

Above the Waves by Zachary Carango

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An entry in the 2011 Windhammer Prize
for Short Gamebook Fiction
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Instructions:

You may notice that this story is not like others. Contained within these pages is an adventure. At the bottom of each numbered section, you will find one or more choices, each pointing you to another section.

It is possible that, at some point, you may find yourself on a page you have already visited. If this is the case, you may pick any option you have not already explored. Before beginning, familiarize yourself with the rules below.

Your **Health** is a number that reflects your current state of wellness or injury. Your health begins at and cannot exceed 10. If your health drops to 0 at any point in the adventure, you have died and must start the story again.

Record your current funds in the **Money** section. You begin the adventure with only \$10, though you will have the opportunity to earn more.

Record any items you obtain in the **Items** section. You may not carry more than 6 items at a time. You will begin with one item of special importance.

Use the **Notes** section to mark any passwords you are asked to record. Passwords will affect your choices at certain points in the story.

Your **Background** is your history up to the start of the adventure. Prior to beginning the story, select one of the three choices below:

The Debtor- You have never shied from a challenge nor let an opportunity slip by. As a result of your drive, you have taken loans from some less than reputable characters. If you could only make one big score, those debts would disappear.

The Vendetta- Your pride has earned you some powerful enemies. Maybe once you have earned the respect of the world these grudges will be forgiven.

The Wanderer- You have drifted for most of your life. Only travel can soothe your restless heart. The world may be your oyster, but at the moment you haven't a penny to your name. Begin the game with \$0 instead of \$10.

Your **Skills** reflect various abilities you possess. Prior to beginning the story, select three skills from the list below:

Marksmanship- Able to wield a firearm.

Piloting- Able to fly aircraft.

Charisma- Skill in dealing with other people.

Engineering- Able to maintain and repair machinery.

Agility- Athletic ability and hand eye coordination.

Con- Skill in the arts of deception, stealth, and theft.

Hand to Hand- Skill in unarmed and armed melee combat.

Once you have selected your background and skills, read the intro, turn to 1 and begin!

Character Sheet:

Name~

Health~
10

Money~

Background~
-

Skills~
-
-
-

Items~
- Precious Documents
-
-
-
-

Notes:

Terror of the Skies:

Even after decades, the dreaded pirate known only as Kurtz still terrorizes travelers on the southern sea. An unknown for most of his life, Kurtz exploded onto the scene when he turned to a life of murder. Using a modified military-grade aircraft, Kurtz has robbed and killed thousands.

Though pirates have always been common, Kurtz's daring and brutality sets him apart from the multitude. Unlike other bandits, who rely on sheer force of numbers, Kurtz flies only with a small band of devoted followers. Thanks to this limited membership, along with the fact that he only attacks at night, Kurtz has evaded capture.

The world has chugged along despite his efforts, but Kurtz remains a very real threat. The blood he's spilt could stain the very ocean, and more lives are claimed every month. Even as his death toll rises, many search for Kurtz. Whether for bounty, justice, or fame, these brave souls search for a true demon.

1

An endless blue fills your vision and a blinding headache splits your skull. You lie face up across the remnants of a great metal wing, your feet and scalp grazing the cool water at either end. The ocean and sky form a sphere with you at its center.

You were certain of your escape. You'd lost the terrible pursuer in a cloudbank, but Kurtz found you anyway. He killed your crew and shot you out of the sky. Kurtz may have got your plane, but you still have his precious information. Only through miraculous luck were you able to steal some of Kurtz's secret correspondence. Were these notes lost, your friends' sacrifice would be for nothing.

Reaching into your coat pocket you make sure that the bundle of priceless documents are safe. The feel of waterproof envelope beneath your hands reassures you. Though they are coded beyond your reckoning, you are sure you can find someone with the skill to translate them.

There's a prize on Kurtz's head greater than a king's ransom. Many have tried to claim it and many have died at the pirate's hands. For you though, it's about more than money. That's why you're going to succeed where others have failed: It's your destiny.

For now though, you keep your eyes to the sky, hoping against all odds to find another plane drifting across the cloudless horizon. If today is a weekday, turn to 36. If it is the weekend, turn to 81.

2

The vent splits with a shudder and you fall face first through the ceiling in a cloud of crushed plaster. Lose 2 health. "Well well well," Rosewater says after the surprise has worn off, "At least we don't have to come to you."

Without a word, the butler strides over to the wall and removes a large machete from a decorative display rack. "My friend here is master swordsman," Rosewater gloats, "In fact he was once bodyguard to the sheik. Lets see how you fare!" Turn to 42.

3

Stepping over Kurtz's body, you look out from the door of his shanty. Kurtz's band surrounds the shack, looking up at you like a mob of stunned children.

"They're going to kill me right here and now," you think to yourself. Moment's pass with the crowd's attention fixed squarely on you, but nothing happens.

And then you understand, the knowledge falling on you like a driven rain. It was not Kurtz that held these people, people rapt. It was a common voice heard by each and every one of them, a voice you yourself know all too well.

As if sensing your revelation, the crowd breaks into a cheer, sweeping you up and towards the center of camp. The thought of leaving does not even enter your mind, you're home.

4

"That's what I found pal," you say with a convincing shrug, "I did exactly what you asked."

"Oh really," says your displeased liaison, "well my counter says otherwise." He holds up the small device to your face as if it will make matters clearer. Snatching the device from his hands, you twist one of its dials until something inside snaps. The whole maneuver is accomplished in a fraction of a second, well before the goon knows what's happening.

"Here's your problem," you say after a cursory glance at the snatched object, "your counter's busted!" Though you know nothing about the so-called "counter", pretending is easy enough. Handing the gadget back to your skeptical handler, you watch with amusement as he fumbles with the now useless device.

"I'm in deep trouble if they find out I broke this thing," the thug says more to himself than to you, "I guess this water's as good as any other." If you do not have the password *burn*, the man gives you \$30 in cash before leaving. In either case, turn to 18 when finished.

5

San Sabre is a sprawling city of labyrinthine streets and mudstone spires. One of the few places not yet under the control of the old world, San Sabre has managed to avoid annexation thanks to its wily leader, the Sheik. An enigmatic yet forceful man, the Sheik has managed to keep control of his city by expertly playing the voracious old world against itself. He has made many enemies in the process.

Making your way down bustling streets, you pass countless canopied storefronts selling all manner of exotic goods. The naturally rowdy port town is even more festive with the holy week approaching. Every aspect of the city, from the scent of cakes baking to the glitter of costume jewelry, suggests a party. You struggle to resist these inviting distractions.

The knowledge that Kurtz could at any time relocate and spoil your opportunity for an attack drives you forward. If you are the Vendetta, turn to 85. Otherwise, you may make a stop for supplies, turn to 32, or begin to immediately plan for your raid on Kurtz, turn to 59.

6

Leading you down to the wharf, the old lady shows you to her plane. Despite its peeling paint and banged-up hull, the twin-engine sea bird is impressive. "She's called the Pelican," the woman says gazing at the wooden beauty, "my husband used to fly all over this sea. There are more stories in that plane than you could ever count."

"How much do you want for it?" You ask, trying to disguise your excitement. Stroking her chin for a moment, the woman answers "It's almost more trouble than it's worth now. I can't fly it after all! I'd be willing to part with it for \$30, if you can pay it."

Only thirty! This is an incredible bargain and would still be, even if the plane were in much worse shape. If you have \$30 and Piloting as a skill, you can purchase the plane, if you do, note that you have the Keys to The Pelican. Whether or not you've bought the plane, turn to 18.

7

Without a firearm, there is little you can do to help James best the circling jaguar. "Go on," he calls, tossing you the radio, "there's nothing you can do." If you flee into the forest, turn to 50. If you'd rather stay and fight, turn to 91.

8

Rosewater smiles at your answer, sets down his drink, and looks you in the eyes before speaking, "You're closer to the truth than most, but Kurtz isn't that simple. You can't just write him off as mad. But I see you will not be convinced that easily...please follow me."

Rosewater now stands and leads you through his manor. Opening a small, brown door, he gestures towards a long wooden staircase within. "Go down and learn for yourself," turn to 93.

9

Radio in hand, you are about to call in Marlowe when a strange feeling overtakes you. Your mind burns with the image of Kurtz before the fire, drawing human beings like a light bulb draws insects. Despite all that you have done to bring the man to justice, perhaps even because of this quest, part of you understands, even admires Kurtz. The choice is in your hands. If you want to radio Marlowe as planned, turn to 62. If you'd rather venture into the camp and see Kurtz with your own eyes, turn to 97.

10

Though gruff by habit, Ishmael soon shows a philosophic side. Looking out at the endless, moonlit ocean through a grimy window, he says the following to no one in particular, "Out here...over the ocean...it's so vast, so untouched. It's one of the few places a man can just lose himself."

"Is that why you became a pilot?" you answer without invitation. Aware now that you are listening, Ishmael turns and fixes his gaze on you, "One reason, yes, but not the only. I grew up in the old country you know. I could either stay and take over the family butcher shop, or try my luck on the open sea. So, here I am..."

This short speech takes the crew by surprise. "The skipper's never said anything like that before!" one crewman says with awe once Ishmael is out of earshot. Though it goes unspoken, you've found a friend in this aviator. Add the password *recourse*, and then turn to 95.

