few tense moments later, the thief pulls out a strange set of lock picks. The third one he tries slides smoothly into the lock. Probmer turns the pick and the lock turns with it. He eases the door open, ushers you and Langor inside, then follows, pulling the door shut behind him.

Roll two dice and add the result to Probmer's stealth skill score. If the result is 22 or more, turn to **17**. If the result is 21 or less, turn to **90**.

69

Probmer can't seem to open the lock. "There's something funny about this," he says finally, straightening up.

“I told you it was magicked,” scoffs Langor.

“Let’s not start an argument here,” you whisper, reminding them of where they are. “We’ll look for another way in.”

You motion them to check the walls for a secret entrance or a way to reach the second story. Carefully you examine the gray stone walls of the house for anything unusual. Whenever you approach a window you duck below it and crawl past. Probmer, sulking, stays behind while Langor studies the house apparently as intently as you. Somehow you doubt if he has your trained eye; he’s too used to letting his magic do the searching for him.

There’s an idea. What about his magic? You turn to Langor. “Can you use a spell to get us in?”

“No, any magic this close to Fluglash’s home will alert him to our presence.”

Determined to get in you return to checking the house, inch by inch.

Roll two dice, add it to your perception skill score. If the total is 13 or more, turn to **84**. If it is 12 or less, turn to **114**.

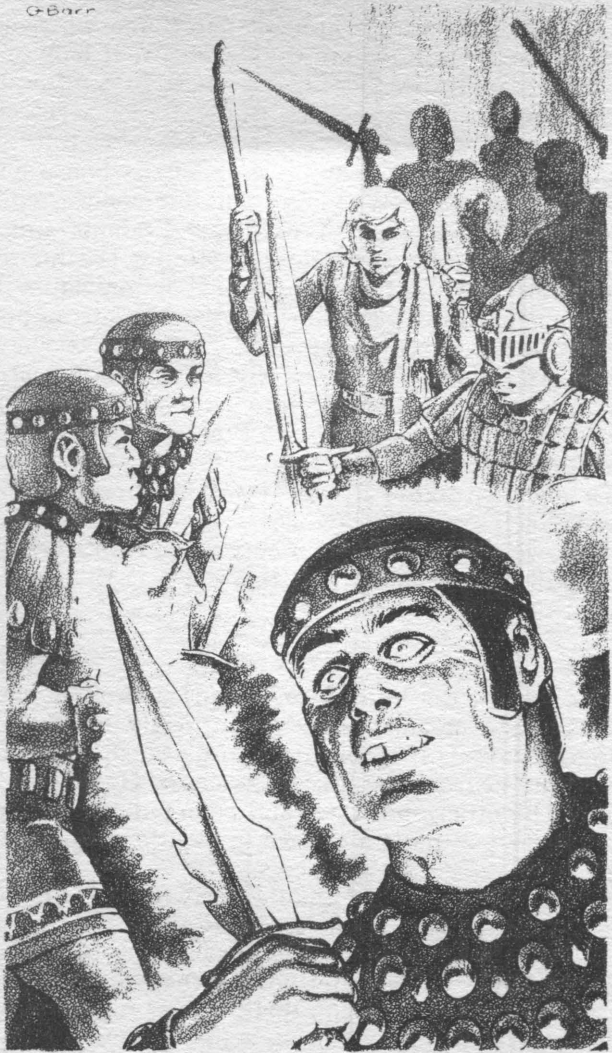
70

The fierce, disciplined mercenaries around you edge closer, working their way cautiously into sword range. You react first. A quick feint, a slash, and you catch the nearest one across the chest. He staggers back. The others hesitate, and before the next one gets close, you have a chance to look for your comrades.

Probmer has stabbed one fighter with his venomous dagger, and the hapless soul is already shaking from the effects of whatever foul substance coats the blade. Langor has transformed another into a living statue with a Hold Person spell.

The battle is going your way, but several of Ara-

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quat's men are closing in again, though more respectfully since sampling your swordsmanship.

On your next attack roll add +1 to the outcome, because of your demoralizing success this round. Turn to **55**.

71

You stretch as high as you can in your saddle and survey the battle as it spreads out below you. The trees behind you will hide you from your enemies, preventing your outline from being seen against the skyline.

Before you is a jumble of movement obscured by the smoke of burning brush, farmhouses, and oil tossed from the heights of the castle walls. Dense clouds of black drift ominously across the field of battle, making it difficult to discern friendly troops from the trolls, and you are hard pressed to decide what is happening.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the result is 13 or more, turn to **92**. If the total is 12 or less, turn to **139**.

72

"Not yet." You catch Probmer's right arm. "Maybe there's another way in."

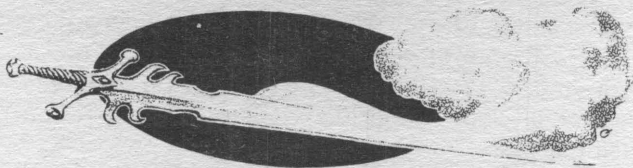
Langor steps past the two of you. "I'll get this," he says.

A few quick gestures and the disguised door shows clearly. Langor pulls on the latch and the door springs open. Too late now, you have no choice. The three of you duck inside and pull the door shut.

Turn to **90**.

73

Carefully you reach down and pick up the beautiful sword. The handle fits perfectly in your hand, balanced just for you. There is a series of fine runes



etched into the blade. You replace your own sword with the new one and note with satisfaction that the new sword fits perfectly in the scabbard.

“What have you got there?” Langor asks, grabbing the sword from your scabbard.

He studies the blade, carefully turning it over to examine both sides.

“A sword of minor power,” he says, not impressed, and hands it back.

As long as you use this sword, add 1 point to any fighting rolls you must make.

If you’ve been injured and want to use a dose of Langor’s healing potion (provided you haven’t already used all three doses), roll one die and add the result to your hit points. Remember you cannot exceed your original total.

Turn to 19.

74

You scan the grounds, searching for anything that indicates danger. Then your hunter’s eye spots movement, something large shuffling quietly behind the curtain of willow branches.

“Watch those willows. Something *big* is hiding there, just ready for us to walk past. Langor, you better have your best offensive spell ready. When that thing comes, there won’t be any time to find components.”

“Okay,” he says, “but I don’t see anything.”

“You will.”

As you wait, whatever it is starts getting restless

and the willow branches swish gently as it pushes them from behind. You hear the soft clatter of metallic scales. It's big, but not big enough to be an adult dragon. Suddenly the willows part and rushing straight at you, teeth bared, poison stinger held high is a large wyvern. Its sharp claws rip the ground, trying to gain traction as it accelerates across the green turf.

Your sword snaps out as reflexes take over. Langor, too, is ready and his incomprehensible mutterings start to draw on the magical energy that sorcerers command.

Roll two dice and add the total to Langor's wisdom skill score. If the total is 19 or more turn to **63**. If the total is 18 or less, turn to **93**.

75

Back in the warm confines of the inn you try to get a lead on the next buyer of the stolen plaques. Langor goes back upstairs, claiming to need another bath, and you and Probmer try questioning the inn's patrons. Most seem friendly enough, especially when you offer to buy a mug of ale, but as soon as you mention Lolita Gig, they excuse themselves with a black scowl.

Slowly, frustrations build. No one will answer your questions, and it isn't long before no one will even talk to you. Who is this Lolita? Why do they seem to know her but refuse to mention her name?

"Somethin' strange about this lady," says Probmer after yet another burly customer has cringed and left at the mention of her name.

"Obviously!" Your frustration explodes. "These people know who she is, but for some reason they won't talk."

"Who is she?"

You look at Probmer. "That's what we've got to find out."

You rack your brain for clues, but find none. Soon Langor returns. He sits down but politely respects your concentration and you're hardly aware he's back. There must be some way to loosen the town-folks' tongues, but how?

Turn to 177.



76

Your party rides north, following the rutted wagon road that leads to Mount Vernot. Neither Probmer nor Langor is a good conversationalist, so time passes slowly for you. If they talk, it's usually only to argue. Probmer seems content to count the coins in his purse, and Langor stares intently into the undergrowth.

After several hours, Langor suddenly stops his horse and quickly dismounts.

"I won't be a moment, sir, but I see a rather rare herb." He scurries into the thicket where you hear the snapping of twigs and stalks.

A few minutes later, he is back on his horse, tucking a bundle of something into his robe. Sometimes his eccentricities are a bit much. He's supposed to be following your orders, not harvesting herbs. Angry about the delay, you kick your horse gently in the flanks to speed him down the road.

A few hours later, you see the broad expanse of a river ahead and a high stone bridge crossing it. Still some distance from the river, you see a thin path

leading away to the right. It appears seldom used, but remains a barren, lifeless track between trees that form an overhanging canopy, shutting out the low sun.

"That must be the road to Fluglash's house," you note. But neither of your companions seems anxious to take the little winding path. Great, you think, now that I need them, they're balking. "Come on, this is where we've got to go. Where's my mighty wizard, my master thief?"

"I'm right here," says Langor with a scowl. "I just thought perhaps it would be better to sneak through the woods rather than march right up to his front door."

"Oh, admit it," growls Probmer, "you're scared, just like me. All the tales of this evil, powerful mage have us shaking in our boots." Probmer looks at you. "Never fear, though, I'm going to live up to my oath. Where you go, I go."

"Then let's go." You start down the trail, looking for traps, but see nothing. Probmer follows, and Langor, shamed by the plucky thief, quickly trots his horse in line.

The side road remains a small path with barely room for the horses to travel in single file. The trail weaves back and forth, aimlessly meandering around large trees, over a small brook, apparently headed no place in particular.

"Doesn't look like any more than a hunter's trail," observes Langor.

"And when did you become expert in woodlore?" asks Probmer, baiting him.

"You are forgetting," you tell them both, "that this leads to the house of a feared mage, who likely doesn't have many visitors. He won't have a King's Road leading to his door."

Probmer scans the trees for signs of an ambush at

this reminder of Fluglash's reputation. Langor puffs out his chest, and you can tell he's thinking about how "superior" his own spell-casting ability must be, but you doubt if he's ever really been tested against a powerful wizard.

Looking up ahead, you see a strange iron gate looming across the path, barring the way. A stone wall stretches out to either side blocking the view, but you can see a large, beautiful house through the gate bars. Cautiously the three of you ride up to it, but no one touches it because there are strange runes forged into the crossbar.

"What is it?" you ask Langor, who is now mouthing the inscription.

"It says 'entry by invitation.' And we haven't got one."

"Well, I can't wait to be invited," you say, dropping off your horse to unlatch the gate.

Your father may even now be overrun by hideous trolls. There isn't time for anything except the direct approach. Some chances cannot be avoided. To your surprise, the gate isn't locked, and it swings open soundlessly when you give it a light push.

Turn to **22**.



77

"Perhaps I can help you," says Jake, the sight of your gold bringing a warm smile to his rough features.

"A round of your finest ale, for myself, my friends, and a mug for yourself." You drop four coins on the bar (subtract them from your total). "I'm Kardel Dolan, this is Probmer and Langor. We've just ridden

into Ironton from the south and are mighty thirsty.”

“Kardel Dolan,” repeats Jake with a wink. “Then you be the duke’s son. A pleasure to serve you, as it always is to serve your father.”

You lean closer. “If you’ve had visits from my father, then perhaps you’d do us a service, as I’m on my father’s business and need some information.”

Jake passes around the tall mugs of ale. “Sure, anything I can, I’ll tell ya.”

“We’re looking for some people who came through Ironton a few days ago with a caravan headed for Mount Vernot. They have some property that they purchased in good faith, but it was stolen from my father and we’re going to buy it back. All we have are names. Araquat, Stoneclash, Stout Snout, Fluglash, Lolita Gig. Any of them mean anything to you?”

“Yeah, I know ’em all; all except Lolita. Araquat’s a fancy merchant from Mount Vernot; got his own trading outfit there. Stout Snout works for the mayor of Mount Vernot as some kind of guard or something, and runs a lot of messages. Lately he’s been passin’ through here pretty regular.

“Fluglash, there’s an evil one.” Jake rolls his eyes and grimaces as he mentions the name. “He’s a nasty wizard who’s better left alone. He lives off the main road to Mount Vernot, just before you get to the river. You’ll see a dirt path off to the right, Fluglash’s place is at the end of the trail. But I would forget about whatever he’s got, cause he’ll never give it up; probably kill you all first.”



The three of you take a long swig from the mugs. Probmer and Langor are both looking at you, but you can't show any sign of weakness. You know you have no choice—all five plaques must be regained.

“What about the last one?” you ask, hoping to take their thoughts off the infamous Fluglash.

“Ah, yes. Stoneclash. You passed him as you came in, he's the mercenary in the corner with a blue fox on his shield.” Jake points to the dark shadowy corner near the front door.

All three heads turn to look at the table in the corner. Turn to 12.

78

Suddenly you know why the room seems so small. Secret doors are hidden in the walls! How could you have been so stupid? You can even see the telltale outlines around the doors widen, as if nervous listeners were anticipating a command. You hear the soft rustle of shuffling feet and the rattle of armor and weaponry. Ambush!

“It's a trap,” you yell, and your sword flashes out.

The trap is sprung! Armed thugs charge out of hiding. The element of surprise has been lost to them, however, and you and Probmer blunt the initial charge. Langor is slower to respond, but he has a spell component out and is beginning an incantation.

Turn to 165.

79

“Twenty-five gold pieces,” you say with a frown. You're not willing to chance losing whatever rooms are left, however, so you dig into your coin purse and retrieve enough to pay for the night's lodging.

“I want my bath hot,” Langor states. “And another mug of ale while I wait.”

“I hope that's included—for the price we're pay-



ing!" You glare at the innkeeper, half expecting him to ask for more.

"Of course," he says. His smile broadens as he counts the coins. "I'll even throw in breakfast for the lot of you, just to show you I'm a fair man. Your room's at the top of the stairs, first door on the right. I'll have the boy draw your bath, sir, if you'll wait at your table while I pour the ale."

Subtract 25 gp from your purse. The night's sleep will restore 2 hit points to any character who does not have his full amount. Turn to 159.

80

You start searching the cave in earnest, but the jumble of rocks makes it hard to cover much ground. The press of time weighs on your mind, but you've got to be thorough. You must find the plaque if it's here. You force yourself to move slowly and search every place the cat might have dropped it. Your father's plight intrudes into your thoughts, fighting for your attention. The plaque *has* to be here.

Langor stands stoically, arms folded, watching you. "This is ridiculous," he says in his squeaky voice.

"You got a better idea?" asks Probmer.

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?" you demand.

"A Detect Magic spell should make the plaque glow bright enough to see a mile away."

"Then do it, please. There isn't much time." Your patience with Langor's attitude is wearing thin, but you'll put up with him if he can find the plaque.

"As you wish, sire."

Langor mumbles a few words, manipulates his fin-

gers in an intricate pattern, and scans the rock-strewn cave.

Roll two dice and add the result to Langor's wisdom score. If the result is 19 or better, turn to **122**. If it is 18 or less, turn to **129**.

81

The surprised would-be assassins writhe helplessly in Langor's sticky web spell. Probmer steps in quickly and callously slits their throats. You know he's prevented them from shouting a warning, but his coldness brings old doubts back to the surface. Why would this killer-thief join you?

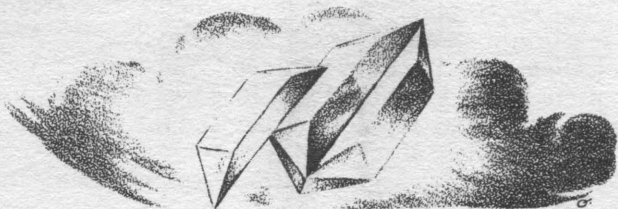
That question must be delayed. Right now, the third assailant lies bleeding against the far wall, stunned momentarily by your sword stroke. Probmer turns to him, preparing to finish him off, but Langor motions the thief back. Probmer waits silently for the magic-user to do whatever it is he's planning.

Softly Langor mumbles the words to his spell and twists his fingers into the intricate patterns necessary to complete his magic.

"Now our 'friend' will be more willing to tell us what awaits us up these stairs," whispers Langor. "I've charmed him into believing I am his trusted ally."

You bend closer to the semi-conscious guard, lightly tapping his cheek to arouse him.

"Are you all right?" asks Langor, ducking in front of you. You step back out of sight.



The bleeding man groans and shakes his head, then looks up at Langor with blurred vision. A glint of recognition flickers across his face and he sits up.

"I'm glad you've come," he says to Langor. "We were attacked and I seem to have gotten the worst of it. Did you see them flee?"

"Yes," answers Langor quickly. "They ran off when they heard our approach. Who is it they wanted to get to upstairs?"

"Lolita, of course. She's waiting for word on the nobleman. You know, the one who's been looking for her. Probably came to avenge some forgotten commission she collected years ago."

"Oh, but of course," the wizard says. "Is she with friends, or are you her only guard?"

"There may be one more at the top of the stairs, but she needs no guard, so there are few of us guild watch here at this hour. But those who mean her harm may return." Panic enters the watchman's voice.

"Listen," says Langor, his high-pitched voice straining to sound sympathetic. "You better retire to a safe place and get someone to look at that nasty cut you've received. We'll watch the guild hall until you can return."

You step forward to help the survivor to his feet and escort him to the door.

"Thanks." He nods to Langor as he shuffles away down the street.

Probmer closes the secret door behind him. "Well, we've found her, but I don't like the sound of her not needing help."

"She'll have no defense for my magic," puffs Langor.

"It doesn't matter. She has one of my father's plaques and I must get it back. It's up the stairs for us."

Turn to 184.

82

Langor starts his spell, but before he can get far, the pesky swordsman pulls a wicked-looking dagger and casts it with an expert hand. The blade sinks deep into Langor's chest. He gives out a weak gasp and crumples to his knees.

Your wounds are starting to drain the life from you. You are so weak you can manage only one more attack. Knowing it has to work, you put every ounce of strength into it. Stoneclash, however, sneers at the weakness in your arms and knocks aside your sword.

Without hesitation, Stoneclash whirls around and chops Probmer on the neck. You can see the razor-sharp sword sever tendons, bone, and soft tissue. Probmer falls with a plop. Langor has fallen, too, and lies still.

Before you can raise your sword, Stoneclash brings his blood-spattered blade down on your neck. It is over so fast you feel almost no pain. ✘

83

With the first assault over, the tempo slows slightly. You regain your confidence as you step, counter, block, move, never leaving your back open long enough to be hit. The men you face are skilled, too. Neither you nor they can score a hit. You circle and dodge, each watching for an opening.

Finally, you realize they are wearing you down with a game of cat-and-mouse. Your heavy armor takes a lot more energy to move than their lighter leather. Time is running out.

With a rush of berserk strength, you charge into the pack, sword swinging wildly.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 22 or more, turn to **172**. If it is 21 or less, turn to **125**.



The ominous gray stone is dampening your mood. Staring at the joins between the limestone blocks, you marvel at how they fit together seamlessly.

Probmer, forgetting his failure at the back door, joins you in your scrutiny of the walls. Langor, without his magic, is not much help.

Suddenly you stop. One pair of stones looks funny; the crack between them is too well defined. You inch closer to the wall, rubbing your right hand against its cold, rough surface. With your left hand you motion Probmer up beside you and point at the visible rectangular outline.

Probmer nods. He hesitates, then, ever so gently, pushes against the far side. A secret door slides noiselessly open. You peer into a cloak closet with a plain flat door on the far side. A musty smell of dusty, frayed robes reaches your nose.

One by one you climb into the small closet, then you close the secret entrance behind you. Breathlessly you push the wooden door open and stare out into a dark, empty hall.

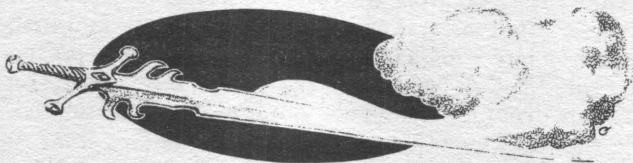
You can't just stand gawking, so you take a deep breath and ease into the hall. The thought that you are unwelcome guests in the home of an evil mage brings a knot to your stomach, but the only alternative means certain death for your family and friends. Cautiously, you begin to search the house, constantly looking over your shoulder. Turn to 147.

85

The great cat ignores your sword and lashes out with vicious claws. Its quickness thwarts your attempts to land a telling blow, and now it intensifies its attacks. You are forced to the defensive, trying to avoid its natural weapons.

Perhaps you should retreat. No, the whole Dukedom is depending on you, and you cannot shirk your noble responsibilities. You must retrieve the plaque you think this beast has hidden here. You blank your mind to the pain and stand your ground, swinging wildly to keep the cat at bay.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **131**. If the total is 20 or less, turn to **3**.



86

Your surge of strength turns the tide momentarily in your favor. Your sword lands with telling force, and Sir Segwick staggers, almost falling from the saddle. Fresh rivers of blood cover his armor.

Now is the time to follow up your advantage, before he gets his second wind.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, turn to **155**. If it is 19 or less, go to **167**.

87

“Hrumph,” the innkeeper snorts. “You won’t get far around here trying to impress people with your high and mighty airs. This is a free town and owes no

one homage. Do you want something an honest innkeeper can give ya, or are ya here to waste my time?"

This puts you back a step. Surely, such a gruff innkeeper couldn't be so prosperous. Maybe he's misunderstood you.

"What I really need is information, but we might be staying for a drink," you say, trying to maintain an air of confidence.

Jake looks hard at you. "If you want ale, mine's the best. It'll be a gold piece for a drink." He holds out one hand for payment.



"Pay the insolent commoner," snipes Langor, his inflated ego tweaked by the innkeeper's remarks. "I'm thirsty and there's others we can speak to in this inn."

"Just a minute," you tell Langor before Jake is totally alienated. There's got to be a way around his attitude. Maybe he needs a little gold to loosen his tongue; then again, it may offend his independent sense of freemanship.

If you decide to slip him a few extra gold pieces, subtract 3 gp from your purse total and go to **77**. If you think this is a waste of resources, turn to **40**.

88

You think for a moment. His asking price is way too high, and Probmer's negative shake of the head reaffirms your thoughts—better to bargain with Araquat.

"Are you trying to make your whole day's profits on one transaction? I think 110 gold pieces would be a fair price, considering the circumstances. You'd still

make a profit and I'd have back what is already mine."

Araquat's face sags momentarily, thoughts of easy profit gone. Now, quickly, there's the lean look of the hungry wolf. A sly smile covers his face.

"Perhaps 150 would be acceptable."

"Araquat, good merchant, surely you can't be serious. I have but to turn you in to the city guards and I can have the plaque for nothing." A strong bluff; your father has little influence this far north and, most likely, Araquat has half the city guard in his pay. "To save us both time, I'll generously offer 125. But not one coin more."

Araquat's face wrinkles with concentration. Apparently he is sizing you up. For what? He must know you have the gold. Maybe he thinks he can get still more.

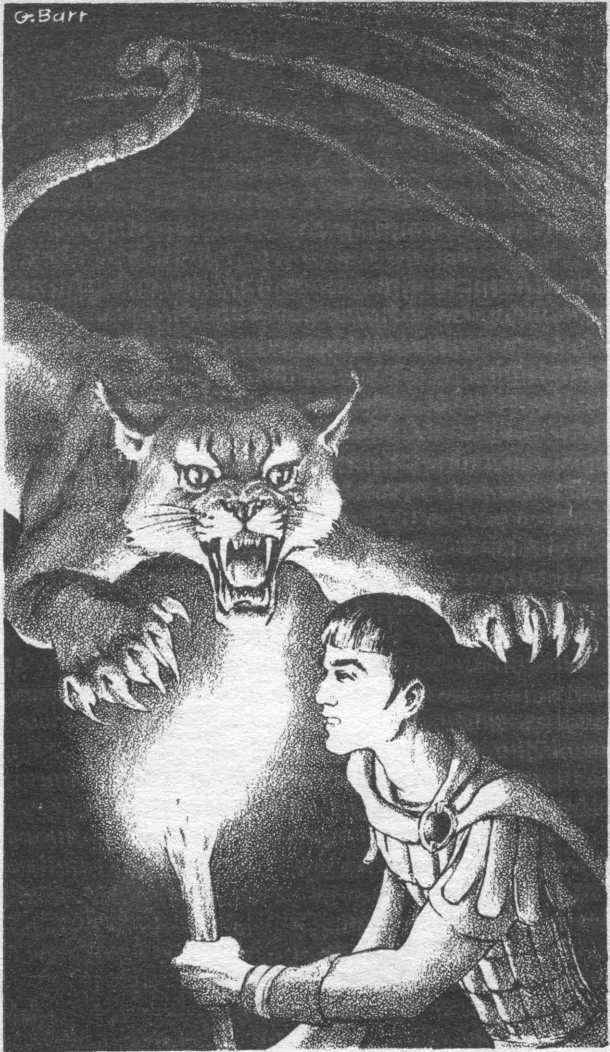
Roll two dice and add their sum to your presence skill score. If the total is 17 or more, turn to **108**. If the total is 16 or less, turn to **141**.

89

With a tremendous bound the cat is on you, claws flashing, snarling its rage. The echoes bounce back and forth between the stone walls. Your sword answers and the two of you trade attacks. The giant cat's moves are measured, controlled, not like any animal you've ever hunted. This catlike thing has more than animal intelligence—it is fighting with near-human cunning. Already it has learned to ignore obvious feints. This will take all your skill, unless your friends can help. Right now that seems unlikely since you and the cat are intertwined too closely. It is up to you.

The cat seems to falter. There's a momentary lapse in his immense strength. Immediately, you plunge your blade toward his exposed side.

G. Barr



Roll two dice and add the results to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **145**. If it is 20 or less, turn to **195**.

90

You are standing in a tiny alcove with a set of stairs leading up to the right. Inside the stairwell, partially hidden by the deep shadows, are three men. They are dressed completely in black and are almost invisible. Almost before you see them, they pounce.

The ring of steel on steel echoes cold and hard within the confines of the cramped room. The first attack is aimed at you. Evidently your armor singles you out as the most dangerous trespasser.

Your fine plate mail blunts their initial attacks, but some of their hacks strike flesh. They force you backward until you bump into Langor, who bounces off the wall and squirms out from behind you.

The first rush is spent. You face them, sword ready, intent on returning their steel with some of your own.

Subtract 5 hit points from your current total. Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the result is 22 or more, turn to **113**. If it is 21 or less, turn to **123**.

91

The wicked wizard chuckles at your fear. He spreads his hands, gestures, and says the arcane syllables of magic. A volley of green-shafted magic missiles leap out. Several of the unerring bolts bury themselves in your flesh. Probmer and Langor, too, look like porcupines. Your strength fades fast, and your breathing becomes labored. Desperately you struggle to reach the door.

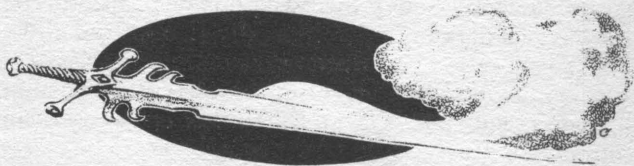
A second volley of missiles blasts across the room, like tracers from a shotgun. It is too much. Multiple

green shafts again riddle your body. A massive pain overwhelms your brain and that is all you know, forever. ✠

92

Now you look at the scene closer to you. On a hilltop not far away, a group of humans sit astride horses, commanding the forces of trolls in the valley. At their front, atop a coal-black stallion, sits a massive knight, whom you recognize as Sir Segwick, of the King of Pittland's court. What is he doing here? What power can these few men hold over an army of trolls?

Then you see, raised by Sir Segwick in the midst of his command group, a fiery sword, whose blade has brilliant flames leaping from the central forged shaft. Not just any sword, but *Trollbiter*, the flaming



sword of the King of Pittland! At last, the picture becomes clear. The king is seeking to bring down your father, head of the oldest ruling family in the realm. Probably he intends to insert one of his henchmen as the new duke, maybe Sir Segwick himself. The king can't do it openly, so he's lent his powerful sword to a secret ally to finish the job for him.

Hatred burns in your stomach. You must stop them, bring down the flaming sword, capture it, and end the threat from the trolls. Better still, you think, if you can get *Trollbiter* to your father, he can present it to the Council of Nobles as evidence, and perhaps even the king can be replaced. The only question is how to get the sword. Turn to 95.

93

The huge lizard rears its fanged head and poises its stinger-tipped tail, ready to attack. Probmer draws his dagger and slides sideways, trying to sneak behind this deadly yard pet. Langor stops his incantation and returns the spell component to the folds of his robe. He has changed his mind and is readying his solid oak staff instead. Your sword is out, ready to strike the first opening you see.

Roll two dice, add that to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **143**. If it is 20 or less, turn to **133**.

94

One attacker steps in front of your sword stroke and manages to turn it aside. His counterattack is too quick; your heavy sword is out of position. His short sword digs in under your lower plate and sinks into the sinews of your stomach. A smashing wave of pain sends your brain reeling. You fight it, willing the pain to subside. It is not the first time you've been wounded.

Before they can attack again, you pivot and swing your sword in a wide circle, scattering the assassins. Now they are like sharks attracted to blood, circling, ready to finish you.

Subtract 9 hit points from your remaining total, then roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 22 or more, turn to **117**. If the result is 21 or less, turn to **100**.

95

You need a plan.

"Langor," you ask the wizard, "have you got enough fire magic to hold back trolls?"

"I can certainly stop a few trolls."

"Then position yourself between that hillock"—



you point to the group of men—"and that squad of trolls at the base. You must keep them under control while I capture that sword Trollbiter for my father."

"And what shall I do?" asks Newrick at your elbow.

"Get to my father. Tell him what we're doing. Tell him to mount a fierce counterattack from the castle. Tie up all the troll reserves so none will be diverted to stop me. I'll wait until I see the troops cross the drawbridge."

"As you wish." Newrick has never questioned you before, and he doesn't do so now.

You try to curb your burning sense of haste. You'll just have to wait.

If Probmer is still with you, turn to 14. If the thief has previously met his end, turn to 23.

96

As your eyes adjust, you see a stealthy figure hastily picking up his shield and heading for the door. As you watch, he goes into the street, turning north, and before the door closes to cut off your view, you see him start to jog off down the main street.

Turn to 5.

97

At first, nothing happens. With a deadly stern expression, the woman stares at your party, dagger in hand. Slowly, a dawning recognition sweeps over her face. She actually gets a smile to twist her cold, hard lips.

“Well, well,” she says to Langor enthusiastically. “I am glad to see you again.”

The dagger swiftly returns to a hidden scabbard, and in two skips, she’s across the room, throwing her arms around Langor’s neck.

“Easy,” he says, “you’ll break my neck. I want you to meet my friends.” Langor indicates you and Probmer with a sweep of his arm. “This is Probmer and Kardel. We’ve come to get back a plaque that you bought from a thief in Pembrook. Probmer must return it or have a price put on his head.”

“I did buy a good-luck charm in Pembrook,” she says thoughtfully, “but I gave 100 gold for it. You come up with that much, and for you, I’ll part with it.” Obviously the Charm Person spell can’t overcome a strong business sense.

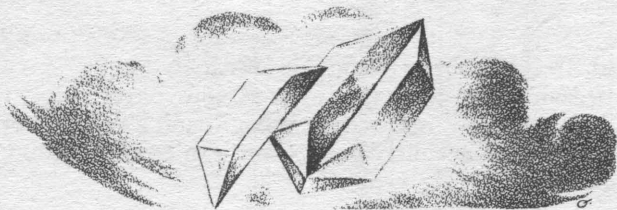
Langor gestures to you. “Kardel, here, will make it good. A messenger will return with the money today.”

You nod assurance, but you’re beginning to wonder how much this spell can fool the assassins.

“If it were anybody else, I’d have to see the color yellow, but I guess I can trust you.”

Without another word, she fishes down the front of her tunic and pulls out a leather pouch. Loosening the drawstrings, she dumps the plaque into her hand and gives it to Langor, whose face fills with awe. You can tell he feels the radiant power of the plaque.

“Thanks,” he whispers in her ear and plants a small kiss on her cheek. “Later.”



Now Langor turns and quickly ushers you back down the stairs, waving as he goes. By the time you are out through the secret door and have turned the corner, he is pushing you into a trot.

“Let’s get out of here before she realizes she’s been duped.”

You beeline it for the inn, and in a few minutes, are back inside the cozy main room. There’s no time to rest. Quickly you collect your belongings, reload the horses, and start the trip south. Turn to **161**.

98

Above your head there is a sudden spray of dazzling colored lights. You know Langor has completed his diversionary spell, and the instant Lolita glances up to see what is happening, you swing under her guard and cut deep into her rib cage with the sharp sword edge. You feel the leather armor part under the devastating force of your well-aimed strike, and muscle and bone crunch like dried leaves at the end of autumn.

In Lolita’s eyes you can see her frustration as she realizes she’s been tricked, but it’s too late. The assassin leader sprawls backward onto the solid oak floor, a widening pool of blood spreading from the great gaping wound in her side. Before a minute passes, her eyes close and her body relaxes. You feel no remorse, for you know she’s killed many who were less capable of defending themselves than she.

Quickly, you bend over her and look for the all-important plaque. Behind you, Probmer and Langor urge you to hurry out of this assassins’ nest. Your nervous fingers come across a small, rectangular leather pouch tied around her neck by a double strand of gold.

You pull it out from under her bloodied armor, and the radiant power of the plaque courses through your hands, even through the thick leather. Just to be



sure, you open the drawstrings, peek in, and see the plaque safely nestled inside. You stuff it, pouch and all, inside your tunic, where it will be protected by your armor.

If you still have any of Langor's healing potion and wish to use one dose, roll a die and add that number of points to the injured character's hit points, remembering not to go over their original total.

Then you hurry back to the inn to get your horses. Turn to **161**.

99

From the shelf in front of him Fluglash grabs a small, green bottle. He mutters a couple of arcane words and pops the top off, waving it toward you.

A green gas billows out of the bottle. The first puff of the cloud reaches your nostrils and you feel a burning sensation. Your eyes start to water as the corrosive gas blows full in your face. You are seized by fits of coughing. You can't fight any more—you can't even stay in the room. You turn and run for the door, Langor and Probmer behind you.

With your back to the wizard, you can't see what he is doing, and right now you don't care.

Turn to **91**.

100

One of them dances in, lunging with his short sword. Again the swift movement slices cleanly through your attempt to parry and cuts flesh from your wracked body. Another shower of your blood sprays the ground at your feet, and weakness begins to overtake you.

Wearily, you heft your heavy, unresponsive sword. Needing time to gather your strength, you back into a doorway in the right-hand wall. At least it will prevent them from attacking from the rear.

You use a split second to look for Langor in the swirl of bodies and weapons. You fail to spot him, but the fight goes on, so he must be alive.