11

Tiptoeing out of your top floor room, you head down the hall towards a flight of stairs. At the landing, you can hear Rosewater speaking from the first floor. You press your body to the wall and creep down. Above all, you pray not to step on any loose boards. If you have Con as a skill, turn to 45, if you do not, read on...

As you approach the basement you think you are in the clear. Your heart sinks, however, when a menacing voice confronts you, "Where do you think you're going?"

Turning to face the voice, you see Rosewater's butler, wielding a massive machete. He means business, turn to 42.

12

You and Marlowe walk in silence, the oppressive heat and incessant mosquitoes sapping any desire for conversation. Still, you can't help but feel there's something more at work. The coldness Marlowe showed on the flight over is even greater now.

Crashing through a wall of vines out into the light, you find yourself facing a long, sheer gorge. More sinkhole than creek, the chasm yawns, its bottom fathoms below you.

"Over there," Marlowe gestures to a bridge suspended across the gorge.

You have no doubt that the structure was made by Kurtz's men. Local vines support the wooden walkway, more of a horizontal ladder than a solid path, but rusted chains form the core of the structure. Kurtz must be nearby.

You lead the way across the rickety bridge while Marlowe follows behind. When you are halfway over, a familiar "click" breaks the silence. Wheeling about, you find yourself staring down the barrel of Marlowe's revolver.

"It's nothing personal," Marlowe speaks his mind for the first time, "I know that it wasn't your fault, but when you made an enemy of the Sheik you sealed your own fate."

"Why?" you ask, "What did I do to you?"

"Do you know what it's like to be hated by the whole world?" Marlowe's face darkens as he speaks, "After the war the old world was all too eager to put the past behind them. I was a relic of a history they didn't want around. Only the Sheik would take me in...I'm at his mercy. So once again, it's not personal, it's just that one of us has to die here."

You have only split seconds to act before Marlowe fires, if you have a Machete and wish to cut the bridge, turn to 89. If you have Agility as a skill, turn to 38. If you have neither of these prerequisites, Marlowe puts a bullet between your eyes, killing you instantly.

13

Desperate to escape your bloodthirsty creditors, you push your way across the pier and make a running dive into the ocean. As you fall towards the greasy black water, you notice for the first time the jagged edges of submerged wooden pilings lurking just below the surf.

If you have Agility, you manage to avoid the deadly spikes and hit the water with a graceful splash. If you lack that skill, you strike the water with a dull smack and take a gash from the splintered edge of one of the pilings, lose 2 health. You swim to shore and enter the city, turn to 18.

14

You draw and fire your gun before Kurtz can reach you, plastering the wall with his mad genius. You gaze down at his crumpled form and feel the slightest tinge of remorse. After so much, it is all over in an instant. Turn to 3.

15

"No harm no foul," one of the slimy collectors says as you hand over the keys to the Pelican. You knew the old woman's offer was too good to be true, but you still feel a bitter disappointment as the freedom of the skies slips away from you again. If you are the Debtor, turn to 51, otherwise you must find work aboard another's plane in order to travel, turn to 79.

16

You drop on your back, just avoiding the butler's machete, and slide away across the floor. This maneuver gives you just enough time to draw your pistol. As you level your weapon at him, the swordsman's eyes widen with fear and rage. He has time to take only a single step before you send a bullet through his face.

Treading through the bloody mess, you search the area and find no sign of Rosewater. He must be hiding. With no one now guarding the front door, you leave for your plane, turn to 31.

17

You uncork the Sheik's vial and slip it into Smith's drink without anyone noticing. You fold your napkin before standing then stride unnoticed out of the room. From the front landing, you hear the room erupt with horrified screams.

"She's collapsed," you hear from the outside the house as you make your escape, "someone get a doctor!"

You head back to the Sheik's palace where the staff shows you in without hassle.

"Excellent job," the Sheik pats you on the back with one hand and gives you a congratulatory goblet of red wine with the other, "you'll have your expedition!" Turn to 72.

18

Oceana is a vast city of nearly a million souls. Its urban jungle covers all of Twenty Mile Island, the small landmass on which Oceana rests. In the past few years, there have even been efforts to expand the island; an expensive yet much needed measure in this claustrophobic city.

Strolling down Creek Street, one of Oceana's main drags, you force your way through an endless crowd. Destitute beggars, and those who've simply given up, huddle like sardines in every alley. At one storefront, the proprietor sits at his door with a stick to beat off anyone who doesn't look like a paying customer. You can't help but think that this place is even more brutal than the open ocean, where at least one can die in privacy.

From here, you may go shopping for supplies, turn to 76, inquire at the Academy for a code breaker, turn to 44 or find a place to grab a few drinks, turn to 63.

19

You wrap the vine around a few nearby trees and pull again. The makeshift pulley system works and you are able to lift Charles out of the pit. Soaked from heel to chin, Charles is shaken but uninjured.

"Thanks for help," Charles speaks after catching his breath, "I thought I was done for."

You and Charles move on, wary of any more traps, turn to 94.

20

"You and I both know he's much more than that," Rosewater says with smirk, "Do you think the price on his head is just for piracy? The reward they're offering is many times greater than anything Kurtz ever stole. But I see you won't be convinced this easily...please follow me."

Rosewater now stands and leads you through his manor. He heads to a small, brown door in the basement and gestures towards a long wooden staircase within. "Go down and learn for yourself," turn to 93.

21

"Kurtz has hassled me far too long. I want to believe you can put an end to him," the Sheik says, crossing his arms and leaning back in his chair, "but I just can't lend that much to someone without knowing I can trust him. Would you like to earn my trust?"

After you nod assent, the Sheik continues, "As you may already know, there are those within the city who are dissatisfied with my rule. This in and of itself is not a problem, but a few such people have begun to organize against me. I would like you to send these troublemakers a message. Their leader, a Ms. Ella Smith, is hosting a party tonight. All you have to do is slip this into her drink," with this the Sheik hands you a small vial of yellow powder.

"Do this for me and you'll have your expedition." Taking up the Yellow Vial, you leave the palace and head off for Ms. Smith's estate, turn to 54.

22

You fill up the vial with water from the tunnel floor and wait for what seems like a reasonable amount of time before heading back out the passage. Your mob liaison is waiting for you at the entrance. You watch without a word as he holds the glass up to the light and examines its contents. He then produces a small, square gadget, which he sweeps up and down the length of the vial. The device gives off a few meager clicks, not enough for your handler's liking.

"You're not trying to pull a fast one on us are you?" the agent looks at you incredulously. If you have the Con skill, turn to 4. If you do not, turn to 65.

23

Ms. Smith's kitchen bustles with chefs and servants, all dressed in elaborate white uniforms. Though you stick out like a sore thumb, the staff is too busy to pay you much attention.

"Hey you," the head chef glares in your direction, "Get in uniform, I need you to bring out drinks!"

If you have a Yellow Vial, and would like to make use of this opportunity, turn to 40, otherwise you tell the chef he is mistaken and take a seat at the table, turn to 52.

24

For days you cook under the infernal sun without hope of rescue. On the seventh day, you realize that you will not survive this trial. One only has so much luck in this life and yours has run out.

25

You duck down an alley adjacent to Smith's estate. Away from prying eyes, you face the ten-foot high wall that surrounds the house. Topped with an ornate, yet brutal line of iron spikes, the wall is an imposing barrier. Putting your foot to the rough stone, you climb with determination.

If you have Agility as a skill, you manage to scramble up the wall and vault the barbs with ease.

If you do not, you are able to climb the wall after a long struggle, but gash yourself on the razor sharp spikes. Lose 3 health.

You land as quietly as possible behind a hedge, compose yourself and join the rest of the crowd, turn to 66.

26

You know that the crooks will offer you no mercy after you have twice crossed them. This reprisal in mind, you fight the three collectors with everything you have. Though they outnumber and outgun you, the goons are taken by surprise by your desperate strength and you manage to break away after a short brawl. Though free, your animalism has left you with some serious wounds, lose 4 health. If still alive, you go in search of passage aboard another vessel, turn to 79.

27

If you have the password *burn*, the woman takes no interest in you, turn to 63 and choose again. "You look like someone with a sense of purpose," the woman says as you take a seat next to her, "would you be interested in a well-paying job?"

"What kind of job," you answer, thinking about your measly stash of money.

"I represent an organization of businessmen," the woman continues, "and we need someone to obtain something from the Oceana Power Works." The power works are a series of underground plants that provide electrical power to the entire city. Though they are a part of daily life in Oceana, their inner workings are a closely guarded state secret.

"I can't tell you anything more now," the woman says, reading your dubious expression, "if you accept we'll provide you with further instructions." If you take this shady mission, turn to 70. If you do not, turn back to 63 and make another choice.

28

You wander through the back alleys of San Sabre, combing the city's underside for information on the rebels. After hours of fruitless search and countless false leads, you find yourself in a cantina across from a shady man in a dark overcoat.

"Yeah, I know all about the rebels," the hustler hikes up his collar before continuing, "it'll cost you \$10." If you pay the man, note that you have lost \$10 then turn to 57 (if you are The Vendetta and have less than \$10, you must surrender all your items and money to the informant, turn to 57), otherwise your only choice is to find the Sheik, turn to 48.

29

Before the loan shark can utter another word, your new friend Ishmael bursts from the crowd and declares, "Is there a problem here?"