Subtract 10 hit points from your current total. Then turn to **166**.

101

The first arrow strikes home, bringing an ear-shattering yowl from the great creature. Before the reverberations die away in the hollow cavern, the second arrow sinks deep into the heavy flesh. Many creatures would have fallen with those two well-placed shots, but this is no ordinary animal. Enraged, the snarling fury leaps from its perch and covers thirty feet before its paws touch the floor. Razorlike claws scrape against the stone as it surges toward you.

No time for more arrows. You cast aside the bow and draw your sword. The heavy, well-balanced feel of it in your hands restores your confidence and you stand against its charge.

Turn to **89**.



102

Just before Langor's spell is complete, your arrow slams home. His scream cuts off the spell and immediately you nock another arrow.

You don't fire though, as now you see Probmer sneaking through the trees almost behind Langor. In

a moment he will be on the wizard. You don't want to chance hitting the thief, so you wait.

As you watch, Langor pulls your arrow from his chest. But at the same moment, Probmer leaps onto the back of Langor's horse.

Roll two dice and add the result to Probmer's stealth skill score. If the result is 21 or more, turn to **127**. If it is 20 or less, go to **178**.

103

With a lunge, you bring your sword down. This time the mage is caught off balance. The honed steel edge catches him flush on the side of the neck. The old man goes down in a geyser of blood. His head hits the floor with a hollow pop, and a lake of blood rushes across the floor to trickle out under the door.

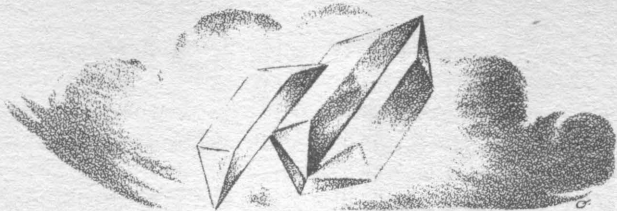
"I'll search the body," says Langor. "My superior knowledge of magic is required to do it properly."

"Okay," you answer, choosing to ignore the arrogance of the statement. "Probmer and I will search the rest of the room—you can help when you finish with him."

Langor rips away the magician's robes as if they were the wrappings of some long-awaited gift. A ring, a wand, a few trinkets, and some tiny bags of spell components—everything he thinks may be useful—go into Langor's large sack. He's so busy filling his own pockets that you wonder if he'll remember to look for the plaque. Well, he's fought hard and is entitled to anything he can use.

Methodically, you and Probmer search through every single item in the disordered workshop, making sure that nothing is overlooked. But the mess you must sift through complicates matters tremendously. Fluglash was a junk collector.

You start with the table, but even after moving every scrap of paper you come up empty. Langor eventu-



ally joins you, and you that notice he adds a few pieces of the paper to his sack.

You look around at the piles of stuff still to be sorted. Where to look next? You haven't got the days that a thorough search of this place would take. Every minute seems to last a year, and each one could be your father's last.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the result is 15 or more, turn to **38**. If the result is 14 or less, turn to **65**.

104

You round an unusually large tree and there stands the frightened mercenary. His face is set now and his sword ready. You realize there is no choice; you will have to take the plaque from Stoneclash by force.

Turn to **192**.

105

Again the pack of assassins swarms around you, daggers and swords clashing in a crescendo of ringing steel. Parry and counter, always swinging at shadows. An occasional clink reminds you that some of their thrusts are reaching your armor. Langor has been driven back away from you, fending them off bravely with his staff. You try to battle your way to him, hoping he has some way to devastate these killers.

With renewed energy you attack those in front of you, and immediately it pays off. Your sword finds an

opening, and one goes down with a nasty chest wound, coughing for air.

The surge carries you near Langor, but there's one more to stop before you can free Langor for a spell.

Roll two dice and add the resulting total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **32**. If it is less than 21, go to **146**.

106

Blood oozes from the terrific slash wounds you've opened in its belly, making your sword slippery. The enraged wyvern snaps at you with its daggerlike teeth. You twist aside, but the slavering maw catches you. Wicked fangs clamp down. Your armor takes the brunt of the attack, but even it cannot ward off all the deadly teeth. Several puncture your exposed flesh. The huge mouth releases you and draws back for another strike.

Now you are covered with blood, both your own and the reptile's. Probmer is nowhere to be seen. What if the thief has run out? Langor, on the other hand is trying desperately to fish some spell component from his flapping robes.

As the wyvern rushes toward you, jaws spread, you launch a counterattack of your own at its underbelly.

Subtract 7 hit points from your total. Then roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **200**. If it is 20 or less, go to **133**.

107

The corner chair sits empty, staring back at you like an empty plate after supper is finished. Whoever was there is gone.

"Did you see the guy in the corner leave?" you ask Probmer who's been watching the room more closely than Langor.

“No, but he must have gone out the front. I’ve been watching the back and no one’s come or gone that way.”

Langor looks questioningly at the two of you. “What difference does it make? Let’s enjoy an ale, talk to some of the other patrons—pick up the local rumors. Then we can pick up his trail if we decide he’s worth the effort.”

“Always thinking of your pleasure, ain’t ya,” snaps Probmer.

But you wonder if delaying to get information might not be such a good idea. The man had to go into the street, and if you hurried you still might see which way he went.

If you think you should follow the man from the corner chair, turn to **5**. If you think it would be worthwhile to question the other patrons, turn to **40**.

108

“You drive a hard bargain, but a little profit will get the day off to a good start,” says the merchant. “It’s a deal.”

Araquat pulls open a drawer in the desk and produces the plaque, wrapped in blue silk. He slides it across the desktop toward you. At the same time, you open the drawstrings to your purse and count out 125 gold pieces. You pick up the plaque and rise.

“A profitable day for us both. Let’s go,” and you motion the others out ahead of you.

Subtract 125 gold pieces from your money supply and turn to **75**.





109

Your sword rings hard against the scales of the beast, but this is not a full-fledged dragon, so your persistent attacks are showing results. You chip off scales, and make a few lucky strokes that slice up under the scales, sinking deep into its flesh. Already a steady drip of acid blood is dampening the lawn.

Langor's magic unleashes a flurry of green shafts that wing unerringly into the beast. The magic missiles penetrate its outer protective hide like so much air.

The great lizard writhes in pain, lashing out with its stinger-tipped tail, but you are too close to its belly to be hit, and Langor and Probmer are too far away. One last sword cut brings a heavy cry of anguish, and the beast falls with a sickening thud to the ground. It shudders once, then lies still.

"You okay?" you ask Probmer, who, though unsteady, apparently is recovering from the nasty stinger wound.

"Yeah," comes his measured reply. "It'll take more than weak poison to stop me."

Langor looks at Probmer and for the first time a shadow of respect flickers across his face. In your own mind, you wonder just how much Probmer knows about poisons and where he learned about them. The urgency of the present situation strikes you though,

and you realize your party is standing in the middle of Fluglash's lawn, in plain sight of several windows.

"Come on. We'd better get out of sight. We need to look for an unobtrusive way into the house."

"This way," says Probmer softly, and he leads you in to a clump of evergreen shrubs.

Turn to 138.



110

Your sword is deflected sideways by Langor's expert staff parry. He whips the other end of the staff around, but it clangs harmlessly off your shoulder plates. Again you lash out with your sword and this time you find Langor's unprotected ribs.

Langor forces his horse back, away from you. You try to close, but Langor keeps you off guard, using precision jabs with his longer staff.

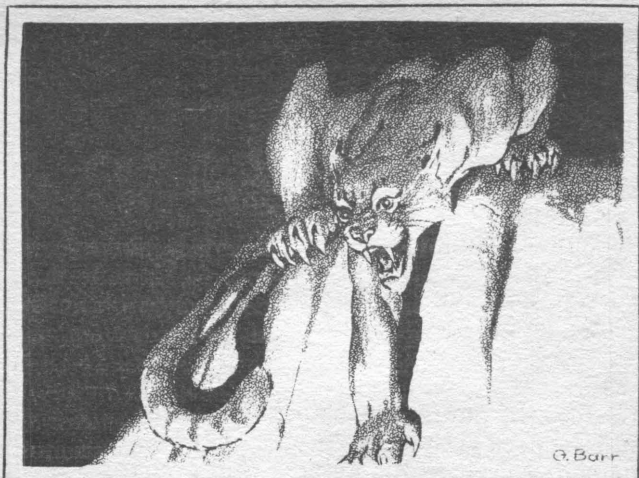
Even as you try to maneuver close enough to score with your sword, you see Probmer's silent shape sneaking up on the wizard again.

Evidently the thief has escaped the poison gas, and his dagger bristles for revenge. You guide your horse, aim your attacks, so that Langor's back remains toward Probmer.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or higher, turn to 127. If it is 19 or less, turn to 62.

111

The two arrows speed toward the snarling, catlike creature. Thick saliva drips off its three-inch fangs,



as if it anticipates sinking them into your flesh.

At the last instant, the beast leaps sideways in lightning-quick bursts. Both arrows miss. Now you see its rippling muscles tense to spring and you drop the useless bow. You draw the razor-sharp length of steel from its scabbard. Probmer and Langor are inching sideways to get out of the way of the cat's charge.

The giant cat leaps from its perch and lands almost at your feet. It snarls and raises one paw, the knife-like talons extended. Your sword is poised. You are ready.

Turn to **89**.

112

A long moment of silence heightens the tension between you and the assassins, who stand frozen, eyeing you. Langor's incantation dies away, and still

everything remains suspended on the brink of action. The lone woman stares at you for a minute with cold, dark eyes. You see no sign to indicate if Langor's spell worked or not.

"Kill 'em," she says and points at you with a wicked-looking dagger.

Her fellow guild members charge, short swords and daggers bristling.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 21 or more, turn to **172**. If it is 20 or less, go to **18**.

113

Before the guards can attack again, you slice deep into the neck of the nearest one. That gives Langor a moment to regain his balance and prepare a spell. Before the other two guards can react, sticky threads spiral from Langor's fingertips, covering the stairwell and them. Within seconds they are hopelessly entangled in the thick fibers, wrapped so tightly that they are even unable to yell for help.

Turn to **81**.

114

Nothing! You've circled the house, checked every inch of the walls, and can't find a way in. The front door stares invitingly, the thin crack still showing you it's open.

"Well, if there's no other way in, we'll have to try the door." Neither of your comrades looks happy.

"Give me another chance to jimmy the back door," pleads Probmer, fiddling with one of his picks.

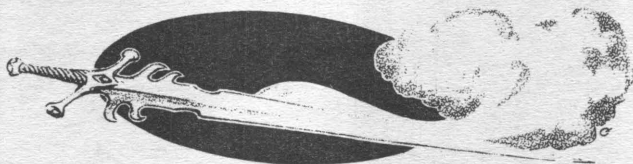
You are in charge, and you tell him no. He couldn't pick the lock before and he probably couldn't do it this time either. Meanwhile, time is wasting.

Turn to **42**



115

Valiantly you try to stave off the inevitable, but to no avail. The dark knight sends blow after blow crashing down on you. One pounds your wrist, sending your sword dropping from your grasp. Now there is nothing to save you. Trollbiter cuts you repeatedly, until finally, you fall face down in the mud of your own blood. ☒



116

After a few minutes, Langor looks disgusted. “Nothing,” he says.

“Let’s stop wasting time,” you say. “I’ll worry about this plaque when we have all the others in hand.”

You jump astride your horse and rein him hard toward Mount Vernot. The fire in your veins pushes you, and you push your horse. The sooner you find the other plaques, the sooner you can start trying to locate the missing one. You gallop down the road, letting the wind sing in your ears and clear your mind.

Turn to **76**.

117

With renewed fury, you press your attack. Your heavy sword is starting to tell against their lighter blades and armor. You strike the nearest, and your finely honed edge severs his forearm cleanly.

For a moment, the killer stares at the bloody stump. You surge on, aiming the next powerful blow at his neck. His headless body falls to the floor.

The dead man's companions falter. For a second they shrink back from you and give you the short breathing spell your body needs. You begin to take hope.

Turn to **105**.

118

Surprised by your open approach, Stoneclash steps back, holding his sword up, nervously clenching and unclenching his fist.

"I don't understand what you want. I don't know you." He shifts uneasily from one foot to the other, and eyes the nearby trees as if to judge their usefulness for escape.

"I don't want to argue right and wrong," you reply. "I just want the return of my property. I haven't got all day to quibble either."

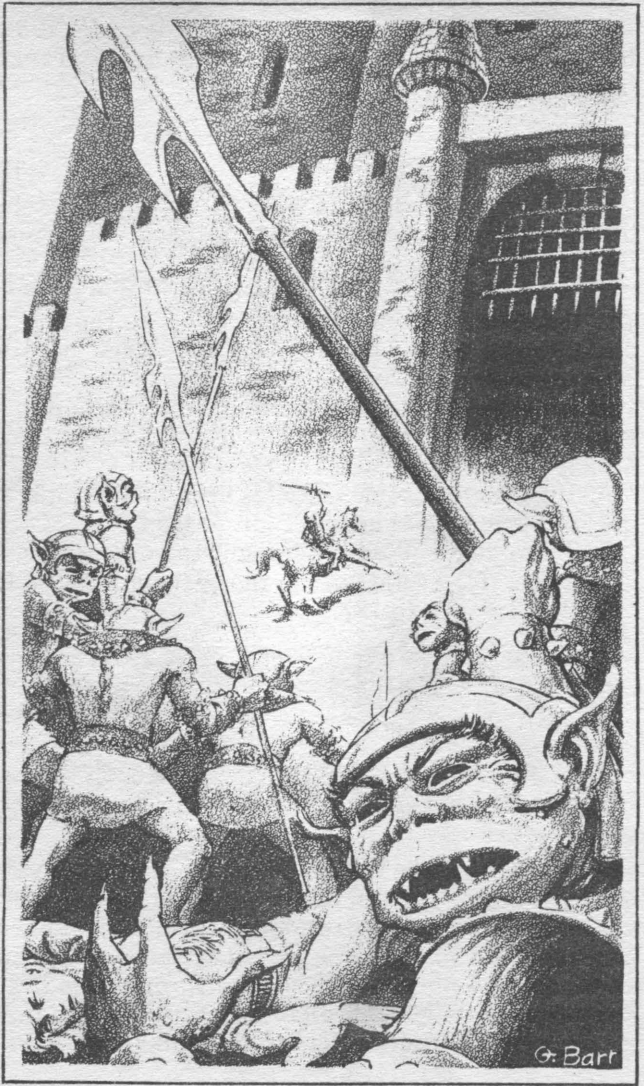
A stubborn look comes into his eyes, and it's only a question of whether he will fight or flee.

Roll two dice and add the result to your presence skill score. If the total is 19 or more, turn to **207**. If it is 18 or less, turn to **192**.



119

You cut across the meadow close to the castle, galloping straight for the band of knights struggling against overwhelming troll forces. Trollbiter flames in your hand and you charge into the flank. The sword flares brightly as it slashes through the first troll. Its fiery edge acts like poison to the fiendish creature who withers before the magical fire.



You slash at the next troll, and the next. Now the surprised monsters are falling back. With no leadership, and Trollbiter in your hands, the trolls quickly lose interest in the battle. You reach the first rank of your father's men.

“Back to the castle. Back to the duke.”

Hearing your command, the knights make a disciplined wheeling maneuver and cover your dash to the castle. As soon as you are clear, they break off the engagement. From the battlements a cheer goes up as they recognize you galloping for the drawbridge.

If Probmer is alive, turn to **214**. If you're alone, turn to **186**.

120

“There's nothing to discuss.” Araquat's voice is firm. It holds something more—a sinister edge, somehow threatening. With an off-hand wave, Araquat adds, “You may leave,” and he nods with an exaggerated jerk.

You are about to protest, but something in Araquat's manner and that knowing nod set up an uneasy feeling. He's up to something, and it's not just trading merchandise.

Warily you scan Araquat's office, alert for signs of treachery. The office is a lot smaller than you thought it would be, judging from outside. Now that you think about it, why did Araquat allow your party into his office without a guard?

Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill. If the total is 17 or more, turn to **78**. If it is 16 or less, turn to **154**.

121

Then you notice, standing concealed in the shadows, an old man, his face grim and cruel, with

deep lines around his eyes that are accentuated by the dim candlelight. He is dressed in robes so dark he might be a part of the blackness. Evil clings to him like a blanket, and a strange coldness touches you.

His left hand is tucked inside his right sleeve as if holding something. He doesn't move, at first, but it's clear he's not happy to see you in his house.

"Why do you enter my house uninvited?" He points accusingly at you with his exposed hand.

"You have recently acquired a plaque. It belongs to my father, and I've come to get it."

"You will not succeed." You hear something twisted in his voice, and see his hand start to inch out of the robe.

Your mind flashes a warning: he's about to attack with powerful magic. Your only hope is to beat him to it.

Roll two dice and add your fighting skill score to the total. If the result is 21 or more, turn to **209**. If the total is 20 or less, turn to **180**.



122

"Ah, there it is," points Langor.

You rush to a small pile of trinkets and semi-precious gems gathered by the feline. There, partially concealed among the modest collection, is the stone plaque. Its gold-inlaid design shimmers in the torchlight. Thankfully you reach down and retrieve it. Its touch sends a tingle through your fingers, and you slip it into its pocket in the special five-pouched leather carrier you cradle under your armor.

“Let’s get going,” you say, and you motion your companions toward the cave mouth.