"It's none of your business, old man," the enforcer snarls. He tries to look confident, but you can tell by a slight crack in his voice that he's uneasy. "Well, I'm making it my business," Ishmael retorts as his three-man crew, along with a few others you have never seen before, file in behind the old captain.

Seeing that he's outnumbered, the loan shark and his thugs promise revenge as they disappear into the crowd. After thanking Ishmael and the others, you move on into the city, turn to 18.

30

After getting ready for the two day long trek, you and your companion set off into the yawning jungle. While you lug the food, your companion carries the bulky portable radio. Though you try to stick to the path of the river, the dense underbrush makes it impossible to travel in a straight line. You see little in the way of wildlife but everywhere around you can sense the eyes of a thousand beasts, watching your passage.

Worse monsters than Kurtz lie hidden in this primeval landscape. If you have the password *red* turn to 43, if you have the password *yellow* turn to 60, and if you have the password *blue* turn to 12.

31

Wiping the sleep from your eyes, you take the Pelican off of autopilot as the sprawling southlands come into view over the horizon. The glittering, mudstone towers of San Sabre crowd a long peninsula that juts out several miles into the ocean. Here is the last bastion of civilization before the great wilderness of the continent.

Throttling back your engines, you land your plane in the calm blue waters off the leeward side of the city. Your blades chop the water, leaving a trail of flickering green sparks as you taxi towards shore. Pulling up to the docks, you tie up the Pelican and head into the city, turn to 5.

32

The heavy scent of hookah smoke and curry hangs over the crowded market. The bazaars of San Sabre hold nearly everything a person could want, along with a great many things few people ever would. As you shuffle past men and women in bizarre outfits, you try to ignore the frivolous trinkets and limit your search to only useful items. You may purchase any of the items below, for the prices listed:

Emergency Rations \$2

Pistol \$8

Flak Jacket (Ignore any health loss of 3 points or less. If you lose 4 health or more, the flak jacket is damaged beyond use) \$6

Machete \$3

Fine Clothes \$5

Though licensed doctors are a rare luxury in these parts, a variety of folk healers have stalls set up through out the city. You may pay one of these healers \$4 to restore 1 point of health.

Once you have purchased what you want, turn to 59.

33

When the burlap sack is finally taken off your head, you find yourself sitting in an uncomfortable metal chair in the middle of a dingy room lit by a single naked bulb. You struggle against the motion sickness brought on by the disorienting ride.

A stern man faces you from across the room. Adjusting his gold cuff links, the man speaks with condescending authority, "I'm Mr. Green and I don't stand for people who steal from my family. I don't very much like you, I will admit, but I'm a reasonable man. I will forgive your debts if you assist me in one small task. The choice is simple, help me or face the consequences of your actions."

You can be sure that refusal will mean a swift and unpleasant death. Your only real choice is to accept.

"Good!" says Mr. Green with faux enthusiasm, "we'll escort you to the site and give you instructions there." Add the password *burn* then turn to 70.

34

You hold your breath and slide up to a grille in the floor of the vent. Through this mesh you can see Rosewater and his butler in a room below.

"There's no reasoning with him," Rosewater says with frightening intensity, "I've heard about him, he's nothing but a tool. He has no imagination! He's not worthy of Kurtz."

While Rosewater is rambling and irrational, his butler is cool and efficient, "Shall I dispose of him now sir?"

Rosewater nods, and the butler strides out of view. You have only have a few minutes before you're discovered. Just as you begin to move, however, you feel the vent shift with a loud groan. The whole passage is coming loose! If you have Agility as a skill, turn to 71. If you do not, turn to 2.

35

After thanking Val, you climb aboard her rickety, four engine plane: the Sea Breeze. You settle down amongst the piled crates and try to ignore the hull's constant groans.

"Here we go fellas," Val's garbled voice comes on over the intercom as the turbo-props roar to life. The Sea Breeze picks up speed as it cuts through the water away from Oceana. With a stomach-churning lurch, the plane lifts off.

For the first day of the flights, you simply laze about the cargo hold and try to stay out from under foot. In the middle of the second day of flight, however, your relaxation is interrupted when you are thrown into the wall by a sudden lurch. Lose 2 health. Wiping the blood from your bruised face, you listen as Val addresses the crew, "Pirates! Get ready for a fight."

Hunkering down in what seems like the safest place, you listen as the Sea Breeze exchanges gunfire with the pirates. Just as the fight seems to turn your way, a jarring explosion rocks the Sea Breeze.

"Damn," Val shouts over the mike, "we've lost an engine. We're going down."

With this, the plane goes into a death-spiral. The forces of the fall cause you to lose consciousness...

When you come to, you are alone on a piece of floating wreckage. The Sea Breeze, likely already picked over for supplies by the pirates, is gone; it's crew are nowhere to be seen. Add the password *coin*, and then turn to 81.

36

You wait for only a few hours before a cross-shaped outline appears out of the distance. Another plane! Spotting your mad gestures, the plane circles in for a landing nearby. Waves from the plane's powerful engines shake your precarious raft as the elegant, wood-bottomed craft pulls up next to you. A lanky man with a square, weathered face shouts out to you from atop the wing, "Looks like you've run into a spot of trouble! Climb aboard, we'll give you a ride."

Thankful for the hospitality, you climb up a rope ladder and enter the craft. "You can call me Ishmael," the man who invited you aboard says as he lights an ornate ivory pipe, "I'm the pilot of this craft."

Though Ishmael does not demand money for the rescue, he does insist that you work along side his two other crewmen during your time aboard. A merchant who's travelled the world many times over, Ishmael knows as well as anyone the value of a fair trade. If you have Engineering as a skill, turn to 53. If you do not but you have Charisma, turn to 10. If you have neither, turn to 95.

37

It is a long ten minutes before Mr. Rosewater shows himself into the room. Dressed in a brown suit and matching fur robe, Rosewater exudes an aristocratic pride; the kind of arrogance that died around the same time his beloved Port Royal did. Sitting down across from you, he speaks, "You are a difficult person to judge, my friend. You've drifted all over this wide world without making much of a mark anywhere. I find such discretion refreshing. Too many people now a days cling to the first opportunity that floats their way. One should always keep an open mind."

With this strange speech, Rosewater produces a bottle of brown liquor and pours two glasses, "Please have some, it's quite good."

As a show of confidence, he takes a long sip from his glass before continuing, "I would introduce

myself, but I'm sure you already know who I am. I know why you're here, I could tell you more about Kurtz than you'd ever want to hear... believe me. But before we get into that, I'd like to hear what you think of Kurtz."

If you say that Kurtz is nothing but a glorified pirate, turn to 20. If you say that Kurtz is mad, turn to 8.

38

You avoid Marlowe's first shot only by falling flat onto the wooden slats. Before he can get off a second shot, you drop between the rungs of the bridge hang like a kid on a jungle gym. Surprised by your deft movements, Marlowe stumbles backwards, loses his footing and, thanks to the uneven surface, falls through the rungs.

You pull yourself back onto the bridge and face your struggling former comrade.

"It looks like you were too much for me," the old ace almost looks almost relieved that you've bested him, "Take this!"

Marlowe reaches into his pack and hands you the radio.

"What are you doing?" you ask as you grab the metal box.

Without another word, Marlowe looks you in the eyes, lets go of the rung, and drops into the chasm. In a matter of seconds, he passes out of sight into the shadowy gorge. So passes the last hero of a bygone age. Shaken, but not deterred, you continue across the bridge. Erase the password *blue*, then add the password *orange*, and then turn to 94.

39

You dive for The Pelican's cockpit and swing the hatch open just as the ruthless collectors begin to open fire on you. If you have Agility as a skill, you clamber in fast enough to avoid their shots. If you do not you are shot through the arm, a severe but survivable injury, lose 4 health. If still alive, you make a daring escape despite the gunmen's violent protests. Turn to 98.

40

You slip the white uniform over your clothes and take up a tray of champagne. Now indistinguishable from the other servers, join the waiters as they parade into the dining room. Before stepping out, however, you open the Sheik's yellow vial and dump it's contents into one of the crystal chalices. After checking the area, you sigh with relief to see that no one has taken notice of your covert ploy.

You shove past the other waiters and head straight for the head of the table where Ms. Smith sits. An elderly woman with elegant tastes, Ms. Smith's laugh lines cannot hide the fire in her eyes. You understand now why the Sheik fears her. As you distribute the glasses to the seated guests, you make sure that Smith receives the one you've prepared.

Once the ceremony is over, you join the other waiters back in the kitchen. Leaning against a wall, you listen as Ms. Smith delivers an opening toast. You listen to the tinkle of up-turned glasses as you make for the exit. Seconds later, the room erupts with screams of horror.

"She's collapsed," you hear on the way out of the house, "someone get a doctor!"

Mission accomplished, you head back to the Sheik's palace where the staff lets you in without hassle.

"Excellent job," the Sheik pats you on the back with one hand and gives you a congratulatory goblet of red wine with the other, "you'll have your expedition!" Turn to 72.

41

You duck and weave like a skilled dancer, dodging your assailants' blows while delivering a flurry of devastating strikes at the same time. Only once you've fought off the mob do you survey your own health. Though you've suffered some minor hits, there are no major injuries, subtract 2 health. You flee the area before the loan sharks return and enter the city, turn to 18.