Langor turns proudly and struts toward the horses that are still waiting outside. Probmer isn’t far behind. You notice the thief can’t resist stooping to grab a handful of the cat’s trinkets. It makes you wonder: How far can you trust this thief? Can he be depended on at all?

Outside, you mount quickly and turn toward the road again.

Go to **76**.

123

The nearest assailant lunges in with a straight stab. Reflex snaps your right arm around, you twist your blade to deflect his short sword. This opens your left side, and the assassin on that side takes full advantage, slipping his blade neatly between plates in your mail and into your ribs. A burst of pain sends fire surging through your brain. You barely manage to force back the scream that tears at your lips.

So far though, you have blocked them from reaching Langor or Probmer. Those two better help soon.

Subtract 9 hit points from your total, then roll two dice and add the results to your fighting skill score. If the total is 23 or more, turn to **113**. If it is 22 or less, turn to **150**.

124

Your new-found strength is not enough. Trollbiter rains down blows. You are being chopped to pieces. Suddenly, you are falling. You hit the ground with a clatter of iron.

You can’t lie there. You struggle to regain your feet. Subtract 8 hit points from your current total.

Turn to **115**.

125

You lunge. Suddenly, the floor drops out from under your feet. You have stepped on a trapdoor and are falling down a shaft through the middle of the building. It drops deep into the earth, and your heavy armor carries you down like a stone.

Cold iron stakes greedily await your fall. Even the fine metal in your armor cannot turn them aside. There isn't time to feel the pain as your body hits bottom, impaled on a dozen forged spikes. ✘

126

Now that you have Stoneclash's plaque, you round up your little band and look up and down the dusty, dirty road.

"A gritty little cuss," says Probmer.

"Scum, not worth the effort," adds Langor, folding his arms across his chest. "Well, which way?"

"Since everyone else we're after went north, that's where we're going."

Turn to 170.

127

Probmer's nasty dagger flashes once. The mage shivers in one long, extended ripple of nervous muscle flex and slumps to the ground.

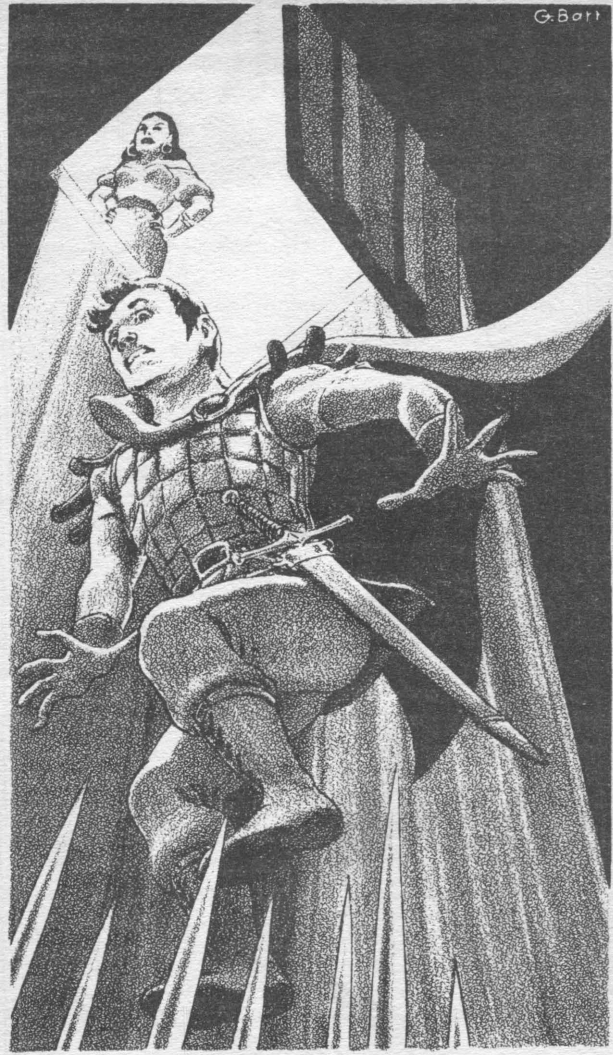
"Thank you, Probmer," you say, feeling a little less superior to the thief.

"Just remember me to your father. I'd really like honest work, though probably some wouldn't call spying and such honest work. Anything in the duke's service'd do."

"And you *shall* have something, if I can get Trollbiter to the duke."

Before any of the surrounding troll units can react to the commotion in the brush where Langor attacked you, you and Probmer are on your horses

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riding on an oblique path that will intercept the latest foray of knights from the duke's stone fortification. If you can reach them, you may be able to ride in their company back to the castle.

Turn to 119.

128

"About half that much seems a fair price," you say, staring coldly at the innkeeper.

He gives a short burst of nervous laughter. "Surely you are kidding. Fine food, clean beds, and a hot bath—that kind of quality service I couldn't possibly give for less than twenty gold pieces."

So that's the game. For years you've seen merchants bargain this way with your father. "Fifteen. It's my last offer. I'm sure this is not the only inn in Mount Vernot."

"Eighteen!"

"Done." You pull out enough coins to pay him.

Subtract 18 gp from your purse. If any characters do not have their full hit points, the night's sleep will restore 2 hit points to them.

Turn to 159.

129

Langor's face reflects a growing sense of puzzlement. Desperately he turns first one direction, then another.

"It's not here," he says crestfallen.

"I bet it is," says Probmer, laughing. "You're just not as *great* as you think you are."

"We're going to search every inch of this cave," you state flatly, leaving no room for argument. "We're not leaving until I'm positive the plaque isn't here."

Langor looks at you in disbelief, but you aren't ready to put up with any more of his aversion to work. "That means you, too."

Disgusted, Langor half-heartedly begins looking behind rocks and boulders, fanning out away from you and Probmer.

It is Probmer who discovers a strange mix of shiny objects hidden in a niche in the rock wall. Many of the trinkets have fallen into cracks that penetrate the solid stone. Some can barely be seen.

Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill score. If the result is 12 or more, turn to **168**. If it is 11 or less, turn to **149**.

130

Langor conjures a dazzling spray of colored lights ablaze in the air in front of you. It blinds you for a split second, but worse, it is behind Lolita, a fact she uses to her advantage. Her short sword pierces the plates at your side, and you feel a trickle of blood run down the inside.

Behind you, Langor curses, but the damage is done. You retreat to give your eyes a chance to clear. In seconds you're ready again, but now Lolita is rejoined by two more henchmen.

Subtract 8 hit points from your total and go on to **144**.

131

Again and again, your sword slices into the monstrous beast. It turns to flee, but its strength ebbs quickly, and, giving a great shudder, it falls dead. A

widening pool of blood seeps between cracks in the floor and is gone.

You must catch your breath, still keeping your sword ready in case there is a mate. Long minutes pass. Only your own breathing mars the stillness, and slowly you begin to relax.

"That was close," you finally whisper.

"Yes, as you wished," says Langor sarcastically. "If you'd stayed back, I could have finished it quickly."

"As if I had a choice."

"Let's find the plaque and get outta here," says Prober, and he starts moving off between the rocks.

Turn to 67.



132

You aren't sure you can use the crystal properly, and anyway, your father told you to return it to him. You'll have to fight your way into the castle.

Without looking back, you pull your sword from its scabbard and charge down the hillock into the fray. Without question, Newrick follows you and the clomp of his horse's hooves blends with your own. The first troll you approach is running toward the castle and doesn't see you coming. The sharp edge of your blade slices through the back of his neck and he topples over in a fountain of blood.

Your horse carries you into the thick of the battle. In seconds you are surrounded by trolls. Newrick is no longer in sight. One creature rakes your horse with his wicked claws. The horse rears, kicking out with sharp hooves, but you manage to hang on. Another troll falls before the heavy stroke of your

sword, and you push your horse on toward the road to the drawbridge.

Now another troll slashes your horse and it stumbles for a minute. You pitch forward, almost falling off, and your sword arm falters. Two trolls rip at your arm, one knocking the sword from your hand. The second grabs you and pulls you from the horse. You watch the horse gallop away in panic.

Before you can get out another weapon, you are engulfed by a mass of raging trolls. They drag you down, ripping the flesh from your bones. The last thing you see, before your eyes close forever, is the proud pennants flying from your father's towers. You wonder how long they will stand now that the plaques are lost. ✚

133

The huge head shoots forward with speed that catches you by surprise. Your sword clangs uselessly off the armored skull, and sharp teeth clamp onto your armor. Several deadly fangs find cracks in your armor where they sink into your flesh. Adrenaline pumping through your veins, combined with battle-fury shut out the pain.

Langor rushes to your aid, thumping the scaled lizard with his staff. The diversion works and its jaws relax, letting you drop free. Langor darts back, but one clawed foot shreds the back of his robe as he tries to avoid being hit. Quickly you regain your balance and move in to attack while the lizard is occupied with Langor.

Subtract 4 hit points from your total, and 1 point from Langor's total.

Now roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 22 or more, turn to **200**. If it is 21 or less, turn to **157**.

134

Suddenly you feel your legs twisted out from under you. One of the assassins has shoved a long pole between your legs. He uses it as a lever and turns you around until you fall to the floor with a heavy crash.

They're on you like wolves on a fallen deer. Daggers stab at you from every direction. Your sword is useless, so you beat at them with its hilt and your mailed fists. Your enemies work silently. The only noise is the click of their daggers trying to find cracks in your armor, and the thud of your fists on flesh.

Suddenly there's a different sound. The solid crack of oak on skulls. Langor's at your side and the assassins are momentarily driven back. The wizard's hand grabs your arm and helps you stagger to your feet. Pain seeps into your brain. Some of their short blades found their mark.

Subtract 7 hit points from your total, and because of your weakened state, you must subtract 1 from your next fighting roll.

Turn to **105**.



135

"You two get an ale," you say, heading for the corner.

"Fine," replies Langor, his high voice almost squeaking. "If you're too good to drink with us, we'll be more than happy to taste the inn's finest without you."

They turn toward the bar and you quickly forget them. As you look back into the corner, it takes a minute for your eyes to adjust to the relative dark-

ness there. When you can see clearly, you see the stranger glaring at you, a worried look in his eyes.

As you start toward him, he hastily grabs his shield and equipment and retreats for the door.

“Hey, wait a minute,” you call after him, but he’s already out the door.

“Come on, you two,” you say to your companions. “I want to talk to that man.”

You hear them grumble as they leave their drinks and follow you into the street.

Turn to 5.

136

Probmer is almost on the mage. But before he can get there, Langor turns halfway around in his saddle, and, with a whip of his wrist, he lets his dagger fly. It catches in Probmer’s throat, and the surprised thief crumbles to the ground. You try to react, but Langor completes his motion by hitting you in the chest with the butt end of his staff. Flailing wildly, you topple over backward and lie helpless on your back.

“Thanks.” He grins and slips a small black wand from inside the loose sleeves of his flowing robes.

Casually he points it at you. You struggle to roll over and regain your feet, but a blue-white bolt of electricity crackles between the wand tip and your armor. The overwhelming surge of power ends your life, and you never feel his greedy hands take the plaques from your body. ✕

137

The initial pain subsides, replaced by a rising fury. You scream in rage and rush the snickering evil presence before you. The smile fades from Fluglash’s lips. Perhaps he underestimated you. You hope he hasn’t prepared a second spell.

Roused by your battle cry, Probmer and Langor charge the evil mage with you. Now all three of you land telling blows. Your sword bites into Fluglash's left shoulder, cutting to the bone. Probmer cuts only cloth with one thrust, but his other dagger sinks straight into soft belly tissue. Langor brings down his staff, cracking the ancient mage on the left ear.

Fluglash is stunned momentarily but far from finished. He circles away from you, trying to use a spell. You press him, trying to hit him again.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or more, turn to **103**. If it is 19 or less, go to **91**.

138

From your place of concealment, you look at the large house. Low, squat and built of massive stone, it seems to stare at you from small, block-shaped windows. It makes you shiver.

Waving to the others to follow, you carefully work your way through the bushes until you can hurry to the side of the house. Then you creep around the corner to the front. Amazingly, you find the door ajar. It seems to beckon you in.

What is the door doing open? Is Fluglash out in the yard? You snap your head around to look for him, but he's nowhere to be seen. Maybe it's just a stroke of luck. You start to inch forward, when there's a tug at your sleeve.

Probmer whispers in your ear, "I could find a better way in. That door is probably a trap."

You glance at Langor, but he just shrugs, leaving the decision to you. Should you take advantage of what seems like a lucky break? Or should you let Probmer find a way to break in?

If you choose to go in through the front door, turn to **42**. If you want to trust Probmer's skills, turn to **31**.



139

You gaze around the horrible battle scene. An awesome army of trolls is assaulting the castle walls. Smoke billows from several fires where the castle defenders have tried to burn the monstrous attackers to prevent them from regenerating damaged limbs. Numerous scaling ladders rest against the battlements, and determined strings of trolls forge their way toward the top of the walls while arrows rain down on them. Some of the archers are shooting flaming arrows, but most are not, so when the trolls drop from the ladders, they can let their wounds repair themselves and start climbing again.

In the open plain near the foot of the castle, a brave band of armored horsemen attacks the enemy flanks. The last few men in the charging vanguard fling flasks of burning oil onto fallen trolls. Even as you watch, one knight is pulled from his horse and dismembered.

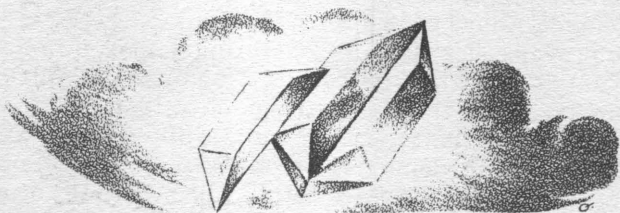
In all the bedlam of battle, you see no plan, no overall strategy. Yet, your father felt strongly about that; he believed someone *had* to be controlling the trolls, organizing them to attack. There is no sign of such structure in their siege. The trolls seem to be blindly throwing themselves at the castle walls. Worse, they appear to be winning!

“Why not use the crystal?” Something strange taints Langor’s question, some inflection in his voice. But right now you don’t have time to figure out what it is.

Newrick looks at you, sympathy in his eyes for

the weight on your shoulders, but he offers no advice.

You must do something. Perhaps you could attack one flank and win your way to the castle gates. Then you could turn the plaques over to your father and let him decide how to use them. Or perhaps you should try to use the plaques to gain insight into the situation, even though you know that the crystal can be used only three times a year.



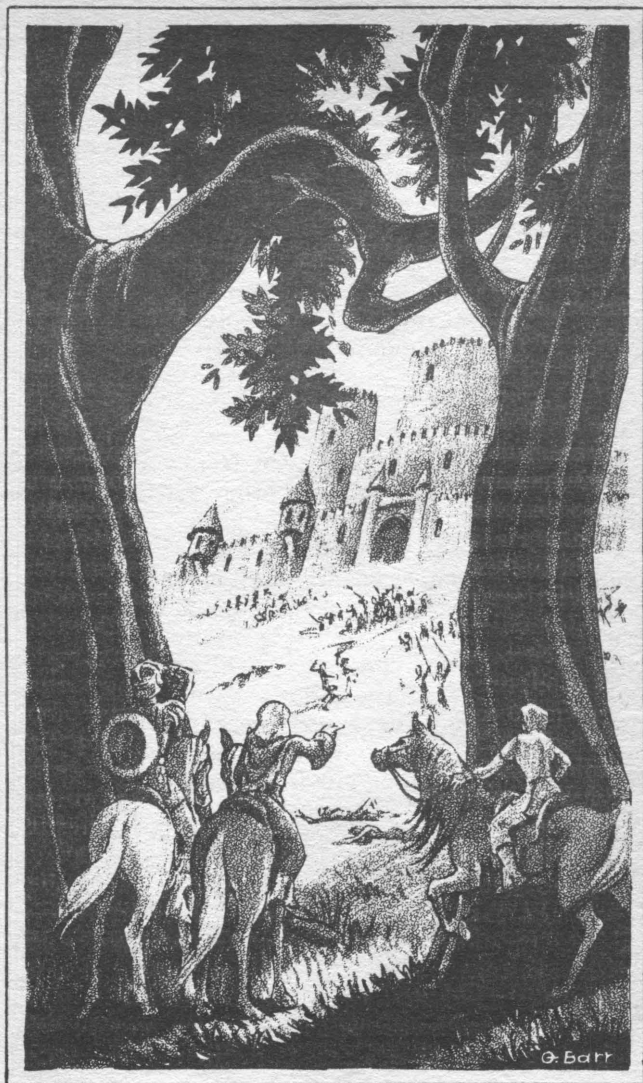
If you decide to try the plaques, turn to **148**. If you decide to fight your way into the castle, turn to **132**.

140

Before you've gone many miles, Newrick turns off the road and leads you through the towering forest along an old short-cut to the castle that bypasses the twisting, turning road. It won't be long before you gain sight of the castle, and your stomach churns with the thought of what waits ahead.

It seems to take hours, but it is only a few minutes before you come out on the crest of a hill and see a wide clearing. You pull up at the edge of the clearing, and before you is the broad panorama of war. Your father's castle, its battlements dark against the somber sky, towers high above the valley that separates you from your home.

Turn to **71**.



141

Araquat glares openly at you. "The price is firm, and your idle threats do nothing to change my mind."

"Surely as a merchant, you know the plaque is not worth what you're asking. There must be some fair price you will accept."

"I think you've wasted enough of my time. I doubt one as ill-mannered as you has gold or nobility either."

"I'll listen to no more! I've come to you fairly and tried to negotiate honestly. Now I must insist you sell me the plaque." Suddenly, things are deadly serious.

Turn to 120.

142

Langor circles cautiously away from you, one hand searching inside his robe, the other deftly using the staff to keep you back.

He snickers. "All I ever wanted was those plaques: I *will* be the greatest wizard of all time!"

You step in to attack, but Langor's hand comes out from under his robes cradling a small wand.

Faster than you can react, a blue-white bolt of lightning leaps from the end of the wand. The charge sends you reeling; every nerve screams in pain. You must fight back, you can't let this crazed wizard ruin your father. You force your frightened horse toward him.

A second bolt of lightning ends your hope, and your life. ✕

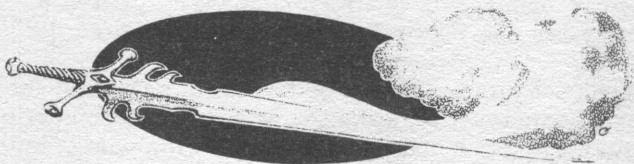
143

The beast twists its head for a better look at Langor. Now's your chance. You leap in toward the monster's belly, your sword crashing downward in a powerful two-handed stroke. The first blow cuts into the creature's soft underbelly, bringing a hiss of rage.

Instantly, the massive head snaps back around and the yellow reptilian eyes glare at you with mixed pain and hatred.

Langor, now forgotten, closes with the wyvern and uses his hard oak staff with an expert's hand. He slams the end of the staff into the brow ridge above the left eye. The great yellow eye blinks in pain and surprise. Langor jabs with the staff again and barely misses the eye.

The angered wyvern rears to attack, but you press home your advantage. Turn to **63**.



144

Wearily you circle the dangerous assassins. They respect your swift sword arm, but you know they are not amateurs to be taken lightly. One fakes a thrust with his gleaming dagger, but you easily avoid the half-hearted move. Another is sneaking up behind you, but you've seen him out of the corner of your eye. You spin and slash at the same time. He ducks and rolls out of the way, retreating back toward the wall. You are on him before any of his cohorts can come to his aid, and the tip of your sword slices cleanly through his unarmored neck. With a groan he dies in a gush of blood.

The other dealer of death leaps away down the stairs, either to get help, or in cowardice, you don't care which, for now he's gone. Then you face Lolita, alone. There is a cruel smile on her face, a look of utter confidence, and you wonder what trick she has left.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, turn to **98**. If it is 19 or less, turn to **125**.

145

Your attack finds its mark and the sharp edge of your sword slices into muscle, tendons, bone. The beast snarls, biting at your sword hand as it tries to twist away from the deadly steel.

Now, Probmer sees his chance. The beast is clear of you, its attention momentarily on the gaping wound you've opened above its shoulder. The gritty thief sinks his short sword to the hilt in the creature's flank.

The cat jumps around, bellowing in pain, and the spasmodic reaction jerks the sword from Probmer's hand. The cat leaps at Probmer, clawing wildly, but the thief deftly rolls behind a huge rock. Instinctively, you attack the exposed rear, hacking with your sword in powerful two-handed strokes.

Roll two dice, add to your fighting skill score. If the result is 19 or more, turn to **131**. If the result is 18 or less, turn to **85**.

146

You move to intercept the last assassin separating you and Langor, but he is ready for you. He slashes in with his left hand, and you knock it aside, your heavy sword carrying past his attack. But your opponent immediately strikes with another dagger concealed in his right hand. A sharp pain wrenches your side, forcing you back.

The assassin has cut you off from Langor, and his companions are on you again, hungry for the kill. If you fight hard, maybe you can distract them long enough for Langor to act. You lunge forward, swinging your sword with quick, powerful strokes.

Subtract 8 hit points from your total, then roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 22 or more, turn to **32**. If it is 21 or less, turn to **194**.

147

It doesn't take long before you discover a double set of doors of painted wood and carved with mysterious symbols and runes. Probmer ducks to one knee and peers through the keyhole; then he puts an ear to the door. Langor studies the strange markings. Finally he shrugs his shoulders helplessly just as Probmer stands up and shakes his head. Still no sign of Fluglash.

You suspect that the door might open on the evil wizard's workroom. If Fluglash kept the plaque, he would probably have brought it here to try to discover its magic. You've got to go in there to find out.

Pretending you haven't seen the runes, you grip the door handle with a jerk, open the door, hand on sword.



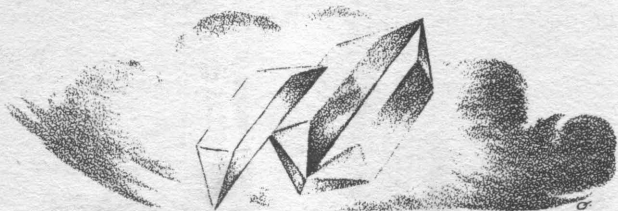
It is the mage's workshop. The shelves lining the walls are cluttered with jars of powders and other strange substances. A large table in the middle of the room is covered by a clutter of scrolls, paper, notes, and a few bottles. A tiny candle burns at the table's center, its feeble light only deepening the shadows in the corners of the room. There are no windows.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 13 or more, turn to **121**. If it is 12 or less, go to **162**.

148

Carefully, you slip down off your horse. With one hand you clear a place in the fallen leaves. Newrick positions himself with his back to you, blocking you from view. Then, almost afraid of making a mistake, you lay the five plaques together, fitting them like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. As the last piece touches the others, a soft glow emanates from the cluster of innocent-looking stone tablets. You gulp back your sense of wonder and fight the fear that rises to your throat. Many times you've seen your father use the Crystal of Knowledge, but never in your dreams did you think you'd be the one using it.

Softly you speak the command word, careful not to be overheard. "Crystal."



Now the glow around the plaques brightens, and in a brilliant flash, you behold the perfect crystal. Light streams off the razor-sharp edges of its natural surfaces. It hums softly in your ear, unheard by anyone else. Slowly the hum fills your brain with a superior alien intelligence.

Once again, you look toward the battle. Now, that which was obscure and hidden is plain and recognizable. You look at the massive troll forces; their discipline and military order register on your

crystal-augmented intelligence. No troll army would maintain such discipline on its own. Men must somehow be controlling them. Where are these men?

Turn to **92**.

149

Try as you might, you see no sign of the plaque. Somehow you felt sure it would be here, but you seem to have been wrong. Stubbornly, you sift through the pile of shiny stones, trinkets, and gold jewelry. Items of real value sparkle back at you, but none of them are important. What are a few gems when the whole Dukedom is lost? Probmer and Langor, on the other hand, are scooping everything you've tossed aside into their pockets and packs.

"It's not here!"

"I told you so," says Langor, "but there's plenty here to make these detestable travels worth my while. It'll certainly bring me some measure of comfort when we return home."

"Comfort," snaps Probmer. "It'll buy me an honest business. I won't be robbing the duke's citizens again."

The whole conversation is lost on you. Troubled thoughts race through your head. One plaque is now missing, with diminishing hope of tracing it. You can't give up, though. Not yet.

"Come on," you order, a sternness edging your voice. "We've no time for junk."

Already you are out of the lair. Quickly you mount your horse. This setback won't keep you from finding the other plaques, and maybe, somehow, the trail of this plaque will turn up. As you start to turn your horse away from the cave, Probmer and Langor come bustling out, still trying to stuff one more stone into their pockets.

Turn to **76**.

150

You fight back valiantly, hoping for help, but your enemies' quickness and sure aim repeatedly find cracks in your armor. Your strength is fading. Now two of them engage you frontally while the third backs away and pulls a throwing knife. He whips it at someone behind you. Langor groans, his body thumps heavily against the wall.

Where is Probmer? No time to think. The third assassin has another dagger out. You catch his movements out of the corner of your eye. Another stabs at your chest. You block his short sword, but the pain in your side tells you the dagger has found your flesh. A burning pain seeps up your spine. Poison!

The figures surrounding you draw back. The burning sensation rages through your body. You stagger, uncontrolled, swaying on legs that can't support you. As you spin, tottering into the wall, you see Probmer's body lying on the floor, garroted by an unseen assailant. His purple tongue lolls out of his mouth.

Your vision blurs as you fall face forward. You are dead before you hit the floor. ✠

151

You find yourself unable to ride on by. You climb down from your restless mount, and the three of you cautiously turn the body over to get a better look at it. A broken sword testifies to the struggle. Probmer, as if practicing, deftly searches each pocket—at least those that aren't torn completely apart.

At first, he locates only a few coins—12 gold and 8 silver—which he hands to you. You keep the gold (add them to your gold-piece count) and return the silver pieces to the slender thief. Then, as you watch, Probmer skillfully locates a secret pouch hidden in the wide leather swordbelt. He opens it and pulls out a neatly folded sheet of parchment.

“Can’t read,” he mutters and hands the note to you.
“Typical low-born!” Langor snickers.
You hold up your hand for quiet. The note reads:

To Mayor Carnifus—This is Stout Snout, a loyal messenger. Entrust him with my goods.

Mayor Ruff Bartilo

The signature is overprinted with the seal of the City of Mount Vernot.

“Search him again. He had one of the plaques.”

Probmer looks hurt, but again he examines the body thoroughly. “It’s gone now.”

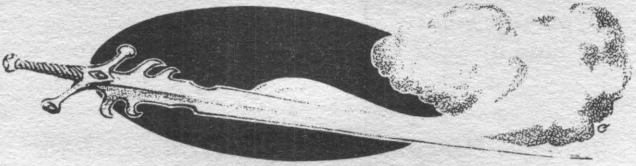
Exasperated, you search the scene of the struggle. Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill score. If the result is 16 or more, turn to **9**. If it is 15 or less, turn to **176**.

152

Time passes slowly as you sit in Araquat’s outer lobby. The clerks continue busily with their work, but otherwise there is nothing to distract you. Probmer keeps eyeing the clerks, watching their every move, probably trying to locate the cashbox, and Langor is absorbed in a small leather-bound book.

You are beginning to wonder why no other customers have come in this morning when you see through the window a huge, dark-haired, bearded man dressed in many layers of expensive clothing. He is walking by, talking to a distinguished man in the uniform of the town’s guard.

As you watch, the the guardsman heads across the street and the bearded man turns the corner around the freight building. A moment later you hear a door



open and close somewhere in the back of the building, off to your right.

Patiently you wait, but no one comes into the freight office.

"I think Araquat has returned," you mumble to Probmer.

"Could be," he says.

You've waited long enough. You get up and approach the counter. "We'd like to see the Master Trader now," you say firmly.

"He's busy," the clerk replies.

"He just came back! I want to see him now." You glare at the clerks, hoping that they're ready to take you seriously now.

Turn to 185.

153

Just when it seems Probmer will stab the beast from behind, the long stinger-tipped tail lashes out. The poison stinger hits Probmer so hard it knocks him over backward. It looks as if your companion is dead, or soon will be. You and Langor may have to complete the quest alone; that is, if you survive yourself.

You circle the reptile, waiting for an opening, looking for something to strike. Now, as you spar with the beast, keeping it at bay, your peripheral vision spots movement from the crumpled thief. You back up far-

ther, putting distance between you and the wyvern, and turn toward Probmer. His hand struggles convulsively from one of the small sacks that hang from his belt. Moving his hand spasmodically, he brings out a small vial, lifts the lid, and with what seems his last ounce of strength, gulps down the contents.

Turn to 175.

154

Suddenly, it's as if the walls themselves open up and several armed men charge through the secret doors. Langor, seated behind you, is knocked flying from his chair and rolls into one corner. He gets up and begins to ready a spell. Probmer dodges his attacker and has his dagger out faster than the wink of an eye. Caught by surprise, you are slashed by one of the two hard-eyed men who lunge at you. You twist away, trying to get your sword from its scabbard.

Again they stab at you with disciplined coordination and again one of them finds you with cold steel. Blood oozes from your wounds, but so far the damage is minimal. Now your sword is out and the battle is on even terms.

Subtract 4 hit points from your total.

Turn to 165.

155

Sir Segwick spurs his horse toward you in a fury of energy, the flaming sword whipping in small circles in front of him. Wild strength fills his berserk attack and you fall back, trying to find an opening in the fiery barrage of thrusts and slices. You can't block all his mad attacks, all you can hope to do is dodge them until his strength fades.

One stroke singes your eyelashes as the magic flames leap at the slits in your helm. Blindness cov-

G. Bull



ers your mind with blackness, and in that instant you lose your balance. Your arms flail wildly trying to keep you in the saddle, your boots locked in the stirrups.

The massive knight rushes you, lust to kill in every muscle. He raises the enchanted sword to deal the death stroke, but he's left himself open to a quick stab to the chest. Your eyes clear in time to see the opening, and lightning reflexes guide your sword point, piercing him through the heart. He pitches forward, dead, his blow never completed.

Immediately you are off your horse and grab Trollbiter. Aware of your exposed position, you rush to unbuckle the special scabbard and fasten it around your own waist. Now, back to your horse. You leap upon his muscled back and wheel toward the castle. Finally you've only to ride to the castle and give your father the proof he needs to keep his lands. It is your only thought.

Any time you use Trollbiter, add +2 to your fighting rolls.

Turn to **211**.



156

Somehow, you've got to get the sword back to the castle. It won't be easy. Trolls are everywhere, milling around, fighting, shouting, many of them scattering in disarray now that Sir Segwick is dead. Hundreds of the ugly, greenish, deformed creatures are still locked in mortal combat with the castle's forces, though. Here and there, trolls fall with sev-



ered limbs and throats, only to rise up, whole again, before the defenders can burn the bodies. Many of these trolls are fighting with berserk rage, oblivious to the loss of their commander.

Through the thick of the fighting, you realize, you've lost sight of Langor. He can't be far; only moments ago he was racing along behind you.

Roll two dice and add the result to your perception skill score. If the total is 16 or more, turn to **205**. If the total is 15 or less, turn to **47**.

157

Langor fails to see the long tail lash, and it slams flush into his side. The stinger plunges through Langor's robes and penetrates the flesh between his ribs. With a moan, he coughs and hunches into a ball, falling on the ground. Before the convulsions set in, the creature snaps at you with long, sharp teeth. You try to dodge, but viselike jaws clamp shut, pinning your arms. You want to scream, but the sound never leaves your mouth. With a savage jerk of its head, the beast snaps your neck. ✘

158

Your opponent ducks, slashes, then sidesteps away from you. He's moving in on Langor, who is defenseless, reciting his incantation. You've got to stop this attacker before he ruins the spell.

You slash down with your sword, chopping at the man's nimble feet. It works; he turns on you, his short sword poised to strike.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 22 or more, turn to **208**. If it is 21 or less, turn to **191**.

159

Early the next morning, you, Probmer, and Langor head for Araquat's offices. As you walk, you think about your chances of buying the plaque from him, assuming it is for sale and not in Araquat's private collection. The fact that the plaque was stolen probably won't matter. You are in the realm of the King of Pittland, and though your father owes allegiance to him, the relationship is strained. The king resents your family's longer line of sovereignty even while being openly supportive. The law here will probably side with the merchant despite your noble background.

A few minutes' walk up the dusty street brings you to the sprawling buildings that bear the sign "Mount Vernot Trading: M. Araquat." A quick glance shows you the main office is on the other side, so you cut through a busy wagon area to the next cross street where you enter a narrow doorway.

A large, open room serves as the dispatching and shipment-scheduling office. Behind a long counter, two clerks are busy looking over racks of papers hanging in slots built into the wall. They ignore you. You wonder if they can really be too busy to attend to customers.

After several minutes, you thump your right fist on the counter. "I need to see Araquat, now!"

Both clerks stop, turn, and glare at you. Refusing to back down, you say arrogantly, "I will see the Master Trader."

Roll two dice and add the result to your presence skill score. If the total is 17 or more, turn to **185**. If it is 16 or less, turn to **199**.

160

Stoneclash is hit! His eyes bulge, rolling back in his head until only the whites are visible. In slow motion, he falls backward into the dust. Stillness drops over the scene and you breathe a sigh of relief. You're sorry that he's dead, but you only did what you had to do.

Turn to 197.



161

Riding hard, you head south, retracing your path of only a few days ago. There is no time to lose, for even now you wonder if your father's castle may be lost. Worry clouds your thoughts.

Langor seems to be holding back, and every time you look for him, he's fallen farther behind. "Hurry up back there," you yell over your shoulder.

"The horses cannot stand this murderous pace," he insists, and he refuses to speed up.

Probmer drops behind, too. "You're a fool, Langor," he snorts. "These horses could hold this canter all day. It's your butt that's tired, and your brain that's going soft. The duke needs our help, and we've promised it to him. When are you and your high-and-mighty attitude going to live up to all your cheap talk?"

Langor's cheeks burn red. In a rage he reaches into his robe and starts to bring something out. Instantly,

Probmer has his dagger out and shoves it under the magic-user's nose.

"I wouldn't try any spells," he snarls, a hint of mirth edging his words.

"Enough," you shout, riding back. "You've one job to do, and that's to get these plaques to my father. Stop this senseless argument and let's get going."

Probmer laughs and puts away his dagger. Langor smiles, but the hate is still in his eyes. His hand comes out of his robe empty.

If you do not have Stoneclash's plaque, turn to **181**. Otherwise, turn to **10**.

162

Carefully you survey the room, straining your eyes to see into every corner. The blackness is so deep away from the candle that you begin to wonder if there is some enchantment cast upon the room. When nothing sinister catches your eye, you step closer to the table. You hope the plaque will be out where you can see it. Maybe you can grab it and be off before Fluglash realizes you've been here.