42

The butler advances on you, fearsome blade raised in an exotic, deadly pose. "I've killed better men than you," the mercenary taunts, "let's make this quick." With this he lunges forward and swings the machete at your throat. You arch your back, allowing the blade to pass over uninterrupted.

Now's the time to act! If you have a Pistol and Marksmanship as a skill, you may fire on the butler, turn to 16. If you have Hand to Hand as a skill, turn to 77. If you have neither of these skills, read on...

The butler/assassin brings his blade to bear upon you again, this time with a merciless upswing. He does not miss twice and deals you a long gash from the middle of your chest to your chin. In your few remaining moments of consciousness, you think back on lost dreams and broken promises.

43

The first day of travel through the jungle seems like the longest in your life. The terrible humidity makes it feel like you are marching through a sauna. To make things worse, the leafy canopy blocks any breeze. The air hangs on you like a fur coat.

While James was friendly enough aboard the plane, the journey saps any strength either of you have for conversation. As the day draws to a close however, you spot something that makes you scream.

"Look out," you alert James just in time for him duck away from a jaguar's pounce. Drawing his sword, James faces the hungry beast, his eyes as fearsome as the cat's. Though capable, your friend is no match for the animal.

If you wish to use a Pistol and have Marksmanship as a skill, turn to 99. Otherwise, turn to 7.

44

Though looked down on back in the old country, the Union Academy is by far the best university in this hemisphere. Walking through its manicured parkways and white stone columns, you realize that this is one of the few places in the city where taste has been allowed to trump pragmatism.

Though it takes several hours to find the right man for the job, a kind secretary eventually points you to the department of communications. Inside this smaller, yet still well decorated building you find a Mr. Bates, Professor of Cryptography, sitting in a third floor office.

"Hello Professor," you say politely as the red-faced, corpulent man looks up from a pile of letters, "I have something here which I need decoded."

Adjusting his thick glasses with a sausage-like finger, Bates looks at the ream of papers you hand him. "Hmm," he says after a long silence, "this is a fairly advanced cipher! It'll take me days, maybe even weeks to solve this." Seeing your expression of dismay, he goes on, "Good thing I don't have to! After all, what good are students if you can't put them to work every so often?"

"Thank you for your help professor," you answer with gratitude.

A few days later, the Professor sends for you. Back in his office, you take a copy of the translated documents. Looking into the professor's concerned eyes, you know he has discovered the origin of these documents.

"So you're going after Kurtz," he says slumping back into his chair, "He's a dangerous man, I'm sure

you know already, but did you know that he's smart too?"

"It sounds as if you knew him," you say, hoping for more information.

Nodding, Bates continues, "We were in the same class at this very school, though he never graduated. No one really knows why he snapped; he just never seemed content here. If you ask me, he was too smart for his own good. I was never very fond of him, few of us were, but there was one who befriended him: James Rosewater. He lives in Port Royal, never could force himself to move even after the earthquake. I can't say how much help he'll be, but I'm sure he knows more than I do."

Furrowing his brow, the professor goes on, "I can tell that you're not just another bounty hunter, but be careful. Remember that Kurtz may be smart but on the inside he's just an animal, no better than you or me. Don't let him get inside your head."

With this chilling warning you bid Bates farewell and examine the translated documents. Though you managed to steal several dozen documents, most of these are irrelevant to your search.

Finally, you manage to find the information you've long searched for, a detailed set of directions to Kurtz's base of operations. According to the page, Kurtz flies out of a jungle outpost deep in the Anaconda Jungle. Located in the unexplored Southlands, this wilderness has defied nearly all attempts at exploration. It is the last true blank spot on the map. Knowing this, your path forward becomes blazingly clear, you must travel to the city of San Sabre, an ancient outpost lying on the north cost of the Southlands, and from there organize passage inland. Though visiting Rosewater in Port Royal would be helpful, it will be difficult to find passage to that ghost town. You head off for the docks, eager to continue your journey, turn to 84.

45

You dart through the unfamiliar hallways without a sound and make your way to the basement without alerting Rosewater of your escape. Only once you stand at the top of the staircase the maid mentioned does a loud bellow of rage reach you from above. You descend down the darkened stairs before your captors can find you, turn to 93.

46

Despite the fearsome task ahead of you, the days aboard the Marlowe's plane are calm and at times even boring. You, James, Charles, and Durak play poker to pass the time. Though nothing much is at stake in these games, you do win some stories from your comrades.

"I hear Kurtz has fifty men under his command, all of them armed to the teeth" Durak keeps his eyes fixed on his cards as he speaks, addressing no one in particular. The implied "we're doomed" goes unspoken but understood by all.

"That's the thing," Charles pipes in as he tosses a few chips onto the table, "Kurtz may have the men, but they have no discipline. Put some fear in their eyes and they'll scatter like animals."

"Just like water is formless without a vessel, strength means nothing without direction," James has proven a veritable treasure trove of such Zen gems, "At least that's what I've been told."

While you get along easily with the three poker players, the other two members of your crew keep to themselves. In all fairness, Richard probably would warm up if he weren't busy trying to make sense of your jumbled directions, but Marlowe is a different story.

Taciturn by nature, the old ace seems especially fixated on this task. You and the other crewmen often wonder when he rests, no one has seen him asleep since the Red Mistress took off.

After a few days of flying over the ocean, you reach the sprawling mouth of the Anaconda River. Following the ribbon of muddy water, you watch the lush tops of countless trees drift away below from the window. What lies under this impenetrable canopy, you don't dare to guess.

Once you are near enough to where Kurtz's camp should be, the Red Mistress swoops down for a delicate landing on the river. Engines idling, the plane eases up to the shore and your band steps outside for the first time in nearly a week.

You take in the scenery while giving your joints a chance to decompress. From here on the jungle floor, the sky is completely obscured by dense foliage. Little light penetrates this barrier, casting the knotted, root-encased landscape in a dim twilight. Vines dangle from the twisted tree branches like nooses. You can imagine demons lurking in every shadow. The sooner you leave this place, the better.

"Someone will scout on ahead with me," you address your circled companions after everyone has had a chance to stretch their legs, "and once we've found the camp we'll radio the plane."

"And once you've given us the location, we'll go straight for their planes," Marlowe interjects, completing your thought, "they won't even know what hit them."

With everyone in agreement, all that's left to do now is decide who will accompany you into the jungle. If you are the Vendetta, turn to 64. If you are not, read on...

Durak and Richard must stick with the plane, to man the guns and maps respectively. Marlowe, living legend that he is, will pilot the Red Mistress during the raid. This decided, you may choose either James or Charles to accompany you. Add the password *red* if you select James or *yellow* if you select Charles. Once you have chosen, turn to 30.

47

Upon seeing your gun, the three collectors dive for cover and draw weapons of their own. Ready for a shootout, you drop flat onto the wooden roof of The Pelican and rattle off a few shots at the goons. The men look out from around the wooden debris they have sheltered behind and return fire. Though they put on a tough act, these men are poor shots and most of their lead flies straight over your head.

You take a shot at one thug who is foolish enough to come completely out of hiding and clip him in the shoulder. Though the wound isn't lethal, the goons lose their nerve at the sight of dark artery blood flowing from their friend's wound. After the collectors have fled the scene, you scramble into your cockpit and start up the engines, eager to leave before the police arrive. Turn to 98.

48

The Sheik wears an impassive look as you relate what you've learned about Kurtz's past and his involvement in the Port Royal disaster.

"No one knows what this man is capable of," you phrase your appeal so as to persuade but not offend the proud monarch, "With your help, I'd like to go after Kurtz before he can strike again."

Stroking his chin, the Sheik reveals his thoughts for the first time, "You know as well as I that money's not much of an object for me," his gaze falls over your shoulder, through a window, and out onto the city, "so long as San Sabre stands, I'll be fine. I'll provide you with all the men and supplies you need...just don't fail me." Turn to 72.

49

You slip in with the good-natured merchants and are soon singing drinking songs with your new friends. Pay \$2 for drinks if you have the money; if you are broke the others will spot you. After an evening of fun, you bid the aviators goodbye.

"If you're ever in need of some work, just give old Val a call. She's always looking for fresh meat!"

The others laugh at this remark, suggesting that they know something you don't. Regardless, you're not going to gain anything else from this drunken bunch. You shut the door behind the stumbling men and wonder whether they were worth the wasted time. From here, you may approach the woman in the red dress, turn to 27, or leave the bar, turn to 18 and make another choice.

50

Minutes after you flee the ferocious cat, a horrible scream pierces the dank silence. James is dead before you even had a chance to know him. Such is the plight of an adventurer: death is never far from your shoulder. At least that's what James would say.

Erase the password *red* and add the password *orange*. Shouldering the radio after dumping your now superfluous food, you move on. Turn to 94.

51

"Say, you're the guy who owes us money, aren't you?" the loan collector says after giving you a closer look, "You can't get away that easy!" Wasting no time, the goon drives his elbow into your stomach. The blow doubles you over with pain. If you have *Hand to Hand* as a skill, turn to 26, otherwise turn to 65.

52

You slide past the other guests and snatch a seat next to Ms. Smith. An elderly woman with expensive tastes, Ms. Smith's laugh lines cannot hide the ambitious fire in her eyes. Though she seems to suspect you, Ms. Smith does not allow your presence to interrupt her grand toast.