On the table the layers of paper, junk, and things that might have once been alive, are so deep that the plaque could easily be buried under them. You are shuffling papers aside when a sudden movement in the corner catches your eye. Your head snaps around as your sword comes out. Behind you, Probmer and Langor freeze. Your eyes focus on an old man dressed in robes so dark they might be part of the blackness. Already he has started a spell.

Turn to **180**.

163

Probmer has been gone a long time, when a young boy in a tattered brown shirt and leather breeches stops at your table.

“Great sir,” he says with a good measure of respect. “I’m sad to tell you that your friend has been murdered. An ugly ambush, not a fair fight at all. I thought you’d wish to know.”

You look at the boy, unsure of his motivation, much less his story.

“Tell me, why was my friend killed, if indeed he was?”

“He followed an assassin. It’s not a healthy practice, sir. But then he must have had reasons for doing so. Myself, I thought it would be worth a coin for my trouble. If you doubt my tale, though, we can go to the gravedigger’s, for that is where the body lies.”

“All right. And if it is my friend, then you shall have your coin. Langor, let’s take a walk, get some fresh air.”

Langor grumbles his displeasure, but joins you.

It takes you only a few minutes following the boy to reach the gravesman’s and hardly more time to discover that the boy is indeed telling the truth. Probmer lies dead of numerous wounds, hacked to death by a hundred cuts. Sadly, you have the boy show you the site of Probmer’s murder. Once there, the boy happily takes a gold coin (subtract it from your purse total) and leaves



You examine the alley for signs of the killers’ identities, but you see nothing. Dejectedly you confer with Langor as you walk up the dusty street. “I suppose we’d better question those who live near or have shops around the spot where Probmer was killed. We’ve little else to go on.”

“I suppose you are right,” says Langor, “but I wish

there were an easier way of it.”

Instead of heading back toward the inn, you spend the rest of the evening questioning anyone in the vicinity who will talk to you. You implore them to remember anything they might have seen or heard concerning Probmer's killers. Most of the decent folk will say nothing. Some only mention the “Guild” and turn away, fear in their eyes. You continue relentlessly. Someone must have seen something. Convinced that Probmer's death is linked to the plaques, you are determined not to give up.

Turn to **206**.

164

Stoneclash moves in, but his attack is an old feint you've seen many times before, and likewise the counter is well known, too. A ringing parry and you twist the edge of your sword in under his arm. The weight of the blow and the sharpness of your edge part the rusty chain links like thin leather and a bright crimson gush springs from between the metal rings.

Stoneclash is far from defeated, and though badly cut, he recocks his sword arm and swings again. It's poorly aimed, missing badly as you dodge to the left. Pivoting and setting both feet, you attack again, aiming for the kill.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 18 or more, turn to **160**. If the result is 17 or less, turn to **201**.

165

Six men move to surround you, men with hard eyes and scarred faces. Each wears studded leather armor and carries a jagged sword, well suited for work in confined quarters. The battle-hardened soldiers waste no time with flash or show but get directly to their bloody business.

Araquat taps a bell on the side of his desk and the tramp of running feet comes from the outer office. You hear more of Araquat's men rush to open the door just as Langor finishes his spell. You can't tell what the spell is until you hear frustrated shouts from the other side.

"Wizard Lock," states Langor and smiles. Araquat will not be getting his reinforcements.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, turn to **70**. If the result is 20 or less, go to **39**.

166

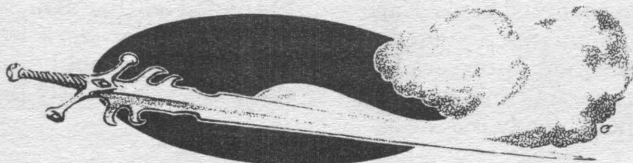
The first to reach you falls to a wicked slash across his left shoulder, almost severing his arm. A two-handed thrust sinks your sword into his chest. You jerk it free. The others retreat a step.

Without hesitation, you charge out of the doorway, swinging like a madman. The clang of steel fills the air; like a battle hymn it roars in your ears. Grunts punctuate the force of your blows landing on thin leather armor.

Ahead you see Langor using his staff to thump any of the enemy that gets close. You surge up to him, hoping to get back-to-back, but the assassins have guessed your plan. Turn to **105**.

167

Too late. Sir Segwick recovers his fierce combat prowess and fends off your attack. His raw power forces you to take the defensive. You twist and parry,



hoping he'll weaken soon so that you can regain the offensive.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If it's 21 or more, turn to **155**. If it's 20 or less, turn to **115**.

168

There it is! The little slab of magic stone winks at you from the sparse pile of shiny stones, trinkets, and various objects collected by acquisitive cat. Carefully you reach in and pick up the plaque. It seems unharmed, and you ceremoniously place it in your father's special leather case.

"Let's be off," you say, straightening once more. "There may be other cats nearby and I don't want to waste any more time fighting wild animals."

Turn to **76**.



169

Your curiosity wins and you turn, keeping your eyes glued to the spot where the stranger tossed whatever it was. You leap from your horse almost before it stops and start spreading the brush with both hands.

There on the ground lies the missing plaque.

"What is it?" asks Langor.

"A plaque. I think I know where I've seen that man before—in the Ironhorse Inn. But it doesn't matter. We must hurry to Pembroke."

You are back on your horse, racing south. A renewed sense of haste spurs you on. You silently give thanks for this fortunate turn of events. You hope it's not too late.

Turn to 10.



170

Immediately the dusty road seems to stretch endlessly ahead. You have gone only about five miles from Ironton, but the weariness creeps back over you. You adjust your position in the saddle, but it doesn't help. Probmer and Langor have been unusually quiet for some time and you wonder what's on their minds. Don't ask, you think, it'll only start them arguing again.

The wide, wagon-rutted road dips down a low hill, then rises again only a few hundred yards farther. Your horse is steadily eating up the miles, but time seems to stand still. No matter how fast you go, you wish it were faster. You wonder how your father, the duke, is holding out against the trolls. You should be there to lend your sword to the battle. No, it would be useless. You must regain all five plaques, and soon.

Your thoughts are jarred by Probmer's shout. "Somebody's lying in the road."

You look where his outstretched finger points. A mutilated body lies partially concealed by the underbrush at the side of the road. What's left of clothing and studded leather armor hangs in tatters, and

huge pools of dried blood cake the dust beneath the body.

Probmer reins up. "Looks like an animal kill."

You scan the woods for signs of any lurking beast, but see nothing.

"Disgusting," spits Langor.

"We should see who he was and bury him," you say.

"Let's not waste the time," replies Langor. "The body is too mutilated for easy identification. I thought you were in a hurry to get back your father's plaques."

You wonder if Langor doesn't have a point. It will take several hours to bury the man, and time is not something you have to waste. On the other hand, it's one of the tasks of the upper class to see those of the lower classes properly buried, and, perhaps, you'll find something of interest on the body.

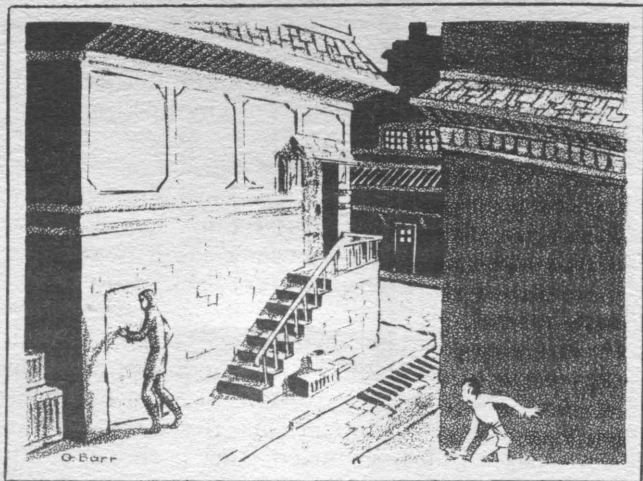
If you decide to have a closer look at the body and bury the remains, turn to **151**. If you think you'd rather not waste the time, turn to **76**.

171

Probmer keeps the fleeing figure in sight, always careful not to reveal himself. The farther away from the inn they get, the faster the spy goes and the less cautious he becomes. Down one dark alley after another they travel, twisting and turning until they come to the back of a two-story building. The sign on the side reveals it to be a book-and-scroll store.

Probmer drops to his knee in the shadows between the two adjacent buildings where he can watch. The spy does not go to the front door; instead he stops in front of the blank wall at the back of the building. Carefully the spy looks around, checking every shadow, nook, and cranny in sight. Probmer holds his breath, every muscle stationary.

As the thief watches, the dark figure gropes with



something about waist height on the back wall. As if by magic, a secret door opens. Giving one last look around, the spy ducks inside, and Probmer gets a quick glimpse of a set of stairs before the door shuts.

Probmer waits, not trusting to luck. He must be sure he isn't spotted. Then, when he's waited long enough, he makes his way unseen back to the Castle Inn.

Turn to 52.

172

Instantly the room is a swirling mass of bodies. The ring of tortured metal hurts your ears, but the sounds of battle hold no fear for you. The first two assassins attack together. You easily turn aside the dagger thrust of one, then turn as the other draws back for a sword thrust, his arms out of position. You pivot toward him and, with all your weight behind the

stroke, hit him in the side of the head. The two-handed slash splits his skull like a ripe tomato.

Beside you, Probmer rolls away from one foe, then trips him and dives on top. The two of them are locked in combat, both holding the other's dagger-hand to keep from being stabbed.

Langor, on the other side, dodges an attack and brings his solid oak staff down on an exposed shoulder with a loud crack. He whips the other end of the staff up, catching his opponent under the chin. There's another crack, and the assassin flies backward.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, go to **28**. If it is 19 or less, go to **58**.

173

Fluglash is pinned in the corner by the three of you. Probmer slashes madly with his daggers, one in each hand. You close in with your sword, making mighty two-handed attacks, while Langor completes a spell.

Probmer's dagger finds the mark first, puncturing the billowing robes and catching the dark mage in the left thigh. The wizard shrieks in pain and fails to dodge your next sword blow. Your blade sinks into his right shoulder, slicing through muscle and bone with a crunch. Almost at the same instant, Langor fires a volley of magic missiles that travel unerringly to their mark.

Delighted with the ease with which you've overpowered this wizard, you begin to think you've won. But the agile little man twists away to your left, ducks behind a table, and scurries to a set of wooden shelves containing jars and bottles. Hastily Fluglash scans the containers as the three of you close in, trying to get to him before he can find whatever it is he wants.



Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 20 or more, turn to 8. If it is 19 or less, turn to 99.

174

Convinced an ambush is likely, you prepare for it as best you can. It isn't hard to find the tannery by its smell. Then you locate the warehouse. But before you enter, Langor casts an Invisibility spell on himself. He promises to follow close behind you. You hope the clanking of your armor will cover any slight noises he might make. In one hand you hold your sword, in the other a stick that burns with an inexhaustible magic light.

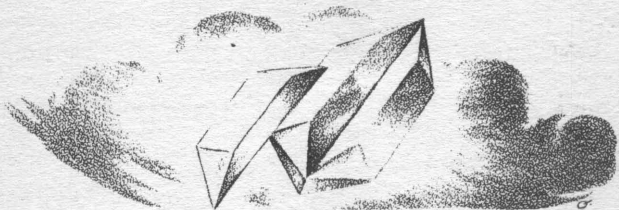
Stacks of crates, boxes, and bags of unknown goods fill the warehouse. Here and there, piles of animal skins wait for the tannery. The stench of half-rotten meat fills the air. Somewhere, hiding among the piles of goods, waits either a friend with information or an enemy bent on killing you. Either way, you aren't going to be caught off guard.

You catch a movement among the nearby crates, then, like shadows, dark figures wrapped in black from head to toe materialize from their hiding places and surround you. Boldly they close the ring and the cold steel of a dagger's blade winks at you from each hand. You let the figures close until they are within striking distance.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 22 or more, go to 4. If it is 21 or less, turn to 16.

There's no time for gawking. The wyvern rushes you, a hissing fury of snapping teeth and raking claws. You can't retreat fast enough; you must fight back. Langor has prepared a spell and begins to spout words of magic.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 19 or more, turn to **109**. If the total is 18 or less, turn to **157**.



You've searched the area thoroughly, and while you are convinced the corpse belongs to Stout Snout, there is no sign of the missing plaque. Whatever animal killed the guardsman left without leaving a trail. There seems little hope of finding the stone tablet.

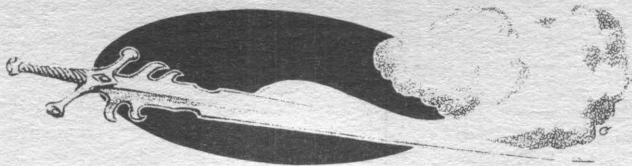
"What now?" asks Probmer, leaning back in his saddle.

"Someone probably happened along and took the plaque before we got here. We haven't seen anyone headed toward Ironton, so the person who took it must be going to Mount Vernot." You try to hide the feeling of hopelessness that is building inside you.

"I suppose you're right," says Langor. "But there is one other possibility. A Detect Magic spell might reveal the whereabouts of a single plaque."

"It's worth a try," you say, "but hurry."

Roll two dice and add the result to Langor's wisdom skill. If the total is 18 or more, turn to **187**. If it is 17 or less, go to **116**.



177

Time passes as you contemplate the half-forgotten mug of ale between your hands. Absentmindedly you sip it. Probmer and Langor have gulped down several mugsful and are leaning back on their stools to enjoy the respite.

"Ale's good," says Langor. "Perhaps we should sample the food."

"Yeah, I'm hungry," adds Probmer.

"Okay, I'm not getting anywhere anyway," you say. "Maybe a full stomach will help." Both nod agreement. "Then let's eat." You wave for a serving maid who's been watching from her station against a pillar at the room's center.

"A platter of roast beef," you tell her.

"Anything you wish, sire." She winks and gives you a hint of a smile before turning for the kitchen.

"Now there's a friend for *you*," says Probmer.

"I haven't time for romancing the innkeeper's daughter."

She returns with a heaping plate of steaming roast beef. With practiced care, she sets the meat in the center of the table.

"Anything else?"

"Not now," you answer, absently taking a hunk of the meat. Between mouthfuls you look around at the other patrons.

Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill score. If the total is 16 or more, turn to 7. If it is 15 or less, go to 21.

Hearing a slight sound, Langor turns and sees Probmer sneaking behind him. He slams his oak staff into the crouching thief. A second time the oak thumps Probmer. He sways and falls to the ground behind Langor's horse. As you watch, Langor pulls out a small dark vial, uncaps it, and unleashes a cloud of noxious vapors. The wind drives the deadly mist toward Probmer, who immediately starts to smother heavy coughs. The gas thickens, and now you hear the crunch of Probmer's feet pounding through dried leaves as he flees from the choking fog. Langor has eliminated your only ally. It's between you and the wizard.

Langor draws a dagger, ready to do battle, hefting the silvery blade with an expert touch. In his other hand, he still wields the staff. You urge your horse to charge, desperate to strike before Langor can take the offensive.

Roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or more, turn to **110**. If it is 19 or less, then turn to **62**.

The small, lightly armed mercenary fakes a slash, then steps back to defend. You chop down with all your might. He blocks with a sweeping move that misdirects your blade past his head. Momentum carries you off balance into a precarious position. Stoneclash takes the initiative with an attack of his own.

You barely have time to twist out of the way. Again Stoneclash comes at you. This time he's got you totally off guard, and his blade sinks in under the lower part of your armor, cutting the sweaty flesh of your right leg.

Subtract 4 hit points from your hit point total.

Then roll two dice and add the resulting total to your fighting skill score. If the total is 22 or more, turn to **164**. If the total is 21 or less, turn to **46**.

180

The ancient mage, a snarl curling his wrinkled lips as he recites the words to his malevolent spell, rages at you. And his gestures are not idle motions, however, for as he completes the casting sequence, a huge bolt of sizzling blue lightning rips from his fingertips, striking first you, then arcing to Probmer, and finally touching Langor before running out of energy.

Subtract 17 hit points from your current total. Subtract 5 hit points from Probmer's total and 3 points from Langor's.

Now roll two dice and add the total to your fighting skill score. If the result is 21 or more, turn to **137**. If the total is 20 or less, turn to **99**.



181

For a time you ride in silence, thinking about Stoneclash and the missing plaque. Where would he go? How can you recover his plaque? At present, you have no clues to follow, and aren't likely to get any.

You round a sharp bend in the road and suddenly find yourself face-to-face with a lone warrior on horseback, dressed in studded leather, with a large oblong shield and an oversized, long sword at his

belt. He is munching on a chicken leg.

"Hail and well met," he says, holding up his right hand and the food.

"Hail," you reply. There's something vaguely familiar about this man. Perhaps he's been a visitor to your father's castle. It can't hurt to ask. "Perhaps you can help me. I am Kardel Dolan, son of the Duke of Pembroke. You may know my father."

A puzzled look crosses his face. "I've heard the Duke is a fair and just man. What is it you want?"

"I'm looking for a man named Stoneclash."

The warrior gets a cold glare in his eye. "What for, my lord?"

"He has a plaque. I believe he purchased it from a thief, but the plaque . . ."

You don't get to finish. Langor interrupts. "The plaque is cursed and brings bad luck to all who possess it. I must gain the plaque and take it to my workshop, where I'll undo the evil magic."

You spin on your horse and glare at Langor. What is this lie? You are about to contradict the wizard, but his knowing look says, "Trust me," and you let the moment pass.