"My friends," she speaks with glass raised high, "we've come a long way in this foreign land. But there are still things to be accomplished, deeds to be done and undone... To the future!"

With this the aristocratic multitude take their seats and within seconds, the a dull roar of muddled conversation fills the room. Now is the time to act. If you wish to dump a *Yellow Vial* in Ms. Smith's drink, turn to 17 if you have *Con* as a skill or turn to 69 if you do not. Otherwise, you may speak with Ms. Smith now, turn to 83.

53

Ishmael's hardy plane, affectionately named the "Marianne" after an old sweetheart, bears the scars of long neglect. Over the next few days, you give the engine and control systems some much needed tune-ups. Noticing your work, Ishmael speaks to you one evening after giving up the wheel, "She hasn't flown this well in years! I know it's not much, but here's something for the trouble." The pilot hands you \$20, "If you ever need something, just look me up." Add the password *Recourse*, then turn to 95.

54

Ms. Smith owns an impressive, gated estate in the foreign quarter of San Sabre. Three stories high with a spacious courtyard, the manor is one of the largest private residences in the city. The Sheik's palace, of course, dwarfs all others.

Walking up to the carved wooden gate, you stop before a muscle-headed doorman. Crossing his arms, the bouncer blocks your path, "Sorry pal, but you're not on the list." If you have *Charisma* as a skill or have a set of *Fine Clothes*, turn to 86. Otherwise, the security refuses to let you in and your only choice is to sneak into the party, turn to 25.

55

After an hour's trudge through the grimy tunnel, you begin to sense a faint glow up ahead. The light grows into a brighter and brighter blue as you close in on the end of the passage. You soon find yourself at the end of the pipe. The light here is bright enough to cast gloomy shadows on the ceiling. Peering

over the edge, you look out into a deep circular pool lined with concrete. A narrow catwalk spans the cistern, but at the moment there is no one else in sight.

You descend to the water where you spot the source of the unearthly glow: a clover-shaped metal assembly at the bottom of the pool. Like a throbbing blue heart inside of a steel rib cage, the glow flickers with the circulating water. The unearthly glow seems to radiate from the water itself. You fill your vial quickly and leave through the passage. Glad to be finished, you hand over the sample to your sleazy liaison. "Been nice doing business with you," he says with a smirk before departing. If you have the password *burn*, the man gives you \$30 in cash before leaving.

Only after days have passed does the dreadful sickness hit you. Your hair falls out in fistfuls and it takes all your strength to keep down even the most meager meal. Though you have no idea what this wasting illness could be, you have no doubt that your trip to the power works was the cause. Lower your health by 3 and reduce your max health to 7 to reflect this disease, then turn to 18 and make another choice.

56

You pry off the vent's iron grille and are soon scooting on elbows and knees through the claustrophobic passage. You try your best not to bang into the thin walls of the vent. In the silence you eventually hear some voices reverberating through the metal tunnel.

Listening carefully, you recognize the voices as those of Rosewater and his butler. They are no doubt discussing you. Will you detour to listen in on their conversation, turn to 34, or continue on, turn to 68.

57

You hand over a wad of folded bills that the dark figure snatches up. Fee paid, you listen as the informant explains, "The rebels aren't as big as everyone thinks. They claim to fight for the people, but in reality they're a bunch of rich newcomers from the old world who want to muscle in on the Sheik's business."

Your informant buys a drink with the money you've just handed him, and then goes on, "The truth is that there is no rebel 'leader', or even much of a rebellion!"

"So is there anyone in particular I should meet?" you ask, hoping to hear something useful.

"You're in luck," the man flashes you a yellow grin, "One of them, a Ms. Ella Smith, is throwing a party tonight. She's the one you want to talk to."

With little else to work with, you head off for Ms. Smith's estate, turn to 54.

58

In the distance you spot something that lifts your exhausted heart. A small, black outline drifts above the horizon toward you. Slowly, wings and a tail take shape. You wave madly until the aircraft veers in your direction.

The plane, a small fishing skiff, splashes in for a landing nearby and its crew emerges to help you onboard. Though he doubts your story, the captain asks few questions. After a meal and a good night's sleep, you feel much better. Add 2 health. By the evening, your flight lands at the city and you bid your rescuer goodbye, if you have the password *coin*, turn to 5, otherwise, turn to 18.

You sit down at the polished wooden counter of an outdoor lounge and consider how best to approach Kurtz. A lone assault would be suicide: Kurtz's band, while small compared to other pirate groups, is still far too large for you to take alone. If you let too many in on the secret though, Kurtz could find out about the plan and vacate before you even set off.

In order to have both the manpower, and secrecy necessary to take Kurtz, you will have to join up with another faction that can sponsor your raid. San Sabre, according to the best of your knowledge, has no real organized crime, the Sheik either buys off or executes anyone who defies him. There is, however, a small, but powerful, revolutionary movement in the city that could use some of the reward money. Your venture would be perfect for them. Finding the secretive rebels in this strange city will be a challenge though.

The only other option is to contact the Sheik himself, though you are somewhat wary of the idea. Infamous for both his duplicity and brutality, the Sheik will be at best a dubious ally. Still, time is of the essence and with the Sheik you can at least expect to be given an audience.

If you seek out the rebels, turn to 28. If you'd rather head for the Sheik's palace, turn to 80.

The oppressive heat of the jungle saps any strength you and Charles have for conversation. With surprising speed, your perilous expedition devolves into a sweaty, monotonous trudge. You'll pay for your distractedness.

"Hold up," Charles raises a hand.

Following the line of Charles's outstretched arm, you spot a shadowy figure crouching in the underbrush a few hundred feet ahead. You look on with confusion as Charles jams a potato on the end of his rifle and then shoulders the weapon. When Charles fires you expect a large bang. Instead, you hear only a muffled "thump".

"Of course," you think to yourself, "the potato silences the shot!"

Gazing back over to the figure, you see its silhouette slumped over a bush, blown away by your friend's round. Charles now heads over to inspect the body. He stands over the ragged bundle for a moment before his eyes widen with fear. Charles has only enough time to scream, "Get back!" before the jungle floor swallows him whole.

Looking at the wasted target now, you realize that it is a decoy; placed near the disguised pit Charles has just stumbled into. This is no doubt Kurtz's work.

"Are you alright Charlie?" you call down the hole.

"A bit scraped up," Charles' voice echoes up, "but that's the least of my problems. The pit's filled with quicksand."

Though his voice is calm, Charles is in mortal danger: he will suffocate in moments if you don't help him.

Aware that every moment counts, you search the surroundings for anything you could use to help your friend. You snatch a vine from a nearby tree and throw the line into the pit. Hoping he can make use of this improvised rope, you call down to Charles.

"I've got it," a strained voice wafts up.

You dig your legs into the soil and pull on the line as hard as you can. It's no use; Charles is too heavy for you. You'll have to come up with something else. If you have Engineering as a Skill, turn to 19. If you do not, turn to 75.

61

You stride up to your ship, taking in the refreshing salty air. After the setbacks of being shot down and marooned, you again have your own plane and a sense of direction. As you climb aboard *The Pelican*, however, a trio of men in dark suits step forward from out of the crowd.

"Hey buddy," one of the men calls in a voice which tells you he is most certainly not your friend, "what are you doing to our plane?"

"Your plane?" you call back, "I just bought it."

"From an old lady?" the man calls back, though he doesn't need an answer, "It wasn't hers to sell, she had already offered it to us as collateral." So, the old woman owed money to some loan sharks; that explains the low price for a perfectly good plane. You can tell by their faces that these guys won't take no for an answer. If you have a Pistol and Marksmanship as a skill you may draw on the men now, turn to 47. Otherwise you may try to flee in the plane, turn to 39, or simply hand over the vehicle, turn to 15.

62

You turn on the bulky radio, tune to the prearranged frequency and give the signal.

"Red Mistress, this is the hunter, time to start the party."

"Copy that," Richard's voice crackles back over the speaker.

Within minutes, the Red Mistress arrives and unleashes a firestorm on the camp. Your allies target the enemy aircraft first, blowing the parked planes to smithereens. Kurtz's band flees the firestorm for the safety of the jungle. To your dismay, some bolt right into your hiding spot. These vengeful minions won't go down without a fight.

Lose 8 health as a result of the skirmish (Subtract 2 from this damage for each of the following: having either the password *red* or *yellow*, having the password *big*, having Hand to Hand as a skill).

If you are still alive, turn to 100.

63

The loud bustle of Creek Street fades into a distant echo as you head down a winding side street. High, featureless brick walls surround your grimy path, and for a moment you are afraid you will be mugged. As you round the next corner, however, a quiet yet inviting wooden façade comes into view.

Striding inside the "Bayside Tavern", you find yourself in a small, yet comfortable room dominated by a large stone fireplace. Behind a stained counter stands the bartender, wearing the standard red and white pinstriped outfit. A trio of hearty men in denim overalls grumbles at a small table near the center of the room: most likely traders or something similar.

An attractive, dark-haired woman wearing a short, crimson dress sits alone at the bar. Considering that she's the only woman in the place, you are surprised at how little attention she is receiving. Once your eyes meet hers, however, you understand: her steely glance is just plain unsettling. Looking elsewhere, you spot a handful of others sitting around the room, but none seem interesting.

If you'd like to talk to the woman in the red dress, turn to 27. If you'd rather drink with the merchants, turn to 49. Otherwise, you may return to 18 and select another option.