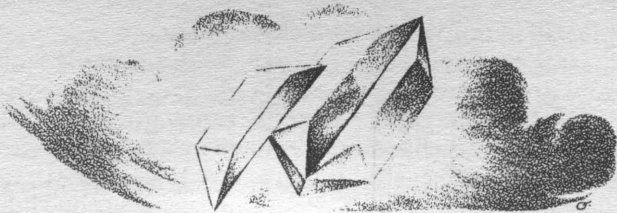
"I see," says the stranger, startled by your quick movement. Then suddenly he adds, "I've never heard of anyone called Stoneclash, but I have important business and must be on my way. Good day."

He kicks his horse lightly and gallops between you and Langor. Curious, you watch him ride off.

Something in the back of your mind is trying to push into the open but can't. You ride on, but just before rounding the curve in the road, you glance back at the receding silhouette headed north.

You turn to Langor. "Why did you lie about the plaque?"

He looks surprised. "No matter what he says, I think he knows Stoneclash, perhaps well enough to



relay a warning. Maybe the plaque will come looking for us.”

A clever scheme, but hardly likely to help in time.

Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill score. If the total is 16 or more, turn to **188**. If the total is 15 or less, go to **203**.

182

You scan the pub visitors for anyone who looks friendly and talkative.

“Probmer, Langor, keep watch for any suspicious activity, while I question that fellow at the bar.” You point to one boisterous commoner.

Not waiting for an answer, you move to the stool next to him. He’s simply dressed, appears to be a laborer, and is fairly drunk. Judging by the calluses on his thick, strong hands, he does heavy work.

“Sir, it seems I’m in need of help. Just a small bit of information. Perhaps you’d share an ale with me and tell me what you know of some people I have to find.”

“You buying?”

“Certainly.” You motion to the innkeeper for two ales.

The ale is hearty and good, and its warmth maintains the glow on your new friend. In a mood to talk, he starts telling you about the mine where he works. You listen for a minute, then change the subject abruptly.

“I’ve been told there’s a group with some valuables for sale, but I don’t know how to find them. I’ve been

told they are either in Ironton or Mount Vernot. Perhaps you've heard of one or more of them. They may be connected in some way, I don't know, but the list includes folks named Araquat, Fluglash, Stout Snout, and Lolita Gig."

The miner stares slyly into the bottom of his empty glass. An old trick, you think, but you order another ale anyway.

When it comes, he guzzles a long drink and then says, "Well, Lolita Whatever, I never heard of. The rest of 'ems pretty well known, so's I don't see no harm in telling ya 'bout 'em.

"Araquat and Stout Snout are both from Mount Vernot. Mr. A's a big shot trader who's always runnin' somethin' through Ironton. Sometimes travels with his caravans, sometimes not."

"Was he here lately?"

"Yeah. Caravan went by yesterday. Him and Stout Snout both was on it, though they ain't friends. Porkface works for the tax-happy Mayor of Mount Vernot and that don't make Mr. A too happy."

"Okay, what about Fluglash?"

"Bad news. He's *real* bad news. Evil wizard who lives on a little road branches off the road to Mount Vernot, just before the river. Don't go there! Folks don't come back that visit him."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw him once. He came into Ironton for somethin' and the look in his eyes could turn ya to stone. I could see the evil in 'em."

"Did he bother anyone while he was here?"

"No, but even wizards are afraid of the sheriff.



Ironton is no place to be on the wrong side of the law.”

When he starts rambling again, you realize that's all you're going to get from him. You buy your informant another beer and hustle over to the other two who have been patiently enjoying their ale. It only takes a few minutes to get them moving and to retrieve your horses from the stable, though it costs 6 gp for board and grooming. Then you are on the road to Mount Vernot. (Subtract the 10 gp spent in this section from your total.)

Turn to **170**.

183

Suddenly, Probmer is surrounded by knife-wielding cutthroats. He looks around the alley in the semi-darkness, trying to locate an escape route. The space between buildings is cramped and the close quarters limit his choices, but if he can get behind the nearest thug, there's a stack of crates and barrels that might cover his movement. From there he should be able to slip down the alley unseen.

Before his attackers can move, Probmer flicks his deadly dagger from its hidden sheath and buries it to the hilt in the closest antagonist's stomach. The dark-faced man staggers back, surprise registering in his face as the poison drains his life.

Probmer ducks past him, using his falling bulk as a screen, and dives behind the nearest barrel. He hopes the confusion will cover his movement.

Roll two dice and add it to Probmer's stealth skill. If the result is 20 or more, turn to **198**. If it is 19 or less, turn to **34**.

184

Langor looks up to the top of the stairs and you follow his gaze. Blackness cloaks the head of the stairs, and you see no guard there. Why hasn't he come

rushing down to the aid of his fellow guild members? Maybe he's hiding and can't see the bottom of the stairs.

You grab Langor's sleeve, and the magic-user turns to face you. He motions to his pocket, where he keeps the potion of healing and cocks his head as if to ask if anyone needs it.

If you want to take a dose and have not used all three doses yet, roll one die and add the result to your hit points, remembering not to exceed your original total.



Moving in single file, you start up the stairs. There is no light and, fearing detection from the top, you cannot risk even a dim one. The short flight of wooden steps makes no sound as you creep slowly to the top. You find no guard, just a dilapidated wooden door. It's tempting to break it, but you know that any noise could alert someone on the other side. Carefully Probmer inspects it for traps. He signals he's found none and lightly places his hand on the door handle.

"It's not locked," he whispers.

"Sir," says Langor quietly into your ear, "before we open it, allow me time to prepare a Charm Person spell. No telling how many people may be waiting on the other side, but I'll wager that only one will be female. If I can win her over to our side, perhaps we can take this plaque without a fight."

You nod your approval and wait the few seconds it takes for Langor to get ready. On your signal, Probmer pulls the door open. Inside, facing you, are several black-clothed assassins, all armed and apparently expecting you. Langor immediately spots

the lone woman in the room and makes her the target of his spell.

Roll two dice and add the result to Langor's wisdom skill score. If the result is 22 or more, turn to **97**. If the result is 21 or less, turn to **112**.

185

One of the clerks looks amused but says, "Yes, sir. And who shall I say is calling?"

"Kardel Dolan. And tell him it's urgent."

"Yes, sir," he says with a hint of disdain.

The clerk walks at a leisurely pace around the end of the counter and opens a door. You only catch a brief glimpse before the door closes, but you can tell by the lavishness revealed for a moment that Araquat makes a good profit somewhere.

"Very impressive," snorts Langor. "Nothing like a bit of high muck-a-muck to get the attention of commoners."

The other clerk glares at Langor for a moment, then resumes his duties. The office door reopens, and the first clerk returns.

"Come right in, Master Dolan," he says with more graciousness than he showed before, and he waves toward the plush office.

The three of you troop in. Seated on a huge stuffed chair is a mountain of a man. His clothing is so bulky and layered that it is hard to tell how big he might be underneath all that cloth. His black hair and matching beard are neatly trimmed. Large gaudy rings adorn his fingers, and everything about him shouts wealth.

"Be seated." You find seats as he continues. "I'm Araquat. My clerk tells me you have urgent business? Profitable, I hope."

"I've come to buy back an article stolen from my father, the Duke of Pembroke, and since, I under-



stand, sold to you. It's an heirloom, but hardly valuable on the open market. My father would consider it a great personal favor if you return the plaque. I'll pay you for it, of course."

Araquat looks at you, scrutinizing you from head to toe. Maybe he doesn't believe you are the duke's son.

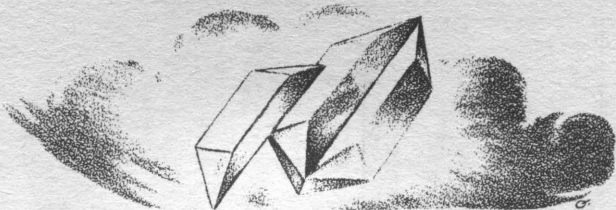
Roll two dice and add the result to your presence skill score. If the total is 18 or more, turn to **35**. If it is 17 or less, go to **120**.

186

Within minutes you are standing in front of your father.

"Father, here are the plaques." You hand him the leather case with the five hard-won stone pieces.

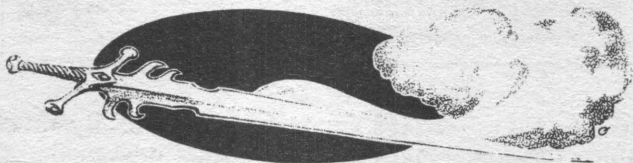
"You've done well, my son. I can see the next Duke of Pembroke is going to be remembered a long time." He winks at you. Then his smile fades. "What are



you doing with the king's sword?"

"It was in the hands of the man leading the trolls, Sir Segwick. He was sent by the king to overthrow us. I took it from him and brought it to you."

The duke carefully takes Trollbiter. He looks it over thoroughly, examining every inch of its length.



"This will be the king's undoing. I will present this as evidence to the Council of Nobles. Many are already grumbling about the king's rough treatment, his over-taxing to support his parasitic relatives. Now we have proof of his treachery. But all that later, now we feast to honor your return."

Your father pats you on the shoulder, and the two of you turn to enter the Great Hall. As you walk side by side up the stone steps, you hear cries go up from the walls. The last of the trolls are leaving in disarray. The dukedom is saved. ✘

187

Langor mumbles a few arcane words that mean nothing to you and walks around the corpse, scanning the ground. He holds his fingers outstretched as

if he were divining for water.

"Do you see anything?" you ask, your impatience taking control of your tongue.

"Not yet," he snaps.

Slowly he circles the body until he is near the forest. Then he points to a narrow, concealed animal trail that you missed in your search.

"There," he says. "Some powerful magic passed this way not long ago. From what little I know about your plaques, I'd say there is a good chance that it is the cause of the trace I see."

"Well, you've finally done something useful," laughs Probmer. "I thought you were just excess baggage."

Langor glares at the thief, but his stone face is wasted as Probmer only laughs harder.

"Enough," you snap. "If that is where the plaque went, we must find it—fast."

You turn and start down the animal trail. Silently you wonder what beast steals magic items.

Turn to **24**.

188

The dark figure on horseback has stopped. He is some distance down the road and you can't see him clearly, but you think you see a faint shadow of something being tossed into the bushes beside the road.

The chicken leg, you think. Your thoughts turn to your father and your need for haste. You must get on— Suddenly you're not so sure about the chicken leg. If you want to rush to your father, turn to **213**. If you're willing to take time to see what the stranger threw into the brush, go to **169**.

189

Without knowing anything about the rest of the people you must find, you know you'd better return

to the inn and see what information you can get from the patrons. Having the first plaque makes you feel good, but it's only the beginning. There's still four more to go.

"Back to the inn. We've got to find out who the others are, if we can."

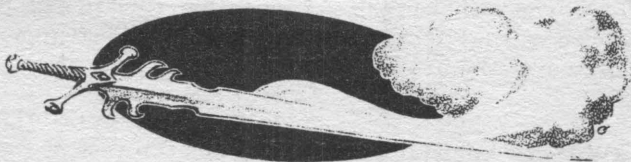
The horses start back down the road at an easy trot, and it's not long before you're once again inside the Ironhorse Inn. Turn to 182.



190

You're almost there, out in the open, spurring your horse at the cluster of humans around the knight with Trollbiter. Your horse's hoofbeats sound like rolling thunder to you, but no one from the enemy party turns. They are too intent on the battle raging below. You crash into their flank, hacking away with your sword, cutting into the surprised entourage. You hear a roar of fire as Langor's first spell goes off, protecting you for the moment against troll counter-attack.

Your initial charge doesn't quite carry you to Sir Segwick, and before you can strike the first blow, he turns and raises the flaming sword defiantly. You swoop in to attack Sir Segwick and grab Trollbiter.



Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 21 or more, then turn to **30**. If the total is 20 or less, turn to **37**.

191

It looks as though you may yet win. The guards are powerless to stop Langor's spell. Suddenly, a dart streaks from Araquat's chubby hand and strikes the lean wizard in the right shoulder. The spell is ruined.

The guard you are battling is joined by another, and now they are working in unison, striking simultaneously. Their swords ring hard on your armor, and occasionally, one slips through and rends your flesh.

Probmer, in his valiant effort to join you, has left his back exposed. A grim soldier cuts him down with one powerful stroke. The thief falls to the floor like a limp scarecrow.

Swords flash faster and faster. Behind you, Langor groans and slumps to the floor with a thud. Now there are attackers at your back, too. Pain wracks your body. Your strength fades. Darkness overtakes your mind even as your sword arm still tries to defend against the relentless assault. This is trail's end. ✘

192

Stoneclash's sword flashes and his shield comes up to protect his off hand. You step back. Your sword comes out, too. Probmer and Langor back away. There is no more time for talk. Stoneclash bares down on you, his stance and manner assure you this is not the mercenary's first sword fight.

Roll two dice and add the results to your fighting skill score. If the total is 19 or more, turn to **164**. If it is 18 or less, turn to **179**.

193

You enter the dilapidated warehouse that sits behind the tannery, which you locate with your nose. It's nearly midnight. Your right hand tensely grips your sword. Langor follows close behind you, on edge, but not speaking his fears. The interior of the weathered wooden building is dark, as if you'd entered a cave. Your flickering torchlight shows no sign of the informant who promised to meet you. Maybe there never was one.

Just when you are about to give up and retreat from the structure, you hear a strange, scratchy voice call out. "Up here. I'm up here." It sounds hollow and detached.

You aren't sure which direction it came from, but it seems to be from just ahead and maybe a little to the right. You walk quickly in that direction between rows of boxes and crates stacked haphazardly around the cavernous interior.

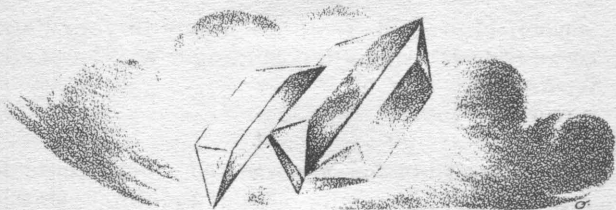
Before you go ten paces, you are attacked by several dagger-wielding assassins. The first lunges from behind a heavy crate and stabs viciously toward your chest, striking your armor. Another stabs at your back. His dagger barely misses its mark, slashing your neck, but only cutting the outer flesh. Your torch is knocked from your hand. It rolls behind a huge barrel, plunging the room into near darkness. Langor grunts in pain and you know he's been hit, too.

Subtract 5 hit points from your total and 3 hit points from Langor's total. Now turn to **64**.

194

A feint by the nearest assassin draws your attention and you duck back. Your sword raises to meet the expected blow. Instead you feel a hot stabbing pain as the short blade of a poison dagger enters your back.

Even before your eyes close from the burning pain, you see Langor make one more attempt to get off a spell, but an assassin's blade finds his chest and he too sinks into the dust on the floor. Now there is no one left to collect the plaques. ✠



195

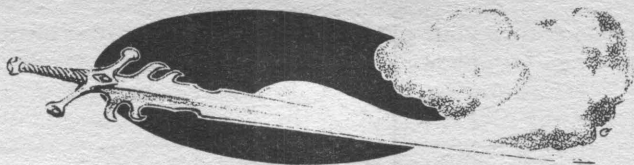
The huge cat lunges sideways with surprising speed. Your sword strikes only air. Instead of attacking you again, the cat turns on the unsuspecting Probmer who crouches nearby, waiting for his chance to enter the fray. A swipe of one broad front paw knocks Probmer off his feet and sends him sprawling backward onto the rock-strewn floor. You try to counter its charge from behind, but the beast is too quick. It wheels around, and its other paw rakes you with hooked claws that rip flesh on your forearms.

Meanwhile, Langor has ducked back into a corner of the cave. The maddened monster must get by you before it can get to him, so for now, he is a forgotten target. You stare into the hate-filled, yellow eyes that glare back at you. Animal blood-lust is written there. Your sword is ready. You push the pain out of your mind.

Subtract 3 hit points from your total. Turn to **85**.

196

As Langor draws closer, you hear Probmer shout, "Look out, Kardel! Behind you!"



You wheel around, Trollbiter ready in your hand. Instead of trolls, though, it is Langor who faces you. Turn to **54**.

197

There's no time for remorse. Anything could be happening to your family back at Pembroke Castle. You tear into the man's belongings and soon find the missing plaque. You hurry to put the important piece of magical stone into its slot in the special leather case and secure it inside your armor.

You look at the body. You can't leave without burying him; every man deserves an honorable burial. Probmer grumbles and Langor refuses to help, but you get the job done as quickly as you can.

If you've been injured and want to use one dose of Langor's healing potion, roll one die and add the result to your hit points. Be sure not to exceed your original total. If you use a dose of the potion, deduct it from the number of doses remaining.

If you have already learned something about where to find the other plaques, turn to **126**. If not, turn to **189**.

198

For a moment, Probmer is screened from the others by the falling thug, and he uses that moment to fullest advantage. Before any of the attackers can regain sight of him in the dim light, Probmer is behind the nearest stack of barrels, dodging up the alley, using every possible shadow for cover.

As he runs, he hears shouts of surprise behind him, and the crash of overturning barrels as they try to roust him from the hiding place they think he's in.

A few hundred feet more and the thief rounds a corner in the alley and enters a broader street. Passing the next couple of sidestreets at a dead run, Probmer locates the main artery that takes him back at a fast walk to the Castle Inn. There he rejoins you.

Turn to **13**.