64

"I'll go with you," Marlowe speaks up first, "Richard can take over at the wheel."

"But you're the best pilot we have!" Richard speaks up, daunted by the task.

"We have the element of surprise," Marlowe's steely gaze is unyielding, "whoever's actually flying won't make much of a difference. Besides, I want to go."

No one dares question Marlowe further. Add the password *blue*, and then turn to 30.

65

“So you think you can pull a fast one on us?” the goon says as he draws a gaudy chrome revolver. The mob, tacky or not, has no mercy for those who try to con them. Rather than soar through the clouds, you’ll spend what little time you have left in a pair of concrete shoes, sinking below murky waters.

66

You weave your way past well-dressed revelers in search of Ms. Smith. She proves easy enough to find, greeting every guest as they enter the dining room. You mingle with the crowd as everyone begins to take their seats.

You glance through a side door where you can see into the busy kitchen. Thankfully, seats don’t appear to be assigned and you could easily snag a spot at the table. If you head into the kitchen, turn to 23, if you’d rather take a seat next to Ms. Smith, turn to 52.

67

The moment you step on the rotting wooden pier you feel uneasy. The dockhands and sailors eye you a bit more suspiciously than usual. Out of the crowd a half dozen men approach you, blocking your path. The bystanders recede as the largest of the six approaches you, “You know you aren’t welcome here kid...unless of course you have our money.”

You now recognize the man, an imposing brute with arms the size anchor chains, as one of the loan sharks you foolishly borrowed from in order to fund your ill-fated first hunt for Kurtz. Though it was only a few months ago, those smoky barroom meetings seem like a dream after everything that has happened since. Staring the bruiser in the face, the danger now feels very real. “Well,” he continues impatiently, “where’s the money?”

You, of course, cannot pay back the loan at the moment. If you have the password *recourse*, turn to 29. Otherwise, you may either plead for forgiveness, turn to 87, attempt to escape the assailants, turn to 13, or simply attack immediately, turn to 92.

68

You emerge from the vents on the lowermost floor of Rosewater’s manor and find the stairs the maid told you about. A long wooden flight leading down into pitch darkness, the path is unimpressive, but you don’t have another option, turn to 93.

69

You uncork the yellow vial and pour the contents into Ms. Smith’s glass while she speaks with her other neighbor. Once you are sure no one else has noticed, you take a sip of wine and sit back to enjoy the fine foods before you.

In a few moments, a strange feeling hits you. Rising from the bottom of your stomach, a feverish warmth works its way up your chest. You realize with dawning horror that someone has switched your glass with Ms. Smith’s. You’ve downed your own poison! You fall face first into your plate, a sly grin on Smith’s face the last thing you see before all goes dark.

70

“Ok mole,” a slim man in a tacky grey suit addresses you behind a rusting warehouse. After you accepted your mission, your employers whisked you off to seamy west harbor, the perfect place for anything illegal. “Inside this warehouse is the entrance to an old vent—not in service anymore—which leads all the way back into the power works.”

He now draws a thin vial from his coat pocket and hands it to you, “The tunnel will take you straight to a, shall we say unusual, pool. Once you’re there I need you to fill this vial and bring it back to me. It’s that simple!”

Without offering you a chance to ask questions, your liaison shows you inside to a jagged hole in the building’s floor. “Just follow this all the way,” he says one last time before shoving you onwards.

As you crawl through the dank, pitch-black tunnel, you begin to wonder why this powerful organization needs you to fetch them some water. Then it hits you: you’re not getting the whole story. Whatever does lie at the end of this tunnel is something even professional criminals refused to handle. You think of ways to escape this raw deal until it hits you: you could simply fill the vial with drippings from the pipe! If you do this and return without seeing what’s at the end of the tunnel, turn to 22. If you’d rather continue your mission, turn to 55.

71

You force your arms out against the sides of the tube, catching yourself before the vent can collapse. Petrified in the darkness, you listen. “We really must fix up this old house,” Rosewater cuts into the wrenching silence, “Its always making awful noises.”

You breathe a sigh of relief before moving on through the vents, turn to 68.

72

With the support of your patron, you assemble a small team to support your raid. James, an ex-officer from the eastern colonies, is an expert in martial arts and a master swordsman. Charles, a seven foot-tall islander-turned mercenary, can shoot the tail feathers off a gull from nearly a mile away. Richard, a spectacled, bookish fellow will serve as navigator. For combined cook and heavy weapons expert you pick Durak, a surly bruiser with a pumpkin-sized head to match his big ego.

Last of all is Marlowe, one of the few men in the city with the right plane, and the right skills, to take on Kurtz. Infamous for racking up over eighty kills during the colonial wars, Marlowe has a heavily armored, twin-engine beauty called the Red Mistress, which he’s willing to lend to the cause. More importantly, Marlowe is the only man you’ve found with a level head to rival your own. If all goes as planned, Kurtz won’t stand a chance.

If you are in possession of the Pelican, you may sell it now for some additional funds. Using this cash, you and Durak buy some fancy new rockets to add to your arsenal. Note the password *big* and erase Pelican Keys from your inventory if you sell your aircraft.

Once the Red Mistress has been fueled and stocked, you board it with your new crew and set off. You hope this attempt will go better than your first, ill-fated expedition. Turn to 46.

73

Though your initial attack takes the thugs by surprise, you succumb to their superior numbers. “You’ll pay for that,” their leader says through a mouthful of blood. The mob surrounds then beats you to within an inch of your life before carrying your limp body off. Lose 5 health, then turn to 33.

You need only wait a few moments for Mr. Rosewater, who strides in carrying a carafe of brown liquor and two glasses. Dressed in white suit and matching fur robe, Rosewater seems to exude an aristocratic kind of pride; the sort of attitude that died off around the same time his beloved Port Royal did. Sitting down casually across from you, he speaks, "I would introduce myself, but I'm sure you already know who I am. Why else would you have come here?"

He does not wait for an answer before continuing, "I too have done my research and I know why you're here. You want some information on my old friend Kurtz. I'm sorry to disappoint you but I can't tell you much."

"Anything you can tell me would be a great help," you offer, still hopeful for some good to come of this detour.

"We were friends at the academy, yes, but he never trusted me much." He pours two glasses of what you now realize is brandy and offers one to you. You take a sip as he begins to recite some of Kurtz's college escapades. As the minutes drag on, however, you find it more and more difficult to pay attention. Only too late do you realize what's happened: Rosewater has drugged you! Slumping sideways on the couch, you mumble an incoherent curse before losing consciousness.

When you finally regain your senses you are face up on a hard wooden floor. The only thing you can perceive is a blinding pain in your head. Though not deadly, Rosewater's poison has left you worse for wear, lose 3 health. As your vision returns a ceiling illuminated by dim moonlight takes shape. Testing your limbs, you feel tight ropes binding you at the ankles and wrists. You are about to scream out in frustration when you feel a delicate hand slip over your mouth.

"Shhh," a woman's voice sounds from out of sight, "I'm going to cut you loose, but you have to be quiet." You feel your bindings slip away and then turn around to face your savior. In the darkness you can see the outline of a young woman who you recognize as Rosewater's quiet maid.

"Thank you," you whisper.

"Don't thank me yet," the girl continues, her worry audible, "You need to get out. Rosewater is a fool, but the butler is a man of hidden talents. Don't underestimate him. They're in the dining room now; they'll see you if you go for the front door. Go to the basement and take the stairs at the end of the hall, they lead out." With this the girl disappears through the door.

Though you're untied, getting to the basement will be difficult. You survey the room and spot a vent on the floor large enough for you to crawl through. Will you crawl through the vents, turn to 56, or just try your luck in the halls, turn to 11.

Unable to come up with an alternative, you clutch the vine with all your might until you can hold on no more. The cord slips from your cramped hands, leaving painful friction burns on both palms. You look over the lip of the pit in hopes of seeing some sign of life. After a few minutes you give up any hope for Charles. Erase the password *yellow* and add the password *orange* then turn to 94.

A high, glass roof covers the bustling shopping scene at Traders Cross. The square lies at the intersection of three of Oceana's major arteries and is packed with shops selling anything and everything. You take a 360-degree view of the bustling scene and think about where to begin.

You may buy any of the items below for their listed prices:

Emergency Rations \$2

Pistol \$8

Flak Jacket (Ignore any health loss of 3 points or less. If you lose 4 health or more, the flak jacket is damaged beyond use) \$6

Machete \$3

In addition to the usual salesmen, there are several practicing doctors in the area. For every point of health the medic restores, you must pay \$4.

Just as you are about to leave the area, an old woman with grey hair and a hunched back approaches you and asks, "A vigorous young individual such as yourself needs to carve their own destiny in the world! I've got the keys to a quality plane which I'm willing to sell." If you take up the woman on her offer, turn to 6. If you'd rather not, turn to 18 and pick another option.

77

As the butler prepares for his second strike, your fighting instincts take over. You duck to your right and maneuver towards the butler's weaker left hand. With this opening, you deliver a series of blows to the assassin's head while he arcs the blade awkwardly across his non-dominant side.

Though he deals you a severe gash, lose 3 health, the butler goes limp from your attack before he can strike again. You are in your plane before he has a chance to recover, turn to 31.