199

"I'm sorry, sir," says the clerk. From his tone you know he's nothing of the kind. "Master Araquat is extremely busy this morning. Would you care to have a seat and wait?"

This standard answer rolls off the clerk's lips like a well-worn political speech. Time is too important for you to be put off so easily.

"This is urgent. I need to see him now."

"Have a seat, please, or I'll be forced to call the guard," he says with a sneer.

Now what? You don't need trouble with the town watch. Clearing yourself with the guard could take days.

"All right," you say resignedly, and find a comfortable seat.

Probmer sits in the chair next to you and whispers, "I oughta steal something, just to show that guy he can't treat us—"

You shake your head "no." You need the plaque, and fighting an army of guards won't get it.

Roll two dice and add the total to your perception skill score. If the total is 13 or more, turn to **152**. If it is 12 or less, turn to **202**.

200

Your blade finds the mark. Its keen edge slices between scales into the soft underbelly. A gush of blood and meaty flesh splatter the side of your armor. You press your attack. A second swing gouges more muscle and scales from the creature.

With a determined shriek it rears back and claws viciously at you. Your armor deflects its talons, but the force of the blow drives you back. You are too far away to attack again, but the lizard's claws and cavernous mouth can reach you perfectly. For the moment, it is all you can do to deflect its attacks.

You get a brief glimpse of Probmer, silent as the wind, sneaking behind the lizard, the bare steel of a dagger clenched tight in his right fist.

Roll two dice and add the result to Probmer's stealth skill score. If the total is 19 or more, turn to **204**. If it is 18 or less, go to **153**.

201

Your right side is exposed. Stoneclash has forced you to make a classic error. He's ready, eyes glowing with eager anticipation. Straight from the cocked position, Stoneclash thrusts at your side. His expert reflexes guide the deadly tip between the plates of your armor and a searing pain sears through you. Two inches of cold steel penetrate your flesh.

Your first thought is for your vital organs. You can only hope nothing has been struck as Stoneclash follows up his initial success. Subtract 11 hit points from your current total.

Maybe he's overconfident, you think, seeing an opening. You go for it, but it's going to take all your skill and strength.

Roll two dice and add the results to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or more, turn to **160**. If the total is 19 or less, turn to **46**.



Somewhat sourly, the three of you sit in the chairs placed near the front windows. You force yourself to wait patiently for Araquat's return.

After a while, Probmer starts to pace the floor. "A lousy way to treat honorable guests," he says on one turn of his route.

"Not much patience, have you," taunts Langor.

You wonder how long the two of them can be together without arguing. To put a stop to the brewing battle, you stand up and go once again to the clerk, who still shuffles papers behind the long counter.

"Just when do you expect Araquat? I've important business and a good deal of money hinges on our conversation."

"I'm sure," he says, "but Master Araquat comes and goes on his own volition, without begging my pardon. So I can't tell you when he'll be back. You'll just have to wait."

"Damn," you mutter under your breath and stalk back to your chair.

Langor leans against the wall and appears to go to sleep. Probmer puts his head into his hands in mind-numbing boredom.

At last, your stomach grumbling in hunger, you stand up once more.

"It appears the good merchant is not coming back today. We may as well go get some dinner."

"Sounds good to me," says Probmer, popping to his feet.

"I suppose so," agrees Langor, and the three of you return to the inn.

Turn to 2.

The dark figure on horseback is moving rapidly away. Whatever his business, he is wasting no time.



You, on the other hand, must return to Pembroke Castle without all five of the plaques. You have almost succeeded, but not quite. The war with the trolls will likely be lost, but you willingly return to fight alongside your father until death ends the struggle. ✕



204

The wyvern snaps at you again. You sidestep and parry its jaws with a heavy swipe of your sword. The sound of its teeth crashing together grates on you, and you fervently hope those teeth never catch your flesh.

As Langor fishes in his robes for something, you stab at the beast's underbelly, but your sword point glances off the rocklike scales without so much as scratching it.

Now, this dragon's-cousin is drawing back for another bite. Behind the monster you see Probmer poised and ready to strike with a small dagger. He's

crazy, you think. No blade so small and thin is going to do any real damage to a creature this size.

There's no more time to think. Already the wyvern's head is lunging forward, and you have to slash back with your sword. Suddenly, in mid-strike the wyvern shudders as if hit by a powerful spell; yet you can see Langor is not ready.

You jump back out of the way and stand amazed as the massive reptile writhes in pain. A couple of fast spasms wrack its body, and then it falls to the ground with a heavy thump. One last shudder and it lies still.

Probmer jumps up from behind it waving his dagger. "Got 'im," he says, triumphantly.

"You?" asks Langor in disdainful amazement.

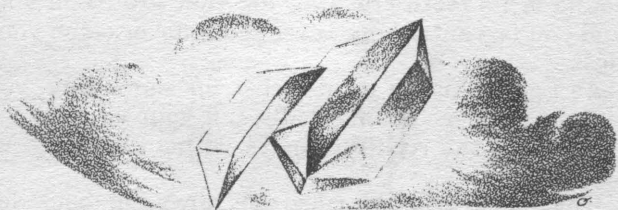
You are about to ask how when the thief says, "A thin needle, slipped between scales, coated with the deadliest poison I know," and he winks, returning the blade to its hiding place in his clothing.

"Good," is all you say. You wonder about this seemingly ordinary thief who now appears to be an expert on poisons. You *will* keep an eye on him in the future.

With the wyvern gone, you quickly realize you are in the open, easily seen from within the house.

"Hurry," you say, motioning, "let's sneak up to the house."

Turn to 138.



There's Langor. He's circled ahead of you. There's something ominous in his eyes. One hand is inside his robes, searching for a spell component. He's going to attack you! You squeeze the reassuring hilt of Trollbiter and face him, ready.

"What is it you want?" you ask, aware in the back of your mind that he's never really helped your mission.

"The plaques, you fool. I want their wisdom for my own. I *will* become the most powerful mage ever."

The glint in the magic-user's eye, the snarling mask that is his face, tell you he isn't interested in



talk. In one hand he grips his staff, his other is slowly inching out of his robe. Without hesitation you lash out, knowing your only chance is to strike Langor before uses more magic.

Roll two dice and add the result to your fighting skill score. If the total is 20 or more, turn to **57**. If it is 19 or less, go to **142**.

Just when all your questioning seems to be getting nowhere, a short, scraggly youth stops you. He barely comes up to your breastplate, but his face reveals him to be on the verge of manhood. His face and hands are dirty with traces of garbage. He is too thin to look healthy.

"Oh, great nobleman," he says, looking awestruck and a bit nervous. "I was told to give you this message: someone knows who killed your friend. They

will meet you in the warehouse behind the tannery at midnight tonight.”

“Who sent you?” asks Langor, grabbing the boy by the remnants of his patched shirt.

“I don’t know.” With a tug, the boy jerks free and runs away, leaving Langor with a strip of dirty cloth in his hand.

“What shall we do?” asks Langor, looking forlornly at the filthy rag.

It could be a trap, you think, but can you afford to pass up the chance to learn something?

“I don’t see any choice,” you finally say. “It is our only clue. We’ll have to go to the tannery. Maybe someone saw the murder; someone who’s afraid of the consequences, someone afraid to be seen talking to us.”

If you think it is an ambush, turn to **174**. If you think it is an informant, turn to **193**.

207

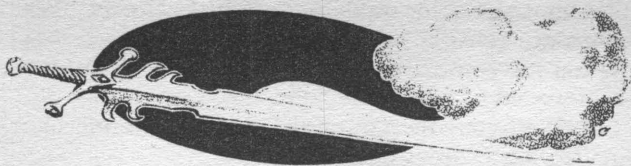
Without warning, Stoneclash spins around and darts into the thick brush that chokes in around the base of the tree trunks near the road. There is a loud crash as small branches and sticks crunch under the heavy tread of his chain mail.

Quickly you are after him, but your bulkier plate mail slows you and the brush seems to cling and grab as you try to enter the woods. But when you break free of the bushes and come out under a canopy of tall trees, your quarry is nowhere to be seen.

You peer through the dark trunks, straining to catch any movement, your ears eager for the slightest noise. Nothing.

“He’s here,” Probmer suddenly shouts from ahead of you. You hurry toward the sound of his voice.

Turn to **104**.



208

The swarthy fighter lunges in, but you turn aside his clumsy short sword attack and grab him by both wrists. With all your might you shove him backward, giving Langor more room to operate.

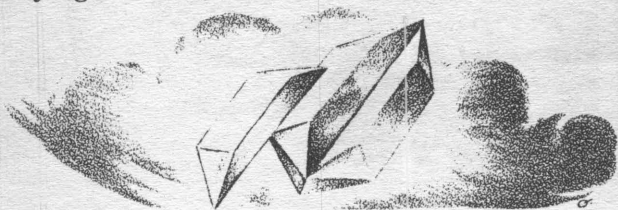
Probmer gets in a clean slash with his venom-covered blade and another of Araquat's mercenaries is done. Now, with room to work and time to spare, Langor fires a volley of magic missiles. The luminous green darts fan out and pierce the hearts of the remaining attackers.

Throughout it all, Araquat has remained stonelike behind his desk. His cold, calculating eyes measure you, but he shows no fear.

"You've won the plaque," he says and flings a blue silk-wrapped object at you.

You catch it in your left hand, but keep your eyes on Araquat. "Watch him," you tell Probmer.

You turn back the edge of the silk and see the corner of the familiar marble plaque. Sheathing your sword, you put it in its place in your special leather carrying case.



“About the gold,” adds Araquat hesitantly. “What about my gold?”

“You have your life,” spits Probmer. You think the thief would as soon take that, too.

“Call off your men outside,” you tell the merchant firmly, “and escort us to the door.”

Araquat smashes his bell twice, then rises. Probmer leads him at dagger-point through the tightly-packed group of men gathered in the freight office.

Holding Araquat before you as hostage, you take your horses and march across the street to the Castle Inn. There, you look Araquat squarely in the eye as Probmer grabs his arm. “If anything happens to us while we are in Mount Vernot, my father will see that you pay with your life. If not, perhaps some gold may yet find its way to your pocket.”



The look on his face is unreadable. Maybe you are safe, maybe not. In any case, someone will remain on guard until you are far from this town. You motion for Probmer to release the merchant. As the man stumbles away, you send the thief after him to be sure he starts no trouble.

A few moments later Probmer returns with an "all clear." Now you have time to examine your wounds. If you have any doses left in the bottle of healing potion and want to use one, roll one die and add the result to the appropriate character's hit points. Remember not to exceed the original total.

So far you've done well enough, but it's time to locate the mysterious Lolita Gig.

Turn to 75.



209

Before Fluglash can get his hand clear of the sleeve, you dodge around the table and attack with your sword. Even in pain as he is, Fluglash spins partially out of the way. But a trickle of bright red shows that you hit more than robes.

At the same time, Probmer whips an unseen dagger from its hiding place and throws it at the ancient figure. The spinning point penetrates the flesh of Fluglash's right shoulder and the old man shudders.

The mage tries to circle out of the corner, but Prob-

mer closes off his escape. The little thief has other daggers out now and the flashing steel turns back the old man.

Turn to 173.

210

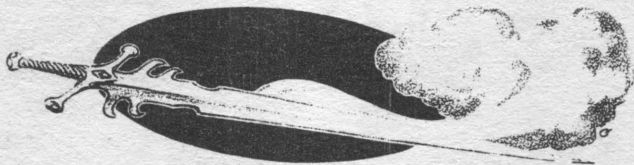
Too late. A burning spout of fire rushes from Langor's hand, surging straight for you. Your arrow thumps into the wizard's chest a split second later.

Frantically you try to turn your horse out of the path of the roaring inferno. There's little hope, but any way you can lessen the attack will help.

Roll two dice and add them together. If the result is 10 or more, subtract 4 from your hit points. If the two dice total 5 to 9, then subtract 9 from your hit points. If the initial total was 4 or less, subtract 14 from your hit points.

Langor begins another spell, but this time your bow is quicker.

Turn to 102.



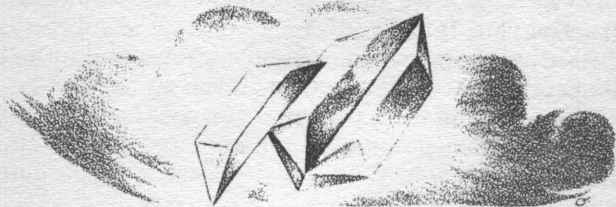
211

The only path to the castle is the path that Langor's fiery spells have cleared through the trolls. Quickly, you make your way toward the magic-user. He smiles as you ride past, then leaps astride his own horse. You are aware that he is following you, but your attention is on avoiding the troll squads that roam the meadows and fields ahead of you. It will be tricky getting past the foul creatures, but you've got the flaming sword to help persuade them to stand away.

Behind you, Langor's hoofbeats draw closer; no need to look back, he'll follow you to the castle. If Probrmer is still alive, turn to **196**. If he is dead, turn to **156**.

212

Without another word you scramble over to the dead woman. You bend over her to look for the all-important plaque. Langor is behind you, urging you to hurry in case the town's guard happens by. Then you feel a small, rectangular leather pouch tied around the woman's neck on a double strand of gold.



You pull it out from under her bloodied armor and feel the radiant power of the plaque even through the thick leather. Just to be sure, you open the drawstrings and peek in. The plaque is snugly tucked inside. You stuff the pouch with the plaque in it inside your tunic where it will be safely protected by your armor.

"Let's move," you say, and Langor doesn't argue.

If you still have any of Langor's healing potion and wish to use one dose, roll a die and add that number of points to your total. Remember, you cannot exceed your original total.

As fast as possible, you regain your horses and start south. Your visit to Mount Vernot was short, but you wish it had been even shorter.

If you do not have Stoneclash's plaque, turn to 181. Otherwise, turn to 10.

213

You can't waste time searching for garbage. Even without all the plaques, your duty is clear. You must return to Pembroke Castle and fight beside your father until the trolls kill you. It was a valiant attempt, but you've failed. There is no time left to finish your quest. Whoever holds power over the trolls has won. ✕

214

Within minutes you and Probmer are standing in front of your father.

"Father, here are the plaques." You hand him the leather case with the five hard-won stone pieces.

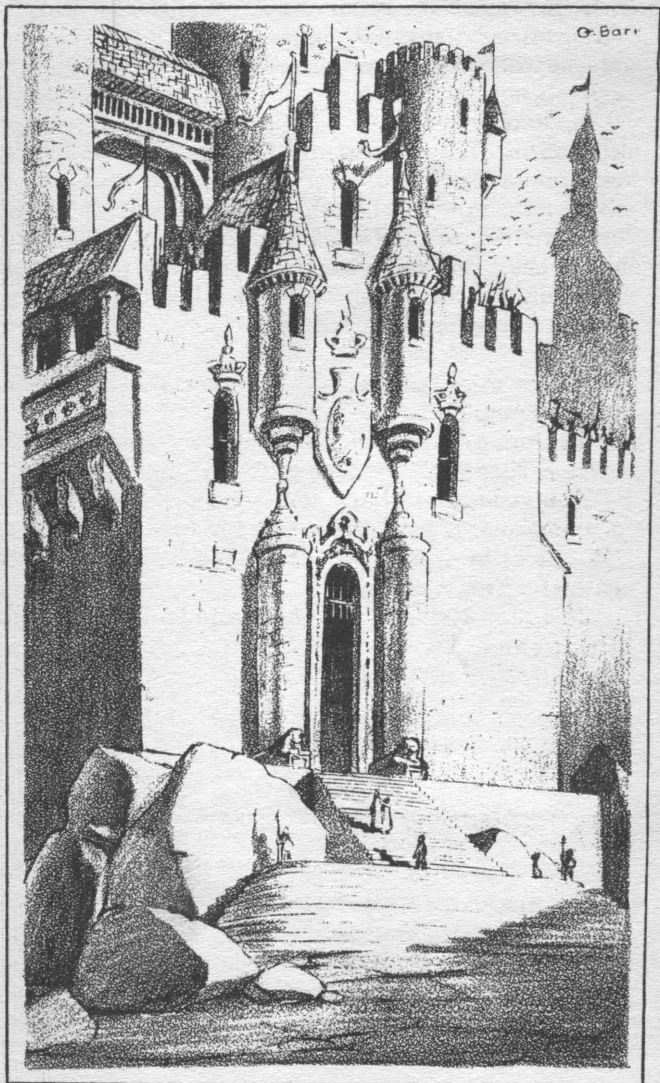
"You've done well, my son. I can see the next Duke of Pembroke is going to be remembered a long time." He winks at you, then asks, "What are you doing with the king's sword?"

"It was in the hands of the man leading the trolls, Sir Segwick. He was sent by the king to overthrow us. Instead, I brought it to you."



The duke carefully takes Trollbiter. He looks it over thoroughly, examining every inch of its length.

"This will be the King of Pittland's undoing. I will present this as evidence to the Council of Nobles. Many are grumbling about the king's rough treatment, his over-taxing to support his parasitic rela-



tives. Now we have proof of his treachery.”

Your father turns to Probmer. “You, sir, have served my son well. What can I offer in reward?”

“A job, sire. Something on the castle staff, maybe?”

The Duke pauses. “We can fully utilize your *special* skills as an officer in my intelligence corps. We’ll talk more tomorrow. Tonight we feast.”

Your father pats you on the shoulder, and the two of you turn to enter the Great Hall. As you walk side by side up the stone steps, you hear the cries go up from the walls. The last of the trolls are leaving in disarray. The dukedom is saved. ✚

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