78

You grab Kurtz's arm at the elbow and trip him with a deft kick to the shins. As Kurtz falls to the floor, his own machete plunges into his chest. With a dull crunch of splitting ribs, Kurtz impales himself. After so much, it is all over in a matter of seconds, turn to 3.

79

Oceana's piers are crowded with crews bound for all corners of the globe. Though the busy scene is a bit intimidating, you are soon able to find a convoy of planes headed for San Sabre. You walk up to the lead pilot, a fearsome bear of a woman named Val and ask about work.

"Well..." she says as she fiddles with the brim of her straw hat, "what are you good for?" If you have Marksmanship as a skill, turn to 96. If you have Engineering as a skill, turn to 88. If you have neither of these skills, Val will still allow you to travel with her, albeit in the cargo hold and without pay, turn to 35.

80

Perched on a bluff on the far end of the San Sabre peninsula, the Sheik's palace commands an impressive view of both ocean and city. Stepping through the tiled gate into the palace's public square, you take in the ornate decorations. The courtyard is tiled in beautiful red granite and ringed by an arcade of marble columns. To your surprise, only a few locals have taken advantage the free space.

Knocking at the palace's massive wooden doors, you tell the official who answers that you have information about Kurtz.

"Wait one moment," he says before ducking back inside. You sit by the door for nearly an hour before he returns.

"His majesty will see you now," the doorman says as he opens the door for you. Leading you through a grand hallway and up several flights of stairs, he shows you into the Sheik's office.

"Please be seated," the Sheik sits behind a mahogany desk that looks as if it were carved from a single

massive trunk. Taking your seat across from him, you size up this modern day monarch. His hair is cut short and slicked back with dark oil. Instead of regal robes and crown, the Sheik wears a tight-fitting white suit and a pair of gold-rimmed sunglasses.

"So you say you know how to find Kurtz," the Sheik removes his glasses and fixes his brilliant green eyes on yours, "why should I believe you?"

If you have the password *lost*, turn to 48, otherwise turn to 21.

81

If you have the password *Aqua*, turn to 24. If you do not, add the password *Aqua* now and read on...

Days pass without a sign of rescue. You can feel your life evaporate under the blazing sun. Lose 6 health due to exposure (if you use an Emergency Ration, lose only 3 health). If you are still alive after this trial, turn to 58.

82

As you ascend to the manor, the horror of Kurtz's deeds dawns on you. How many others knew about his weapon? Was it covered up? Perhaps Rosewater will have some answers.

"So now you know," the pompous eccentric says as you emerge. Rosewater guesses at your next question and continues.

"Kurtz destroyed Port Royal, don't doubt that. Those within the state who knew about his work also knew that he was responsible for the earthquake. This crime was why they first placed the bounty on his head. He only became a pirate after they gave him the title."

You spit back at the smug Rosewater, "He's a child. He just threw a fit because he couldn't have what he wanted."

Smiling serenely, Rosewater brushes your words aside, "I did not expect you to understand...not yet at least. Until you have seen Kurtz, listened to him speak, you could never understand. I'd like to give you that opportunity."

With this Rosewater stands up and shows you to the front door, "I hope you find Kurtz. All I ask is that, when you do, hear him out. If you listen, I'm sure you'll make the right decision."

Sick of your host's sermon, you make for your plane. Though you have left Rosewater behind, his words haunt you even as you lift off into the starry sky, turn to 31.

83

You lean over towards your imposing hostess and speak, knowing that you will have only one chance to impress, "Ms. Smith, I haven't been totally honest with you. I came here uninvited, but I'm sure that once you hear what I have to say you will forgive me."

"I suspected as much," Smith gives a knowing grin, "you've come this far though, so say what you wish."

You try your best to keep your voice down, but the tale of your hunt for Kurtz draws more than a few stares from around the table.

"...I would like you to fund my raid on Kurtz's camp. The reward money—"

"The money is of little concern to me", Ms. Smith cuts you off, "the credit is all I need."

Seeing your look of confusion, Smith elaborates, "Don't you see? If I'm responsible for Kurtz's defeat then the Sheik can't touch me. Once the people are on my side, the Sheik wouldn't dare cross me. You'll have your raid!"

Once the party is over, you set about preparing for your journey, turn to 72.

84

The wharf at Oceana is a scene of perpetual toil. Fishermen unload their catch, wrenched with great effort from the few surviving fisheries. Merchant aviators--half pilot, half trader, and half mercenary--haggle with men from the city over the price of goods. Engineers with leather gloves patch up bullet holes with strips of salvaged wood.

If you have Piloting as a skill and have the Keys to "The Pelican", turn to 61. Otherwise, your only option is to find a place as a worker aboard a plane bound for your destination, turn to 79.

85

You and the Sheik have a shared past neither of you are willing to forget. If he finds out that you are in his city, the Sheik will kill you without a second thought. Asking him for help, even to defeat a mutual enemy, is out of the question.

With this in mind, you realize that your only other option is to contact the elusive, yet powerful rebel faction within the city. Aside from the Sheik, the rebels are the only organization in the area with the resources to launch a raid after Kurtz. Besides, the promise of reward money would probably mean much more to their underground group than to the wealthy Sheik.

Mind made up, you set off in search of the elusive rebels, turn to 28.

86

You strike an aristocratic pose, raise your chin, and ask the doorman, "Are you sure I'm not on the list?"

Whether because of your natural charisma, or just plain luck, the bouncer changes his mind. His face softens as he opens the gate for you, "My mistake sir, right this way."

Stepping inside, you begin searching for the woman of the hour, Ms. Smith, turn to 66.

87

"You're going to pay up one way or another," the thug says in response to your pleas. Two men grab your arms and throw a black sack over your head.

"The boss will decide what to do with you," you hear from one of the thugs as you are carried away to parts unknown, turn to 33.

88

You climb aboard Val's plane, a battered four engine vessel called the Sea Breeze and step around precarious stacks of crates in order to reach the cockpit.

"Good to have you on board," Val says as she slams a meaty palm on your back, "this planes almost as old as I am, but she's tough. I'll trust you to keep things in working order!"

You now perform a pre-flight inspection. After patching a few pipes and checking the fuel lines, you give the all's-clear. The Sea Breeze picks up speed as it cuts through the water away from Oceana. With a shuddering lurch, the plane lifts off.

Aside from a few leaks in the hydraulic system and a small grease fire, the first day of the flight is uneventful. On the second day, however, a line of single-engine planes appears on the horizon. They move towards you with ominous speed.

"Hold on," Val calls out over the intercom, "we've got pirates." Sitting in your small quarters, you hold on as the Sea Breeze performs a series of hairpin turns. The jarring rattle of the Sea Breeze's machine

guns joins the constant rumble of the engines as the pirates come in range. While the battle rages on, you make repairs to the plane. Thanks to Val, the gunners, and you, the Sea Breeze manages to fight off the pirates, who flee once their ammunition is depleted. After hours of clambering through broken glass and split metal, you have a collection of fresh cuts. Lose 3 health.

Air whistling through its many bullet holes, the Sea Breeze pulls in for a triumphant landing in San Sabre. Val shakes your hand as you step off the plane and hands you \$20, "Good working with you kid!"

You bid Val farewell and head into bustling city of San Sabre, turn to 5.

89

You slam the machete down on the rusty chain and it snaps instantly. Clutching the other chain, you hang over the abyss the walkway falls to one side. Caught off guard, Marlowe dangles below you from the other side. You inch your way forward until Marlowe speaks to you.

"Looks like you were too much for me," Marlowe almost looks relieved that you've bested him, "Take this!"

Marlowe reaches into his pack and hands you the radio.

"What are you doing?" you ask as you take the metal box.

Without another word, Marlowe lets go of the chain and drops into the chasm. So passes the last hero of a bygone age. Shaken, but not deterred, you continue across the bridge. Erase the password *blue*, then add the password *orange*, and then turn to 94.

90

The few days' flight over open ocean goes by in a flash. Before you know it, the lush island of Ispana comes into view on the horizon. The ruined buildings of Port Royal stand out of the shallow waters around the island like broken teeth. Once a center of trade and government, most of the city of Port Royal fell into the ocean after a large earthquake.

Rather than rebuild after the disaster, everyone who could leave left for the then fledgling outpost of Oceana. It was not long before Oceana was the new center and only those too stupid or too poor to escape were left in Port Royal.

You line up with what was once the city's broad main street and pull The Pelican in for a landing between rows of flooded buildings. While the timber frame structures have long rotted away, many of the stone buildings on this street still stand.

Taxiing to the cliffs that form the island's new shoreline, you spot a large brownstone manor perched atop a commanding bluff. It must be Mr. Rosewater's, after all no one else left here could afford such an estate.

After mooring your plane, you catch sight of a pair of dark figures moving down the hill towards you. An old, tuxedoed man and young woman in a similar uniform come into view. You hail the pair as they arrive, "Hello! I'd like to see Mr. Rosewater."

"And Master Rosewater would like to see you as well," the man responds in a dry, forced accent only a butler would use.

"Please, follow me," the younger woman, probably a maid, keeps her eyes on the ground as she leads you up towards the manor.

Once inside, the butler shows you to a small sitting room and then leaves you alone on an antique sofa. "Master Rosewater will see you in a moment," the butler says as he closes the door behind him. If you are the Wanderer, turn to 37. If you are not, turn to 74.

91

Not willing to abandon your friend so easily, you pick up a heavy stick and charge the jaguar. The beast is distracted by your attack and turns its attention to you.

With a deadly pounce the cat lands on your chest tears a deep gash in your flesh. Lose 4 health. The animal does not have a chance to finish you off, however, as James brings his blade down on the beast from behind, killing it with a few messy blows.

Sitting back beside the carcass, you examine your wounds. Though there's a lot of blood, the wound is not very deep and the biggest risk now is infection.

"Looks like we came out alright", you call out to James. Your relief soon deflates as you notice the blood sopping out through your friend's clothing.

"The bastard got me!" James says, struggling to breathe, "I don't think I'm going to make it."

Too exhausted to feel anything besides a distant shock, you stay by your friend's side until his raspy breathing ceases. Unable to prepare a proper grave, you leave James with his sword, take the radio, and move on. Erase the password *red* and add the password *orange*, turn to 94.

92

Though you lack a weapon, you are not one to back down from a fight. You stride up to the chief thug and wipe off his smug expression with a swift sucker punch. As their leader staggers back with several broken teeth, his companions step forward to take you on. If you have the Hand to Hand skill, turn to 41, if you do not, turn to 73.

93

As you follow the stairs to their abyssal destination the thin light from the doorway above slowly fades into nothing. You lose your footing for a moment as you step off the last wooden plank and onto a stone floor. You fumble in the darkness for a few moments before finding a heavy-duty electrical switch on the wall.

Slamming the rusty apparatus on, you watch as a long string of lights illuminate a large, natural cave. Benches and worktables stacked with reams of paper and lab equipment sit around the rough chamber. You patch together the story of what happened here by reading some of the scattered papers:

According their own records, Kurtz and Rosewater moved to Port Royal soon after graduating from the Academy. Both were experts in chemistry and physics, though Kurtz was the more visionary of the two. With Kurtz's rabid creativity and Rosewater's nuts and bolts expertise, the two created a strange and frightening new explosive.

They tried to sell the design to the state for construction purposes: Kurtz's dream was to tame the wild south. The state, however, turned him away and told him to convert the technology into a weapon. Kurtz was furious, so much so that even Rosewater shrank from his friend. For weeks, Kurtz worked alone in his lab right up until the day of the disaster. After the devastating earthquake sunk the city, Kurtz and his device were nowhere to be seen.

The more you think about it, the more it dawns on you that Kurt's research and the destruction of Port Royal can be no coincidence. Based on the power of Kurtz's device, it is entirely possible that his bomb sunk Port Royal. Sobered by this realization, you move on. Add the password *lost*. If you are the Wanderer, turn to 82. If you are not, you follow the tunnel to its termination at the base of Rosewater's hill. Ducking into your plane, you lift off before Rosewater can catch up with you, turn to 31.

94

The signs of Kurtz's camp are at first subtle: an animal carcass with a bullet-shattered leg, the hidden remains of a campfire, the leftover wires of an already triggered trap. When you come across a mound of human bones, the remnants of some unlucky prisoners, you know you are getting close.

Edging carefully through the forest, you come to the edge of a large clearing. Examining the charred ground, you realize that the clearing has been cleared with fire. Peering through the underbrush, you spot a crude tent city, teeming with the most psychotic and bloodthirsty scum the world has to offer. At the far end of the clearing, you can just make out the riverbank, where several planes are parked. There is no doubt, this is Kurtz's camp.

Though you are eager to make your next move, you must be sure that Kurtz is actually in the camp before attacking. You needn't wait long, for moments after you settle down the shantytown erupts with an enthusiastic yell. Outlined against a blazing fire in the middle of the camp, you see Kurtz for the first time. Though his voice does not carry to your hiding spot, you can see from his wild gestures that he's giving a rousing speech.

If you have the password *orange*, turn to 9, otherwise turn to 62.

95

The busy routine aboard Ishmael's trading skiff soon engrosses you and before you know it, you are splashing down outside the island city of Oceana. After pulling up to the quay, you say your goodbye to your generous rescuers. If your background is The Debtor, turn to 67, otherwise turn to 18.

96

You climb aboard Val's plane, a battered four engine vessel called the Sea Breeze and step around cluttered stacks of crates in order to reach the cockpit.

"Good to have you on board," Val says as she slams a meaty palm on your back, "this planes almost as old as I am, but she's a tough old girl. I'm always in need of fresh gunmen, best of luck!"

After this encouraging speech, you go to the rear of the craft and examine your weapon. The set up is an antique large caliber machine gun suspended by fabric strips, ragged but no doubt effective. Barely a minute after you have taken your seat, the engines roar to life. The Sea Breeze picks up speed as it cuts through the water away from Oceana. With a shuddering lurch, the plane lifts off.

Out your window on the first day you see nothing but blue skies and the occasional stray cloud. On the second day, however, a line of single-engine planes appears on the horizon. They move towards you with ominous speed.

"Hold on," Val calls out over the intercom, "we've got pirates." You load up a belt of ammunition in preparation for battle. Once the pirates are within range, you open fire, trying your best to keep their nimble fighters at bay. The pirates' gunfire rakes the Sea Breeze and the noise makes you feel like you have your head in a drier full of marbles. Thanks to your shooting and the rest of the crew, the Sea Breeze fights off the pirates, who flee once their ammunition is depleted.

Air whistling through it's many bullet holes, the Sea Breeze pulls in for a triumphant landing in San Sabre. Shaking your hand as you step off the plane, Val hands your \$10, "Good working with you kid!"

You bid Val farewell, you head into bustling city of San Sabre, turn to 5.

97

You take advantage of Kurtz's speech and sneak into the camp while everyone is fixed on him. In the midst of emptied tents, you find a small hut. Though modest, the wooden hovel is by far the most impressive structure in the camp. It must belong to Kurtz.

You step inside and wait for the infamous man to return. Though it is difficult to see in the dim light, you can spot a variety of macabre knickknacks pinned to the walls. The noise at the center of camp lasts long into the night. Sure enough though, when the commotion dies down Kurtz enters.

You can't help but feel a bit disappointed at the man before you. Lanky and short, Kurtz wouldn't merit a second glance if he passed you on the streets of Oceana. Only when his eyes, bloodshot and intense even in the near darkness meet yours do you feel his power.

"I suppose you've come to kill me," Kurtz's voice is tranquil, not even surprised by your presence, but you can sense madness just below the surface. Kurtz is like a lake, his placid surface disguising murky skeletons below.

"I don't know what you know about me," Kurtz is not one to wait for an introduction, "and I don't really care. I've taken what I want. I'm not ashamed."

"You're a monster," you cannot hold back your rage anymore.

"Maybe so, but at least I know I'm a monster. Do you know what you are?"

Kurtz smirks at your frustration, "Say of me what you want, but I have never lied to myself nor the world. Can you say the same? You tell yourself that you're different than me, but on the inside you know it's a lie...and it tears you up. You can kill the monster before you, but you can never the kill the beast within!"

His speech finished, Kurtz grabs a machete from his wall and lunges towards you. If you have Hand to Hand as a skill, turn to 78. If you want to use a Pistol and have Marksmanship as a skill, turn to 14. If you have neither of these skills, Kurtz cuts you down without a second thought.

98

Listening to the hum of the engines from inside the cockpit of your plane, you feel at ease for the first time in many months. As The Pelican lifts off above the waves into a salmon-pink sunset sky, you watch as the lights of Oceana flicker on. Within a matter of minutes the city that is both home and prison to so many people is just another star in the sky.

From here, you may set a course for Port Royal, turn to 90, or San Sabre, turn to 31.

99

Pistol in hand, you fire a round into the air. The resulting bang is enough to scare off the jaguar, which retreats back into the jungle.

"Thanks for the save," James says after sheathing his weapon, "lets hope we haven't alerted Kurtz!"

To both your relief, there is no sign that Kurtz has discovered you and the rest of the day passes without incident. Turn to 94.

100

Thanks to a brutal bombardment from the Red Mistress, the battle is over before it even has a chance to begin. Within hours, you are picking through the burnt debris with your comrades. In order to claim the reward, you will have to bring back some proof Kurtz died. Kicking over a charred piece of corrugated steel, you find what you've been looking for.

"Hey guys," you shout into the charred air, "get over here."

With the help of the rest of the crew, you uncover Kurtz's huddled body, badly burnt but still

recognizable. Packing up this morbid, but necessary piece of evidence, you set off. Turning your eyes away from the jungle's black scar, you look out to horizon. The ocean is barely visible, a blue ribbon between green land and pink sky. More than the fame or the reward, you look forward to soaring over the endless blue sea once again.

The End of an Era

In many ways, Kurtz's death marked the end of the age of exploration. Piracy, a dying art even before Kurtz was killed, faded into irrelevance. With the seas now open, even the wild Southlands, the last bastion of true wilderness, was colonized by the old world. San Sabre of all places held out the longest against the tide of newcomers, though after the Sheik's assassination even this proud city fell.

As new aircraft with longer range became popular, Oceana, once the center of commerce and culture in the southern seas, became little more than a ghost town, a shadow of its former glory. Those who could took flight for greener pastures just as they had so many times before.

Even in this wave of change, the freedom of the skies and waves has survived. Pilots still brave the wild blue. Opportunity and adventure, along with great evil, are still alive, albeit harder to find. Fortune and the perils that come with it still wait over the horizon for those who are willing to seek them.